Cluster Approach - FAQ

Q1. Are Participants in Cluster Groups Accountable to the Cluster Lead?

Answer: The cluster approach itself does not require that humanitarian actors be held accountable to sector leads. Likewise, it does not demand accountability of non-UN actors to UN agencies. Individual humanitarian organizations can only be held accountable to sector leads in cases where they have made specific commitments to this effect.

Q2. What is the proper terminology: clusters or sectors?

Answer: A "cluster" is essentially a "sectoral group" and there should be no differentiation between the two in terms of their objectives and activities. Both have the same ToR. The IASC/Humanitarian Country Team decides on the terminology to be used, e.g. "clusters", "sector groups", "working groups", "task forces" etc.To ensure coherence, standard terminology should be used within each country and similar standards should be applied to all the key sectors or areas of humanitarian activity. Because of global commitments to humanitarian reform, country level cluster leads may not opt out of certain provisions of the cluster approach, such as "accountability" or "partnerships" or "provider of last resort". There is no such thing as a "cluster lite" approach.

Q3. Must all nine "Global"Clusters be represented in the Field?

Answer: Leads should only be designated for the sectors that are relevant to the emergency. There may be cases where particular clusters are not needed (e.g. Logistics). There may be cases where particular sectors are merged (e.g. Health and Nutrition). Separate "early recovery" groups should not be established; each sector group should ensure that early recovery planning is integrated into the work of the group.

Q4. Who May be a Cluster/Sector Lead?

Answer: To enhance predictability, where possible, sector lead arrangements at the country level should be in line with the lead agency arrangements at the global level. However, there is flexibility, as the strengths and capacities of humanitarian organisations already operating in the country/region must be taken into consideration. This may mean that in some cases sector lead arrangements at the country level do not mirror those at the global level. Should this happen the designated cluster/sector lead at country level and the global lead should communicate to ensure that agreed global standards/procedures are applied.

In some cases (e.g. where regional "hubs" have been established) NGOs or other humanitarian partners may act as sector focal points in parts of the country where they have a comparative advantage or where the cluster leads has no presence.

Answer: The Humanitarian Coordinator consults with the IASC/Humanitarian Country
Team to agree on the establishment of appropriate sectoral groups, and to designate
sector lead organisation based on,
Assessment of needs and gaps;
Mapping of response capacities (including those of the government, local authorities, and
local civil societey)
Each designated cluster/sector lead is to be aware of the ToR for Cluster/Sector Leads at
the field Level; and
Common Humanitarian Action Plans and appeal documents should clearly state the
agreed priority sectors, and the designated leads for each.

Answer: The IASC has agreed on a generic Terms of Reference for Cluster and Sector
Leads at the field level. This is annexed to the IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster
Approach. The ToR outlines a minimum set of support and services that Cluster and
Sector Leads are expected to provide. In this capacity, Cluster and Sector Leads
are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator.

Responsabilities fall under the following headings:
Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
Establishment of appropriate coordination mechnisms
Coordination with national/local authorities, local civil society etc.
Participatory and community-based approaches
Attention to priority cross-cutting issues (age, environment, gender, HIV/AID etc)
Needs assessments and analysis
Emergency preparedness
Planning and strategy development
Application of standards
Monitoring and reporting
Advocacy and resource mobilization
Training and capacity building
Provision of assisstance and services as a last resort

Answer: Complementing arrangements already in place for some sectors or areas of
activity, global cluster leads have agreed to be accountable to the Emergency Relief
Coordinator for ensuring system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to
humanitarian emergencies, and for ensuring greater predictability and more effective
inter-agency responses in their particular sectors or areas of activity. More specifically,
they are responsible for establishing broad partnership bases
(i.e. "clusters") that engage in activities in three main areas, as follows:

Standards and policy-setting
Consolidation and dissemination of standards; where necessary, development of standards and policies; identification of "Best practice".
Building response capacity
Training and system development at the local, national, regional and international levels.
Establishing and maintaining surge capacity and standby rosters
Establishing and maintaining material stockpiles

Operational support
Assessment of needs for human, financial and institutional capacity
Emergency preparedness and long term planning
Securing access to appropriate technical expertise
Advocacy and resource mobilization
Pooling resources and ensuring complementarity of efforts through enhanced patrnerships

Q8. What are the Role and Responsabilities of Cluster Leads?

Answer: Global Cluster leads have been established for the following sectors that had been identified as "gap areas" in humanitarian response:

Nutrition		UNICEF
Health		WHO
Water/Sanitation		UNICEF
Emergency Shelter	*IDPs (from conflict)*	UNHCR
	Disaster situations	IFRC
Camp Coord/Management :	*IDPs (from confllict)*	UNHCR
	Disaster situations	IOM
Protection:	*IDPs (from conflict)*	UNHCR
Disasters/civilans affected conflict *(other than IDPs)*	UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF	
Early Recovery		UNDP
Logistics		WFP
Emergency Telecommunications		OCHA/UNICEF/WFP

The newly established Global Cluster Leads complement arrangements in other sectors or arrangements in other sectors or areas of activity where leadership and accountability within are already clear, e.g. Agriculture (FAO), Food (WFP), Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights (OHCHR), Children (UNICEF).

Q9. What are the Role of Government in the Cluster Approach?

Answer: A key responsability of cluster/sector leads at the country level is to ensure that humanitarian actors build on local capacities and that they develop and maintain appropriate links with Governemt and local authorities, state institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders. The nature of these links will depend on the situation in

each country and on the willingness of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities.

It is important to remember that the cluster approach does not diminish the responsability of states, first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occuring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance (GA Resolution 46/182).

The cluster approach does not imply that the sector lead in a particularly country is responsible for leading the overall humanitarian response within that sector, as this may be the responsability of a government department or a local authority.

In fact, in disasters, it is often teh case that the Government and local authorities are in a strong position to lead the overall humanitarian response. In this case, the role of the HC (or RC) may be to organise an international humanitarian response to support the host government's efforts.

In conflict situations, the wilingness or capacity of the Government or state institutions to lead or contribute to humanitarian activities may be compromised, and this will influence the nature of the relationships, wich it established with international humanitarian actors.

The nature of the reslationships established between international humanitarian actors and local civil society will depend on the political and security situation and on their capacities and willingness to lead or engage in humanitarian activities.

Q10. When is the Cluster Approach used?

Answer: All major "new" emergency requiring a multi-sectoral response with participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors. In such situations, the cluster approach should be used from the start to plan and organize the international response.

For new emergencies it is necessary for the Resident Coordinator (or Humanitarian Coordinator) to communicate the decision to use the cluster approach to the ERC in a timely fashion so that Global Cluster Leads can provide the necessary support. This can be done by following these steps:

The Humanitarian coordinator (HC) or resident coordinator (RC) consults relevant partners and determines the priority sectors or areas of response;

He/she proposes leads for each priority sector or area of response and sends this information to the Emergency Response Coordinator (ERC);

ERC shares proposal with Global Cluster Leads;

ERC ensures agreement at global level and communicates agreement to HC/RC and partners within 24 hours f receiving the proposal;

HC/RC informs host government and all partners.

During on-going emergencies. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) agreed in late 2006, that all countries with Humanitarian Coordinators should use the custer approach.

TO assist HCs, a "Diagnostic Tool" has been developed to assist HCs and Humanitarian

Country Teams (HCTs) to determine the support needed to use the approach and to establish a plan and timeframe for doing so.

The tool is based on lessons learned during the first year of using the approach. Taking these lessons into consideration should ensure that HCTs better (a) understand the operational purpose and modalities of the cluster approach, (b) clearly identify roles and responsabilities, response capacity and operational gaps, (c) ensure that adequate coordination structures are in place and, (d) develop targets against which progress can be measured.

Upon completion of the exercise the HCT should have consensus on (a) the current state of response capacity (and response gaps) and coordination mechanisms in country and how this compares to the "standards" of leadership, partnership, predictability and accountability of the cluster approach as outlined in the Guidance Note, (b) a bullet-point list of the "next steps" to be taken by the Humanitarian CT to use the cluster approach (with key targets and timeframe) and (c) a bullet point list of the external support that is needed to begin (e.g. guidance notes, advice needed, issues that require further clarification targeted training).

Q11. What is the Cluster Approach?

Answer: The Cluster Approach is one element of humanitarian reform and is designed to contribute to objectives 1,3 and 4 of the Reform Agenda (for specific objectives see What is the Humanitarian Reform Agenda?). It aims to strengthen overall response capacity through partnerships as well as the effectiveness of the response in five key ways:

First, the approach aims to ensure sufficient global capacity is built up and maintained in key gap sectors/areas of response, with a view to ensuring timely and effective responses in new crises.

Second, the approach identifies predictable leadership in the gap sectors/areas of response. Cluster leads are responsible for ensuring response capacity is in place and that assessment, planning and response activities are carried out in collaboration with partners and in accordance with agreed standards and guidelines. Cluster leads also act as the "provider of last resort", in line with the IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level.

Third, the approach is designed around the concept of "partnership" (i.e. "Clusters") between UN agencies, NGOs, international organisations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*. Partner's work together towards agreed common humanitarian objectives both at the global level (preparedness, standards, tools, stockpiles and capacity-building) and at the field level (assessment, planning, delivery and monitoring). Partnerships facilitate improved inter-agency complementarity by maximizing resources.

*NOTE: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has stated that its position on the cluster approach is the following: "Among the components of the movement, the ICRC is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between the IRCR and the UN will continue to the extend necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people

affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence". At the global level, the ICRC participates as an observer in many of the cluster working group meetings.

Fourth, the approach strengthens accountability. Cluster leads are accountable, at the global level, to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for building up a more predictable and effective response capacity in line with IASC agreements. At the field level, in addition to their normal institutional responsabilities, cluster leads are accountable to HCs for fulfulling agreed roles and responsabilities for cluster leadership, such as those listed in the IASC Generic Terms of Reference. The approach also strengthens accountability to beneficiaries through commitments to participatory and community-based approaches, improved common needs assessments and prioritization, and better monitoring and evaluation.

Fifth, the approach should help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization in specific sectors/areas of response by placing responsability for leadership and coordination of these issues with the competent operational agency.