

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE ON DESIGNATING SECTOR/CLUSTER LEADS IN MAJOR NEW EMERGENCIES

Detailed guidance on the cluster approach is provided in the *IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response (November 2006)*.

Why is there a need to designate sector/cluster leads in major new emergencies?

- The aim of the cluster approach is to strengthen humanitarian response by ensuring high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all sectors or areas of activity.
- The IASC has agreed that the cluster approach should be used in all contingency planning for major new emergencies; in all responses to major new emergencies; and eventually in all countries with Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs).
- In a major new emergency, the cluster approach requires that sector/cluster leads be designated at the earliest possible opportunity in order to ensure an adequate response.

What constitutes a “major new emergency”?

- For IASC operational purposes, a “major new emergency” is defined as any situation where humanitarian needs are of a sufficiently large scale and complexity that significant external assistance and resources are required, and where a multi-sectoral response is needed with the engagement of a wide range of international humanitarian actors.

Can the cluster approach be used in countries where there is a UN Resident Coordinator but no Humanitarian Coordinator?

- Yes. In addition to countries where there is an HC, the cluster approach can be used in countries where there is no HC but where the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) is coordinating the international response to a major new emergency.

What is a “sector/cluster lead”?

- A “cluster lead” is an agency/organization that formally commits to take on a leadership role within the international humanitarian community in a particular sector/area of activity, to ensure adequate response and high standards of predictability, accountability & partnership. A “cluster lead” takes on the commitment to act as the “provider of last resort” in that particular sector/area of activity, where this is necessary.
- A “cluster” is essentially a “sectoral group” and there should be no differentiation between the two in terms of their objectives and activities; the aim of filling gaps and ensuring adequate preparedness and response should be the same.

What are the responsibilities of sector/cluster leads and who is accountable to the HC?

- The sector/cluster lead for any given sector is an agency, not a person. For that reason, at the country level it is the Country Director/Representative of the agency/organization designated as sector/cluster lead who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that relevant sector/cluster leadership activities are carried out effectively.
- The specific responsibilities of sector/cluster leads are described in detail in the *IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads (Annex 1 of the Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response)*. These lay out minimum standards for all sector/cluster leads, including the need to ensure that agreed priority cross-cutting issues such as age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights are effectively addressed in all sectors. The IASC Generic Terms of Reference may be contextualized and added to, but may not be reduced.
- Sector/cluster leads are responsible for ensuring that within their sectors focal points are nominated for Early Recovery and for agreed priority cross-cutting issues, as appropriate, to ensure that these issues are included in sector work plans and appeals.
- Sector/cluster leads at the country level are responsible for ensuring adherence to norms, policies and standards agreed at the global level and should treat the global level clusters as a resource that

can be called upon for advice on global standards, policies and 'best practice', as well as for operational support, general guidance and training programmes.

- Sector/cluster lead agencies at the country level are responsible for appointing appropriate individuals, with the necessary seniority, facilitation skills and expertise to be the sector/cluster coordinators. In some cases, there may be a need for sector/cluster lead agencies to appoint dedicated, full-time sector/cluster coordinators with no other programme responsibilities.
- Country Directors/Representatives of agencies designated as sector/cluster leads are responsible for ensuring that the HC, OCHA and the Humanitarian Country Team are informed of the names and contact details of the individuals designated as sector/cluster coordinators and that they are kept regularly informed of any changes.
- In cases where stakeholders consider that a sector/cluster lead agency at the country level is not adequately carrying out its responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the HC to consult the Country Director/Representative of the agency/organization concerned and where necessary, following consultations with the Humanitarian Country Team, to propose alternative arrangements.

What is expected of sector/cluster partners?

- Humanitarian actors who participate in the development of common humanitarian action plans are expected to be proactive partners in assessing needs, developing strategies and plans for the sector, and implementing agreed priority activities. Provisions should also be made in sectoral groups for those humanitarian actors who may wish to participate as observers, mainly for information-sharing purposes.

How are sector/cluster leads expected to relate to local government structures?

- "Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory." (GA Resolution 46/182)*
- A key responsibility of sector/cluster leads at the country level is to ensure that humanitarian actors build on local capacities and maintain appropriate links with Government and local authorities, State institutions, civil society and other stakeholders. The nature of these links will depend on the situation in each country and the willingness and capacity of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities.
- From the very outset of an emergency, it is the responsibility of sector/cluster leads to ensure close consultation with national authorities/counterparts on issues related to their respective sectors.
- By designating clear focal points within the international humanitarian community for all key sectors or areas of activity, the cluster approach should help governments and local authorities to know who to approach for support. This should help ensure more timely, predictable and adequate responses.

What sectors/clusters should be established and who should lead them?

- In terms of what sectors/clusters are established at the country level, this may differ from the set of sectors/clusters established at the global level. For example, there may be cases where particular sectors are merged (e.g. Health and Nutrition). There may also be cases where particular sectoral groups are not needed (e.g. Logistics or Emergency Telecommunications). Sector/cluster leads should only be designated for the sectors relevant to the emergency.
- In the case of Protection, at the global level there are focal point agencies for issues such as Gender Based Violence (UNFPA). Similar arrangements can be made at the country level, as appropriate.
- In terms of who should lead each of the sectors/clusters at the country level, 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. This principle should, however, be applied flexibly, taking account of capacities and strengths of humanitarian organizations already in the country/region. This may mean that in some cases sector lead arrangements at the country level do not replicate those at the global level. In such cases, it is particularly important that sector/cluster leads at the country level consult and maintain good communications with the respective global cluster leads, to ensure that agreed global standards/procedures are applied and to help mobilize the necessary operational support from the global level.
- The designation of sector/cluster leads should be based on transparent consultations within the Humanitarian Country Team and should take account of existing operations and capacities.
- Any IASC member can be a sector/cluster lead; it does not have to be a UN agency.
- Early Recovery planning should be integrated into the work of all sectoral groups. For this reason, rather than establishing separate Early Recovery clusters/sectoral groups at the country level, it is

recommended that each cluster nominate an Early Recovery focal point. The focal points should form a “network” to ensure joint planning and integrated response.

- To complement and support the clusters, thematic groups should also be established where needed to address priority cross-cutting issues.
- 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 lead has no presence.
- In all instances clusters/sectoral groups at the country level should be inclusive of those organizations with real operational capacities in their respective sectors. They should be results-oriented, with a clear focus on ensuring adequate humanitarian response. This includes addressing any gaps that may exist in the overall response.

How long should sectors/clusters continue to function?

- The HC (or RC), in consultation with humanitarian partners, is responsible for adapting coordination structures over time, taking into consideration the capacities of the host Government, development partners, local organizations etc.
- Sector/cluster leads are responsible for ensuring the development of exit or transition strategies for their clusters. These strategies should be developed in close consultation with national authorities and development actors, in order to strengthen national coordination capacities. Some clusters may phase out or transition into other arrangements earlier than others.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR DESIGNATING SECTOR/CLUSTER LEADS IN MAJOR NEW EMERGENCIES

At the onset of the emergency (if possible, within the first 24 hours):

Step 1. The HC (or RC, in countries where an HC has not been appointed) consults national authorities/counterparts and relevant IASC partners at the country level (NGOs, international organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies) to determine priority sectors or areas of activity for the emergency; which agencies are best placed to assume the role of sector/cluster lead for each one; what thematic groups are needed to address cross-cutting issues; and what support is needed from OCHA and other actors in terms of common tools and services.

Step 2. Based on these consultations, the HC (or RC) draws up a proposed list of sectors with designated sector/cluster leads for each. The HC (or RC) may also propose the establishment of thematic groups for particular priority cross-cutting issues. The HC (or RC) forwards this list to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), addressed to holmes@un.org, requesting endorsement within 24 hours from the full IASC at the global level.

Step 3. The ERC shares this proposal with the IASC, requesting endorsement or alternative proposals.

Within 24 hours of receiving the proposal from the HC (or RC)

Step 4. The ERC ensures agreement is reached within the IASC at the global level. Where agencies at the global level propose arrangements that differ from those initially proposed by the HC (or RC), the ERC consults the HC (or RC) and IASC further in order to reach agreement.

Step 5. The ERC communicates the decision reached to the HC (or RC) and all relevant partners at global level.

Step 6. The HC (or RC) informs the host government and all relevant country-level partners of agreed arrangements within the international humanitarian response. Common Humanitarian Action Plans and appeal documents should clearly state the agreed priority sectors and the designated leads for each.