

Two-tier coordination management: SAG & TWiG



There are three stones, not two, balanced on one another here for a reason. This is because the entire Cluster coordination process is about balancing the divergent needs of traditional and non-traditional Cluster partners in three key areas of work, each represented by one of the stones:

1. Collectively agreeing a strategic operational framework which outlines the overall approach while allowing for diversity in programme orientation
2. Timely sharing of reliable and relevant evidence that points out the need for mutual cooperation in adapting on-going programmes to the evolving needs and priorities of others
3. Formulating and sharing the most appropriate technical practices.

Both the IASC Principals' meeting of February and DFID's Humanitarian Emergency Response Review of March 2011 endorse the need to formalise some form of "two-tier" management of the Clusters. This is in recognition of the practical impossibility of involving every single Cluster partner in all aspects of strategic planning, and the consequent need to constitute a smaller 'core' group to take on this task on behalf of the wider membership. The "SAG and TWiG (and IMWiG)" model outlined here is one proven way of doing this without

disengaging those who feel left out of the overall results-driven planning process for the sector. This model ensures that everyone gets a say in how evidence is used and the most appropriate technical standards are applied to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable and difficult-to-reach are not ignored.

In larger emergencies clusters should become two-tier, consisting of a 'strategic body' group and an 'information sharing' group (DFID HERR March 2011).

Experience has consistently shown that there are three complementary mechanisms that need to be set up and managed by the Cluster Coordinator as the person to whom representation of the Cluster Lead Agency has been delegated. Each involves individual tasks which can be delegated to the coordination team or other Cluster members as required. Each mechanism is formal, and is accountable to the entire Cluster (peer) Group through the Cluster Coordinator. In reality, these three mechanisms comprise a **'two-tier' approach** which will only need to be applied in the largest crises when there are simply too many people around the table to do everything together in plenary meetings. The principles will have to be applied in all response settings, however:

- **Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)**
- **Technical Working Groups' (TWiGs)**
- **Information Management Working Group' (IMWiG)**

STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)

The Cluster Coordinator would be well advised to set up a 'Strategic Advisory Group' (SAG) once meetings have more than 20 agencies and/or 30 people attending. It is *not* necessary to establish a SAG-type mechanism if membership is below this.

This group is a small, representative sub-set of the wider Cluster membership, and is needed simply to allow decision-making to take place on behalf of a much larger 'plenary' group. The aim is to have no more than twelve to fifteen people around the table.

Each SAG member represents a specific stakeholder group, each of which will change depending on the type of crisis being faced, the scale, and the phase. For example, Donors will be heavily represented during the initial two weeks of a crisis, but are likely to reduce their presence thereafter. Representatives should 'self-select' from within their particular groups. For example, three international NGOs are requested to join, one small and two large. It is left to the NGOs to decide among themselves who considers themselves to be large and who small, and which three will represent. If desired by either SAG or non-SAG members, these representatives can rotate in order to counter perceptions of favouritism.

The Government representative should co-chair the SAG wherever possible, with the other co-chair being either the Cluster Coordinator or any of the other SAG members in rotation.

SAG meetings are called by the Cluster Coordinator according to need. As a guide, this is likely to be three or four times in the first week of response, becoming weekly for the next three weeks, and monthly thereafter. Meetings should be held according to 'Chatham House Rules' i.e. comments are incorporated but are not attributable to any particular organization.

Should the Cluster decide it wants a SAG-type management mechanism, Terms of Reference should be agreed by the entire membership as one of the first actions of the Cluster. These TORs should ideally contain:

- Agree SAG composition and way of working, including Terms of Reference;
- Draw up and agree Terms of Reference for Cluster Partners;
- Formulate and agree the Cluster's 'Strategic Operational Framework' (SOF); ensure formal ratification by Government; ensure complementarity with government policies and plans at local level; update regularly according to evolving needs; and hold partners to account against this framework

- Formulate and agree the Cluster workplan; and provide strategic oversight of its application by Cluster partners;
- Establish 'Technical Working Groups' (TWiGs) as required and hold such groups accountable to Terms of Reference agreed by the SAG; ensure proper representation within such groups; ensure timely output; ensure transparent reporting; and close such groups;
- Formulate and agree advocacy positions on behalf of the Cluster partners;
- Provide strategic planning oversight for effective and efficient allocation of resources by Cluster partners;
- Provide strategic oversight on integration of cross-Cluster planning and inclusion of cross-cutting issues (in close cooperation with the OCHA Cluster Coordinator);
- Agree performance indicators, and method by which these will be measured;
- Ensure appropriate technical standards are agreed and consistently applied;
- Support the Cluster Lead Coordinator in setting up dedicated mechanisms and systems for transparent and equitable allocation and monitoring of 'pooled' funds available to the Cluster;
- Oversight technical, financial, and functional capacities of Cluster partners
- Oversight quality assurance, market price fluctuations, and quantities available from local and/or national markets;
- Ensure coherence of public messaging
- Ensure the Cluster Lead upholds its responsibilities by applying both Cluster and Cluster partner Terms of Reference
- It is the responsibility of the Cluster Coordinator to ensure that outputs from SAG meetings are brought to the attention of, and followed up with relevant authorities, promulgated in plenary coordination meetings, reflected in Situation Reports (which provide the working 'frame-of-reference' for the Cluster membership and beyond), and posted to the relevant web-site.

Essential SAG TORs

- Collectively agrees a strategic operational framework that outlines the overall approach while allowing for diversity in programme orientation
- Advocates to government, other Clusters, and Donors for necessary change
- Transparently allocates resources
- Seeks proportionality of response actions
- Takes 'formal' responsibility for representing the collective Cluster position

SAG MEMBERS

- Government Focal Point
- Cluster Coordinator
- Donors x 3
- Large Int'l NGOs x 2
- Small Int'l NGO
- National NGO Forum Rep
- IFRC
- Early Recovery Cluster
- Other related Clusters + (if required)
- OCHA Inter-Cluster Coord
- ICRC
- Red Cross/Crescent National Society
- Military Liaison

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS (TWiGs)

Set up as many 'Technical Working Groups' (TWiGs) as required to agree minimum standards and to formulate the most appropriate technical practices with which to attain those standards for each technical area requiring such input.

For at least the first 4-6 weeks of a crisis, TWiGs will need to be managed by the Technical Advisor within the Cluster coordination team. For the Pakistan Floods response in 2007, this position was filled part-time for the Shelter Cluster by an INGO under a global pre-agreement with the Emergency Shelter Cluster.

Technical Working Groups are established and provided Terms of Reference by the WASH Cluster Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) as required. Once the Cluster has decided that further technical discussion is required — and any Cluster member can alert the Cluster Coordinator to the need for this at any time — the Cluster Coordinator appoints a designated volunteer Focal Point to facilitate the work of the working group. Such groups have a **limited life-span** since they disband once the outputs delineated in the TORs have been achieved. Note that this may involve a 'flurry' of meetings. Note also that there is a tendency for TWiGs to go on for too long and that outputs have to be formulated within days. In Haiti, the 'water quality control' TWiG was still deliberating five months after the earthquake which rather undermined its relevance and limited its usefulness.

Composition of such groups is determined through a self-selection process depending on available technical skills, interest, and capacities from among the UN agencies, non-governmental, Governmental, commercial, and academic sectors. In principle, anyone can join such a group although, in practice, the Focal Point is advised not to let the group grow much beyond fifteen members. It may be that sub-groups need to be formed to explore specific issues. In this event, the TWiG Focal Point will appoint a responsible person to report back to the TWiG. The TWiG Focal Point is responsible for updating the Cluster on status of work-in-progress. Final outputs/recommendations of the TWiG are presented to Cluster stakeholders in plenary coordination meetings in oral and written form for feedback and comment. Once sufficient time has elapsed (not more than 48 hrs), the SAG will endorse the recommendations of the TWiG and post the written guideline to the appropriate web-site. Cluster partners are then expected to apply such recommendations.

Terms of Reference for TWiGs will be largely generic, but will include details of specific outputs required. Generic TORs will probably need to include:

- Ensure relevant technical standards are formulated and agreed within the terms of reference and deadline set by SAG. This will include a review of existing materials and may culminate in an endorsement of existing guidelines, an addendum to existing guidelines, or production of completely new material

- Recommend the quantity, quality, and price of materials to be produced, if applicable
- Support the Cluster Coordinator in promoting such standards within the context of the Strategic Operational Framework (SOF)
- Advise SAG on compliance issues connected with appliance of the agreed standards
- Update the Cluster on status of work-in-progress and present final outputs/recommendations of the TWIG to Cluster stakeholders in oral and written form for feedback and comment
- Ensure a TWIG membership that is representative of the wider Cluster stakeholder groups, and ensure that relevant technical skill-sets are appropriate and available (advise the Cluster Coordinator if this is not the case)
- Set up Sub-Working Groups as required
- Ensure all Cluster stakeholders have the opportunity to feedback into the work of the TWIG prior to presentation to the Cluster in plenary, and SAG for ratification

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP (IMWiG)

The crucial role played by Information Management in coordinating humanitarian action is now better appreciated than it was before the advent of the 'Cluster Approach'. The IM function requires a dedicated team consisting of an Information Manager, at least one Data Manager, and at least one Geographic Information Systems (GIS) manager.

Establish an 'Information Management Working Group' (IMWiG) that ensures timely sharing of reliable and relevant evidence through joint information systems that:

- Ensures consistent usage of common datasets between clusters
- Identifies those most in need
- Tracks trends in coverage and access over time against key performance indicators
- Highlights the need for mutual cooperation in adapting on-going programmes to the evolving needs and priorities of others
- Captures relevant information from other Clusters
- Makes use of, and manages content through dedicated IT and web-based resources

Members of SAGs and TWIGs can de-select themselves at any time, but should find a replacement from within their designated 'stakeholder group' before doing so. They can also be asked to step aside by the Cluster Coordinator on advice of his/her peers so that perceptions of an 'old boys club' setting the agenda are minimised.

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<http://james.shepherd-barron.com/clusterwise-2/5-the-three-essentials-of-coordination-management/>