

FRAMEWORK ON CLUSTER COORDINATION COSTS AND FUNCTIONS IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

INTRODUCTION

In February 2010, donor partners and cluster representatives agreed that a small group of donors and representatives from Global Cluster Lead Agencies (GCLAs) and Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points should be established to take forward some key conclusions of their discussions in the Multi-Stakeholder – Cluster Meeting.¹ This group met regularly throughout 2010 to discuss the issue of meeting the costs of cluster coordination in depth, producing an initial *Draft Framework*. In the formal meeting of the wider group in February 2011, to bring these discussions to some conclusions, donor and cluster representatives further explored and sought clarification and/or consensus on remaining questions and issues. The current document has been informed by this discussion. It represents some broad principles about cluster coordination by international actors at country level and funding modalities, reflecting the current status of discussions on these issues, and seeks to build greater understanding and accountability between donors, GCLAs and Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points on what each can reasonably expect from the other in the future.

EFFECTIVE COORDINATION IS INTEGRAL TO HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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Effective cluster and inter-cluster coordination are widely recognised as an essential part of any humanitarian response that is accountable to affected populations. Cluster coordination should enable actors within the same sector to work more efficiently by jointly identifying the priority needs of an affected population through sector-wide, coordinated needs assessment and capitalizing on their respective strengths to meet those needs quickly and effectively. Effective cluster leadership should be sufficiently strong to ensure that decisions are made and difficult tasks addressed, but should also be able to facilitate consensus. Such leadership should be matched by an acknowledgement of this role and supported by active and committed cluster members. Both are key elements of mutual accountability.

¹ Summary Record, Donor-Global Cluster Lead Agencies Meeting, 16 February 2010, (page 4). The Small Group was comprised of representatives from the following Canada, Denmark, ECHO, GenCap, IFRC, OCHA, Save the Children, UK, UNEP, UNDP, UNHCR, USA, WHO.

**CLUSTER
COORDINATION
SHOULD BE
TAILORED TO SCALE**

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As a basis for a more coherent sectoral and overall response, essential outputs and services should include, at a minimum, collective, coordinated assessment, analysis and planning by the cluster to identify and address gaps, establish priorities and avoid duplication, as well as monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the sector strategy and results; ensuring the effective use and transfer of information for and between cluster members, between clusters, and with other elements of the coordination architecture; ensuring the quality of response, including the promotion of appropriate standards and delivery of services; and advocacy. The cluster should also engage in inter-cluster coordination activities and ensure due attention to cross-cutting issues.²

Wherever possible and when established, cluster coordination mechanisms should complement and aim to strengthen any existing national/local humanitarian management and coordination systems. The aim is not to set up parallel structures which compete with or undermine existing ones, but rather to support and build on existing capacity to enhance the overall response. Strategic planning should include the development of an exit/transition strategy.

Cluster coordination involves a range of functions related to the essential outputs and services of the cluster that, depending upon the size of the response needed, can be fulfilled either by an individual Cluster Coordinator or, more commonly, by a cluster coordination team. A coordination team might include a Cluster Coordinator and other specialized capacity, for example in information management, needs assessment, advocacy/PR/PI and cross-cutting issues. In addition to staffing for cluster coordination, other requirements might include temporary technical support for joint needs assessments, the integration of relevant cross-cutting issues(s), as well as database management, and possibly additional equipment and transportation.

The type of cluster “coordination model” needed – and its ‘life-cycle’ - will vary according to the scale, timing, duration, typology and logistical challenges of the humanitarian emergency, and there may be a need for cluster coordination at different levels, e.g. at the national level and in sub-national hubs. Guidance for a more systematic approach to scaling up and phasing down (including a timeframe for doing so) is needed and greater involvement of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), is recommended in the decision-making process. Context-specific criteria and triggers should be

² OCHA is conducting internal and external consultations on inter-cluster coordination and the extent and nature of the mechanisms and respective roles of both OCHA and the Clusters for this. Guidance will be produced in 2011.

**CLUSTER
COORDINATION
REQUIRES BROAD
ENGAGEMENT**

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developed as part of the strategic response planning for phasing out, potentially linked to the disaster-management cycle and calendar. Both phasing out and preparedness activities may be supported by Clusters being linked to pre-existing sectoral coordination structures and/or national/local mechanisms.

Although Cluster Lead Agencies and partners have a responsibility to deliver the 'essential' cluster functions, as outlined in section 1, it is clear that there cannot be a 'one-size fits-all' cluster coordination model. It will be up to the Cluster Lead Agency, in consultation with the HC, HCT and other partners on the ground, to decide which model is appropriate for the circumstances.

Cluster coordination could be described as an essential 'common service' or 'enabler' provided for all partners in the cluster. It is the responsibility of the Global Cluster Lead Agency to ensure that this service is provided, either by itself or by drawing on capacity within its global cluster membership and relevant surge capacity mechanisms. While Cluster Lead Agencies are held accountable for cluster performance, cluster partners also have a responsibility for this; predictable and accountable partnership is the *quid pro quo* of enhanced leadership. All cluster partners, and the donors that support them, have a responsibility for ensuring successful outcomes and in finding appropriate solutions when issues arise.

Partners where possible should consider providing support to the Cluster Lead Agency in fulfilling the cluster coordination role, which may include sharing out some of the coordination responsibilities within the cluster/ sub-clusters³. Moreover, various evaluations of the cluster approach have recommended that international NGOs, and other partners, take on more leadership roles within clusters (both co-leading and co-facilitating) at national and sub-national levels, and where they have the capacity and comparative advantage. Global Cluster Lead Agencies and donors support such initiatives in principle, but a concerted effort is still needed to ensure this can be translated into practice.⁴

Donors have a particular part to play in expressing the value they assign to the INGO role, supporting the consistent engagement of partners, as well as their ability to assume leadership roles where appropriate. Donors should encourage all partners to actively engage in clusters when shaping emergency proposals and making funding decisions.

³ Generic TORs for Cluster Coordinators at the Country Level

⁴ See for example Cluster Evaluation II Synthesis Report p. 80, sub-recommendation 2.5.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE SUPPORT AT COUNTRY LEVEL

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Various evaluations of the cluster approach and Real Time Evaluations have recommended that cross-cutting issues should be better integrated into humanitarian response.⁵ The reality is that Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points are often not present at the country level to support clusters, and individual clusters often lack the knowledge and expertise needed to mainstream these issues within their response. If the situation requires specific support from cross-cutting issue experts, OCHA and concerned Cluster Lead Agencies would ensure that appropriate cross-cutting expertise is available in the inter-cluster coordination structure.

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF CLUSTER COORDINATION

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During the height of an emergency and in large protracted emergencies, when cluster coordination is a full-time job, Cluster Lead Agencies should appoint dedicated Cluster Coordinators, i.e. individuals who can spend 100% of their time fulfilling their cluster coordination responsibilities and are accountable to the broader cluster membership⁶. Global Cluster Lead Agencies should continue their efforts to ensure that trained cluster coordination capacity is readily available for deployment to emergencies and it is up to each individual agency to decide how best to achieve this. It is recognized by donors that professional and adequate staffing does entail costs. Donors should support agencies to meet those costs through mainstreaming of roles and, when needed, funding coordination directly.

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While agencies seek assurances that all coordination costs will be covered, from the donor perspective, full predictability on this is not possible. Where the costs of cluster coordination are largely unforeseeable due to the size, scale and/or unpredictability of a humanitarian emergency, funding for cluster coordination activities should come from a combination of additional contributions to projects and activities in the Flash Appeals, or their equivalent, and – where there is scope in such budgets to cover sudden needs – from available, often unearmarked, funding for annual/core budgets.

It is recognized by donors that, while efforts are being made to use core resources, the ability of agencies, organizations and partners to access core funds, alternative funding pools and other support mechanisms for unforeseeable emergencies differs, and may be limited and/or time-bound. Donors remain committed, therefore, to funding some well-defined coordination costs in such emergencies, with the expectation that meeting such additional costs will translate into a more effective humanitarian response.

⁵ A specific Review on the coordination and funding of cross-cutting issues in humanitarian action is planned for 2011, with the development of an Action Plan to enhance integration, support capacity-building and better delineate funding modalities.

⁶ See Joint GCLA letter to Country Representatives, 2009, on the separation of the respective Cluster Coordinator/Agency roles.

**MEETING
COORDINATION
COSTS IN
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Cluster Lead Agencies will seek to increase transparency on the full costs of coordination, including the extent to which these have been covered from core funds. Where additional funding is required to meet costs that the agency/organization is unable to meet itself, donors will expect those organizations to clearly set out how additional resources will be allocated. Donors recognize that partners assuming a coordination and leadership role will have additional financial needs. Donors will also explore mechanisms to fund NGOs directly for coordination roles and thus avoid potential dependency upon 'pass through' funds.

Recognizing the fact that efficient cluster coordination is an essential 'enabler' for effective programming across the board, donors should uphold the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) principle of burden sharing among themselves⁷, i.e. they should not neglect funding cluster coordination in favour of more 'high visibility' projects. While donors will not always be able to meet all the costs of coordination for every cluster in every humanitarian emergency of this nature, they undertake to give such appeals serious consideration and to act in accordance with the Principles of GHD.

Appropriate coordination mechanisms remain essential in protracted emergencies and to respond to recurrent/cyclical emergencies, although the focus and structures may differ. Maintaining and participating in such coordination structures is seen as fundamental to the organization and conduct of the humanitarian response.

At the same time, while there may be some reduction in the number of staff entailed, some scaling down of structures, and greater predictability on the possible level of costs, it is recognized that continued coordination is **not** cost free. It may be less intensive, but more sustained and/or spike in response to changes in the context or transfer of the management role to a different partner as part of the transition plan.

There remains some divergence of views, however, between donors and agencies on the modalities for meeting these costs of coordination:

For the majority of donors, use of mainstreamed funding in foreseeable, protracted and recurrent crises remains the primary expectation. The cluster approach is widely recognized as the mechanism through which effective humanitarian interventions should be coordinated. As a result, donors would expect CLAs to prioritise cluster and cross-cutting issue activities in their annual programmes and budgets and allocate core (and often

⁷ Good Humanitarian Donorship Principle number 14.

unearmarked) funds to them.⁸ For this reason, some donors have increased allocations of unearmarked funds. Similarly, where cluster coordination is a priority, CLAs should submit proposals to pooled funds provided that proposed projects meet the criteria of those funds.⁹ For agencies reliant on project-based budgets, donors suggest agencies include coordination roles in large project proposals, as well as consider how project overheads could also be used to mainstream cluster coordination costs.

From the agency perspective, several CLAs and partners are already accessing bilateral agency funds, core budgets or using other mechanisms to cover considerable percentages of their coordination costs.¹⁰ Yet some CLAs and NGOs have difficulty accessing core/annual budget resources to lead coordination activities and have different internal budget and management structures. Where they do not have access to core funds, agencies and NGOs need to continue, in the short term and until a more durable solution can be found, to seek additional funds through earmarked channels for these coordination costs. In such cases, some donors may consider limited funding through the CAPs or other appeals. However, the value-added of meeting such costs would have to be clearly defined.

It is recognized that clearer guidance and criteria in relation to coordination costs for foreseeable, and protracted emergencies is still required, as well as continued advocacy by both donors and agencies at all levels, including through Executive Boards and annual consultations, for access to, and allocation of, core funding to meet the costs of cluster lead and cross-cutting issue responsibilities.

*Based on
Donor Stakeholder–Cluster Consultations,
February 2010 – February 2011*

Geneva, May 2011

⁸ In this section, Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs) includes Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points/entities.

⁹ Funding criteria, as well as the ability of different humanitarian actors to access the respective pooled funds, is under discussion within the IASC Humanitarian Financing Group and will also be addressed in upcoming evaluations.

¹⁰ See the *IASC Final Report on Mainstreaming Cluster Costs and Functions*, April 2010, for the agency-defined benchmarks for mainstreaming functions and costs at both global and country level, as well as progress against these. For some donors, 'mainstreaming', includes costs reflected in the overall budget for an agency, but with different potential channels – core, loosely earmarked, or projects – being used to fund that budget.