Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)
DRAFT 29/11/11

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR CLUSTER ADAPTATION

Detailed guidance on the cluster approach is provided in the *IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response (November 2006).* This guidance note should be read in conjunction with other relevant IASC guidance[1].

Background

- This Operational Guidance on cluster adaptation is part of a larger process aimed at improving the way the UN system and its partners work together to ensure that coordination mechanisms created during the humanitarian emergency are effectively adapted to accompany the transition as humanitarian needs decrease and the focus in the country changes to development[2]. The overarching goal is to better serve affected populations during this transition and beyond. This Guidance is limited to those situations where there is a distinct reduction in humanitarian needs following the initial emergency and a resumption of national capacity/ability to coordinate recovery.

- The cluster approach is the standard coordination mechanism used by UN humanitarian actors and their international partners for responding to large-scale complex and natural humanitarian emergencies requiring a multi-sectoral response[3]. The cluster approach was never envisaged, however, as a suitable mechanism for coordinating recovery and development. As the affected area emerges from the humanitarian emergency, clusters should be phased out/ adapted into structures which are more appropriate for the evolving context.

- This Guidance focuses on the adaptation of clusters (also commonly referred to as the 'phase-down/out' of clusters). It is generic and not cluster-specific[4] with the aim of bringing greater predictability and coherence to the transition overall. The Guidance has been developed using the lessons learned by practitioners in country operations which have already experienced transition. It is not intended to be prescriptive as every context will be different. Rather, it is hoped that colleagues facing transition in their country operation will take those elements which are relevant and apply or adapt them for use. This Guidance note will be revised periodically to take account of experience at the country level.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Working in support of the national response

- As outlined in the 2011 *IASC Guidance Note on Working with National Authorities,* wherever possible, clusters should support and/or complement existing national coordination mechanisms for emergency response and preparedness. Where appropriate, government, or other appropriate national counterparts should be actively encouraged to co-

---

[1] E.g. *IASC Guidance Note on Working with National Authorities (July 2011); Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators [date]*

[2] This Guidance Note will form part of a larger 'toolkit' on transition, which will include guidance and templates.

[3] Refugees fall under the specific mandate of UNHCR and are therefore assisted outside the cluster approach. Under international law, the High Commissioner for Refugees is accountable to the United Nations General Assembly.

[4] Individual clusters may of course develop their own cluster-specific adaptation guidance.

chair cluster meetings with the Cluster Lead Agency from as early as possible.[5]

❑ Some service-based clusters (e.g. Logistics) may lack a national counterpart to work with while programme-based clusters (e.g. Health) typically have long-established relationships with government counterparts. Some clusters (e.g. Protection) may not have one single counterpart and will therefore have to consult with a number of line ministries and other partners; there may also be sensitivities involved which preclude such a relationship. These different models will affect both the *speed* and *manner* in which different clusters adapt as the humanitarian phase comes to an end.

❑ In consultation with Cluster Coordinators, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)[6] should agree how to maintain support (if needed) to those clusters which have not been able to establish a working relationship with a national counterpart and which therefore lack an entity to 'hand-over' to during the transition. Very often, many of the services/programmes these clusters supply are still required in some form through the transition, and some residual capacity may need to be maintained in case of a new emergency.

❑ The future of the Protection cluster should be given special consideration at HCT level according to the particular circumstances in-country. During the emergency phase, especially if it is a complex humanitarian emergency, the Protection cluster may have taken the decision <u>not</u> to involve a government/other national counterpart. If real protection concerns remain during the transition, the cluster may re-group in a different form but still under international leadership.

Begin cluster adaptation planning early

❑ **Cluster Activation:** When the HC and HCT recommend the activation of a particular cluster, it should be because the magnitude or complexity of needs in that sector exceeds the national response capacity[7]. There should therefore have been a mapping of existing coordination mechanisms and national capacity for that sector of response which can then be used as a basis for cluster adaptation planning.

❑ **Cluster Exit Strategy:** cluster adaptation planning should begin as early as possible during the humanitarian emergency, as part of developing an overall 'strategy'/response plan for the cluster, and should build on the early recovery approach adopted by the cluster[8]. Where possible, the cluster should appoint a focal point/small team to work closely with national authorities on cluster adaptation planning from the outset.

Contribute to the development of an overarching 'HCT Transition Plan'

❑ **HCT Transition Plan:** The HCT should agree on an over-arching 'Transition Plan' for all international coordination mechanisms, in line with national frameworks. This plan will articulate how the HCT itself will adapt to changing circumstances[9]. The HCT will also rely on analysis coming from OCHA, the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and the clusters to decide on the future of the inter-cluster coordination mechanism and which 'model' of cluster adaptation might be most appropriate in their particular context.

❑ **Different models for cluster adaptation:** Some of the models which have been seen in the

---

[5] The Cluster Lead Agency still remains accountable for leadership of the cluster in terms of being 'Provider of Last Resort'.

[6] Throughout this Guidance Note, HCT is used to also refer to any equivalent body (e.g. UN Country Team).

[7] In conflict situations, the national authorities may be unable or unwilling to respond.

[8] E.g. building on efforts to strengthen local and national capacity.

[9] For instance by (1) reducing the frequency of meetings or inviting attendance according to the focus of the agenda; (2) expanding/changing the membership; and (3) changing the focus to recovery and development.

field are: (1) merge the clusters into existing national coordination mechanisms; (2) modify the clusters, i.e. to form 'sectoral working groups' around related areas; (3) streamline clusters, i.e. they loosely retain their form but meet less frequently and focus on Disaster Preparedness and national capacity building; (4) close down clusters as other coordination mechanisms take over. There is no 'one-size fits all' approach; the model adopted should reflect local needs and circumstances and should be named accordingly.

❑ **To inform HCT decision-making:** Each cluster should conduct a simple mapping of cluster functions and of national capacity to take over those functions. It will include some analysis of: (1) functions that need to continue in the adaptation process; (2) functions that can be phased out; and (3) suggestions regarding any new functions which might be needed.

Planning the cluster's adaptation

❑ **Invest in national capacity building from early on:** for those clusters which have been able to identify a government counterpart from early on and to use a Cluster Lead Agency/national authority Co-Chair arrangement for the cluster during the emergency, it will be easier to handover responsibility for coordination of the sector. In this scenario, the Cluster Lead Agency and cluster partners should invest time and resources in the capacity building of their national counterpart during the emergency phase[10], as part of their wider early recovery efforts.

❑ **Develop benchmarks/indicators for cluster adaptation:** Clusters should develop their own benchmarks/indicators for *when* adaptation should begin, building on: (1) the mapping of national coordination mechanisms and capacity that was done at the start of the emergency; and (2) cluster-specific and joint needs assessments, which should provide a kind of check-list of what outstanding needs remain to be addressed. These benchmarks may have to be adjusted if there is a significant change in circumstance in the country. Some cluster benchmark templates have already developed at the field level and these can be adapted for use[11]. The inter-cluster coordination group can provide support in sharing and developing these benchmarks. Where possible, cluster benchmarks and indicators should be coherent with those used in the CAP.

❑ **Make a simple cluster adaptation plan and monitor progress against that plan:** As a cluster's benchmarks for adaptation are being reached, they should act as triggers for action. For example, the cluster should start building working relationships with development actors and donors (inviting them to attend cluster meetings), national actors should ideally start assuming more responsibility for coordination and decision-making, cluster meetings should become less frequent/ have a change of focus and the handover of assets should begin in earnest. The aim is to have a phased adaptation process, rather than an abrupt end to programmes and services.

❑ **Align humanitarian priorities with national and international development plans[12]:** during the overall transition, the cluster should continue to advocate for residual humanitarian needs to be addressed, for example by ensuring they are included in national

---

[10] This should include exploring any opportunities there may be for seconding staff to national counterparts to support the transition.

[11] Some examples are provided as an annex to this guidance note (generic ones might include a significant return of displaced persons following a ceasefire agreement, a resumption of livelihoods, a significant decrease in key indicators such as malnutrition); others will be included in the 'Transition Toolkit'.

[12] For useful guidance on transition financing, see: *'Building a Better Response'* by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development International Network on Conflict and Fragility (OECD/INCAF) at http://www.oecd.org/document/2/0,3746,en_2649_33693550_45347394_1_1_1_1,00.html

and international development plans and priorities. The HCT, UN Country Team and RCO should similarly continue to stress how humanitarian action can contribute to longer-term development priorities[13].

❑ **Agree on roles, responsibilities and accountabilities through the cluster adaptation process:** During the humanitarian emergency, the Cluster Lead Agency is ultimately accountable for the performance/delivery of the cluster, though that in turn depends on the contribution of cluster partners, funding and other factors. In planning the cluster adaptation, there will have to be agreement on who will be assuming responsibility for what, with agreed handover timelines (e.g. between the Cluster Lead Agency and the national authorities). If there were specific mechanisms in place for consulting with and inviting feedback from affected populations, consideration should be given to how these might continue/ be adapted for use through the recovery and development phases.

Transfer of tools and resources

❑ Each agency/organization has its own internal institutional policies regarding the transfer of physical assets, tools and human resources as that agency/organization leaves or downsizes. This guidance is therefore limited to the transfer of collective tools and resources developed and 'owned' by the cluster as a whole, such as Information Management (IM).

❑ **Begin early:** experience suggests the most successful asset 'handovers' are those where there has been a clear cluster adaptation strategy from the outset and MoUs have been developed with counterparts during the emergency phase.

❑ **Undertake a functional review** of functions/services the cluster provides, which ones need to be continued (tailored to the local context) and whether there is a need for new services. One way of doing this is to conduct a client discussion/survey of needs. It will also be important to do a simple **capacity analysis of national counterparts and on the basis of that, to engage in capacity building where needed** to ensure that a handover will be sustainable[14]. Regarding the continuation of some services like IM, the government should be encouraged to build additional costs into its transition plans and future budgets from the outset.

❑ **Ensure HCT has some dedicated capacity** to support some of the ongoing needs of the UN system, e.g. in IM.

Preparedness

❑ During the emergency, Cluster Lead Agencies and cluster partners should ensure that their coordination mechanisms and activities support national emergency preparedness efforts[15], and during the transition, efforts and resources should be directed towards ensuring national response mechanisms are better equipped for mitigating the effects of future disasters[16].

❑ **Link to national authorities on disaster management**[17]: the HCT and/or the inter-cluster

---

[13] As already articulated in Post Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNAs) and Post Conflict Needs Assessments (PCNAs).

[14] This will need to be accompanied by a proactive fund-raising strategy, which might involve leveraging public-private partnerships.

[15] IASC Operational Guidance for Clusters working with National Authorities, July 2011

[16] The emphasis is on Preparedness and DRR for natural disasters but Preparedness is also essential for effectively managing conflict-related emergencies

[17]There are some good practical examples from the country level of the HCT/UNCT and clusters working with national authority counterparts on all aspects of preparedness and DRR. For example, in Mozambique, when there is no active emergency, the HCT works with the National Disaster Management Agency supporting vulnerability and DRR, emergency preparedness and mitigation efforts. Humanitarian partners in Mozambique contributed to the Government Contingency Plan which forms the basis for the HCT Inter-Agency contingency Plan. In the Philippines, the HCT and

coordination group should establish a working relationship with the national disaster management authorities during the emergency phase and any 'HCT Transition Plan' should outline how the relationship will evolve following cluster adaptation.

❑ **Handover of preparedness and DRR-related activities**: as part of the mapping of national capacities to take over key cluster functions during cluster adaptation, each cluster should take account of the following activities which they may have initiated during the emergency response: early warning programmes/activities; risk and hazard assessments; crisis prevention/mitigation programmes; vulnerability assessments; contingency plans. It is important to ensure these efforts are sustained by handing them over to national counterparts[18].

Endorsed by the IASC Working Group
Geneva,

---

national authorities established a technical working group involving the national disaster management agency, line ministries and UN and INGO representatives, which, among other things, will look at contingency planning and joint needs assessments.

[18] The IASC SWG on Preparedness is currently preparing a 'checklist' for inter-agency teams working on preparedness at the country level.