Inter-Agency Standing Committee

**IASC SUBSIDIARY BODies**

IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach

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## Key Achievements against Work plan Targets

***List 5 to 10 achievements and successes in line with the 2012 Work Plan***

* Working in teams, the IASC Sub-Working Group (SWG) on the Cluster Approach drafted the 9 sections of the IASC Coordination Reference Module with support from the Global Clusters. It focuses on response to both L3 and non-L3 emergencies, and covers the critical areas of cluster activation and deactivation; cluster functions and management; minimum commitments for participation in clusters; sub-national and inter-cluster coordination; sharing leadership within the cluster approach; and, monitoring cluster performance. The Module is intended to serve as a reference guide for field practitioners and to help the Humanitarian Country Team devise the most appropriate ‘coordination solutions’, avoid complicated arrangements and decrease unnecessary workload and process.
* Based on a dissemination and communication strategy prepared by the SWG, the Module was translated into French and was widely circulated to IASC members, including Global Clusters, for dissemination and use. It was also posted on <http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/>, along with sample terms of reference for shared leadership models and other good practice. A draft version of the Module was circulated to clusters in South Sudan in mid-2012 to get early feedback on the content. The Module is currently being field tested, with five countries undergoing an impact assessment in the second quarter of 2013 and a revision of the Module planned for mid-2013.
* Monitoring coordination performance at the national and sub-national level in both sudden onset and protracted crises was highlighted as a priority under the IASC Transformative Agenda. The SWG also developed two cluster performance monitoring tools: a cluster activation checklist (for sudden onset crises) and coordination performance report (for protracted emergencies). Both enable the identification of areas for support, improvement, and follow-up actions, and were developed to ensure that clusters are efficient and effective coordination mechanisms, fulfilling the core cluster functions, meeting the needs of constituent members, and supporting delivery to affected people. These tools are also necessary for accountability purposes to demonstrate the added value and justify the cost of coordination. The checklist will be used in the next level 3 emergency, and the coordination performance report will be rolled out to all cluster activated countries in 2013.
* The sub-group on accountability to affected populations worked in the first half of 2012 to strengthen existing tools. The Operational Framework developed by the sub-group was made more user-friendly based on feedback from SWG members, clusters and field-based colleagues. A simple self-assessment tool was also developed to measure progress of IASC organizations in meeting the Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP).
* The SWG supported the agenda setting process and the development of background material for the 2012 Multi-Stakeholder Cluster meeting, which reaffirmed the value of the ‘Framework on Cluster Coordination Costs and Functions’; identified good practice for further replication; and identified issues to address and improve the roll-out of clusters. Part of the outcome of the meeting was the preparation of an analysis on 2011 cluster coordination funding, which was developed with inputs from the SWG and will be used in future discussions with donors on the need for predictable resourcing of clusters and for support to NGOs taking on coordination roles. The meeting also focused on the IASC Transformative Agenda and the changes needed to achieve transformation in the areas of coordination, leadership, and accountability.

## Challenges faced in 2012

***List up 5 challenges and constraints faced by the Subsidiary Body***

* While it was widely acknowledged that accountability to affected populations was the fundamental basis for humanitarian action, there was limited action by IASC partners to take this forward on a system-wide basis. In line with an IASC Principals request, the sub-group spent considerable time in developing and pursing opportunities to pilot the Operational Framework in up to three countries in 2012 and to incorporate the CAAP into the policies and operational guidelines and to promote them with operational partners in the first half of 2012. In July 2012, the SWG together with the sub-group organized a one-day meeting of humanitarian partners and donors to discuss and reach agreement on concrete ways to take forward the CAAP and the Operational Framework. These efforts were met with limited success due to resource constraints (no response from donors to fund the pilots) and insufficient support across the humanitarian community to facilitate this work. At its July meeting, the IASC Working Group changed the status of the sub-group to an IASC Task Force on Accountability to Affected Populations to provide greater visibility/prominence to this important topic. Following this decision, the SWG workplan activities related to steering the implementation of the CAAPs and further developing/rolling-out the Operational Framework were transferred to the new Task Force.
* Throughout 2012, the SWG held several discussions to agree on the parameters of cluster involvement in preparedness. There seemed to be general agreement that where clusters were activated, they should work on preparedness activities. However, there was no consensus on the role of global clusters in supporting activated clusters in preparedness work (e.g. resources, capacity-building, guidance, technical support, surge capacity from HQ) or in supporting high-risk countries that do not have activated clusters but where early warning systems indicate a potential need for support. Global clusters requested that the Emergency Response Planning (ERP) concept be further defined before reaching agreement (likely in mid-2013) on preparedness roles and responsibilities. The IASC Principals have asked the SWGCA and the GCC to work on guidance and training aimed at building “the ability of clusters and agencies to effectively integrate preparedness, early action and adopting early recovery approaches in humanitarian responses to strengthen resilience” in 2013 (from the final summary record of the IASC Principals Meeting, 13th December 2012).
* One of the SWGCA’s action points for this year was to hold policy discussions the impact of the revised definition of ‘Provider of Last Resort’ on the leadership/co-leadership of clusters by NGOs at the country level, with a view to engaging with donors on funding for NGO shared management/leadership responsibilities. One of the challenges to taking this issue forward is the fact that there does not seem to be a united NGO position on this, or real momentum in the NGO community to focus attention on it. That said, to some extent the issue was indirectly addressed during the Multi-Stakeholder Donor-Cluster meeting in February 2011 via the analysis of cluster coordination funding (though few NGOs submitted data) and the plenary discussion which flagged the need for additional resources to fund the contribution of NGOs to shared cluster management/leadership. This issue will be picked up again in the planned donor-cluster consultations and stakeholder meeting in 2013.

## Any outcomes of your Subsidiary Body in relation to the Transformative Agenda in 2012

***Please list work done in relation to the Transformative Agenda***

* In line with the IASC Transformative Agenda Action Plan (recommendation 31)[[1]](#footnote-1), the SWG prepared a ‘Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the country level’ composed of 9 sections focused on response to both L3 and non-L3 emergencies. In November/December 2012, based on the dissemination and communication plan endorsed by the SWG, the Module was circulated to the field to ensure that every country cluster was aware of the standards expected of them for coordination. The Module will be reviewed and updated periodically based on feedback from the field, with the next revision likely in mid-2013.
* The SWG also developed two cluster performance monitoring tools as part of the Transformative Agenda for use by all country clusters.

## Outstanding work of your Subsidiary Body requiring the attention of the IASC Working Group in 2013

***Please list issues requiring the IASC Working Group’s attention***

* Preparedness: as mentioned above, the IASC Principals have asked the SWGCA and the GCC (in consultation with the CWGER) to work on guidance and training aimed at building “the ability of clusters and agencies to effectively integrate preparedness, early action and adopting early recovery approaches in humanitarian responses to strengthen resilience” in 2013 (from the final summary record of the IASC Principals Meeting, 13th December 2012).
* Revision of the Cluster Coordination Reference Module: several sections need more inter-agency agreement in order to be improved, for example the sections on cluster transition and inter-cluster coordination which are both areas which field colleagues highlight as crucial in terms of receiving guidance. The SWGCA may need to raise some questions for the IASC Working Group to consider, in order to complete the revision. The SWGCA will then continue to be involved in the roll-out of the Module and related training/coaching at the country level.
* In 2012 OCHA commissioned a report on behalf of the SWGCA on ‘the coordination and funding of cross-cutting issues in humanitarian action’ which is due to be shared with the SWGCA at the end of January 2013. The members of the group will then be asked to take a position on the future of cross-cutting issues which they will ask the IASC WG to consider at its March meeting.
* There were a number of issues which SWGCA members raised for further consideration in 2013 including working with national authorities in cluster/sector contexts and cluster coordination in low-finance contexts. The SWGCA and GCC also expressed their continued wish to work together on issues whenever appropriate.

Prepared by:

IASC SWG on the Cluster Approach, January 2013

1. It follows the IASC Transformative Agenda Compendium Action Point 31, which tasked the IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach "to review and, where necessary, simplify existing cluster guidance to make it less prescriptive and more empowering for HCs and HCTs to devise the most appropriate ‘coordination solutions’ for their country taking into account the local operational situation, including at the sub-national level." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)