INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

AD HOC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HUMANITARIAN REFORM

Developing Cluster Responsibilities and Accountability – a Concept Note

12 July 2005
New York UN Secretariat, 36th Floor, Conference Room S 3627

Circulated 11 July 2005

I   Background:

There is general recognition that while the humanitarian community is capable of launching a massive level of response when called upon, there are also areas of humanitarian activity where performance is less than optimal. In certain sectors, it appears that it is difficult to mobilise adequate resources, material inputs and sufficient levels of expertise in the time frame appropriate to the needs of the crisis. The main clusters of concern that have been identified are Protection, Camp Management, Emergency Shelter, Water and Sanitation, Nutrition and Feeding, Logistics and Emergency telecommunications, Reintegration and Recovery.

The Humanitarian Response Review has noted that there is a broad level of commitment throughout the humanitarian community to address the concerns over humanitarian performance. In discussions at the June meeting of the IASC working group it was felt that further progress in addressing these gaps could be facilitated by establishing cluster leads with agreed overall responsibilities for supporting and strengthening the cluster, as well as predetermined responsibilities in response to crises. This note therefore seeks to explore; what is meant by cluster responsibility and leadership, the sectors and crises in which this concept can most usefully be applied and how this approach can be further developed by the IASC.

II   Defining Cluster Responsibility and Managerial Accountability

The intention behind identifying an agency or agencies with managerial responsibility is both to provide a longer term approach that systematically develops capacity within a cluster or area of activity as well as providing a stronger basis for more effective technical coordination, identification of the resources required, and clearly defined preparedness for action in response to specific crises. Agencies designated with responsibility for a cluster should ideally therefore have both longer term functions to support the development of a cluster as well as operational functions. These can be defined as follows:

2.1   Cluster Development functions:

- **Map capacity and identification of key partners**: The starting point for strengthening capacity needs to be based on a thorough identification of available and deployable resources across the whole of the IASC membership, but may also

need to include the private sector. Identification of gaps and weaknesses will need to be a key part of the mapping process.

- **Establish an improved basis for support and deployment**: Depending on what is seen as most appropriate to the specific cluster, this could involve the creation of a support network and/or creating standby or surge capacity as appropriate.

- **Support to Standard setting and performance**: Cluster leads would also be involved in supporting the development and application of generic performance standards, where these are feasible for activities within the sector.

2.2 *Cluster operational responsibilities:*

Designating operational responsibilities for a cluster during humanitarian operations should be seen as facilitating and speeding up the process of operational coordination and will assist Humanitarian Coordinators in their task through ensuring a pre-designated lead for coordination of activities within a cluster. The role of the agency that takes responsibility for leading the cluster should not necessarily be that of undertaking all the required operational actions but rather in ensuring that that the appropriate actions and responses are undertaken. The proposed operational functions are defined as follows:

- **Planning and strategy development**: Ensure needs assessments are undertaken for cluster and establish priority actions, develop cluster implementation plan, contribute on behalf of cluster to country strategies,

- **Identification and coordination of key partners**: Including the identification of private sector, national and local capacities.

- **Standard-setting**: promote best practice within cluster and ensure establishment of appropriate technical standards for the crisis

- **Monitoring**: Ensure appropriate monitoring mechanisms in place to review impact and progress against implementation plans

- **Advocacy**: Identification of core advocacy concerns and contribute key messages to broader advocacy initiatives.

III   Application of the concept of cluster responsibility and leadership:

There are two main concerns that need to be addressed when dealing with the practical application and implementation of this approach. The first issue is that of the selection of the agency or agencies that would take responsibility for a cluster, the second related issue lies in appropriately defining each cluster of activities where this approach to capacity building and strengthening is required.

3.1 *Allocation of cluster responsibilities:*

Preferably the agency that takes responsibility to develop the cluster and have pre- designated responsibilities in emergencies should be one and the same. The agency should have a strong technical expertise in the area and also have the capacity to provide support in all crises at field level. However, it is recognised that there are circumstances where this may not be feasible. For example, in certain areas of activity such as shelter, where it is likely that there is a need for operational support across all types of crises including natural disaster response, the mandate of an agency may restrict its ability to operate in this type of crisis. Therefore, there may well be

circumstances where responsibility for the cluster will need to be shared, in order to ensure coverage across the board.

3.2 Delineating clusters

There are many areas where the humanitarian response has been effective and where there are already mandated agencies. The cluster approach should recognise this and only be applied to those areas where there is common agreement on the need for improvement. Furthermore, the last meeting of the IASC working group took a decision to enhance the predictability of sectoral responsibilities for Internally Displaced People. Consequently every effort should be made to ensure that the overall cluster approach is congruent with the actions being undertaken with respect to the support of Internally Displaced Persons.

The following areas have been identified through the HRR and other processes as requiring strengthening:

- Protection (including camp management /camp coordination),

- Emergency Shelter,

- Water and Sanitation,

- Nutrition and feeding,

- Reintegration and Recovery,

- Logistics and emergency telecommunications

(With regard to the delineation of clusters, "Protection" stands out as the largest area in terms of scope and complexity, is a cross cutting issue and therefore may require further definition in terms of sub clusters or further discussion as to what strategy is most appropriate for capacity strengthening)

Proposed Action by the IASC WG:

1. The IASC Working Group in its June meeting agreed to develop a matrix defining and identifying the key elements of cluster responsibilities for a meeting of the IASC Principals to be held in early September. It is proposed that this matrix should identify the agencies with cluster responsibilities, the main agencies and organisations involved and outline the main issues to be addressed in strengthening the various clusters.

2. It is also proposed that the IASC Working Group outlines the implementation process that is required to establish a system of cluster responsibilities by the beginning of 2006. This should include a proposed timeframe for establishing specific strengthening plans for the individual clusters.

Prepared by: OCHA (PDSB) – July 2005