

IASC SUB-WORKING GROUP ON THE CLUSTER APPROACH (SWGCA) TERMS OF REFERENCE

Date established: 76th Meeting of the IASC Working Group, 7-9 April 2010

End of mandate: Ongoing

Background

At the 78th Meeting of the IASC Working Group on 10-12 November 2010, the Working Group agreed to extend the mandate of the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach (TTCA) until the end of 2011 and for OCHA to replace UNHCR as Task Team Co-Chair as of 1 January 2011 (the other Co-Chair continued to be Merlin UK). The Task Team was requested to prioritise the recommendations from Cluster Evaluation Phase 2 (CE2) in the form of an inter-agency Management Response Plan (MRP) and within that, to focus on initiatives which would result in tangible improvements to humanitarian field operations. The Task Team identified 6 priority actions which were included in its work plan for 2011. The future and status of the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG), including its relationship with the Task Team, was to be reviewed at the first IASC Working Group meeting of 2011 (cancelled due to events in North Africa).

At the 79th Meeting of the IASC Working Group on 11-12 July 2011, the Working Group agreed that the TTCA would become an IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach (SWGCA) with a mandate to address critical on-going priority issues to be identified in a clear IASC Working Group multi-year agenda with an annual work plan. The work of the SWGCA is not time-bound. It was also agreed that the GCCG, chaired by OCHA (Humanitarian Coordination Support Section), would no longer be directly affiliated to the IASC Working Group but would continue to provide a forum for Global Cluster Coordinators to meet to discuss operational issues. The GCCG will continue to provide regular updates on its work to the SWGCA.

At the IASC Principals meeting on 19 April, it was agreed to establish an IASC Principals Task Team (PTT) to follow-up on the IASC humanitarian reform initiative launched in December 2010. The PTT created a Directors Task Team (DTT) and asked it to provide support and present clear recommendations at the strategic level on the most efficient and effective inter-agency response mechanism for large-scale emergencies of the type seen in Haiti and Pakistan, and for this to inform the Principals' decision-making.

The DTT was asked to take forward key transformative actions on 1) an inter-agency rapid response mechanism; 2) a peer review process to improve accountability; and 3) cluster related issues. The former TTCA worked on a number of issues included in the key transformative actions, especially those related to the cluster approach, and the SWGCA will continue to do so in support of the PTT and other high level policy groups as appropriate.

Purpose

The purpose of the SWGCA is to ensure a harmonized approach to addressing strategic and policy issues related to the cluster approach and generally, to strengthen the effectiveness of the cluster approach in responding to the needs of affected populations.

The remit of the SWGCA is normally related to tasks identified by the IASC Working Group, and recommendations of the SWGCA are sent to the IASC Working Group for approval. With the creation of the PTT and DTT, the SWGCA has also been effectively tasked by these bodies, and has therefore reported to them on its results.

The IASC Working Group agreed that the SWGCA will address the following:

- Operationalise the cluster related parts of the Principals' reform Agenda initiated in 2011 as specified by the Principals.
- Provide support to the Principals reform process and other high-level policy initiatives as appropriate and work on implementing relevant recommendations as requested.
- Monitor and report back on how the work of the CE2 and subsequent recommendations has contributed to improved cluster delivery.
- As appropriate, refer operational issues relating to the cluster approach to the GCCG for their consideration/action and ask OCHA (HCSS) to provide a regular update on the work of the GCCG.

Chair

The SWGCA is co-chaired by Merlin UK and OCHA (HCSS).

Participation

Participation is open to interested humanitarian organizations, bringing together NGOs, UN, Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points and other international organizations together on equal footing. Cluster Lead Agencies participating represent both their agency and their respective cluster. Operational NGOs are actively encouraged to participate. Participants are expected to be at an appropriate level (senior adviser level). Experts and donors may be invited as observers to provide technical input or to discuss certain relevant issues, when needed. .

Secretariat

OCHA (HCSS) functions as the secretariat of the group and, under the direction of the co-chairs, coordinates the substantive implementation of the work-plan. With information provided by representatives to the SWGCA, the secretariat drafts the annual work-plan (for discussion and agreement by the membership), a progress update, and annual report to the IASC Working Group; convenes regular meetings/provides venue arrangements; drafts and distributes the agenda and minutes; monitors progress of the implementation of the work-plan and action points from the SWGCA, IASC Working Group, and IASC Principals meetings; maintains an email distribution list of participants and keeps participants lists for each meeting; prepares materials for distribution to the group; facilitates the flow of communication, in particular acts as a liaison between the SWGCA and the GCCG, ensuring that each group is kept informed about the other's work and that each can refer issues to the other for consideration; and updates the SWGCA's webpage on the IASC website.

Meeting Schedule and Agenda

The SWG will meet every 6 weeks. The agenda is decided by the co-chairs through consultation with members, and will reflect on-going activities but also have the flexibility to respond to urgent issues.

Funding

Individual members' organizations/agencies sometimes provide funding for particular pieces of work to be carried out by external consultants.

Work-plan

The SWGCA prepares an annual work-plan based on the standard template, prepared by the IASC Secretariat, which includes specific objectives, prioritized activities, indicators, expected outcomes and deadlines. Focal points are identified for each activity listed in the work-plan, and are accountable for ensuring the implementation of the specific tasks and for progress reporting on a regular basis. Work-plans should be submitted to the IASC Secretariat by the deadline (usually end of October) for the IASC Working Group to review, and subject to agreement, endorse before the end of the year prior.

Reporting and Public Information

The SWGCA provides an annual report to the IASC Working Group against progress toward meeting the objectives of the work-plan. This annual report should be prepared in accordance with the standard template and is due by the deadline (usually end January), in order for the IASC Working Group to take stock of progress and performance of the group. Each subsidiary body is also required to submit a brief progress update (2-3 paragraphs) to the IASC Secretariat by the deadline (usually end of October) for consolidation and presentation to the Working Group before its November meeting.

The SWGCA maintains a webpage on the IASC site, and will post regularly all relevant meeting notes, background papers and other documents on that site.

IASC Products

The SWGCA will ensure that any IASC products developed by the group are in line with the IASC guidelines on product development available from the IASC Secretariat.

Relationship to the Working Group

The SWGCA prepares background papers and recommendations on salient topics and broader policy/operational issues in support of effective field-based action at the request of the IASC Working Group or Principals/Directors. The SWGCA can propose agenda items for the IASC Working Group via the IASC Secretariat as part of the agenda setting process.

The IASC Working Group will review the performance and relevance of the SWGCA periodically. At that time, the mandate and, if appropriate, the continuation of the SWGCA will be assessed. The IASC Secretariat supports the IASC Working Group in monitoring the performance of IASC subsidiary bodies.