

INTER AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
PRINCIPALS MEETING

Emerging Issues on the Cluster Approach Requiring Decision  
by the IASC Principals

12 December 2005  
Hosted by OCHA  
Palais des Nations, Geneva

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the September meeting of the IASC Principals, the nine designated clusters have worked hard to address a list of tasks outlined in the Outcome Document of the 62<sup>nd</sup> IASC Working Group Retreat and of the *Ad Hoc* IASC Principals Meeting of September 2005 (hereinafter referred to as “Outcome Document”) <sup>1</sup>, on which they made varying degrees of progress. This progress depended in part on the varying ‘starting point’ of the particular clusters, including the existence of clear definitions, networks, partnerships, and of standards, among other matters. At the 63<sup>rd</sup> IASC WG held on 21 and 22 November 2005, the chairs of the nine Cluster Working Groups (CWGs) presented their reports, focusing on the a) implementation plans, b) capacity mapping, and c) cost requirements.

The presentations of the CWGs and discussions relating to initial experiences with the cluster approach in the field highlighted a number of issues that are becoming increasingly apparent as the work on the clusters progresses. The 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the IASC Working Group requested the IASC Secretariat to prepare an Issues paper outlining outstanding and emerging issues, which needed to be addressed by the IASC. While some of these still need to be discussed and agreed upon by the IASC Working Group (See Annex I), others require decisions by the IASC Principals. The latter are presented below.

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<sup>1</sup> **From the Outcome Document (September 2005): Clusters leads will undertake the following priority actions, between September and December 2005:**

- *Decide how the cluster will substantially improve the humanitarian response within the sector for new emergencies*
- *Complete assessment of capacities and gaps in the sector*
- *Carry out specific capacity mapping and response planning in consultation with the Humanitarian Coordinators to improve response in a selected number of existing emergencies*
- *Improve non-UN actor involvement in the process, building on regional/national capacities*
- *Ensure integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender, age and diversity; HIV/AIDS; human rights*
- *Undertake coordinated response planning and preparedness measures, build links between clusters and prevent duplication with other structures*
- *Prioritize actionable recommendations for 2006 implementation*
- *Develop recommendations on outstanding cluster specific issues, such as the broader protection framework*
- *Develop a plan for a phased introduction*
- *Prepare cluster-specific resource requirements*

## II. EMERGING ISSUES REQUIRING DECISION BY THE IASC PRINCIPALS

### (i) Selection of Existing Emergencies to which to apply the Cluster Approach

Now that the clusters have completed their preliminary work, the **focus in the next ‘phase’** (6 months or so) should be shifted **to implementation in the field**. The clusters, at the global level, should focus during the same period on providing technical support to the field in selected ‘first phase’ countries, and on building capacity within the cluster to respond to future emergencies according to their implementation plans. Concepts and actions at the global level could thus be informed and refined through the practical experience in the field.

In this connection, the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the IASC Working Group agreed that the ‘architecture’ of the cluster approach should not be set too firmly at this point. Lessons learned from implementing the cluster approach would vastly improve the overall results if more time was taken; furthermore, flexibility in the field was highlighted as vital and would inform the IASC at the global level as to practical and useful future steps.<sup>2</sup>

The IASC WG also recalled the decisions made at the IASC Principals meeting of September 2005 to implement the cluster approach in a selected number of existing emergencies. OCHA/IDD, on behalf of the ERC, has consulted with a number of agencies, HCs and Country Teams on the **selection of countries for the implementation of the cluster approach in existing emergencies**. Following the recent inter-agency missions to the DRC, Uganda and Liberia, the HC/AHC and Country Teams have recommended the application of these countries. Additional countries under consideration following the inter-cluster meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> October 2005 include: Nepal, Sudan and Somalia. It was agreed that consultations on country selection would be undertaken by the ERC in preparation for the IASC Principals’ meeting on 12 December 2005.

#### Actions required:

- a) Endorsement of DRC, Liberia and Uganda as the initial countries for implementation of the cluster approach.
- b) Agreement on the other existing emergency situations for which the cluster approach should be piloted.
- c) Commitment to support the country teams in the implementation of the cluster approach in these countries.

### (ii) Resource Mobilization

The need for a **concerted resource mobilisation strategy** and action is now apparent, in order to increase donors’ attention and support. At the 63<sup>rd</sup> IASC Working Group meeting, all clusters clearly stressed the need for additional resources, in particular for global-level capacity-building (including specific resources for the cluster lead), for preparedness and

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<sup>2</sup> **From the Outcome Document (September 2005):** *The focus of these efforts will be on delivery at the field level and on ensuring global preparedness. The involvement of organisations active in field settings is critical for the further development of these arrangements. We will encourage ownership of the process at the field level, with adoption at both global and country levels. At all levels, the decision to apply cluster lead arrangements should enable more effective participation of all actors, while respecting their individual mandates and programme priorities.*

contingency planning costs, and for operation-specific needs. Some Cluster Working Groups had developed significant capacity-building proposals, and a reality check was needed to ensure a relatively consistent approach. Some clusters have indicated their financial costs for lead agency or for advocacy role and a few clusters have indicated their plans to mobilize resources for the clusters through the CAPs and Flash Appeals as well as through the CERF. It was also stressed that cluster leads should not necessarily control all resources at operational level and that fundraising strategies should not negatively affect non-cluster leads.

A suggested template was approved by the IASC Working Group, identifying global costs estimates, including (i) Components of the IASC appeal, that should be funded up-front and (ii) Global strategic stockpile costs, (iii) Preparedness and Contingency Planning costs (probably from different source of funds from agencies, to be funded prior to the appeal, and also to be used for operations) and (iv) costs for operations (financed from the appeals of agencies). The recurrent cost of support structure to the CWGs ('support cell', 'cluster facilitation cell') needs to be balanced against agreement to avoid overly bureaucratic structures.<sup>3</sup> It will be also important to take into account that in addition to the global requirements, field-specific cost estimates will come as and when country selections will be made and a strategy for mobilizing the resources for such field-based requirements, under the lead of the ERC, will be required.

Action required:

- d) Agreement on the elements of a Research Mobilization Strategy, as proposed by the IASC Working Group and the OCHA paper "Action Plan for Implementing Humanitarian Reform".

**(iii) Expanding the inclusiveness in the membership of cluster arrangements to governments and bilateral institutions**

The Outcome Statement from the 12 September 2005 IASC Principals' meeting stated that the decision to apply the cluster approach should "enable more effective participation of all actors, while respecting their individual mandates and programme priorities," and that "The cluster lead will work with relevant actors and agencies with expertise in that area." The importance of strengthening the outreach and inclusion of partners, in particular NGOs, was again reiterated at the 63<sup>rd</sup> IASC Working Group meeting, although the need to develop criteria was also expressed. It was agreed that the focus should remain on operational capacity on the ground.

The role that governments of affected countries should play in the implementation of CWGs at the field level has been highlighted, since this area has received little attention so far. At the 25 October 2005 IASC inter-cluster meeting, the ERC "underlined the importance of engaging host governments, with due consideration being given to identifying appropriate strategies as per type of emergency".

The question has been raised as to whether bilateral aid agencies could be included in the cluster at the global level, as in some cases this constitutes significant additional capacity for

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<sup>3</sup> **From the Outcome Document (September 2005):** *Principals cautioned against creating unnecessary bureaucracy or secretariats, while recognising that the cluster approach will require dedicated people to support the cluster lead in the development of the cluster*

response. It has been acknowledged that there may be political sensitivities that would preclude this in some situations, in view of the impartiality and neutrality required by humanitarian agencies for this approach.

Actions required:

- e) Agreement that host governments could be included in the cluster arrangements at the field level at the discretion of the Humanitarian Coordinators and the Country Teams.
- f) Agreement that bilateral organizations could be invited to participate in specific discussions at the global level, should this be deemed appropriate by the respective clusters.

#### (iv) Cluster Coverage for Natural Disasters

The coverage of the clusters in Natural Disasters (Protection, Emergency Shelter and Camp Coordination) is also to be reviewed by the IASC Principals on 12 December 2005.<sup>4</sup> Consultations have now been undertaken and these results will be announced by the ERC.

Action required:

- g) On the basis of proposals to be made by the ERC as a result of his consultations, confirm cluster arrangements in protection, emergency shelter and camp coordination in natural disasters.

#### (v) “Last Resort” for cross-cutting clusters

While the principle of ‘provider of last resort’ was fundamental to the cluster approach and should not be negotiable, the realism and practicality of applying this concept need further re-thinking with regard to cross-cutting clusters such as camp coordination, protection and early recovery. Accountability of the cluster participants will have to be clear, and availability of resources will in the end determine the cluster lead’s ability to perform this function.

Action required:

- h) Agree that for cross-cutting clusters the providers of last resort would be determined within the clusters, based on the agreed division of responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> **From the Outcome Statement (September 2005).** *Principals took note that the ERC will revert to the IASC Principals on the designation of the cluster lead for emergency shelter and camp coordination and management in natural disasters, after having consulted with IFRC and with IOM.*

**(vi) Need for greater advocacy and for sharing Information on the Cluster Approach**

While a great deal of work has gone into the development of the Cluster Approach, not much has been done to fully brief donors or other stakeholders on this approach. From recent briefings of the HLWG and other donors, it has become apparent that there is a need for a consistent advocacy message to be prepared to publicise the work and garner support for it.

There is also a strong call for **a sustained communication strategy to all stakeholders and practical guidance** to be developed for the field in implementing the cluster approach. It is felt that colleagues in the field had ‘been left behind’.<sup>5</sup> The IASC WG agreed that the Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level” (prepared by OCHA) will be shared with all HCs in CAP countries, for their comments and feedback. Comments from the IASC WG should also be sought before finalization.

Actions required:

- i) A common advocacy message should be prepared for dissemination to various stakeholders.
- j) A joint letter from the Principals should be sent to country representatives to introduce the cluster approach.

Prepared by: Chairperson, IASC Working Group, December 2005

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<sup>5</sup> **From the Outcome Statement (September 2005):** *To ensure that this initiative adds value, all stakeholders must be involved in its implementation. Critical among these are the Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators. We will issue a **single message** on the aims and expected benefits of this initiative, situating it in the context of the broad range of ongoing UN reform. The IASC’s advocacy and outreach strategy will engage member states constructively and be supported by measurable progress in the field. Recognising the different governance structures of IASC members and the differing implications of this initiative for those organisations, we will engage in mutually supportive efforts to convey the common message. The Emergency Relief Coordinator has a key role to play in advocacy.*

## ANNEX 1. ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE IASC WG FOR FUTURE FOLLOW UP BY THE IASC WG AND BY CLUSTER WORKING GROUPS.

1. Issues for further reflection, clarification, refinement.
  - 1.1. Concerns of ‘cluster-creep/over-clusterisation’: there is a risk that we are developing an over-sectoralised or segmented system that will detract from integrated, coherent approaches and we must ensure this does not happen. ‘Cluster leadership’ was introduced to respond to gaps in the system and there is no need to completely ‘clustrify’ the whole humanitarian response.
  - 1.2. As occurred in Pakistan, the cluster approach will influence the architecture of assessment and appeals and not just for onset emergencies and this in turn raises a number of issues, e.g. food aid and livelihood not being a cluster, if food security, livelihood protection and recovery are not addressed. Therefore, if clusterization expands to embrace all sectors and issues, the guidelines for formulation of CHAPs, CAPs and Flash Appeals will need to be significantly revised.
  - 1.3. Regarding the clarification on the difference between cluster and sectoral approaches, it was stressed that the cluster approach was designed to fill gaps in the emergency response, improve leadership, and increase the predictability of the response. It was not meant to over clusterized or fragment the efficiency of the humanitarian response.
  - 1.4. There are different views in the IASC WG on whether the cluster approach should be applied to all sectors or only nine “gap” sectors. At the global level, it is clear that the cluster approach aims to build global capacity in sectors where such capacity is lacking. However, during the three support missions, field colleagues viewed the cluster approach as a way of strengthening the overall coordination framework, not only “gaps” areas but all sectors, by clarifying lines of accountability to the HC and defining how sector groups should work with partners. In DRC, the Country Team decided that all sectors would be managed using the cluster approach.
  - 1.5. Exit strategies and criteria for exit in should be considered at the outset and should be clarified. Should the exit strategy be following the same procedures as for the “Activation process”? Are they different from the usual issue of an exit in humanitarian response? Some clusters provided indications on how their work could be coordinated with the Early Recovery group or set out criteria specific to their work. Thinking is also needed on how the early recovery work will phase onto the larger transition and development efforts.
  - 1.6. Important to rationalize number of meetings and information processes in the management of the cluster approach.
  - 1.7. The role of OCHA in supporting the cluster approach needs to be clarified. One option is to identify common services required of all clusters, and strengthen OCHA to provide these. Services should include: inter-cluster coordinator, information management, advocacy and resources.

2. Issues raised by the IASC WG, already covered by the Outcome Statement (for reference purposes).

1.1 Ensuring a predictable response is one of the primary aims of the cluster approach. However, clusters leads and cluster membership at the global level may not necessarily be the same at the country level. Due flexibility at the field level in applying the cluster leadership approach is needed to maximise capacities on the ground. Global cluster leads remain accountable for ensuring, in consultation with the HC, that adequate field-based cluster arrangements are in place (See also Outcome Statement, in Box below).

1.2 At the field level, the clusters provide support to the Humanitarian Coordinators who are able to call upon cluster leads for support as required and they report to the Humanitarian Coordinators (not to global clusters). Accountability of UN and non-UN agencies needs to be better clarified: specific regarding reporting lines between Clusters in the field, Cluster Working Groups, Humanitarian Coordinators and the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

1.3 Benchmarks for the success of this initiative and the effectiveness of the cluster leadership response will be crucial to its evaluation and improvement.

1.4 The importance of ensuring inter-cluster coordination and information sharing among clusters was stressed, including the need to harmonize separate needs assessments, contingency plans etc.

**From the Outcome Statement (September 2005):**

*9. The Cluster Lead, at the global level, will take all necessary actions to ensure adequate and effective responses to new crises, as well as to certain current crises (including essential support for local and national risk assessment, vulnerability reduction and preparedness).*

*10. The Cluster Lead is responsible for (a) taking forward capacity assessments and developing capacity within cluster, (b) securing and following up on commitments to contribute to these functions, and (c) sustaining mechanisms through which the cluster as a whole can deliver on its overall commitments, and the contribution of individual entities within it.*

*11. Functions at global level include up to date assessments of the overall needs for human, financial and institutional capacity in the cluster area, and in linkages with other cluster areas – including preparedness measures and long term planning, standards and best practices, advocacy and resource mobilization; review of currently available capacities and means for their utilization; taking action to ensure that vitally needed capacities and mechanisms (including rosters for surge capacity) are put in place (through training and system development) at local, national, regional and international levels as appropriate, with the use of existing resources where possible.*

*12. The Cluster Lead, at the Country Level, will take all necessary actions to ensure fulfilment of commonly accepted standards for timely, adequate and effective humanitarian action that achieves the required impact in relation to the specific cluster area. This must be done in ways that ensure the complementarities of the various stakeholders' actions, strengthen the involvement of national and local institutions, and make the best use of available resources for adequate and effective results - in ways that that are well co-ordinated, do no harm and are complementary.*

*13. These obligations imply that the cluster lead would be responsible for (a) predictable action within the cluster for analysis of needs, addressing priorities and identifying gaps in the cluster area, (b) securing and following up on commitments from the cluster to contribute to responding to needs and filling the gaps, (c) sustaining mechanisms through which the cluster as a whole, and individual participants, both assesses its performance and delivers effectively.*

