

Role of cluster coordinators in the revised Response Plan, and related issues¹

A. Frequently-asked questions

“Cluster lead” or “cluster coordinator”?

- “Cluster lead” or “cluster lead agency” refers to the agency or organization that has been designated by the HC as cluster lead agency for a particular sector at the country level, following consultations with the HCT. (IFRC is called “cluster convenor” rather than cluster lead, for legal reasons.) The Representative or Country Director of a cluster lead agency is accountable to the HC for the cluster coordination.
- “Cluster coordinator” refers to the person whom the cluster lead agency has designated as cluster coordinator at the country level. (Sometimes the ‘person’ is actually a small team.) The Cluster Coordinator reports to the Head of the cluster lead agency.

Is funding supposed to go “through clusters”?

Clusters and cluster lead agencies are NOT meant to be funding channels: cluster lead agencies generally don't have the mechanisms to channel funds to other organizations (aside from their existing implementing partners). However cluster leads and members should influence donors about which projects to fund, according to the cluster's consensual prioritization. Similarly, they should contribute to HCT decisions on pooled fund allocations.

Should the cluster response plan aim to cover all affected people, or only the part that cluster members will cover?

Cluster response plans, and the projects that stem from them, must not duplicate each other or actions planned by non-cluster-members (or by actors that may participate in cluster planning and coordination but do not count their projects in CAPs, like affected country government). The best approach is to state all assessed needs, agree on a division of labour including the non-Response Plan-participants, specify in the Response Plan document which needs are to be covered by non- Response Plan-participants, and then specify the remaining needs which the cluster members' proposed projects and funding requests will cover. The Response Plan document template section for cluster response plans will contain a format for this.

B. Role of cluster coordinators in the Response Plan

Note: *this section is a summary of a longer IASC-approved paper. [Click here for the full document](#), which cluster coordinators should study.*

Cluster coordinators (CCs) are responsible for the day-to-day running of clusters in the field.² CCs should act as neutral representatives and coordinators of the cluster as a whole rather than as a representative of their particular agency. One way to ensure this separation of roles is to appoint a dedicated CC with no agency responsibilities. The head of a cluster lead agency is accountable to the HC for cluster issues.

While “cluster coordinators” are defined as individuals not agencies, some of the following roles are best understood as fulfilled by a team from the cluster lead agency, or sometimes the cluster member organizations as a whole, rather than just one individual.

- ◆ **Build an Inclusive cluster. How to measure success:** number of humanitarian aid organizations (national and international) that participate in cluster and/or CAP, as a proportion of all such organizations in country (the higher the better). Amount and proportion of humanitarian funds going to

¹ Adapted for the Pakistan context from the 2012 CAP Guidelines

² In this document, for brevity, the term “cluster” is used to cover all sectoral humanitarian working groups. These, and their coordinators, have the same role in the CAP whether or not the cluster system has been formally invoked in a country or whether that country or a particular working group within it uses the term “cluster.”

organizations or activities inside the Response Plan (the more the better, with due regard to local funding and organizational realities).

- ◆ **Government consultation. How to measure success:** In situations where the government is covering some of the needs, the cluster/sector response plan should map the government's coverage and show its inter-relation with the cluster/sector's plans.
- ◆ **Organize needs assessments and analyse the results.** The goal is a full base of evidence and analysis on which to develop the cluster response plan. The quality of this process is fundamental to the quality of the Response Plan. **How to measure success:** Availability of baseline data, implementation of agreed needs assessment plan, and use of resulting analysis in the Response Plan; cluster response plans and prioritization of projects reflecting the results of the needs analysis.
- ◆ **Information management. How to measure success:** The OPS' enhanced geographical fields verify that cluster's selected projects cover the needs without duplications and minimizing gaps.
- ◆ **Formulate cluster response plan. How to measure success:** Cluster response plan provides strategic direction and overall objectives for the cluster/sector, maps all the sector needs and planned coverage of those needs (including coverage by those not participating in the cluster/sector or in the Response Plan—see below), integrates meaningfully all relevant cross-cutting issues and fills identified gaps. The cluster response plan is expressed in terms of SMART objectives and sector-relevant indicators.
- ◆ **Incorporate early recovery. How to measure success:** cluster/sector response plans include early recovery-related objectives and activities that aim to strengthen national and local capacities and reduce aid dependence.
- ◆ **Achieve complementarity.** CCs ensure that interventions of the humanitarian actors, including government actions and others not included in the Response Plan's funding request, complement each other. In practice, this means identifying or mapping priority needs of the affected population and then matching the capacities of the humanitarian actors to those needs so as to avoid overlap and duplication of activities. **How to measure success:** The cluster response plan presents a comprehensive mapping of needs and planned actions, clearly mentioning who does what and where for all actors on the ground, thus eliminating gaps and overlaps.
- ◆ **Inclusion of cross-cutting issues,** including age, gender, environment and HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ **Project selection. How to measure success:** Each project selected for the Response Plan is demonstrably within the boundaries and strategic objectives agreed for the Response Plan, and justified by needs assessment and capacity to implement the project by the concerned agency, within a defined timeframe. The selection process is inclusive of all cluster members, or an agreed representation, as well as representatives from relevant cross-cutting theme groups.
- ◆ **Prioritization among selected projects. How to measure success:** Each project selected by the cluster bears a priority designation, consistent with the Response Plan's general prioritization criteria (which in turn grow out of the strategic objectives and the most urgent identified needs). The proportion of projects awarded top priority is restrictive enough to give donors a clear guide on what to fund first and to make it likely that the top-priority set of projects will be 100% funded.
- ◆ **Influence funding.** CCs should master the information in the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) tables for their appeal (<http://fts.unocha.org>), use it often, and encourage cluster members to feed updated information to FTS (fts@un.org). CCs should monitor funding in their sector outside the Response Plan (FTS table H), and try to get those organizations and projects into the CAP. **How to measure success:** Cluster's funding as percentage of requirements, in comparison with other clusters in the appeal; funding first to the highest-priority projects in the cluster.
- ◆ **Update and revise cluster response plan and projects. (Ongoing or imminent) How to measure success:** Projects displayed on public platform (OPS/FTS) are updated to reflect reality on the ground, taking new information and analysis into account.
- ◆ **Monitoring. How to measure success:** Information on collective outputs to date for the cluster, compared to Response Plan targets, is available continually in real time throughout the duration of the appeal, plus outcome measurement as often as necessary and feasible.
- ◆ **Evaluation:** To evaluate the more nuanced impact level of analysis (for example, reduction of child mortality, and attribution of its causes), CCs should guide their cluster to develop a plan to measure humanitarian impact related to the cluster's actions and outputs. Note that it is usually impractical for methodological reasons to measure impact at the project level; such evaluation is better made at a more aggregated or collective level (cluster, or perhaps inter-cluster). Also, evaluation is often done by

outside experts, which the CC could commission. CCs should consult the wider HCT including cross-cutting theme groups or experts in developing their monitoring and evaluation plans, in case an inter-cluster evaluation plan suggests itself.

C. Suggested process and consultation for developing cluster response plan and projects for the Response Plan

- *Commission needs assessments in time to fill key information gaps before needs analysis for the Response Plan (DONE)*
- *Compile assessment results and draft cluster needs analysis; hold cluster meeting to agree on cluster needs analysis.*
- *Forward cluster needs analysis to OCHA for inclusion in general needs analysis in early September.*
- *Give OPS orientation to any cluster members who aren't yet familiar with it.*
- *Following Response Plan workshop and preliminary Response Plan concept note (which specifies strategy, strategic objectives, boundaries and caseload), convene cluster meeting for detailed planning. In this meeting, present a map of needs and the total outputs required (like 300 water points or 70 therapeutic feeding centres). Draft SMART cluster objectives & indicators accordingly. Agree on a plan to cover the needs and achieve the objectives – who will cover which needs where, i.e. a division of labour. (In this division of labour, account for planned actions by non-cluster-members or non-Response Plan-participants, like affected country government.) If there are overlaps in these preliminary plans, encourage cluster members to move some redundant planned actions to other locations so as to fill gaps.*
- *Tell cluster members to upload draft projects onto OPS that reflect their parts in this agreed division of labour. Present criteria for selection & prioritization. Present OPS project format and user guide. Set process to review projects. (They can be reviewed on line, or printed from OPS for review on paper.) Make it clear that putting these projects in the Response Plan does NOT mean that they cannot also send the proposals to their favourite donors – ECHO or whatever. In fact they should, even if they think the project is already likely to be funded. The Response Plan is thus an inventory of everyone's actions that are necessary to cover the priority needs.*
- *CC starts writing the response plan chapter.*
- *Organizations upload draft projects to OPS, where all peers can see them. The CC uses the new enhanced geographical feature on OPS to 'map' the draft projects, to ensure that they cover the needs and divide the labour as agreed.*
- *The CC e-mails the draft cluster response plan to full cluster team for comment; incorporates comments, noting controversial or contradictory comments for discussion in meeting.*
- *Second meeting of full team, to peer-review all proposals, select those corresponding to the agreed division of labour and meeting the criteria for selection in the Response Plan, and rating the priority among the selected projects per the general CAP prioritization criteria (plus any additional cluster-specific filtering on which the group agrees). Discuss and agree any outstanding issues in response plan chapter. Proposing organizations amend projects on OPS per cluster's advice, and add agreed priority rating and gender marker score for each selected project.*
- *The CC clicks "approve" on OPS for the selected projects (and "reject" for the others), checks that each has the agreed priority rating and ensures that each project has a Gender Marker code.*
- *The CC e-mails cluster response plan to OCHA, by deadline.*

Note to cluster members: *If the cluster group doesn't accept your project for the Response Plan, of course you can still seek funds for it and implement it; no one will try to stop you. The Response Plan represents the group consensus on what's important and what projects are needed to achieve it. And if you can't convince humanitarian professional peers that what you propose is important, maybe you should rethink whether you really want to direct your efforts there.*

D. Field cluster coordination costs should go in the Response Plan

Field cluster coordination requires dedicated staff, and this in turn requires resources. Some cluster lead agencies manage to fund coordination roles from flexible resources or core budgets. But the essence of the cluster lead role is predictability, and this mode of resourcing is not predictable enough. The IASC has now

decided to systematize this, and to put costs of field cluster coordination into appeals wherever the lead agency needs to raise funds for it.

Donors are, however, ambivalent about funding cluster coordination costs with earmarked grants. Where an agency cannot have foreseen cluster coordination costs, i.e. a sudden-onset disaster, donors express more willingness to support them with earmarked grants, but expect the value-added of meeting such costs to be clearly defined. Despite these donor reservations, it certainly doesn't hurt for cluster lead agencies to put these costs in the Response Plan. For a more detailed overview of current donor positions on funding cluster coordination costs in both sudden-onset and protracted emergencies, please see the [Framework on Cluster Coordination Costs and Functions in Humanitarian Emergencies at the Country Level, May 2011.](#)

Cluster coordinators should prepare their cluster coordination projects by calculating the resources needed, touching base with their agency country office and headquarters (plus their fellow CCs in country) to learn success stories, and considering what measurable outputs they could promise in a CAP project proposal for cluster coordination. The IASC's guidance is:

- ▶ Use standard TOR (in the form of the "Role of" section above) to form the project text.
- ▶ You can either present freestanding cluster coordination projects, or roll them in larger direct-implementation projects. If either works equally well for your organization and donors, then the preference is to present freestanding projects, so that the IASC can measure donor response to cluster coordination resource needs.

Experience:

- ◆ Click [here](#) for a list of cluster coordination project proposals in CAPs in 2010 (the most recent compilation available), with funding results.