

GUIDANCE NOTE ON INTER-CLUSTER SUPPORT MISSIONS

Background

Recommendation 4 of the '*Cluster Approach Evaluation II Synthesis Report*' calls for an increased focus of resources towards clusters at the field level, and for global clusters to adopt more of a "service mentality" towards their clusters at the national and sub-national level. The first inter-cluster support missions were initiated in 2009 in response to specific requests from country level partners for more targeted, in-country support to strengthen cluster coordination and leadership capacity. Such missions would therefore seem to fall in line with this recommendation.

Inter-cluster support missions have so far been organized on an ad hoc basis, in response to country level requests. In 2010, however, the volume of requests for such missions has increased exponentially and it has become clear that there is a need for a more standardized approach, especially in terms of how such missions are requested, considered and organized. Now that there have been several inter-cluster support missions, there is also an opportunity to learn from experience and to ensure that good practice is shared between missions.

Rationale

The overall rationale for an inter-cluster support mission is to support national and humanitarian actors at the country level to achieve a humanitarian response of the highest quality possible, by strengthening coordination between and within every part of the humanitarian system and improving overall cluster performance. An inter-cluster support mission should only proceed if it is clear that a mission at the particular time requested would really add value, for example because the humanitarian operation is at a strategic turning point or is facing a particular challenge which necessitates support in this form from the global/regional level¹.

In general terms, the advantage of an inter-cluster support mission, which comprises Global Cluster/Cross-Cutting Issue Lead Agencies and partners from organizational/regional headquarters, is that it can provide a joint, external overview of the situation, leading to joint recommendations for strengthening the humanitarian response, with a particular emphasis on cluster coordination structures, rather than focusing on individual components.

Working directly with the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), clusters and international and national partners at the country level, global missions can support the HCT and clusters to identify challenges and gaps in the response and make recommendations on potential ways to address/resolve them, as well as commit to following up by providing appropriate support from the global level. The specific configuration and objectives of an inter-cluster support mission will depend on the context and needs of the country in question.

In general, an inter-cluster support mission will aim to:

- ensure a common understanding of the cluster approach amongst humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders including national authorities;
- strengthen awareness among Cluster Lead Agencies, Cluster Coordinators, and partners regarding their respective roles and responsibilities to lead and guide coordinated emergency response, including global level tools and resources available to support them;
- strengthen the link between the strategic and operational coordination levels;
- improve inter-cluster coordination, including the effective integration of cross-cutting issues

¹ See also the accompanying document '*Factors to consider when responding to requests for inter-cluster support missions*' developed by the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach.

Requests and Terms of Reference (ToRs)

Both the request for a mission and its initial Terms of Reference (ToRs) should come from the RC/HC, following full consultation and agreement within the HCT and with other relevant actors that such a mission is needed and a shared understanding of what the objectives and deliverables of the mission should be. Guidance on the request process and ToRs development is provided below:

- To ensure consensus on the objectives of the mission, and to manage expectations on what it can realistically achieve, a basic assessment of challenges, gaps, and critical issues relating to the effectiveness of coordination structures and the overall response should be conducted by humanitarian partners at country level in advance, the results of which would form the basis for the mission ToRs.
- Mission requests should include an outline of the initiatives already taken at country level by the HCT, under the leadership of the RC/HC, to deal with challenges, gaps, and obstacles in the humanitarian response.
- The request should include suggestions regarding the objectives, timing, size and composition of the mission, taking into account any security concerns or other restricting factors in the country and the timing of any evaluations that may be planned.
- Based on the proposed objectives, the request may include a suggestion of clusters and cross-cutting issues the RC/HC and HCT would particularly like to see represented, perhaps because they are viewed as the most relevant to addressing specific issues identified. This should not detract, however, from the intrinsic inter-cluster nature of the mission.
- The request should be sent to OCHA (Humanitarian Coordination Support Section), which will share the request with the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach (TTCA) for their consideration of whether the mission should proceed, taking into account issues such as global resources and capacity to respond, priority countries for global cluster/agency support, and the rationale and objectives proposed for the mission itself. In responding to mission requests, the Task Team will also consider whether alternative global level support might be more appropriate².
- Once the TTCA agrees that an inter-cluster support mission will proceed, OCHA (HCSS) will communicate this decision to the relevant RC/HC.
- If it is agreed that a mission should go ahead, final ToRs should be agreed in advance through consultation between the RC/HC, HCT, OCHA, Cluster Coordinators and other relevant stakeholders at the country level and Global Cluster/Cross-Cutting Issue Lead Agencies, OCHA and other relevant stakeholders at the global level.
- Once the TTCA approves a mission request, the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCC) will be the forum for discussing the logistical organization of the mission.
- Once mission participation is agreed and the mission leader selected, the mission leader, with support from OCHA, will lead discussions and preparations with the RC/HC, HCT, OCHA, Cluster Coordinators and other relevant stakeholders at the country level.

Participation

Mission participation should always be tailored to the context and needs of the country in question. Participation will be decided in an open and democratic way, considering various criteria (see below), including (but not limited to) suggestions from the RC/HC and HCT regarding priority needs and specific global level support required. Global Cluster Lead Agencies have a responsibility to disseminate the invitation to participate, along with the mission ToRs, to cluster partners.

² It should be noted that there is likely to be a maximum of 5/6 Inter-Cluster Support Missions per year, considering global resources and capacity to respond to such requests. As not all requests will be received simultaneously, the IASC Task Team will consider each request on an individual basis.

General Principles

- Participants represent the cluster or cross-cutting issue, not their respective agency/organization, and have a clear understanding of the inter-cluster nature of the mission. To the extent possible, participants are drawn from the Global Cluster/Cross-Cutting Issue Lead Agency, but they may also be drawn from cluster partners (with the explicit approval of the Global Cluster Lead Agency to participate on behalf of the cluster); either way, participants should be empowered to make recommendations on behalf of their respective cluster/cross-cutting issue.
- Participants are drawn from the global level, but may exceptionally be regionally-based. They must be fully versed in global and country-level cluster policies, procedures, and processes. Participants cannot be based in the target country itself, as the aim is to provide external and impartial support and analysis.
- If a specific cross-cutting issue is identified as a priority by the HCT, then ideally someone specialised in that issue should participate in the mission. If Cross-Cutting Issue Lead Agencies are not part of the mission team, they will, to the extent possible, brief the team before its departure.
- There should be NGO representation/participation in all inter-cluster missions. This may be through an NGO representing a particular cluster and/or an NGO participant identified by the three global NGO consortia (according to their agreed criteria and ensuring that s/he is fully knowledgeable on the relevant cluster systems, policies, and processes).
- OCHA should participate in all ICSMs. OCHA will also be required, at the global and country levels, to support the mission leader and to provide reliable organizational services both in advance of and during the mission and to support the mission leader. These will include, but not be limited to provision of secretariat support. OCHA participation will normally be from the Humanitarian Coordination Support Section.
- The overall number of mission participants is kept to a manageable number so as not to burden field colleagues. The exact size of the mission should be decided based on consultations with the RC/HC and the HCT taking into consideration issues such as security, logistics, and other potentially limiting factors.

Participant Criteria³

In deciding which clusters and cross-cutting issues should be prioritized with regard to mission participation, consideration should be given to the following:

- Key challenges highlighted by the RC/HC and HCT - e.g. if a cluster is not present in a country, has insufficient dedicated resources/capacity to function effectively, has not been activated due to contextual constraints or has received little or no funding but is considered key to the humanitarian response.
- Expected future humanitarian needs (e.g. seasonal factors/likely deterioration of crisis/vulnerabilities & risks) and the relevance of particular clusters/cross-cutting issues for contingency planning/preparedness.
- Bilateral feedback received by individual clusters at the global level from in-country cluster members that cluster coordination is inadequate or that the particular cluster is not functioning effectively.
- The need for multi-sectoral representation (e.g. Early Recovery) wherever possible/relevant, and representation of cross-cutting issues if identified as a priority in the country context (if not, then systematic identification and briefing of focal point(s) on mission team to ensure cross-cutting issues are incorporated).
- The need to limit representation per cluster to one person per mission, with the exception of Protection (with five AORs). There may also be cases where the mission will have to accommodate a request from the RC/HC and the HCT for additional expertise from one particular cluster.
- The need for bilateral discussion at the global level between global leads of co-led clusters to

³ Note: These criteria are indicative and are not necessarily pre-requisites at an individual level. Not all criteria must be fulfilled to determine participation – these are simply for consideration in the overall process of deciding which entities should participate.

determine which co-lead is best-placed to participate in the mission, recognizing space limitations and the possible need for one co-lead to represent the priority issues of for both lead entities.

Process

Subject to any changes to existing coordination bodies:

1. The GCC forum initiates the organization of the mission, and calls for expressions of interest in participation from Global Cluster Lead Agencies, Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points and the NGO consortia.
2. Once the deadline date for submission of proposed participant names is passed, the GCC reviews the list and a mission leader is selected (see below).
3. The GCC reviews the participant list to ensure relevant clusters are represented and criteria for both NGO and cross-cutting issue participation are met.
4. If the participant list is too long, GCC makes proposed changes, referring back to the country level (RC/HC) as required.
5. The final decision on mission participation is made by the RC/HC, in consultation with the mission leader.
6. Last-minute changes in personnel or proposed additions should only be made on an exceptional basis, as this disrupts the mission planning process, in-country logistics, etc.

Leadership

Leadership selection is made from the list of proposed participants to a particular mission.

Leadership Criteria

- Leadership selection is primarily based on experience, taking into account the mission scope, the range of participants and the likely issues and challenges to be faced by the mission. The mission leader is expected to be “impartial”, ensuring that all participants’ views and inputs are incorporated into the mission analysis and recommendations.
- The mission leader must have a sound understanding of the cluster approach, policy issues and procedures at the global level, as well as sufficient field experience, ideally directly linked to clusters, to ensure awareness of the practical issues, opportunities and challenges associated with the cluster approach at the country-level.
- It is an advantage if s/he has experience working in the target country but if not s/he should have a good understanding of the challenges and issues faced in the target country/region and be familiar with the findings of any recent assessments and evaluations conducted there.
- The mission leader must be used to working in an inter-agency environment and have a proven ability to lead an inter-agency/multi-disciplinary team.

Process

1. When Clusters and/or Global Cluster Lead Agencies, Cross-Cutting Issue Focal Points and the global NGO consortia are putting forward nominations for mission participation, they should already indicate if a participant is willing and/or interested to additionally take on mission leadership responsibilities. When the GCC meets to consider the list of proposed participants, it will also discuss the selection of the mission leader.
2. If there is clear agreement, based on the above-outlined criteria, as to which participant is best-placed to be the mission leader, then the GCC should make this proposal to the RC/HC for their consideration (in consultation with the HCT). If the RC/HC rejects the candidate of the GCC, it should be referred back to the GCC to decide how to proceed (i.e. whether to suggest an alternative leader).
3. If there is no agreement in the GCC, then the decision should be referred to the TTCA.

Addressing cross-cutting issues

Cross-cutting issues should be systematically included in the ICSM mandate and the ICSM should address how cross-cutting issues could be strengthened in the humanitarian response. For the purposes of ICSMs, cross-cutting issues that need to be addressed include at least: age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights.⁴

- All ICSM members are responsible for addressing cross-cutting issues in their area of responsibility and the mission leader will be responsible for ensuring that cross-cutting issues are appropriately addressed throughout the ICSM. Where people with appropriate knowledge/experience on a particular cross-cutting issue exist within the team they will be invited to volunteer as a focal point for each of the above cross-cutting issues to provide support as required to other ICSM members. Designation of an ICSM participant as focal point for a cross-cutting issue should be subject to the approval of the Cluster Coordinator for the cluster that participant is representing.
- The ICSM participants should receive a briefing from relevant cross-cutting focal points at global level prior to the mission. A document should be shared by Global Focal Points with the participants on key issues to be considered for each of the cross-cutting issues and relevant to the sectoral responses. Where possible, ICSM members should meet with any in-country focal point(s) for cross-cutting issues.
- Where a specific cross-cutting issue is particularly important either because of the situation (for example because HIV prevalence rates are high) or because it is identified as a priority by the HCT, then someone specialised in that issue may be invited to participate in the mission.

Mission Report, Recommendations and Follow-Up

The Mission Leader, with the support of OCHA and the input of participants to the mission, is responsible for ensuring the development of a Mission Report reflecting the outcomes of the Mission, the support provided and, where appropriate, recommendations for subsequent follow-up at global and country level. The scope of the recommendations, as well as the follow-up process, shall be determined based upon the specific nature of the mission and the country context. General principles and follow-up options are indicated below:

General Principles

- The mission report, particularly the action points/recommendations should ideally be produced before the mission leaves the country, in consultation with the RC/HC and HCT. If this is not feasible then adequate time should be provided for all mission members to comprehensively review and agree to the final report, on behalf of the clusters they represent, before it is sent by the mission leader to the RC/HC and HCT.
- Suggested action points/recommendations should be practical and realistic, taking account of the funding situation in-country as well as the capacity and resources of specific clusters/agencies. They should be addressed to particular stakeholders at the country and global level, with suggested time-frames for action, proposed focal point agency or entity, and an indication of how results might be monitored and measured. For ease of reference, they may be reflected in a 'Recommendation Matrix' annexed to the Report.
- Where 'cluster improvement plans' are produced as a mission output and have been mutually agreed, Global Cluster Lead Agencies have a responsibility to continue to support their respective clusters in their implementation, where appropriate through the planning of subsequent cluster-specific missions to assess progress and address specific issues.
- The full mission report, once it is finalized incorporating feedback from the RC/HC and HCT, will be shared with all Global Cluster Lead Agencies, Cross-Cutting Issue Lead Agencies, NGO consortia and any other relevant stakeholders at the global level and will be posted on an agreed central web-based information-sharing platform and could also be shared at appropriate meetings, including the IASC Weekly Meeting.

⁴ Named cross-cutting issues based on original IASC Guidance on the Cluster Approach, November 2006.

Type of Recommendations

There are eight types of recommendations that may be made by an ICSM. Recommendations directed at:

1. The OCHA Country Office (e.g. on inter-cluster coordination or information management);
2. The Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator;
3. The Humanitarian Country Team;
4. Individual clusters at the national/sub-national level;
5. Individual clusters at the global level;
6. Global cross-cutting issue lead agencies/focal points in-country;
7. National authorities;
8. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian coordination system in place, including the cluster approach, requiring policy review and standard setting.

Follow-up Options

- Based on the ICSM report, The RC/HC and HCT will be invited to review the Recommendation Matrix, modifying and/or endorsing this to develop a country-level Response Plan.
- At country level, OCHA is expected to facilitate this process and help monitor subsequent follow-up in support of the RC/HC and the HCT.
- At global level, and in conjunction with the relevant GCC members, OCHA will follow up on progress made against the *overall* Recommendation Matrix. This process may include facilitating a teleconference between focal points at the country level and the GCC to discuss progress.
- In some cases and dependent upon the nature of the mission recommendations, referral to the Emergency Relief Coordinator may also be an option. This would only be pursued following consultation with the GCC and review by the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach. If this were agreed, the report would be forwarded to the ERC by the IASC WG upon request of the IASC Task Team. In such cases, the ERC may then request the RC/HC and the HCT to develop a formal management response plan and/or to provide information on progress made.

The Guidance Note on Inter-Cluster Support Missions has been reviewed and endorsed by the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach on 25 January 2011, and endorsed by the IASC on 6 April 2011. The Guidance Note will be formally reviewed and adjusted if necessary 18 months after IASC endorsement.