<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE (IASC)

GUIDANCE NOTE ON USING THE CLUSTER APPROACH TO STRENGTHEN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

24 November 2006

</div>

1. Introduction

In international responses to humanitarian crises, some sectors have in the past benefited from having clearly mandated lead agencies, while others have not. This has repeatedly led to *ad hoc*, unpredictable humanitarian responses, with inevitable capacity and response gaps in some areas. Recognizing this, in September 2005 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) agreed to designate global "cluster leads" – specifically for humanitarian emergencies – in nine sectors or areas of activity. The IASC Principals also agreed that the cluster approach should be applied, with some flexibility, at the country level.

In December 2005 the IASC Principals generally welcomed the "cluster approach" as a mechanism that can help to address identified gaps in response and enhance the quality of humanitarian action. It is part of a wider reform process aimed at improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability and accountability, while at the same time strengthening partnerships between NGOs, international organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement[1] and UN agencies.

In June 2006 the IASC issued a *Preliminary Guidance Note* on implementation of the new approach. Emphasizing that the humanitarian reform process must be an inclusive one, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC Principals invited all relevant stakeholders, particularly in the field, to comment on this document. It is on the basis of the comments received that the present Guidance Note has been put together. The Guidance Note will continue to be reviewed periodically and revised as necessary, taking into account the conclusions of further "lessons learnt" exercises and evaluations of implementation of the cluster approach at both the global and country level.

---

[1] The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has stated that its position on the cluster approach is the following: "Among the components of the Movement, the ICRC is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between the ICRC and the UN will continue to the extent necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence."

2. Aim and scope of the cluster approach

At the global level, the aim of the cluster approach is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by ensuring that there is predictable leadership and accountability in all the main sectors or areas of humanitarian response.

Similarly, at the country level the aim is to strengthen humanitarian response by demanding high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all sectors or areas of activity. It is about achieving more strategic responses and better prioritization of available resources by clarifying the division of labour among organizations, better defining the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organizations within the sectors, and providing the Humanitarian Coordinator with both a first point of call and a provider of last resort in all the key sectors or areas of activity. The success of the cluster approach will be judged in terms of the impact it has on improving the humanitarian response to those affected by crises.

The cluster approach should eventually be applied in all countries with Humanitarian Coordinators. By definition, these are countries with humanitarian crises which are beyond the scope of any one agency's mandate and where the needs are of sufficient scale and complexity to justify a multi-sectoral response with the engagement of a wide range of humanitarian actors. The cluster approach can be used in both conflict-related humanitarian emergencies and in disaster situations. It should significantly improve the quality of international responses to major new emergencies. Also, although not limited to situations of internal displacement, it should make a significant improvement in the quality, level and predictability of the response to crises of internal displacement and represents a substantial strengthening of the 'collaborative response'.

3. Cluster leadership at the global level

Sectors and categories of population where leadership and accountability amongst international humanitarian actors are already clear are not included among the nine clusters at global level. These include, for example, agriculture, led by FAO; food, led by WFP; refugees, led by UNHCR; and education, led by UNICEF. (In the case of education, there may be some further modification to this, as consultations are underway to clarify the lead at the global level.) In addition to these, as indicated in the table below, cluster leads at the global level have now been designated by the IASC for nine sectors or areas of activity which in the past either lacked predictable leadership in situations of humanitarian emergency, or where there was considered to be a need to strengthen leadership and partnership with other humanitarian actors.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;">

<u>Global "cluster leads"</u>
(As agreed by the IASC Principals in December 2005)

Sector or Area of Activity		*Global Cluster Lead*
Technical areas:		
1. Nutrition		UNICEF
2. Health		WHO
3. Water/Sanitation		UNICEF
4. Emergency Shelter:	*IDPs (from conflict)*	UNHCR
	Disaster situations	IFRC (Convener)*
Cross-cutting areas:		
5. Camp Coord/Management:	*IDPs (from conflict)*	UNHCR
	Disaster situations	IOM
6. Protection:	*IDPs (from conflict)*	UNHCR
	*Disasters/civilians affected by conflict (other than IDPs)***	UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF
7. Early Recovery		UNDP
Common service areas:		
8. Logistics		WFP
9. Emerg. Telecommunications		OCHA/UNICEF/WFP

* IFRC has made a commitment to provide leadership to the broader humanitarian community in Emergency Shelter in disaster situations, to consolidate best practice, map capacity and gaps, and lead coordinated response. IFRC has committed to being a 'convener' rather than a 'cluster lead'. In an MOU between IFRC and OCHA it was agreed that IFRC would not accept accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitutions and own policies and that its responsibilities would leave no room for open-ended or unlimited obligations. It has therefore not committed to being 'provider of last resort' nor is it accountable to any part of the UN system.

** UNHCR is the lead of the global Protection Cluster. However, at the country level in disaster situations or in complex emergencies without significant displacement, the three core protection-mandated agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR) will consult closely and, under the overall leadership of the HC/RC, agree which of the three will assume the role of Lead for protection.

</div>

The establishment of clusters at the global level in areas where there are clearly identified gaps in capacity is an important addition that will enhance technical capacity and better ensure the immediate availability of critical material and expertise.

To help build capacity at the global level in areas where this was previously lacking, a Global Cluster Appeal for US$ 39 million was launched in March 2006. A second Global Cluster Appeal will be launched in 2007, after which any costs associated with cluster leadership at the global level will be incorporated into agencies' normal fundraising mechanisms.

Concerning the emergency shelter cluster, it should be noted that IFRC does not participate in Consolidated Appeals launched by the UN and will appeal separately for support in providing leadership and strengthening capacity for the provision of emergency shelter in disasters resulting from natural hazards.

4. Responsibilities of global cluster leads

Complementing arrangements already in place for some sectors or areas of activity, global cluster leads have agreed to be accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for ensuring system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and for ensuring greater predictability and more effective inter-agency responses in their particular sectors or areas of activity. More specifically, they are responsible for establishing broad partnership bases (i.e. "clusters") that engage in activities in three main areas, as follows:

Standards and policy-setting
➢ Consolidation and dissemination of standards; where necessary, development of standards and policies; identification of 'best practice'

Building response capacity
➢ Training and system development at the local, national, regional and international levels
➢ Establishing and maintaining surge capacity and standby rosters
➢ Establishing and maintaining material stockpiles

Operational support
➢ Assessment of needs for human, financial and institutional capacity
➢ Emergency preparedness and long term planning
➢ Securing access to appropriate technical expertise
➢ Advocacy and resource mobilization
➢ Pooling resources and ensuring complementarity of efforts through enhanced partnerships

5. Sector/cluster leadership at the country level

At the country level, sectors and sectoral groups have always existed and they will continue to exist. In the past, however, it was usually the case that only a limited number of sectors had clearly designated lead agencies accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator. The cluster approach aims to rectify this by ensuring that within the international humanitarian response, there is a clear system of leadership and accountability for *all* the key sectors or areas of humanitarian activity. The cluster approach is intended, therefore, to strengthen rather than to replace sectoral coordination under the overall leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, with a view to improving humanitarian response in emergency situations.

Concerning terminology, some Humanitarian Country Teams prefer to speak of "clusters" and "cluster leads", while others prefer to stick to the more traditional terminology of "sectors", "sectoral groups" and "sector leads" (or in some cases, "working groups", "thematic groups" or "task forces"). It should be left to Humanitarian Country Teams to decide on a case-by-case basis on appropriate terminology for the country in question, depending on the working language and agency preferences. To ensure coherence, standard terminology should be used within each country and similar standards should be applied to all the key sectors or areas of humanitarian activity. A "cluster" is essentially a "sectoral group" and there should be no differentiation between the two in terms of their objectives and activities; the aim of filling gaps and ensuring adequate preparedness and response should be the same.

The cluster approach represents a raising of standards in humanitarian response. At the country level, it involves having clearly identified leads (within the international humanitarian community) for all the key sectors or areas of activity, with clearly defined responsibilities for these agencies in their capacities as sector leads.

The Humanitarian Coordinator, in close consultation with the Humanitarian Country Team, is responsible for securing agreement on the establishment of appropriate sectors and sectoral groups, and for the designation of sector leads. This should be based on a clear assessment of needs and gaps, as well as on a mapping of response capacities, including those of the host Government, local authorities, local civil society, international humanitarian organizations and other actors, as appropriate.

To enhance predictability, where possible sector lead arrangements at the country level should be in line with the lead agency arrangements at the global level. This principle should, however, be applied flexibly, taking into consideration the capacities and strengths of humanitarian organizations already operating in the country or region concerned. This may mean that in some cases sector lead arrangements at the country level do not replicate those at the global level. Also, in some cases, it may be appropriate for NGOs or other humanitarian partners to act as sector focal points in parts of the country where they have a comparative advantage or where the cluster lead has no presence.

There may be cases where particular sectoral groups are not needed, or where particular sectors are merged (e.g. Health & Nutrition, or Food & Agriculture). In the case of Early Recovery, the global level cluster is not encouraging Humanitarian Country Teams to establish Early Recovery sectoral groups at the country level, but rather to ensure that early recovery planning is integrated into the work of all sectoral groups. Where there are early recovery gaps not covered by other sectoral groups, *ad hoc* groups could be set up to address these where necessary. Likewise, in the case of Emergency Telecommunications and Logistics, it may not be necessary to establish special sectoral groups with sector leads in every country, though they may be much needed in some cases – particularly in the early stages of major new emergencies. In establishing sectoral

groups at the country level, the principle should always be to prioritize the main issues and ensure that there are no major gaps in the humanitarian response.

Sectoral groups at the country level should ensure adherence to norms, policies and standards agreed at the global level and should treat the global level clusters as a resource that can be called upon for advice on global standards, policies and 'best practice', as well as for operational support, general guidance and training programmes. There is no direct reporting line, however, between sectoral groups at the country level and global level clusters.

Sector leads are expected to report to the Humanitarian Coordinator on issues related to the functioning of the sector as a whole, while at the same time retaining their normal reporting lines insofar as their own agencies' activities are concerned. In some cases, particularly at the height of a humanitarian crisis, there may be a need to appoint staff to work as dedicated, full-time sector leads.

Common Humanitarian Action Plans and Consolidated Appeal documents should clearly reflect the agreed sectoral structure, indicating which agencies are the designated sector leads.

6. Contingency planning and application of the cluster approach in major new emergencies

The cluster approach should be used in all contingency planning exercises for major new emergencies which involve multi-sectoral responses with the participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors. Those responsible for doing the contingency planning, whether at the country, regional or headquarters level, should consult closely with national/local authorities as appropriate, building on local capacities. They should also ensure that they consult closely with relevant international actors at the country and regional level, as well as with global cluster leads and other lead agencies at the global level.

In the event of a sudden major new emergency requiring a multi-sectoral response with the participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors, the cluster approach should be used from the start in planning and organizing the international response. The Humanitarian Coordinator (or the Resident Coordinator in countries where a Humanitarian Coordinator has not yet been appointed at the beginning of the emergency) should consult all relevant partners at the country level and make proposals regarding the designation of any new cluster/sector leads, if possible within the first 24 hours. Following consultation with the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Emergency Relief Coordinator should consult global cluster leads and other lead agencies at the global level on the designation of country-level cluster/sector leads for the emergency in question. The Emergency Relief Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that agreement is reached on appropriate country-level cluster/sector leads, and that this decision is communicated without delay to all relevant humanitarian partners, as well as donors and other

stakeholders. The Humanitarian Coordinator should in turn inform the host government and humanitarian partners at the country level of the agreed arrangements.

7. Responsibilities of sector/cluster leads at the country level

The role of sector leads at the country level is to facilitate a process aimed at ensuring well-coordinated and effective humanitarian responses in the sector or area of activity concerned. Sector leads themselves are not expected to carry out all the necessary activities within the sector or area of activity concerned. They are required, however, to commit to being the 'provider of last resort' where this is necessary and where access, security and availability of resources make this possible.

As spelt out in the *Terms of Reference for Sector Leads at the Country Level* (see Annex 1), specific responsibilities of sector leads at the country level include ensuring the following:

- Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
- Establishment and maintenance of appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms
- Coordination with national/local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other relevant actors
- Participatory and community-based approaches
- Attention to priority cross-cutting issues (e.g. age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights)
- Needs assessment and analysis
- Emergency preparedness
- Planning and strategy development
- Application of standards
- Monitoring and reporting
- Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Training and capacity building
- Provision of assistance or services as a last resort

Sector leads have a particular responsibility for ensuring that humanitarian actors working in their sectors remain actively engaged in addressing cross cutting concerns such as age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights. Experience of recent crises suggests that these important dimensions to ensuring appropriate responses have too frequently been ignored.

Sector leads are responsible for ensuring the necessary shift in programming as priorities move from emergency relief to longer-term recovery and development. All sectoral groups should include early recovery strategies and procedures for phasing out or handing over activities. In addition, networks of early recovery focal points should be established at the country level to ensure joint planning and integrated response. Sector Leads should ensure that sectoral groups promote strategies that support the government

and other local partners from the outset of the response and enable strong linkages between humanitarian and development actions, as appropriate.

Sector/cluster lead agencies are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator for ensuring that the tasks mentioned above are carried out effectively.[2]

8. **Strengthening partnerships and complementarity amongst humanitarian actors**

A central element of the humanitarian reform process is the need to strengthen strategic partnerships between NGOs, international organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies. Indeed, successful application of the cluster approach will depend on all humanitarian actors working as equal partners in all aspects of the humanitarian response: from assessment, analysis and planning to implementation, resource mobilization and evaluation. As such, the establishment of a Humanitarian Country Team at the country level is an essential pre-requisite for effective application of the cluster approach.

Humanitarian partnerships may take different forms, from close coordination and joint programming to looser associations based on the need to avoid duplication and enhance complementarity. To be successful, therefore, sectoral groups must function in ways that respect the roles, responsibilities and mandates of different humanitarian organizations. There must be recognition of the diversity of approaches and methodologies that exist amongst the different actors. It is essential that sectoral groups find non-bureaucratic ways of involving all humanitarian actors in a collaborative and inclusive process focused on areas of common interest.

Some humanitarian actors may not be prepared or able to formally commit themselves to structures which involve reporting to sector leads. Sector leads should ensure, however, that all humanitarian actors are given the opportunity to fully and equally participate in setting the direction, strategies, and activities of the sectoral group. Sector leads are responsible for ensuring – to the extent possible – appropriate complementarity amongst different humanitarian actors operating in their sectors or areas of activity.

9. **Ensuring appropriate links with Government/local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders**

A key responsibility of sector leads at the country level is to ensure that humanitarian actors build on local capacities and that they develop and maintain appropriate links with Government and local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders. The nature of these links will depend on the situation in each country and

---

[2] In the case of emergency shelter, IFRC's commitments are described in an MOU between IFRC and OCHA. IFRC has not committed to being 'provider of last resort' nor is it accountable to any part of the UN system.

on the willingness and capacity of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities.

In some cases, Government and local authorities may be in a strong position to lead the overall humanitarian response and the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator may be to organize an international humanitarian response in support of the host Government's efforts. This would typically be the case in disasters. In other cases, particularly in situations of ongoing conflict, the willingness or capacity of a Government or State institutions to lead or contribute to humanitarian activities may be compromised, and this will clearly influence the nature of the relationships which it establishes with international humanitarian actors.

Similarly, the nature of the relationships established between international humanitarian actors and local civil society, as well as other stakeholders, will depend on the political and security situation and on their capacities and willingness to lead or engage in humanitarian activities.

Application of the cluster approach does not imply that the agency designated as sector lead in a particular country is responsible for leading the overall humanitarian response within that sector, as this may be the responsibility of a Government department or a local authority. It does mean, however, that the agency designated as sector lead is responsible for promoting close cooperation amongst international humanitarian actors working in that sector, and for ensuring appropriate linkages with Government and local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders. Where appropriate, sectors leads should promote training and capacity-building initiatives, particularly in terms of strengthening the capacity of local authorities to provide leadership.

10. Accountability of sector/cluster leads to the Humanitarian Coordinator

The intention of the cluster approach is to strengthen overall levels of accountability for humanitarian response and to ensure that gaps in response do not remain un-addressed because there are no clearly assigned responsibilities. At the global level, in line with the IASC agreement on the allocation of responsibilities, cluster leads are accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for ensuring system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and for ensuring greater predictability and more effective inter-agency responses in their particular sectors or areas of activity.[3]

At the country level, the Humanitarian Coordinator – with the support of OCHA – retains overall responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and is accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator. While sector/cluster lead agencies at

---

[3] In the case of emergency shelter, in agreeing to convene the emergency shelter sector in disasters resulting from natural hazards the IFRC has made clear that it cannot accept accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitution and policies. It will, however, do its utmost to ensure an adequate and appropriate response as far as the network's capacities, resources, as well as the access and security situation allow.

the country level cannot be held accountable for the performance of all humanitarian partners operational in that sector, they are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator for ensuring, to the extent possible, the establishment of adequate coordination mechanisms for the sector or area of activity concerned, adequate preparedness, as well as adequate strategic planning for an effective operational response.

In cases where stakeholders consider that a sector lead at the country level is not adequately carrying out its responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the Humanitarian Coordinator to consult the sector lead concerned and, where necessary, also the Humanitarian Country Team. If necessary, based on these consultations the Humanitarian Coordinator may propose alternative arrangements. If needed, the Humanitarian Coordinator may also ask the Emergency Relief Coordinator to consult the relevant IASC Principals at the global level before proposing alternative arrangements.

While the cluster approach encourages strong partnerships and joint planning amongst humanitarian actors, it is up to individual agencies to determine levels of participation in the work of the different sectoral groups. The cluster approach itself does not require that humanitarian actors be held accountable to sector leads. Likewise, it does not demand accountability of non-UN actors to UN agencies. Individual humanitarian organizations can only be held accountable to sector leads in cases where they have made specific commitments to this effect.

11. What is meant by 'provider of last resort'?

The 'provider of last resort' concept is critical to the cluster approach, and without it the element of predictability is lost. It represents a commitment of sector leads to do their utmost to ensure an adequate and appropriate response. It is necessarily circumscribed by some basic preconditions that affect any framework for humanitarian action, namely unimpeded access, security, and availability of funding.

Where there are critical gaps in humanitarian response, it is the responsibility of sector leads to call on all relevant humanitarian partners to address these. If this fails, then depending on the urgency, the sector lead as 'provider of last resort' may need to commit itself to filling the gap. If, however, funds are not forthcoming for these activities, the Cluster Lead cannot be expected to implement these activities, but should continue to work with the Humanitarian Coordinator and donors to mobilize the necessary resources. Likewise, where the efforts of the sector lead, the Humanitarian Country Team as a whole, and the Humanitarian Coordinator as the leader of that team are unsuccessful in gaining access to a particular location, or where security constraints limit the activities of humanitarian actors, the provider of last resort will still be expected to continue advocacy efforts and to explain the constraints to stakeholders.

For cross-cutting areas such as Protection, Early Recovery and Camp Coordination, the concept of 'provider of last resort' will need to be applied in a differentiated manner. In all cases, however, sector leads are responsible for ensuring that wherever there are

significant gaps in the humanitarian response they continue advocacy efforts and explain the constraints to stakeholders.

12. Rationalizing meetings

Sector leads are responsible for determining, together with those participating in the relevant sectoral groups, the frequency and types meetings needed. Sector leads should ensure that they do not make excessive demands for meetings, particularly where this concerns small organizations which have limited capacities to attend large numbers of individual sectoral meetings. Sector leads are responsible for ensuring that sectoral meetings are well managed and productive. In some cases, different sectoral groups may decide to meet collectively.

Sectoral meetings should supplement rather than replace or undermine the Humanitarian Country Team meeting (at the country level) and to its equivalent at the district or provincial level. Establishing individual sectoral meetings at the district level should be determined by need rather than by a concern for creating a uniform structure.

13. The role of the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA at the country level

The role of the Humanitarian Coordinator at the country level is described in the IASC Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator. In line with the Terms of Reference, the Humanitarian Coordinator – with OCHA support – is responsible for establishing and maintaining comprehensive coordination mechanisms based on facilitation and consensus building. These mechanisms should be inclusive of all the actors involved at the country level in the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection. Concerning the sectors, the Humanitarian Coordinator should ensure that:

- Sector leads, together with other members of the Humanitarian Country Team, are consulted closely in developing the overall strategic direction of the humanitarian operation;
- Effective coordination and information-sharing amongst the different sectoral groups takes place, and the work of the different sectoral groups is integrated into a coherent overall response;
- Unnecessary duplication and overlap among sectors is avoided;
- Cross-cutting issues such as age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights are effectively addressed in all sectors;
- Strategic planning is coherent throughout the country, i.e. at the national (capital) level, between capital and the regions, and among the regions;
- Sectors are provided with the necessary common services and tools for effective cross-sector collaboration, particularly in the areas of information management, inter-agency needs assessments, development of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP), preparation of the Consolidated Appeal, Flash Appeal and contingency planning;

- Sectoral meetings supplement rather than replace general inter-agency coordination meetings, to prevent a fragmentation of the humanitarian response;
- Sectoral meetings at the capital level and in the regions are streamlined;
- Support is provided to sectors in advocacy and resource-mobilization efforts to ensure a balanced, comprehensive and well-prioritized humanitarian response;
- Early recovery planning is integrated into all sectors or areas of activity.

Application of the cluster approach along with the other elements of the humanitarian reform process will require strong coordination among a wide range of partners. There will continue to be significant demand for common systems and services, such as information management tools, advocacy and resource mobilization. At the country level, OCHA will need to continue to provide support to the Humanitarian Coordinator in four main areas: coordination; information management; advocacy and resource mobilization; and policy development.

The Humanitarian Coordinator, in consultation with the Humanitarian Country Team, is responsible for adapting coordination structures over time to reflect the capacities of government structures and the engagement of development partners.

Annex 1

Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level

The Cluster Approach operates at two levels. At the global level, the aim is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by designating global Cluster Leads and ensuring that there is predictable leadership and accountability in all the main sectors or areas of activity. At the country level, the aim is to ensure a more coherent and effective response by mobilizing groups of agencies, organizations and NGOs to respond in a strategic manner across all key sectors or areas of activity, each sector having a clearly designated lead, as agreed by the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team. (To enhance predictability, where possible this should be in line with the lead agency arrangements at the global level.)

The Humanitarian Coordinator – with the support of OCHA – retains responsibility for ensuring the adequacy, coherence and effectiveness of the overall humanitarian response and is accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Sector/cluster leads at the country level are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator for facilitating a process at the sectoral level aimed at ensuring the following:

Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
- Ensure inclusion of key humanitarian partners for the sector, respecting their respective mandates and programme priorities

Establishment and maintenance of appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms
- Ensure appropriate coordination with all humanitarian partners (including national and international NGOs, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, IOM and other international organizations), through establishment/maintenance of appropriate sectoral coordination mechanisms, including working groups at the national and, if necessary, local level;
- Secure commitments from humanitarian partners in responding to needs and filling gaps, ensuring an appropriate distribution of responsibilities within the sectoral group, with clearly defined focal points for specific issues where necessary;
- Ensure the complementarity of different humanitarian actors' actions;
- Promote emergency response actions while at the same time considering the need for early recovery planning as well as prevention and risk reduction concerns;
- Ensure effective links with other sectoral groups;
- Ensure that sectoral coordination mechanisms are adapted over time to reflect the capacities of local actors and the engagement of development partners;
- Represent the interests of the sectoral group in discussions with the Humanitarian Coordinator and other stakeholders on prioritization, resource mobilization and advocacy;

Coordination with national/local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other relevant actors
- Ensure that humanitarian responses build on local capacities;
- Ensure appropriate links with national and local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other relevant actors (e.g. peacekeeping forces) and ensure appropriate coordination and information exchange with them.

Participatory and community-based approaches
- Ensure utilization of participatory and community based approaches in sectoral needs assessment, analysis, planning, monitoring and response.

Attention to priority cross-cutting issues
- Ensure integration of agreed priority cross-cutting issues in sectoral needs assessment, analysis, planning, monitoring and response (e.g. age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights); contribute to the development of appropriate strategies to address these issues; ensure gender-sensitive programming and promote gender equality; ensure that the needs, contributions and capacities of women and girls as well as men and boys are addressed;

Needs assessment and analysis
- Ensure effective and coherent sectoral needs assessment and analysis, involving all relevant partners

Emergency preparedness
- Ensure adequate contingency planning and preparedness for new emergencies;

Planning and strategy development
Ensure predictable action within the sectoral group for the following:
- Identification of gaps;
- Developing/updating agreed response strategies and action plans for the sector and ensuring that these are adequately reflected in overall country strategies, such as the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP);
- Drawing lessons learned from past activities and revising strategies accordingly;
- Developing an exit, or transition, strategy for the sectoral group.

Application of standards
- Ensure that sectoral group participants are aware of relevant policy guidelines, technical standards and relevant commitments that the Government has undertaken under international human rights law;
- Ensure that responses are in line with existing policy guidance, technical standards, and relevant Government human rights legal obligations.

Monitoring and reporting
- Ensure adequate monitoring mechanisms are in place to review impact of the

sectoral working group and progress against implementation plans;
- Ensure adequate reporting and effective information sharing (with OCHA support), with due regard for age and sex disaggregation.

Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Identify core advocacy concerns, including resource requirements, and contribute key messages to broader advocacy initiatives of the HC and other actors;
- Advocate for donors to fund humanitarian actors to carry out priority activities in the sector concerned, while at the same time encouraging sectoral group participants to mobilize resources for their activities through their usual channels.

Training and capacity building
- Promote/support training of staff and capacity building of humanitarian partners;
- Support efforts to strengthen the capacity of the national authorities and civil society.

Provision of assistance or services as a last resort
- As agreed by the IASC Principals, sector leads are responsible for acting as the provider of last resort (subject to access, security and availability of funding) to meet agreed priority needs and will be supported by the HC and the ERC in their resource mobilization efforts in this regard.
- This concept is to be applied in an appropriate and realistic manner for cross-cutting issues such as protection, early recovery and camp coordination.

Humanitarian actors who participate in the development of common humanitarian action plans are expected to be proactive partners in assessing needs, developing strategies and plans for the sector, and implementing agreed priority activities. Provisions should also be made in sectoral groups for those humanitarian actors who may wish to participate as observers, mainly for information-sharing purposes.