

# Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of Food Security Cluster Coordination

## Lesson: Humanitarian Coordination and Cluster Approach

*Text-only version*

*In partnership with:*



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## Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe how this course is organized;
- explain the origin of the Humanitarian Reform;
- illustrate the Transformative Agenda;
- describe the Humanitarian Response structure and objectives;
- identify the key actors in humanitarian response; and
- illustrate principles, objectives and actors for the Cluster Approach.

## How the course is organized

Welcome to this e-learning course on Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of Food Security Cluster Coordination!

### *What is the purpose of this course?*

This course is by no means exhaustive, rather it is intentionally designed to ensure you have the key foundational knowledge in order to successfully participate in the coordination mechanisms of the Food Security Cluster at both global and country level.

### *What can I expect from this course?*

This learning experience has the purpose to provide you with some guidance on how to improve coordination efficiency and effectiveness within the cluster system.

### *How is the content organized?*

The course is organized into 2 units, for a total of 11 lessons.

**Unit 1** illustrates the structure and objectives of the humanitarian response architecture, and describes principles, advantages and challenges of the cluster approach and its application in operations.

**Unit 2** illustrates the Food Security Cluster's role and core functions at country level and presents the key activities related to each core function, focusing on how Accountability to Affected Population assists in enhancing a people centred approach in emergencies.

### *Course scenario*

Let's consider the following scenario, which unfolds throughout the course and will allow you to apply what you've learned about a humanitarian crisis.

Reports are being received that **category 5-typhoon** Cristobal is gathering speed off the coast of Aristopulous and that it is highly likely to hit the country in the coming hours. Predictions about exactly where and when the typhoon will make landfall are still unclear however the government of Aristopulous has made a statement that they believe they do not have sufficient capacity to respond fully given the strength of this typhoon and its potential impact. The government believes that it is almost certain that there will be need for assistance from the international community in terms of personnel on the ground, financial resources and supplies and that preparations for this should begin in earnest. Dozens of relief organizations are arriving with supplies, but **coordination** among these groups and the Aristopulous Government has yet to be fully established.

### How the course is organized

As you progress through the course, you will meet these characters who are working "on the ground" in Aristopulous, each representing one of the profiles who are usually involved with the humanitarian coordination process.

**Marcel**, the communication advocacy officer.

**Jade**, the Humanitarian Coordinator.

**Amina**, the FSC Information Manager.

**Farid**, the Food Security Cluster NGO co-facilitator.

**Sara**, the Food Security Cluster Coordinator.

**José**, the Global Food Security Cluster Coordinator.

### Introduction

The humanitarian field is constantly evolving. Whether you are a seasoned humanitarian worker, with years of experience, or completely new to the field, the efficiency of your contribution to a response may be enhanced by your **knowledge of the humanitarian structure and its underlying principles**.

This lesson offers you a chance to increase your knowledge of these essential concepts, by describing the **key humanitarian response elements** and recent developments within the humanitarian system. This lesson will also introduce you to the **key actors responsible for food security coordination**, with whom you are likely to interact during a humanitarian response.

## Humanitarian Response

When a crisis occurs, systems can break down. Typically **time and resources are limited** and a wide range of communities and agencies come together to provide assistance. Regardless of an organization's size, experience, or resources, everyone who is there shares the responsibility for cooperating with one another and coordinating relief efforts.



**Coordination** must be a priority, so as to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall relief operation.

**National governments** play the **primary role** in the **organization, initiation, implementation and coordination** of humanitarian response on their territory (UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991). Governments lead the humanitarian response process unless their capacity is such that they ask the international community to take on that role.



### *General Assembly Resolution 46/182*

In December 1991, the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182. It was designed to strengthen the United Nations' response to complex emergencies and natural disasters, while improving the overall effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the field.



*Hello, I am Sara the Food Security Cluster Coordinator. I've been coordinating disaster relief for more than 20 years now. I can help get you oriented to the situation here in Aristopulous.*

*It is important you know how to coordinate and not add to the chaos. Let me explain a little about the organizations that are here and how we all work together.*

*Let's have an overview of some of the **foundations of humanitarian action**. You may be familiar with some of this already, but it's the framework for our response and the foundation of your work, so it's worth reviewing.*

## Humanitarian Reform

In 2005, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), together with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) initiated the process of **Humanitarian Reform**. Emergency response capacity was reinforced at global level according to an agreed division of labour. However, subsequent humanitarian operations revealed that some **challenges** remained, as shown in several major disasters during recent years. These include:

- deploying **adequate leadership**;
- putting in place **appropriate coordination** mechanisms at various levels;
- ensuring **clear mutual accountability**.

### The Humanitarian System before 2005

Let's explore the history of the humanitarian system before 2005. Red flags indicate a disaster or emergency. Blue flags indicate what measures were taken in response to these events.

 Red flags - a disaster or emergency

 Blue flags-measures were taken in response to these events

**1960-1980:** Several large-scale emergencies, including the Biafra crisis, an earthquake in Peru, a cyclone in East Pakistan and the Indo-Pakistani war, highlight the need for coordination of humanitarian efforts.

**1971:** UN member states create the position of Disaster Relief Coordinator and establish the Disaster Relief Organization. This organization had a strong mandate to mobilize, direct and coordinate UN humanitarian assistance and to coordinate UN assistance with the activities of non-UN actors.

**1990-1991:** The Gulf War and refugee crisis highlight the need for a more empowered humanitarian coordination entity, coordination with the military and coordinated assistance for internally displaced people.

**1991:** The UN General Assembly adopts Resolution 46/182. This establishes several important entities that remain cornerstones of humanitarian coordination:

**1994:** Genocide and civil wars in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region raise questions about willingness to act and reveal weaknesses in the management of relief operations.

- Transforming the position of Disaster Relief Coordinator into Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who will be responsible for coordinating and facilitating the humanitarian assistance of the UN system and will serve as a central focal point for governments and non-governmental organizations.
- Establishing a Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) to coordinate funding appeals.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) - a pooled donor fund of initially US\$50 million.</li> <li>• Creating an Inter-Agency Standing Committee - a central coordination platform for humanitarian UN organizations, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.</li> </ul> <p><b>1997:</b> Reviews recommend that the UN retain a standalone, non-operational humanitarian coordination office. This leads to the creation of OCHA.</p>
<p><b>2003-2004:</b> Large-scale, highly visible crises, such as the Darfur crisis and Indian Ocean tsunami, reveal further limitations in the humanitarian response system.</p>	<p><b>2005:</b> ERC initiates a "Humanitarian Reform" in an attempt to strengthen coordination, financing, leadership and partnership (added later) to provide more accountable, effective and predictable humanitarian response.</p>

### Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) is the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The ERC is responsible for the overseeing of all emergencies requiring UN humanitarian assistance.

He or she also acts as the focal point for governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental relief activities. The ERC plays a critical advocacy role in specific crises and in the promotion of humanitarian action. The ERC also leads the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

### Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org> is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development, and decision-making, involving key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. It was established in June 1992 in response to General Assembly Resolution 46/182. UN agencies are permanent members and others have standing invitations to participate. The IASC is the only decision-making group related to humanitarian response that includes UN agencies, the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and NGOs. Its focus is primarily on developing policies and guidelines for field application. The

IASC is a forum that allows humanitarian agencies to coordinate on an ongoing basis. This way, when disaster strikes, they have addressed common concerns and codeveloped mechanisms for coordination.

! The Humanitarian Reform aims to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response through greater **predictability, accountability, responsibility and partnership**.

The actions launched under **Humanitarian Reform in 2005** are still evolving and being improved.

The late 2000s witnessed many humanitarian emergencies, including the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods in 2010. The response to these disasters exposed a number of weaknesses and inefficiencies in international humanitarian coordination and response, highlighting areas that needed to be strengthened. In 2005 ERC initiates a new "Humanitarian reform". In 2010 Response to earthquake in Haiti and floods in Pakistan exposes some weaknesses and inefficiencies in international humanitarian coordination.

In response to these events, in 2011 IASC created a set of recommendations to ensure that these shortcomings were addressed and to improve humanitarian interventions by ensuring a more strategic response. This has become known as the **Transformative Agenda (TA)**.

## The Transformative Agenda

The **Transformative Agenda** consists of a set of concrete actions to bring a substantive improvement to the humanitarian response model. It focuses on three key areas for **improving the timeliness and effectiveness** of the collective response through: stronger **leadership**, improved **accountability**, and more effective **coordination**.

IASC Transformative Agenda - <http://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>

### The Transformative Agenda: a set of actions

The Transformative Agenda consists of a set of concrete actions aimed at transforming the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies. These actions include:

1. A mechanism to deploy strong, experienced senior humanitarian **leadership** to guide the humanitarian response from the outset of a major crisis.
2. The strengthening of **response capacities and rapid deployment** of humanitarian workers at various levels, to ensure the coordination architecture functions well.

3. Improved **strategic planning** at country level, to clarify the collective results that the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identify how clusters and organizations will contribute to them.
4. Enhanced **accountability** of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for the achievement of collective results.
5. Streamlined **coordination** mechanisms adapted to operational requirements and contexts, so as to better facilitate delivery.

The Transformative Agenda also describes how the IASC members will respond together to major emergencies that require a system-wide response. These are "**Level 3**" (or "**L3**") **emergencies** and you will explore them a few screens later in this lesson.



For more details on the declaration of L3 emergencies see **Lesson "Supporting Service Delivery"** of this course.

To support the implementation of the Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals developed and agreed on **eight protocols**.

#### **The 8 protocols of the Transformative Agenda**

1. Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures.
2. Concept Paper on "Empowered Leadership".
3. Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: What "Empowered Leadership" looks like in practice.
4. Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM).
5. Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level.
6. Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.
7. Accountability to Affected Populations Operational Framework.
8. Common Framework for Preparedness.

Since each context and response is different, there is scope for significant **local adaptation of the IASC guidance** to meet conditions on the ground.

The **steps, method** and **timeline** for each context can therefore be adapted to the particulars of the crisis, the coordination structures in-country, the capacity of the government and of the humanitarian community, and the social and political environment.

Watch the Video Thoughts on the Transformative Agenda – 2012: <https://youtu.be/58i7dYB6dUQ>

Based on the video “Thoughts on the Transformative Agenda” is obvious that all parts of the IASC have committed to putting in place the right systems and resources to improve the **collective impact** of our emergency response operations, and to fulfil their obligations, both as members of an agreed system at HQ and field level, and as global cluster lead agencies. They have also committed to following the agreed procedures for Level 3 response operations. This is in addition to decisions taken on activating their respective internal processes. IASC organizations are committing to working as a team, with crisis meetings of heads of agencies (Principals) chaired by the ERC, and with empowered IASC leaders in the field heading and coordinating humanitarian response teams.

## The Humanitarian Response Structure

### *Why is coordination important in a humanitarian crisis?*

Coordination of aid provision is crucial so as to adequately meet the needs of the population affected by an emergency.

**Good coordination** allows the actors providing assistance to affected population to share information, about where they are working, what services they are providing and the needs in their areas of coverage. This allows to provide aid to all persons in need in a timely manner - using resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.

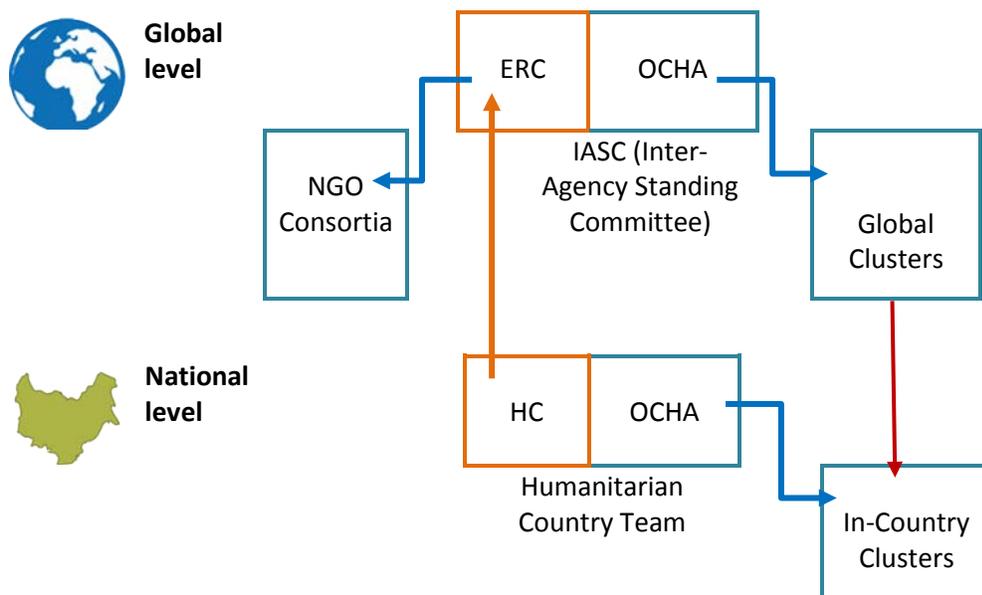
! Coordination increases the overall response capacity and prevents resources waste by avoiding duplication of efforts.

In the event of an emergency (or crisis), the first to respond and provide assistance to the population are **local communities** and **local authorities**, immediately followed by **the national government**, which is responsible for providing aid.

If the extent of the disaster exceeds the ability of local and national actors to handle the situation by themselves, the Humanitarian Response Structure provides a **framework for coordinating the different humanitarian actors** involved in helping the national authorities.

The Humanitarian Response Structure (also called the International Humanitarian Architecture) helps the humanitarian actors involved to better identify and take care of the affected population’s needs.

The main components of the humanitarian architecture are on **Global level and National level**



### NGOs Consortia

NGO membership organizations, known as NGO consortia, are a crucial part of the international humanitarian architecture. These organizations represent many different NGOs and are highly active in the architecture. A large number of NGO consortia actively participate in humanitarian response at global and national levels. Three of these consortia are part of the IASC. They are:

- the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), a global network of NGOs;
- InterAction, a consortium of American NGOs; and
- the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), which includes a small group of NGOs, IFRC and ICRC.

These consortia represent the interests of their members at the IASC and in other fora. They often help to coordinate their members' advocacy and policy work, but are not generally directly involved in field operations or coordination.

### Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)

The head of OCHA is the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). The ERC is responsible for the overseeing of all emergencies requiring United Nations humanitarian assistance. The Emergency Relief Coordinator also leads the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In a country affected by a disaster or conflict, the ERC may appoint a Humanitarian

Coordinator (HC) to ensure that response efforts are well organized. The ERC, in consultation with the **IASC Principals**, determines when a humanitarian crisis requires a system-wide response.



### *IASC Principals*

IASC Principals are the heads of all IASC member agencies or their representatives. Their responsibilities include:

- making strategic and operational policy decisions for the IASC;
- advocating common humanitarian principles, collectively or individually, on behalf of the IASC; and
- bringing issues to the attention of the Secretary-General and the Security Council through the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The ERC ensures IASC endorsement of the HC proposal for cluster activation and cluster lead appointments.

### **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)**

OCHA is part of the United Nations (UN) Secretariat. It is responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA works closely with national and international actors to develop policies, coordinate inter-cluster issues, disseminate operational guidance and organize field support. At field level, OCHA helps to ensure that the humanitarian system functions efficiently and in support of the Humanitarian Coordinator's leadership. OCHA provides guidance and support to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and facilitates inter-cluster coordination. OCHA also helps to ensure coordination between clusters at all phases of the response, including needs assessments, joint planning and monitoring and evaluation.

### **The Cluster Approach**

The Cluster Approach is the primary tool used by humanitarian actors to ensure coordination. It is adopted for ensuring that gaps in the humanitarian response do not go unaddressed. A cluster is a group of humanitarian organizations from the same sector of humanitarian action. A cluster can include any number of UN agencies, NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent representative and - at the national and subnational level - relevant government agencies. There are two categories of clusters: **global clusters**, which are always active, and **in-country clusters**, which are activated as needed during a crisis.

By working together, these organizations are not only able to provide better assistance to affected populations. They are also better equipped to coordinate their work with actors outside their sector.

### **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)**

The IASC is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

Under the leadership of the ERC, the IASC:

- develops humanitarian policies;
- agrees on a clear division of responsibility for the various aspects of humanitarian assistance;
- identifies and addresses gaps in response; and
- advocates for effective application of humanitarian principles.

The IASC allows humanitarian agencies to coordinate on an ongoing basis. That way, when a disaster strikes, they have addressed common concerns and co-developed mechanisms for coordination.

### **Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)**

The appointment of a Humanitarian Coordinator is one of the earliest steps in the international humanitarian response, when a country is affected by a major disaster or conflict. The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) selects the HC from a small pool of qualified professionals, and his or her appointment is approved by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, or IASC.

The HC has a long list of specific duties and responsibilities. Among these is responsibility for assessing whether or not an international response to the crisis is warranted and for ensuring that humanitarian response efforts, if needed, are well organized. The HC also leads the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in deciding the most appropriate coordination solutions for the country, taking into account the local situation. Agreement must be reached on which clusters to establish, and which organizations are to lead them. For detailed information on the HC's roles and responsibilities, see the IASC's "Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator"

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/HC%20Terms%20of%20Reference.pdf>

### **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)**

It comprises representatives from the UN agencies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), national and international Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the Red Cross/Red Crescent

Movement. Agencies that are also designated as cluster leads should represent the clusters, in addition to their respective organizations. The HCT is responsible for agreeing on common strategic issues related to humanitarian action.

## The Cluster Approach

When a crisis occurs, hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals may participate in the humanitarian response. In the past, there was no clear way for these groups to organize their activities. This **lack of coordination** led to duplication in some areas of the response and significant gaps<sup>1</sup> in others. There was also recognition that organizations needed to work together in a more harmonized and coordinated way, so as to maximize the impact of resources for the response. To address these issues, in 2005 the Humanitarian Reform introduced several new elements to the humanitarian system.

The

**Cluster Approach** is one of these.

### *Example of lack of coordination*

Before typhoon Cristobal hit Aristopulous, most international NGOs were active in the north-western area of the country, around the capital city. When the typhoon struck, the NGOs did not have sufficient staff on the ground in the southern part of the country, and could therefore not gather information on the needs of the affected people in those areas. Those who did have access did not have access to a platform where this information could be shared and could not reach the southern area due to logistics and security constraints.

The first response was therefore concentrated around the capital city, while the affected populations in the country's southern area were not reached with the necessary assistance. However, once the clusters were activated, assessment information was widely shared and common logistic services were offered to all partners. The food security cluster carried out a sector needs assessment, and several NGOs are now operating in the southern region in a coordinated manner.

The **Cluster Approach is a coordination tool** for improving financing, leadership and partnership to make humanitarian response more predictable and effective. It is a way of organizing coordination and

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<sup>1</sup> Gaps: Gaps in geographic coverage and in the types and levels of assistance and services provided.

cooperation among humanitarian actors so as to facilitate joint strategic planning, when the national government is not in a position to perform this task on its own.

! Good coordination means fewer gaps and overlaps in the assistance delivered by humanitarian organizations.

### *How does the cluster approach differ from other coordination mechanisms?*

The principal difference between the Cluster Approach and other sector coordination mechanisms is the designation of **Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs)**, which have clearly defined responsibilities and accountability.

Among other responsibilities, CLAs have the task of identifying gaps in humanitarian response in their sector and taking action to fill them, in case no other actor is capable of doing so. The provider of last resort, in the cluster context, refers to the lead agencies. Essentially, this means that the lead agencies have an obligation to do whatever is possible to fill the gaps in humanitarian response.

### **What is a Cluster?**

A cluster is a **group of humanitarian organizations**, both UN and non-UN, responding in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action (e.g. food security, water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and logistics, etc.). By working together, these organizations are not only able to provide better **assistance to affected populations**. They are also better equipped to coordinate their work with actors outside their sector. Each cluster is paired with one (or two) agencies that lead the cluster. These are Cluster Lead Agencies (**CLA**).

Besides the Lead Agencies, the main actors involved in a cluster are:

- ➔ **Cluster Coordinators**, responsible for leading and facilitating the mobilization of stakeholders to respond to a humanitarian crisis, ensuring coordination among partners and checking that issues of concern that cannot be addressed within the cluster are raised and discussed at HCT level. They are also with ensuring that strategic decisions are shared and acted upon at operational level.
- ➔ **Information Managers** oversee the systematic process of collecting, collating, storing, processing, verifying and analysing data and information, and disseminating it to humanitarian stakeholders.
- ➔ **Cluster Partners** should adhere to the minimum commitments that set out what all local, national or international organizations undertake to contribute.

The Cluster Approach operates at two levels: there are **Global Clusters**, which are always active, and **Local/In-country Clusters**, which are activated as needed during a crisis. Global and local clusters fulfil different tasks. At global level, clusters work to build global capacity; at country level they focus on building relationships with local actors.



### Global Cluster

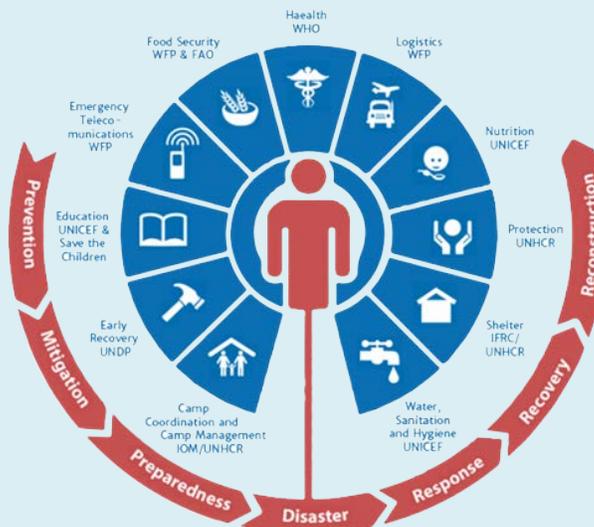
At global level, there are **11 clusters**. Each one has a **Global Lead Agency (GCLA)**, or two Co-Lead Agencies (CLA). These global leads are responsible to the ERC through their agencies. Global clusters work to maintain and build system-wide **preparedness** and **technical capacity** for emergency humanitarian responses. As they are always active, they help to ensure greater predictability and more effective inter-agency responses in their particular sectors. GCLAs are responsible for strengthening field response through policy setting, developing standards, establishing best practices, and providing operational support to in-country clusters.

#### IN DEPTH: GLOBAL CLUSTERS

There are **11 global clusters**. Each cluster has a designated **Global Lead Agency (GCLA)**, or two co-lead agencies. The same agency is usually the cluster lead when clusters are activated in-country. The Global Cluster Lead Agencies are accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), and cover three main areas: standards and policy settings, established best practices, and providing operational support. In particular, the leads agencies provide the following types of support to strengthen field response:

- technical **surge**<sup>2</sup> capacity;
- trained experts to lead cluster coordination at the field level;
- standardized technical tools, including tools for information management;
- agreement on common methods and formats for needs assessments, monitoring and benchmarking;
- best practices and lessons learned from field tests.

<sup>2</sup> Surge: In OCHA, “surge” means the swift deployment of experienced coordination experts and other specialized humanitarian personnel. Surge capacity is used when there are unforeseen emergencies and disasters, when a crisis deteriorates or when a force majeure affects and office.



**Global clusters responsibilities**

**Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM):** The goal of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management, cluster is to improve living conditions for displaced persons by facilitating protection and services in camps and camp-like settings. The cluster also works toward long-term solutions for the affected populations, ensuring organized closure and phase-out of camps. In conflict situations, the lead agency for the CCCM cluster is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In emergencies caused by natural disasters, the CCCM lead agency is the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):** The goal of the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) cluster is to coordinate agencies that work on water delivery, storage and treatment. The WASH cluster also coordinates agencies that promote the safe disposal of human waste and general hygiene. The cluster lead for WASH is the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

**Food Security WFP&FAO:** The goal of the food security cluster is to strengthen food security responses in crisis situations, support early recovery of local food production and markets and enhance national capacity. This might be achieved by monitoring how food aid affects local farmers or markets, or by finding ways to support local farmers and markets by buying food for disaster affected populations from local sources, whenever possible. The cluster leads for food security are the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). A detailed description of the Food Security Cluster is available in Lesson 1.3 of this course.

**Education:** The goal of the education cluster is to ensure that children and youth affected by the disaster have as little disruption in their education as possible. The education cluster may implement emergency education systems, such as schools in camps, and work with local and national authorities to restore permanent education systems where these have been disrupted. The cluster leads for education are the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and an NGO Save the Children.

**Health:** The goal of the health cluster is to identify the health needs of the affected population and determine the most efficient and effective ways of addressing these. The cluster works to prevent health issues such as disease outbreaks from occurring, and to address them when they do. The cluster lead for health is the World Health Organization (WHO).

**Logistics:** The goal of the logistics cluster is to ensure efficient logistics of humanitarian operations. Members of this cluster are largely focused on transport and resource management. The logistics cluster works to ensure that the humanitarian operation flows smoothly and successfully, and provides information and technical training on logistics. The cluster lead for logistics is the World Food Programme (WFP).

**Emergency Telecommunications:** The goal of the emergency telecommunications cluster is to provide timely, predictable and effective information, communication and technology services to support the humanitarian community in carrying out its work. If requested, within 48 hours of a disaster, the emergency telecommunications cluster provide basic security communication services and shared voice and Internet connectivity to all humanitarian actors in the field. The cluster lead for emergency telecommunications is the World Food Programme (WFP).

**Protection:** The goal of this cluster is to protect the rights of the crisis-affected population, regardless of age, gender, social, ethnic or religious background. It also helps to ensure that humanitarian actors consider protection concerns as they go about their work. The global lead agency for this cluster is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The global protection cluster is responsible for ensuring effective response in several speciality areas, known as Areas of Responsibility (AoRs). Each AoR has its own focal point agency, the functions and responsibilities of which are identical to those of a GCLA. The AoRs and their focal point agencies are: Child Protection, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Gender-Based Violence, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF; Housing, Land and Property, UN-Habitat; Mine Action, UN Mine Action Service; Rule of Law and Justice, UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Even though these speciality areas are called AoRs at global level, they are typically referred to as sub-clusters at country level.

**Early Recovery:** The goal of the early recovery cluster is to support ongoing humanitarian assistance operations while also supporting longer-term recovery of affected populations. Early recovery includes many features:

- ✓ restoration of basic services
- ✓ shelter
- ✓ security and the rule of law
- ✓ social dimensions, including the reintegration of displaced populations as soon as feasible.
- ✓ governance
- ✓ environment
- ✓ non-agricultural-based livelihoods

The cluster lead for early recovery is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

**Nutrition:** The goal of the Nutrition cluster is to safeguard and improve the nutritional status of affected populations. This cluster coordinates supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes that target those who are ill or in need of additional nutrition. The nutrition cluster lead is the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

**Shelter:** The goal of the shelter cluster is to provide basic and immediate shelter needs to disaster-affected populations. This includes tents, insulation materials, other temporary emergency shelter solutions and shelter-related non-food items. This cluster may also address longer-term shelter support, housing construction and reconstruction, and settlement support, such as site planning and urban planning. In the event of natural disasters, the Shelter cluster lead is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). In situations involving armed conflict, the cluster lead is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

### **Cross-cutting issues**

Cross-cutting issues affect all areas of concern and have an impact more than one cluster. Examples of cross-cutting issues include age, gender, environment, and accountability to affected populations. It is the responsibility of each cluster to consider how to address these cross-cutting issues in its own activities.



## Country-level Cluster

When a disaster occurs, **country-level clusters** may be activated as a way of improving coordination during the response. In-country clusters are temporary, and are only activated when there is insufficient coordination capacity at the country level in order to avoid gaps and duplication in assistance to affected communities. The global lead agency is usually designated as the **in-country lead agency** when a country-level cluster is activated, though this can vary depending on the location of the emergency and which organizations are most active in that area.

### **IN DEPTH: LOCAL CLUSTER**

Local clusters are temporary measures that are only activated when the gravity of the emergency requires it, depending on what is needed and what coordination capacity already exists in the country. Country Clusters are designed to increase **predictability** and **accountability** in all the main sectors of international humanitarian response and ensure that gaps in response do not go unaddressed. Local clusters should strengthen, rather than replace existing sector coordination mechanisms. Their objective is to contribute to the resumption or establishment of national coordination mechanisms.

Though each cluster addresses a different aspect of the response, there are six core functions that are common of all of them:

- **Support Service Delivery:** cluster members assist each other in identifying needs and providing services.
- **Informing the HC and HCT's strategic decisions:** cluster members contribute to needs assessments, response gap analysis and identification of cross-cutting issues. This information is passed on to the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team.
- **Planning and developing cluster strategy:** cluster members are responsible for developing sectoral plans, and for making sure that these plans adhere to relevant standards and guidelines, as well as for developing strategies that contribute to the wider strategic plan.
- **Advocacy:** cluster members support the Humanitarian Country Team by identifying advocacy concerns, and by advocating for resource mobilization and allocation, on behalf of affected people and cluster participants.

- **Monitoring and reporting coordination:** cluster members contribute to coordination performance reports and recommend corrective action to cluster strategies.
- **Building national capacity in contingency planning and preparedness:** cluster members might also develop contingency plans, when the risk of a future disaster is high. Each cluster is also responsible for integrating early recovery into its work from the very beginning of the emergency response.

The Food Security Cluster six core functions are described in detail in **Unit 2** of this course.

The same agency designated for the global cluster is usually also the country **cluster lead agency**, when a country-level cluster is activated. However this may vary depending on the agency's experience and presence at country level. Cluster lead agencies are also the "**provider of last resort**" for their sector. Where necessary, and depending on access, security, and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as provider of last resort, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil critical gaps. The head of an in-country cluster lead agency is accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC).

To determine which clusters should be activated and who should lead them, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) will look at initial assessments and draw up a recommendation.

This recommendation is sent to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who submits it to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and global cluster lead agencies for approval.

Once approved, clusters are established so that humanitarian organizations can coordinate resources, prioritize activities, and define their respective roles and responsibilities.

*“Prior to the typhoon, the government of Aristopolous had been working on coordinating a variety of activities to address the country’s development needs. Now, its support is further required to respond to the impact of the recent typhoon. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is supporting the government-led response in coordination with other UN agencies and international and national NGOs.*

*The Aristopolous Red Crescent Society (ORCS) is conducting an initial assessment and providing emergency health support. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), in support of ORCS, is closely monitoring the situation and coordinating with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other NGOs present in the country, to ensure that resources and support services are available when required.” – Sara, the Food Security Cluster Coordinator*

## Principles

Humanitarian actors share a common goal to provide life-saving assistance and protection to population in need. Over time, the international humanitarian system has developed **principles** that guide the activities of these response organizations and individuals. Three sets of **principles underlie the Cluster approach** and are expected to be adhered to by all clusters and their partners:

### 1. Humanitarian Principles

Adherence to these principles reflects a measure of accountability of the humanitarian community.

#### Humanity

The principle of humanity means that when seeking to offer assistance, you treat individuals as human beings with dignity, who must be respected and protected. If someone's life is threatened, your job and the job of your organization is to find ways to ensure that life-saving assistance and protection are provided as immediately as possible.

#### Neutrality

The principle of neutrality dictates that humanitarian actors must NOT take sides in hostilities, or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

#### Impartiality

Humanitarian aid must be provided without discrimination, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, political opinions or religion. People should receive assistance on the basis of need, and need alone.

#### Independence

Humanitarian actors must remain independent. They should never act as instruments of foreign policy. As an organization and as an individual, you should act independently, regardless of who is providing you with financial support. You cannot be influenced by political, economic, military or any other power when you are working to provide assistance.

#### Situations

1: Aristopulous. Your needs assessment shows that the area of greatest need is the adjacent district. If the government of Aristopulous offered you money to open a field hospital in an area dominated by the ruling government's political party you shouldn't accept funds because aid should be based on the greatest need.

2: A small village devastated by the typhoon. You are the first international agency to reach it, but there are already a number of local and national organizations present, which are starting to organize relief. You would not be comfortable taking on the police or the local branch of the ruling party as potential local partners. By definition, the ruling party will be seen as partisan and any alliance may jeopardize your neutrality. Likewise, in many places the police are seen as partisan and it would be best not to partner with them even though you might look to them for protection.

## 2. Principles of Partnership

Just as the humanitarian principles guide how we work as individuals and organizations, the Principles of Partnership address how the various organizations present collaborate to make sure they are all as efficient, effective and accountable as possible. The **Global Humanitarian Platform** <http://fscluster.org/document/global-humanitarian-platform-principles> adopted the Principles of Partnership in 2007 to promote and enhance the role of partnership in humanitarian response. There are five Principles of Partnership:

### Equality

Equality requires mutual respect among members of a partnership, irrespective of size and power. Partners must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

### Transparency

Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on an equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultation and sharing of information. Communication and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.

### Results-oriented approach

Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires results-oriented coordination, based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

### Responsibility

Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must ensure that they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills and capacity to deliver on their

undertakings. Humanitarian organizations should also make constant decisive and robust efforts to prevent any abuses.

### Complementarity

The diversity of the humanitarian community is a strength, if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part of emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

#### Example

Here is part of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between an NGO, Humanitarian Corps Worldwide (HCW) and local partner organization Help the Needy (HtN).

- ✓ HCW and HtN undertake to share all reports on their respective work and reports of meetings they have had with local officials. – *Principle of transparency*
- ✓ Our work is focused on installing 20 mobile camp kitchens over the next three weeks to serve 4 000 people. - *Results oriented approach*
- ✓ If either party finds it doesn't have the skills or resources to move forward on this project, it will immediately inform the other party and discuss ways of resolving the problem.- *Principle of responsibility*
- ✓ HCW enters into a partnership of mutual respect with HtN to implement a food security programme.- *Principle of equality*
- ✓ HCW will supply the tools and materials, and HtN will negotiate local access and supply local workers.- *Principle of complementarity*

### 3. Commitments on Accountability to Affected Population (CAAP)

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is an **active commitment to take account of, give account to and be held to account by** the people humanitarian organizations seek to assist. Accountability to Affected Population also focuses on the **rights, dignity and safety** of all segments of an affected community, identifying the capacities, aspirations, constraints and **unique needs** by: gender, age and diversity groups, and as they evolve over time.

#### TIP: How to provide equal support



To ensure that the benefits of the Food Security Cluster response accrue to women, men, girls and boys affected by a crisis, of all ages and backgrounds, including persons with disabilities or

other vulnerabilities, first consider the following. Will the different groups of affected people have access to:

- Appropriate, relevant and timely information?
- Two-way communication channels that welcome and facilitate feedback and complaints and provide redress for complaints?
- The means to participate in decisions that affect them, including fair and transparent systems of representation?
- Active involvement in the design, monitoring and evaluation of the goals and objectives of programmes?

Then put in place the appropriate mechanisms to ensure that this is so...

### Good practice in Iraq: a call centre for beneficiaries

The Food Security Cluster in Iraq promoted the creation of an inter-agency call centre for beneficiaries. The aim of the call centre is to provide a **direct line for beneficiaries** to receive information on humanitarian assistance and record their feedback and complaints. Following a successful pilot in July 2015 in Erbil Governorate, the information centre is now operational across Iraq and can be reached via any Iraqi mobile phone by dialling 6999. The call centre is technically operated by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and financially supported by WFP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and OCHA. The information provided to the beneficiaries is regularly updated by UN agencies and NGOs through the relevant clusters.

The cluster system acknowledges that affected people must always be at the centre of humanitarian planning and implementation and is committed to not allowing this principle to become lost, despite the high stress and pressured environment of a humanitarian response. To help ensure that, the cluster system actively supports a **people centred approach**, a series of commitments was drawn up.

These **commitments** were agreed in 2011, by the IASC Principals: **Leadership/governance, Transparency, Feedback and complaints, Participation, Design, monitoring and evaluation**

These commitments are illustrated in greater detail in **Lesson “Accountability to affected populations, centrality of protection, gender and age, and PSEA”**.

## The Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level

The **Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level** is a valuable resource for information on the cluster approach and how it improves coordination, leadership and accountability in humanitarian action.

The reference module for Cluster Coordination at Country level:

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/files/reference-module-cluster-coordination-country-level-revised-july-2015>

### Summary

The Transformative Agenda consists of a set of concrete actions to transform the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies.

The designation of an L3 emergency is based on an analysis of five criteria: scale, urgency, complexity, combined national and international capacity to respond and reputational risk.

Coordination prevents duplication of efforts and allows information sharing among the actors providing assistance. This enables aid to be provided where it is needed and to whom it is needed, in a timely fashion - using resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Cluster Approach is a mechanism to increase predictability and accountability in all the main sectors of international humanitarian response and ensure that gaps in response do not go unaddressed.

A cluster is a group of humanitarian organizations from the same sector of humanitarian action who coordinate in order to avoid gaps and duplication in assistance to affected communities.

The Cluster Approach is based on the Humanitarian Principles (Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence); Principles of partnership; Accountability to Affected Populations.