

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE ON RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLUSTER/SECTOR LEADS & OCHA IN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Detailed guidance on the cluster approach is provided in the IASC *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, 24 November 2006. The *IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster/Sector Leads at the Country Level* includes a requirement that Cluster/Sector leads at country level ensure “effective information sharing (with OCHA support)”. The following Operational Guidance is intended for use at the country level to help Cluster/Sector leads, OCHA and humanitarian partners ensure that relevant information related to a humanitarian emergency is provided to the right person at the right time in a usable form to facilitate situational understanding and decision-making.

Cluster/Sector leads and OCHA at the country level should aim to ensure that information management (IM) activities support national information systems, standards, build local capacities and maintain appropriate links with relevant Government, State and local authorities. Cluster/Sector leads and OCHA should thus seek to strengthen, not replace or diminish national efforts including those of institutions not part of the Cluster or Government.

Who is responsible for information management in emergencies?

- The responsibility for ensuring appropriate IM needed for an effective and coordinated *intra*-cluster response rests with the Cluster Lead Agency.¹
- The responsibility for ensuring appropriate IM needed for an effective and coordinated *inter*-cluster response rests with OCHA.

How does information management support effective humanitarian response in emergencies?

- IM improves the capacity of stakeholders for analysis and decision making through strengthened collection, processing, interpretation and dissemination of information at the *intra* and *inter*-cluster level. **Information is in this sense the foundation on which decision-making for a coordinated and effective response is based.**
- Strong IM, carried out in support of coordination processes in a given emergency, will ensure that the relevant actors are working with the same or complementary information and baseline data, and that this information is as relevant, accurate and timely as possible. Properly collected and managed data during emergencies, are furthermore, to the benefit of early recovery, recovery and later development and disaster preparedness activities.

What are the information management responsibilities of Cluster/Sector leads at the country level?

- Cluster/Sector lead agencies shall allocate the necessary human and financial resources for IM. Each cluster shall appoint an IM focal point, who should have sufficient expertise and an ability to work with different partners and clusters.
- While it is important that there is one IM focal point per Cluster/Sector, humanitarian partners are encouraged to share IM resources and capacities within and across clusters at the country level where appropriate to promote harmonization and economies of scale.
- Cluster/Sector IM focal points should contribute to inter-cluster IM coordination led by OCHA, and support efforts to ensure coherence and coordination between *intra* and *inter* cluster information management initiatives.
- Cluster/Sector IM focal points are responsible for ensuring adherence to global—and taking into account national—IM norms, policies and standards. Global level clusters and OCHA can be called upon for IM expertise, operational support, general guidance, training materials and funds as appropriate.
- Cluster/Sector IM focal points will work with OCHA to establish the systems and processes needed for effective information sharing with cluster partners related to inter-cluster coordination and cross-cluster programming.
- Cluster/Sector leads are responsible for generating up-to-date cluster specific information (e.g. contact lists, meeting minutes, standard forms, policy or technical guidance, datasets, needs/gap analysis, etc.) and sharing it with OCHA in order to support inter-cluster data sharing.
- If needed, Cluster/Sector leads are responsible for establishing a data confidentiality and privacy policy within their cluster, which ensures that sensitive, personally identifiable datasets are suitably anonymized.
- Cluster/Sector leads should ensure all information is age and sex disaggregated where appropriate.

¹ The term ‘information management’ covers ‘the various stages of information processing from production to storage and retrieval to dissemination towards the better working of an organization; information can be from internal and external sources and in any format.’ Association for Information Management 2005, <http://www.aslib.co.uk> [accessed 16 July 2007]

What are the information management responsibilities of OCHA at the country level?

- Providing information products and services to the humanitarian community is an important part of OCHA's coordination role in both new and ongoing emergencies. OCHA will allocate appropriate IM resources, according to the nature and scope of the emergency.
- OCHA will suggest standards that allow for datasets and databases to be compatible in order to support inter-operability of data.
- The minimum set of predictable standardized information products to be produced in collaboration with clusters/sectors and made available to all are:
 - Contact directories of humanitarian partners and IM focal points;
 - Meeting schedules, agendas and minutes of coordination meetings chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator or OCHA;
 - Who does What Where (3W) database and derivative products, such as maps;
 - Inventory of relevant documents on the humanitarian situation, i.e. mission reports, assessments, evaluations, etc;
 - Inventory of relevant common Cluster/Sector data sets, including population data disaggregated by age and sex;²
 - Data on the humanitarian requirements and contributions (through FTS);³
 - A country-specific or disaster specific humanitarian web-portal;
 - Situation Reports; and
 - Mapping products.
- The minimum services to be provided or made available to clusters/sectors are:
 - A space where the humanitarian community can access information resources;
 - Maintenance of common datasets that are used by the majority of sectors/clusters;
 - Geospatial data and analysis relevant to inter-cluster/sector decision making;
 - Management of the collection and dissemination of all *inter*-cluster information;
 - Advocacy for data and information sharing within the humanitarian community as well as the adoption of global data standards;
 - Provision of technical IM advice to clusters/sectors on survey design for needs assessments and/or other significant external data collection exercises; and
 - Access to schedules, agendas and minutes of cluster/sector coordination meetings.
- OCHA will also aim to provide standardized cross-cluster needs/gap analysis based on information provided by the clusters.
- OCHA is responsible for establishing an Information Management Network at the country level in order to coordinate IM activities and support sectors/clusters in their IM activities, including the promotion of best practices.
- In determining OCHA's IM response, OCHA will be cognisant of those organizations with in-country IM operational capacities willing to support *inter*-cluster humanitarian response throughout the emergency.

What is the role of the Information Management Network at the country level?

- The role of the Information Management Network at the country level is to build on existing relevant information systems in place in-country and support the Government's efforts to coordinate and harmonize IM activities of all humanitarian partners.
- Through the Humanitarian Country Team the Network will support efforts to achieve consensus on authoritative common data sets disaggregated by sex and age. All partners will be informed accordingly concerning numbers and definitions of beneficiaries, administrative boundaries and operational areas.
- The Network should aim to be representative of all clusters/sectors, including national authorities.

² **Minimum Common Operational Datasets.** Political/Administrative boundaries (Country boundaries, Admin level 1, Admin level 2, Admin level 3, Admin level 4, 1:250K); Populated places (with attributes including: latitude/longitude, alternative names, population figures, classification) Settlements 1:100K – 1:250K: Transportation network Roads; Railways 1:250K: Transportation infrastructure; Airports/Helipads Seaports, 1:250K: Hydrology; Rivers, Lakes, 1:250K: City maps, Scanned city maps, 1:10K..

³ United Nations Financial Tracking Services. For more information visit: <http://ocha.unog.ch/fts2/>

What is expected of Cluster/Sector partners at the country level?

- Government representatives will play an important role in ensuring that IM carried out in support of the humanitarian response is based on existing, national datasets and IM systems in a sustainable manner.
- Humanitarian actors who participate in the Cluster/Sector are expected to be proactive partners in exchanging information relevant to situational understanding and the response
- Cluster/Sector partners are to adhere to commonly agreed definitions and indicators for "sector" needs and activities, as well as the use of common baseline or reference data, which are disaggregated by age and sex and consider diversity issues where appropriate.
- Humanitarian actors who participate in the Cluster/Sector as observers should be encouraged to share information with the wider humanitarian community.

What is the role of the Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC)?

- The mission of the Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) is to support the humanitarian community in the systematic and standardized collection, processing and dissemination of information with the aim of improving coordination, situational understanding and decision making. In undertaking this mission, the HIC will complement the information management capabilities of the national authorities, as well as in-country development and humanitarian actors, in order to optimize the response and meet the needs of the affected population. The HIC will only be deployed in new complex emergencies or a disaster that exceeds the capacity of the Member State(s) and the IASC to respond. In fulfilling its mission, the HIC will be guided by the principles of humanitarian information management and exchange in emergencies: accessibility, inclusiveness, inter-operability, accountability, verifiability, relevance, objectivity, neutrality, humanity, timeliness, sustainability, and confidentiality.^{4,5}

How can information management support needs assessment activities?

- Information on humanitarian needs is collected through assessments and their subsequent analysis. Undertaking assessments is primarily the responsibility of clusters/sectors and individual operational organizations. However, clusters/sectors are encouraged to seek the support of an IM specialist (from within the Cluster/Sector or OCHA) who may support the process in a number of ways:
 - Provide guidance on survey design and implementation including sampling, instrument development/adaptation, data collection, cleaning, storing, transformation, analysis and reporting (to ensure the quality, type and format of data collected meets the user's output needs and advise on relevant existing data);
 - Provide technical advice on data ownership, processing, management and outputs for distribution;
- Where they do not already exist, Clusters/Sectors should develop appropriate strategies and tools for data collection, interpretation and verification, with support from the Cluster lead.
- Where possible, common, complementary or distributed assessment arrangements should be put in place by OCHA and the Cluster/Sector leads to avoid over-assessment by multiple agencies.
- Cluster/Sector leads are to coordinate and share data collection efforts with the Information Management Network at the country level to ensure harmonization on data standards and avoid duplication of data collection.

How can information management support monitoring of the humanitarian response?

- Each Cluster/Sector lead should identify common standards and indicators for monitoring the progress and the effectiveness of humanitarian response within their Cluster/Sector.
- Standards and indicators should take into account existing globally-agreed standards such as SPHERE, ISO, IASC or other Cluster/Sector-specific norms as well as national standards or guidelines.
- Once indicators have been agreed to by each Cluster/Sector, mechanisms for ongoing data collection and reporting should be harmonized with the Humanitarian Country Team and OCHA. Mechanisms should clearly indicate a.) **What** data are needed?; b.) **Who** will collect the data?; c) **Where** will data be aggregated and processed? d.) **How often** will data be updated? e.) **To whom** is information disseminated?

⁴OCHA, *Best Practices in Humanitarian IM and Exchange*, Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange, Palais des Nations Geneva, Switzerland, 5 – 8 February 2002, Note: principles were abridged and adapted from the original 2002 version available at www.reliefweb.int/symposium/2002_symposium/final_statement.doc

⁵ IASC, Humanitarian Information Centre Terms of Reference (endorsed by the IASC Working Group, 20 May 2008)

What are the principles of humanitarian information management and exchange in emergencies?

The following operational principles should be used to guide IM and information exchange activities in emergencies:⁶

- Accessibility.** Humanitarian information should be made accessible by applying easy-to-use formats and tools and by translating information into common or local languages when necessary.
- Inclusiveness.** Information exchange should be based on a system of partnership with a high degree of ownership by multiple stakeholders, especially representatives of the affected population and Government.
- Inter-operability.** All sharable data and information should be made available in formats that can be easily retrieved, shared and used by humanitarian organizations.
- Accountability.** Users must be able to evaluate the reliability and credibility of information by knowing its source and having access to methods of collection, transformation and analysis.
- Verifiability.** Information should be relevant, accurate, consistent and based on sound methodologies, validated by external sources, and analyzed within the proper contextual framework.
- Relevance.** Information should be practical, flexible, responsive, and driven by operational needs in support of decision-making throughout all phases of a crisis.
- Objectivity.** A variety of sources should be used when collecting and analyzing information so as to provide varied and balanced perspectives for addressing problems and recommending solutions.
- Neutral.** Information should be free of political interference that distorts a situation or the response.
- Humanity.** Information should never be used to distort, to mislead or to cause harm to affected or at-risk populations and should respect the dignity of those affected.
- Timeliness.** Humanitarian information must be kept current and made available in a timely manner.
- Sustainability.** Humanitarian information should be open sourced, preserved, cataloged and archived, so that it can be retrieved for future use, such as for preparedness, analysis, lessons learned and evaluation.
- Confidentiality.** Sensitive data and information that are not to be shared publicly should be managed accordingly and clearly marked as such.

*Endorsed by the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach
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⁶ OCHA, *Best Practices in Humanitarian IM and Exchange*, Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange, Palais des Nations Geneva, Switzerland, 5 – 8 February 2002, Note: principles were abridged and adapted from the original 2002 version available at www.reliefweb.int/symposium/2002_symposium/final_statement.doc