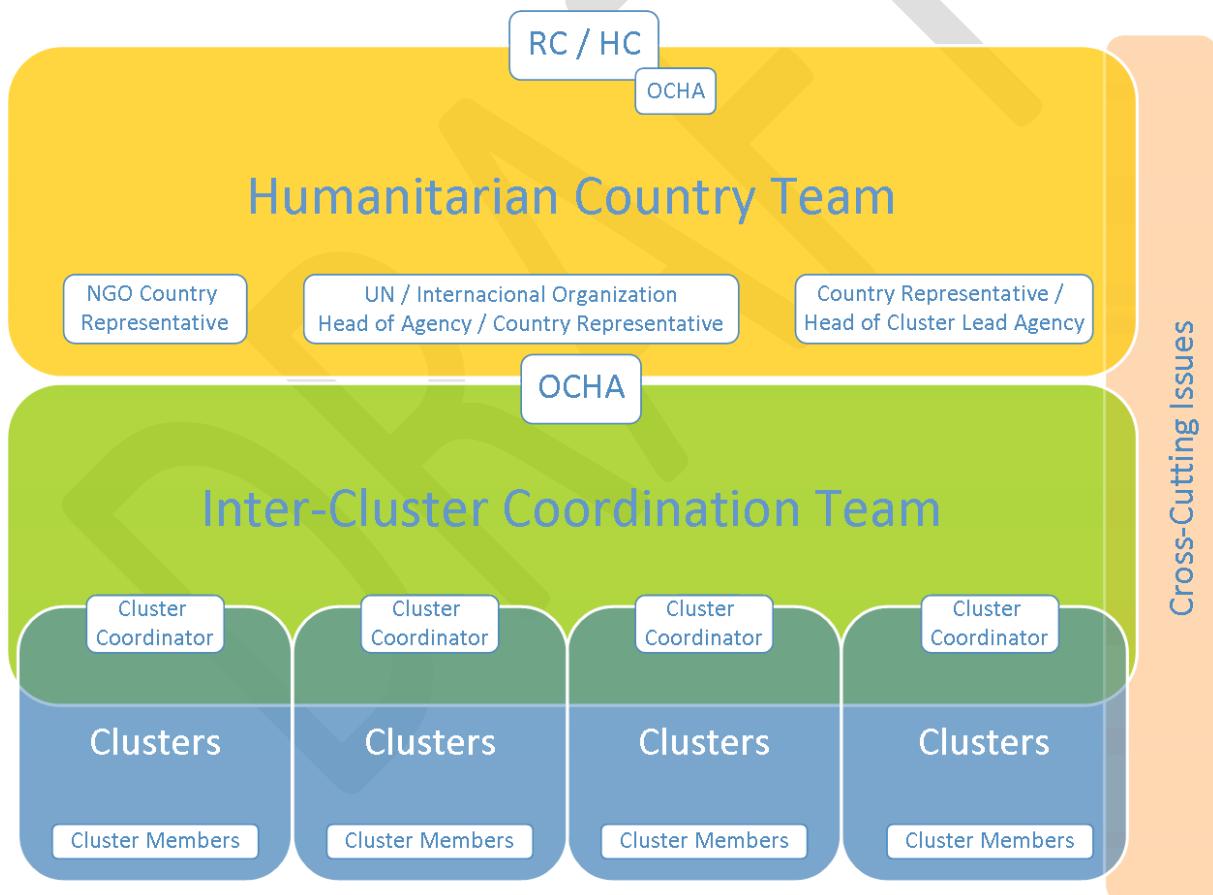


GUIDANCE ON INTER-CLUSTER COORDINATION
OCHA November 2013

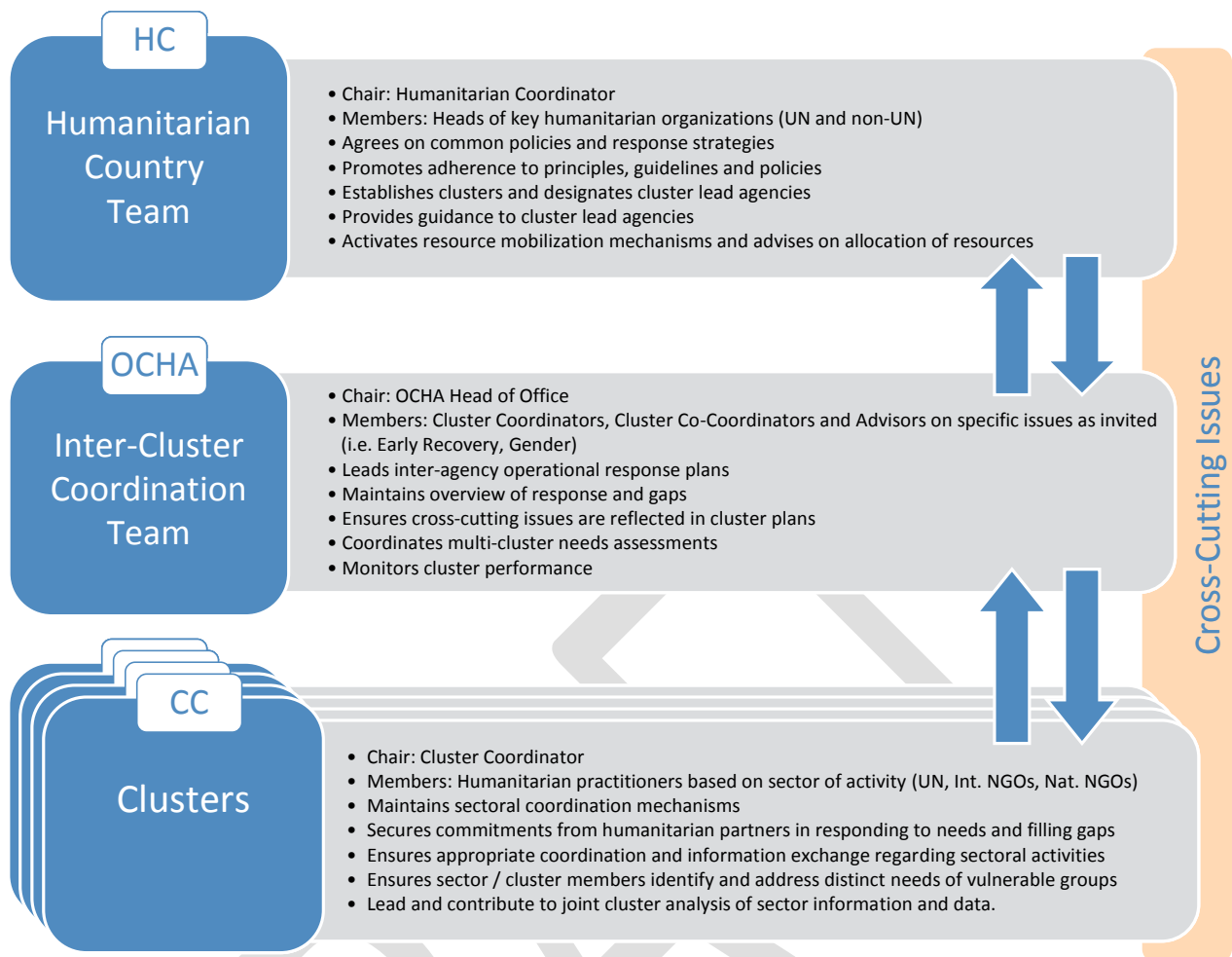
Effective humanitarian coordination seeks to identify and meet priority needs, address gaps and reduce duplication in humanitarian response. In simplistic terms, the **Humanitarian Country Team** provides a forum for the Country Directors of humanitarian agencies/NGOs to agree and direct the strategic direction of the humanitarian response, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Meanwhile the **inter-cluster coordination team/group** brings sector/clusters coordinators together at the national and sub-national level to coordinate the implementation of the response through each step of the common humanitarian programme cycle.

OCHA supports humanitarian coordination by (1) supporting the HC and the work of the HCT; (2) chairing the inter-cluster coordination group/team at the national and sub-national level; and (3) acting as a communication channel between the two.

Simplified Humanitarian Coordination Structure at Country Level



[Source: Handbook for RCs and HCs on Emergency Response and Preparedness]



The Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), whenever possible in support of and in coordination with national and local authorities, ensures that response efforts are inclusive and coordinated, by regularly convening and leading the Humanitarian Country Team.

[\[IASC Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator, endorsed May 2009\]](#)

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) should comprise the Heads of Cluster Lead Agencies (who represent both the Cluster and their respective Agency), representatives of key operational partners (membership criteria should be determined in the country-specific HCT Terms of Reference). The primary function of the HCT is to agree on a strategic plan to meet humanitarian needs, set common goals, and promote adherence to humanitarian principles, IASC guidelines, and policies and strategies adopted by the HCT.

[\[IASC Guidance on Humanitarian Country Teams, 2009\]](#)

The HC/HCT also decide what inter-cluster and cluster coordination mechanisms should be put in place in the country, in support of the national response.

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Team/Group (the ICC) at the national level is normally chaired by a senior OCHA representative (Head of Office or Deputy Head of Office); at the sub-national level, operational presence may make alternative chairing arrangements more practical but OCHA should ensure there is good coordination between the national and sub-national level. An ICC should bring Cluster Coordinators/ Co-Coordiators, representatives for cross-cutting issues and other relevant operational partners together to work collectively on key strategic/operational issues and to coordinate work around the programme cycle (see below). Membership criteria should be agreed at

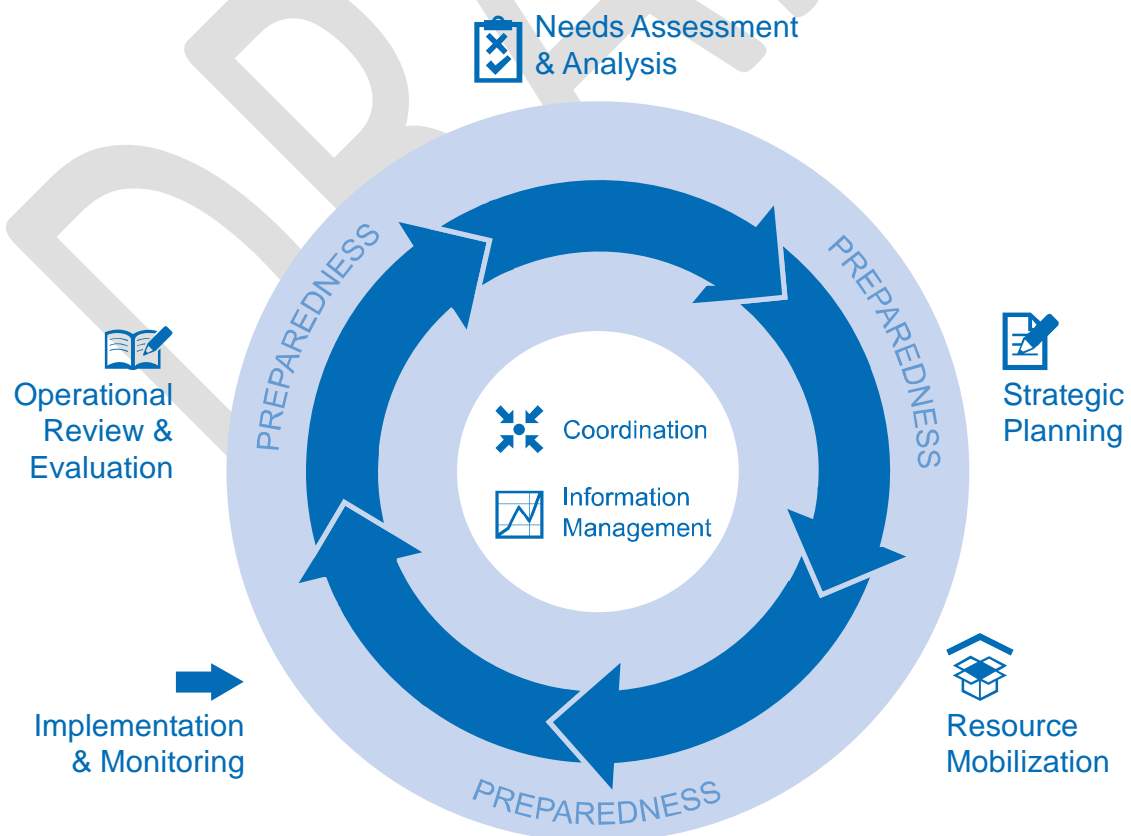
the country level and set out in a Terms of Reference (see examples attached), with operational relevance being paramount. National partners, NGO consortia, government authorities, and donors can be invited to attend ICC meetings as needed around specific issues of concern. The IASC Principles of Partnership apply.

What is the purpose of Inter-Cluster Coordination and what form should it take?

Purpose: The HC/HCT sets the overall humanitarian strategy for the country/affected area, and the purpose of inter-cluster coordination is to ensure this strategy is implemented across the sectors/clusters in a coordinated way. The ICC provides a platform for:

- Coordinating the work of sectors/clusters around all the steps of the humanitarian programme cycle (see diagram below) which require a 'joint' approach, i.e. preparedness, needs assessment and analysis, planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and monitoring
- Ensuring the HC/HCT receives the information and analysis it needs to make informed strategic decisions and to conduct advocacy;
- Coordinating the information management of sectors/clusters;
- Maximising resources, minimizing duplication and enhancing complementarities between sectors/clusters;
- Ensuring the systematic mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues (e.g. age, gender, environment) and cross-cluster issues (e.g. early recovery, cash transfers) across the response.

The Humanitarian Programme Cycle



Form: In some instances, good inter-cluster coordination depends on the active participation of *all* the Cluster Coordinators working together in one forum, for example to jointly prioritise needs. But inter-cluster coordination can also take the form of smaller groups of a few Cluster Coordinators/technical experts working together on particular operational/technical issues, or to address specific objectives in the strategic response plan. There is no 'one size fits all' model for inter-cluster coordination and the form it takes at both the national and sub-national level should be flexible to adapt to the changing needs on the ground.

What should the inter-cluster group/team do?

The following is a checklist of tasks which has been compiled from terms of reference from different operations. Clearly the inter-cluster group's ability to do all of these tasks will depend on the context and the capacity dedicated to inter-cluster and cluster coordination in the country. It is not intended to be prescriptive, neither should it limit what an ICC group wants to achieve.

Multi-cluster needs assessments and analysis (including periodic review and updates):

- Coordinate/harmonise needs assessments, ensuring they reflect different vulnerabilities and capacities (e.g. gender, age, HIV/AIDS and environment);
- Analyse and prioritise needs to produce a Humanitarian Needs Overview;

Joint planning:

- Ensure sector/cluster strategies and plans are aligned with the country strategic response plan and that priorities are being addressed;
- Review sector/cluster plans to ensure consistency and complementarity between objectives and indicators;
- Ensure programme implementation supports a principled approach to humanitarian assistance;
- Agree on multi-cluster operational approaches;
- Ensure cluster strategies jointly address specific vulnerabilities (i.e. gender, age, disabilities) or risks (mines, natural disaster hazards);
- Promote linkages with national stakeholders to support in-country capacity building;
- Ensure the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues in the inter-cluster operational planning;
- Facilitate the implementation of standard planning tools across clusters.

Resource mobilisation and allocation

- Ensure coherence and complementarity of sector/cluster programmes in joint appeals;
- Recommend allocation of resources to the HCT according to evidence-based needs assessment and prioritization;
- Coordinate applications to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), promote adherence to CERF guidelines, and monitor allocation;
- Support the transparent allocation of in-country Emergency Response Funds (ERF), where relevant, based on shared analysis and prioritization.

Implementation, monitoring and reporting

- Initiate the mobilisation of specific expertise (e.g. Gender Advisors) when relevant and necessary;
- Develop a joint monitoring and reporting plan, including indicators and outputs, paying special attention to changes in the operational context affecting needs;
- Analyse information and provide updates to the HC/HCT;
- Ensure adherence to information management requirements to keep track of implementation, impact and gaps, including regular input to OCHA Situation Reports.

- Where possible, initiate use of the cluster performance monitoring process to ensure clusters are adhering to agreed workplans and Terms of Reference.

Lesson Learning and Evaluation

- Systematically collect information and evidence to monitor impact of overall humanitarian response and to re-prioritize as needed;
- Organise learning events to share good practice and exchange experience.
- Conduct periodic review of multi-cluster performance.

Early Recovery and Transition Planning

- Draft criteria for transition of the cluster approach;
- Ensure early recovery programming is mainstreamed in cluster strategies and create specific mechanisms to address identified gaps;
- Where appropriate, liaise with the Post-Disaster/Post-Conflict Needs Assessment team and participate in the PDNA/PCNA process.

Emergency Response Preparedness

- Jointly identify planning scenarios, set common planning figures, and support the HC in coordinating the development of a Contingency Response Plan, in support of national contingency plans where appropriate.
- Where appropriate, develop a coordinated approach to building capacity of national counterparts for cluster coordination.