

Cluster Approach

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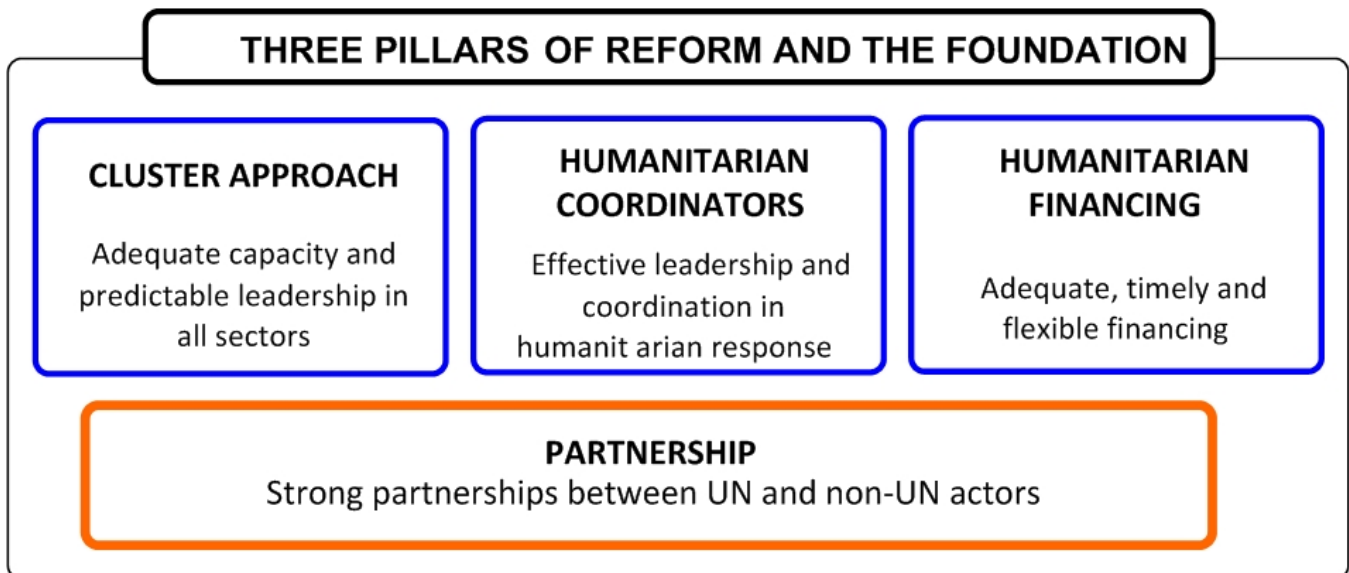
Humanitarian Reform

The concept of the "cluster approach" was an outcome of the Humanitarian Reform process of 2005, led by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) comprising NGO consortia, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, IOM, World Bank, and United Nations agencies.

The reform identified three axes, known as the three pillars of the reform. They are:

- Development of clusters at global and country levels.
- Strengthening of the role of the Humanitarian coordinator at field level.
- Modification of some aspects of the funding mechanisms.

Those three pillars rely on the principle of strengthening partnerships between all actors as the key to improved coordination.

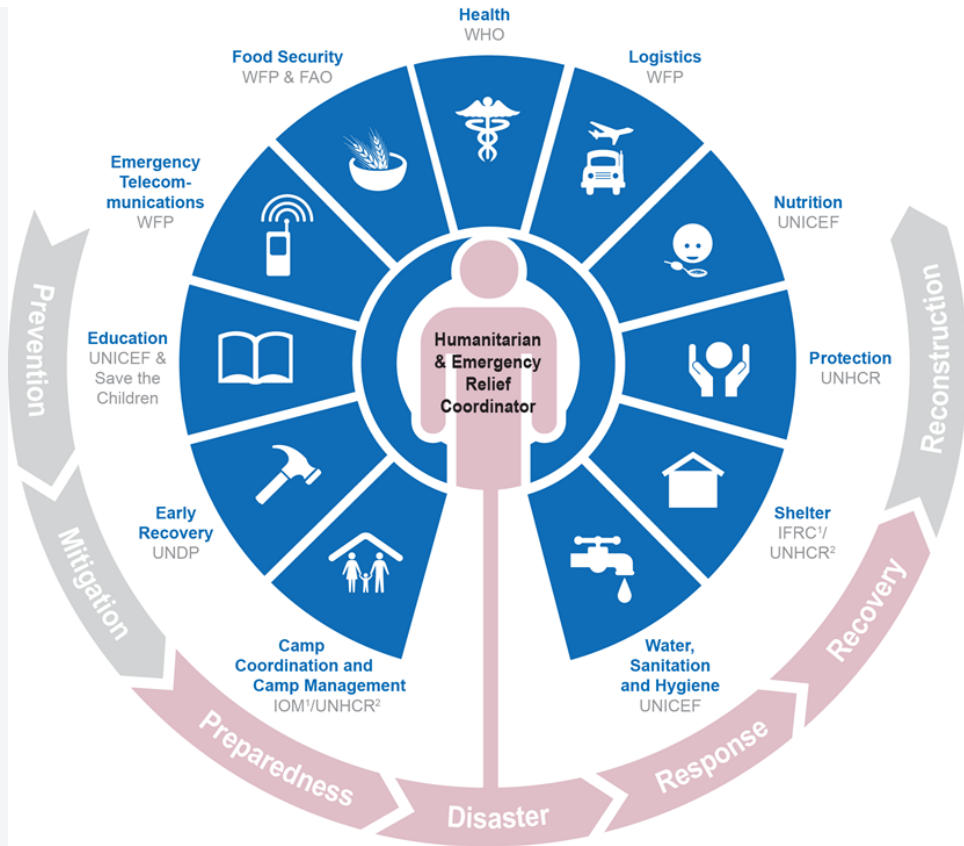


During this reform process, the cluster approach was proposed as a way of addressing gaps and strengthening the effectiveness of humanitarian response through building partnerships. The cluster approach ensures predictability and accountability in international responses to humanitarian emergencies, by clarifying the division of labour among organisations, and better defining their roles and responsibilities within the different sectors of the response. The cluster approach is about making the international humanitarian community more structured, accountable and professional, so that it can be a better partner for host governments, local authorities and local civil society.

There are now 11 sectors/clusters. WFP was designated as the lead agency of the Logistics Cluster and is therefore responsible for coordinating logistics support for the humanitarian community. The 11 designated global cluster leads are:

Sector or area of activity	Global Cluster Lead
Food Security	FAO / WFP

Camp Coordination /Management: Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from conflict Disaster situations	UNHCR IOM
Early Recovery	UNDP
Education	UNICEF Save the Children (UK)
Emergency Shelter: IDPs (from conflict) Disaster situations	UNHCR IFRC (Convener *)
Emergency Telecommunications	WFP
Health	WHO
Logistics	WFP
Nutrition	UNICEF
Protection : IDPs (from conflict) Disaster / civilian affected by conflict (other than IDPs**)	UNHCR UNHRC / OHCHR / UNICEF
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	UNICEF



*IFRC has made a commitment to provide leadership to the broader humanitarian community in Emergency Shelter in disaster situation, to consolidate best practice, map capacity and lead coordinates response. IFRC has committed to being a 'convener' rather than a 'cluster lead'. In an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between IFRC and OCHA, it was agreed the 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 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.

Aim of Cluster Approach

The cluster approach aims to strengthen overall response capacity as well as the effectiveness of the response by:

- Ensuring sufficient global capacity is built up and maintained in all the main sectors/areas of response.
- Ensuring predictable leadership in all the main sectors/areas of response.
- Reinforcing the concept of partnerships (i.e. clusters) between UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international organisations and NGOs.
- Strengthening accountability.
- Improving strategic field-level coordination and prioritization in specific sectors/areas of response.

Global Cluster Leads

Complementing arrangements already in place for some sectors or areas of activity, global cluster leads were identified and agreed upon. Accountable to the ERC, the global cluster leads engage in activities in three main areas:

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.

Reference the [IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response](#) and [Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Cluster Leads](#) for more information.

Cluster Activations

Clusters can be activated 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 as well as during ongoing emergencies. Specific circumstances are include when:

- The Humanitarian Coordinator(HC)/ Resident Coordinator (RC) informs the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).
- The ERC informs the global cluster leads.
- The global cluster leads assess a situation to determine that there is a need.

"The HC (or the RC in countries where an HC 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 HC, the ERC 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 ERC 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 HC should in turn inform the host government and humanitarian partners at the country level of the agreed arrangements. "

Source: [IASC Guidance Note on Cluster Approach](#)

See the [SOP Designating lead agencies in new emergencies](#) for more information.

Cluster Activities at 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.

See the [Terms of reference for sector leads at the country level](#) for specific responsibilities of cluster leads at the country level.

References

- [UN DMTP \(1997\) Disaster Management Ethics](#)
- [ICRC \(2004\) What is Humanitarian Law?](#)
- [OCHA/Humanitarian Funding](#)
- [OCHA](#)