

Global Health Cluster

The Cluster Approach

The aim of the cluster approach is to strengthen the effectiveness and predictability of humanitarian response by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of various humanitarian actors, designating an accountable cluster lead agency, and strengthening collaborative action so that the international humanitarian community can better support and complement the humanitarian work of host governments, authorities and civil society while building on and developing national capacities.



The Global Health Cluster

The Global Health Cluster, under the leadership of the World Health Organization, is made up of more than 30 international humanitarian health organizations that have been working together over the past two years to build partnerships and mutual understanding and to develop common approaches to humanitarian health action. The work of the GHC aims to produce:

- Widely endorsed products and services that will stream-line emergency response and increase its predictability
- Greater coherence in health action among the many and varied stakeholders by building partnership and common understanding
- Well managed health information, integrated into an overall information management system that will serve all stakeholders to ensure an evidence-based health response

- A system to rapidly deploy health cluster coordinators, other experts and medical supplies for a more effective and timely response
- A greater focus on building national level capacity to strengthen the preparedness, response and resilience of affected countries.

The Country Health Clusters

The cluster approach is currently being used in 14 countries with chronic emergencies, and has been applied in 12 countries that have experienced acute sudden onset emergencies. The health cluster in each of these countries has brought together national and international humanitarian health actors to work in partnership and collaboration for an inclusive and coordinated health response. Strong and accountable leadership is required to ensure that humanitarian health action is evidence-based and coherent within an integrated strategic framework.



Success of the cluster approach, and ultimately the health response, will depend on the collaboration of all health actors in the many functions of humanitarian response: from assessment, analysis, prioritization and planning to implementation, resource mobilization and evaluation.

Role of WHO as Country Health Cluster Lead

- Establish and maintain appropriate health coordination mechanisms
- Coordinate with national/local health authorities, state institutions, local civil society
- Give space and voice to all key humanitarian partners who have a stake in health
- Stimulate, support and conduct health needs assessment and analysis
- Lead development of health strategy and action plan that integrates priority cross-cutting issues

- Ensure that life-threatening needs are addressed by appropriate public health measures
- Promote participatory and community-based approaches
- Monitor and report on priority health threats and critical health resources and activities
- Support the application of best public health standards
- Strengthen emergency preparedness
- Lead advocacy and resource mobilization
- Lead training and capacity building efforts
- Provide assistance or services as provider of last resort



Looking Ahead

- WHO is very committed to the cluster approach and to its role as Cluster Lead and is sparing no effort to meet the expectations of all its partners in this respect.
- Two consecutive global cluster appeals will continue to fund the work of the GHC until the end of 2008. However, the work of the GHC is not yet complete. Ongoing funding will be required to ensure the upkeep of the rosters and deployment mechanisms, to continue to provide related workshops, trainings, and efforts at product dissemination, to stock and provide logistics support for regional stockpiles, and continue advocacy efforts through media, donors and governments.
- There is significant work ahead...most importantly getting the commitment from all stakeholders, through consultations, advocacy, field visits, workshops and trainings, to adopt and widely use the cluster approach and the common cluster products and services developed by the GHC.

For further information on the cluster approach, the Global Health Cluster, and country clusters, please visit the health pages of the humanitarian reform website at:

<http://www.humanitarianreform.org/Default.aspx?tabid=75>

The following documents on the website about the cluster approach and the Global Health Cluster could be of particular interest:

IASC guidance note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response

IASC operational guidance for new emergencies

IASC operational guidance for ongoing emergencies

The following documents are also available on the website from the GHC:

Global Health Cluster work plan

GHC meeting summary 7-8 May 2008

Initial Rapid Assessment Tool and Guidance

Gap Analysis Materials

Cluster Contacts:

Dr Eric Laroche, Assistant Director-General for Health Action in Crises, World Health Organization and Chair of the Global Health Cluster, laroche@who.int

Erin Kenney, Global Health Cluster Support Hub, kenney@who.int

Linda Larsson, Global Health Cluster Support Hub, larssonl@who.int