DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK (SOF)

● In an inter-dependent humanitarian world, strategic approaches allow multiple agencies with diverse mandates to achieve goals collectively that could not be achieved by individual approaches alone. Clusters are the expression of that collective realization and aim to provide the "enabling environment" that allows diversity to strengthen both the effectiveness and efficiency of aid delivery.

● The Cluster's (interim) Standard Operating Procedures call for a strategic framework to be drafted on behalf of all Cluster partners and participants by a small team representing all stakeholder groups (see Terms of Reference for the Strategic Advisory Group - SAG). It is a framework document. As such it allows partners to develop their own strategies according to their own mandates, capabilities, capacities, and comparative advantages, while at the same time providing a road-map for coherent planning.

● A key assumption when drafting such a framework is that the 'leadership' demanded of Cluster Leads (and, therefore, their appointed Cluster Coordinators) by the IASC Guidance Note can only be achieved through consensus management techniques when a) there is a strategic frame of reference, and b) there is a reliable and valid evidence-base against which to focus discussions. (Hence the need for a strong Information Management capability).

● The following is a checklist of processes and strategic areas to be considered when formulating and adopting the framework:

PROCESS	CONSIDERATIONS
Convene SAG	Having first requested the Cluster to agree this approach
Include Government and/or Local Authorities	Not always possible
Circulate first draft to all stakeholders	Within 24 hrs of first SAG drafting meeting (By Day 4)
Incorporate comments	Allow 24 hr turn-round for each re-draft
Penultimate draft discussed with Gov't and OCHA by Cluster Coordinator	No later than end of Day 7
Obtain formal (written) Gov't endorsement	This may require a separate Memorandum of Understanding (in which case, involve the OCHA Cluster Coordinator or Humanitarian Coordinator). Since this may take some days, allow the Cluster to adopt the strategy as an interim measure.
Review the framework monthly in light of evolving needs	In natural disaster response settings, it is expected that the strategy be re-visited every month to ensure that it remains relevant to evolving needs on the ground.

STRATEGIC AREA	CONSIDERATIONS
Guiding Principles	Relevant international standards particularly the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (annexed below).
	Use locally available human and material resources in order to achieve maximum participation and empowerment of the local economy without compromising the principles of environmental sustainability
	Seek to ensure equity across all vulnerable groups. Such assistance should be based on independent assessment of need, vulnerability, community resilience, hazard risk, and numbers of households affected
	Disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures are integrated into emergency response
	Linkage to more durable early recovery frameworks
	Avoid partial coverage of needs in a beneficiary community
	Ensure involvement of affected communities in and decision that may affect their future, and provide a proactive feedback mechanism where complaints can be addressed
	Engage with, and build capacities of local authorities and Government coordination bodies
	Ensure proper linkages with relevant Clusters as appropriate
	Ensure mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues
	Explore and encourage the use of alternative technology
Policy (Shelter Example)	Maximise use of salvaged building materials
	On-site / owner-driven construction preferred

	Tents are the least appropriate form of emergency shelter, with planned settlements the sheltering option of last resort
	No use of illegally-sourced timber
	Cash-for-Work or Food-for-Work programmes can undermine local coping mechanisms
	Recommended Shelter and NFI assistance packages (e.g 'rubble removal kits, 'community site preparation kits') should be adhered to.
	Prioritize allocation of resources according to agreed vulnerability criteria, and according to capacities and presence of Cluster members
	Prepare timely transfer of responsibilities to local institutions, including Information Management unit
	Emergency responses focus on the effective and timely provision of emergency *and* transitional Shelter.
Strategy (Shelter Example)	Support market-led/owner-driven recovery initiatives through self-help support at community level
	Work with Gov't and local authorities to inform households consistently and coherently through mass media on policy directives as they emerge, including, for example: • Technical advice (e.g practical and affordable earthquake-resistant construction techniques) • Mechanisms for (land tenure) dispute arbitration • Housing Safety • Compensation
	Establish need for emergency and temporary shelter solutions based on level of damage, vulnerability, community resilience, hazard risk, and number of households affected
	Assistance should be prioritized equitably according to vulnerability (e.g child and female-headed households, the elderly, and physically disadvantaged)
	Support those living with host families, self-settling in urban and rural areas, and, should it prove necessary, developing appropriate infrastructure for unplanned or planned camps.
Aim (Shelter Example)	To complement Government and civil society efforts in providing all disaster-affected persons with safe, appropriate, and habitable shelter – at least one safe room per household – in dignity, to defined international standards
Objectives	Specific, Measurable, Applicable, Relevant, Prioritized, and Time-bound using indicators of success which have been pre-agreed within and between Clusters against which to measure progress
Standards (Shelter Example)	Provision of emergency and transitional shelter assistance will strive to comply with minimum standards as outlined in the following documents: • The Sphere Project; Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004; Chapter 4 (www.sphereproject.org) • Transitional Settlement of Displaced Populations; Chapter 7 (www.shelterproject.org) • Guide to the use and logistics of family tents in humanitarian relief (ochaonline.un.org/lsu)
Information Management	Maintain an integrated monitoring capacity using common methodologies, definitions, and indicators
	Trend analysis
	Geo-statiistical mapping of variables
	Reporting within the Cluster
Phasing	Work with the Early Recovery Cluster and other Independent Finance Facilities such as the World Bank on merger and hand-over planning from the outset using early recovery frameworks
	A standing preparedness capacity for renewed responses and the coordination thereof should be maintained as long as funds and capacities allow.