

SUDAN SHELTER AND NFI CLUSTER

TERMS OF REFERENCE

VERSION 1.0 – 5 MAY 2025

I. BACKGROUND

After more than 20 months of relentless conflict, Sudan has become one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Ongoing armed conflict and attacks against civilians, displacement, hunger, malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and climate shocks have left nearly two-thirds of the population in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and protection services. An estimated 11.5 million people are forcibly displaced in Sudan, including 2.7 million displaced prior to April 2023, making Sudan the largest internal displacement crisis in the world. Children make up well over half of the displaced population. Sudan ranks 8th in the world in terms of humanitarian severity, according to the INFORM risk index in 2025. Its "very high" risk classification is driven by high scores against multiple key indicators, including projected conflict risk, current highly violent conflict intensity, vulnerability, and developmental deprivation, among other factors.¹

Meanwhile, Sudan's vulnerability to climate change is particularly concerning, ranking among the world's ten most at-risk nations. The El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) creates irregular periodic variation in the temperature as well as sea surface temperature, thus influencing year-to-year variability and extreme weather events. In 2020, Sudan witnessed its most severe flooding in a century, affecting over 800,000 individuals, and in 2022, more than 349,000 people were affected. By November 2024, the number of people affected by flooding has reached over 685,000, with heavier-than-normal rains driven by El Niño-related weather phenomenon.²

Shelter remains one of the top three priority needs for displaced populations in Sudan. The Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) Cluster was activated in 2012 to coordinate the humanitarian response in this sector. Current estimates indicate that at least 11.6 million people are in need of Shelter and NFI assistance across the country. The Cluster is supported by a Coordination Team at the national level, consisting of a Cluster Coordinator, a Co-Coordinator, and an Information Management Officer. At the sub-national level, the Cluster operates through 13 sub-national structures, ensuring comprehensive coverage across Sudan. Strategic guidance is provided by the Cluster's Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), which includes six representatives from international and national NGOs, and UN agencies, in addition to the Cluster Coordination Team. Technical Working Groups are often established as needed to address specific thematic or technical issues, ensuring an informed and effective response.

II. MANDATE AND CORE FUNCTIONS

The Shelter and NFI Cluster in Sudan is mandated to ensure effective coordination, strategic planning, advocacy, and quality implementation of shelter and NFI responses for conflict and disaster-affected populations. The Cluster operates in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) six core functions while also pursuing strategic objectives that ensure a timely, efficient, inclusive, and accountable response.

The six core functions of a cluster at the country level are:

1. Supporting service delivery

The Cluster provides a coordination platform to facilitate and support service delivery, with key actions including:

- Providing an effective coordination platform that ensures service delivery is driven by the Cluster strategy and Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan.
- Developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of service delivery, ensure complementarity, and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable populations.
- Maintaining national and sub-national solid coordination mechanisms in close collaboration with government counterparts.

¹ Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan ([Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 - Executive Summary \(December 2024\) \[EN/AR\] | OCHA](#))

² Same as ¹

- Acting as the focal point for cluster response and coordination of its activities.
- Establishing and maintaining Technical Working Groups (TWGs) to address thematic or technical issues.
- Encouraging the participation of all humanitarian partners and relevant authorities.
- Ensuring standardized approaches to data collection, information management, and operational reporting.
- Supporting the use of locally appropriate materials and locally accepted construction techniques.
- Encouraging the integration of market-based approaches, such as vouchers and cash assistance, and developing SOPs to guide their use.

2. Informing HC/HCT strategic decision-making

The Cluster facilitates and coordinates joint needs assessments, gap analyses, and contextual risk assessments to guide decision-making on prioritization and resource allocation.

Key actions include:

- Preparing and coordinating needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities.
- Identifying and addressing emerging issues, assistance gaps, duplication, and cross-cutting concerns.
- Supporting inter-cluster planning processes that reflect the dynamic and evolving needs on the ground.

3. Planning and strategy development

The Cluster leads the development and updating strategic direction using a consultative and evidence-based approach.

Key actions include:

- Developing cluster strategies, plans, objectives, and indicators that directly support the realization of the overall response's strategic objectives.
- Promoting the use of common standards, policies, and guidance (e.g., SPHERE, Good Enough Guide).
- Standardizing tools and guidance for improved planning and implementation.
- Reinforcing the use of reliable data to inform strategic decision-making and response planning.
- Developing exit or transition strategies to reduce care-and-maintenance models and encourage durable solutions.
- Clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing on cluster contributions to the overall humanitarian funding.

4. Monitoring and reporting

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, the Cluster establishes mechanisms to monitor progress, measure impact, and promote collective learning.

Monitoring priorities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on activities and needs related to Shelter and NFI.
- Measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results.
- Facilitating joint monitoring missions and field visits.
- Recommending corrective action where necessary.
- Promoting knowledge-sharing and capturing lessons learned for future response improvements.

5. Contingency planning / preparedness

The Cluster enhances the readiness and technical capacity of members and stakeholders by investing in preparedness and institutional learning.

Activities include:

- Supporting contingency planning and risk mapping in high-risk areas.
- Acting as a focal point for inquiries on emergency response plans and operations
- Organizing and facilitating training and workshops on relevant technical and cross-cutting topics.
- Disseminating technical guidance and learning materials through in-person and online modalities.

- Building the capacity of national NGOs, local authorities, and communities to take a stronger role in the humanitarian response.

6. Advocacy

The Cluster advocates for sufficient resources, technical solutions, and policy support for the Shelter and NFI response, while also promoting best practices and community-driven solutions.

Advocacy efforts focus on:

- Identifying concerns and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and actions.
- Undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.
- Promoting community-based and participatory approaches throughout the response cycle.
- Representing cluster interests in inter-cluster coordination, HC/HCT discussions, and donor engagement.
- Reviewing and providing technical inputs to humanitarian funding proposals (e.g., Sudan Humanitarian Fund, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)).

III. SCOPE

The Shelter and NFI Cluster in Sudan operates within the framework of the six core functions as defined by the IASC, with a strong emphasis on AAP. The Cluster's primary objective is to ensure effective, coordinated, and timely shelter and NFI responses across the humanitarian spectrum, while also strengthening preparedness and technical capacity at both national and sub-national levels.

Recognizing that recovery begins the moment a crisis strikes, the Cluster understands that affected households often take early action to rebuild their lives. Therefore, the scope of the Shelter and NFI Cluster encompasses all aspects of achieving the right to adequate housing within the humanitarian context. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Settlement planning and improvement
- Construction and rehabilitation
- Provision of covered living space
- Individual, general household & shelter support items³

The Cluster recognizes that there are diverse methodologies and modalities for delivering shelter assistance, including direct construction, in-kind distributions, and cash or voucher modalities. These are determined based on context, phase of response (emergency, transitional, or early recovery), market situation, protection considerations, climate, local regulations, and community preferences. Shelter solutions are designed in collaboration with national and local authorities, ensuring compliance with relevant building codes and standards.

The Shelter and NFI Cluster also acknowledges and values the critical contributions of national stakeholders, government entities, national NGOs, and local communities in supporting both emergency and recovery responses. The Cluster is committed to ensuring their meaningful participation and engagement at all levels of coordination and decision-making.

Given the multi-sectoral nature of humanitarian shelter, the Cluster actively promotes inter-cluster coordination to ensure a comprehensive and integrated response. Particular emphasis is placed on collaboration with the Protection, CCCM, WASH, Education, Food Security and Agriculture Clusters, as well as Early Recovery or Development actors and the Cash Working Group to maximize the effectiveness of cash-based and multisectoral programming.

Additionally, contingency planning, preparedness measures, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) are integral components of the Cluster's mandate to build resilience and mitigate the impact of future crises.

To operationalize its mandate and maintain transparency and effectiveness, the Shelter and NFI Cluster develops, updates, and disseminates a range of key documents and tools, including:

- Strategic framework
- Technical guidelines and standards
- 5W matrix and gap analyses
- Response plan
- Needs assessments, reviews, and situation analyses
- Fact sheets, dashboards, and website updates

Details on key deliverables and outputs of the Cluster can be found in [Annex I](#).

³ As defined in The Sphere Project, chapter: Minimum standards in shelter, settlement and non-food items (<http://www.spherehandbook.org/>)

IV. LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

The Shelter and NFI Cluster in Sudan is led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the designated Cluster Lead Agency, in partnership with a Co-Coordinating Partner Agency.

Cluster Coordination Team: The National Cluster Coordination Team, currently based in Port Sudan, comprises the Cluster Coordinator, the Co-Coordinator, and an Associate Information Management Officer. This team is responsible for providing overall leadership and coordination of the Cluster, facilitating strategic planning, information management, reporting, and representation in inter-cluster and high-level forums. It supports members through technical guidance, coordination platforms, and operational tools, and ensures alignment with the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic objectives.

Under the leadership of the National Cluster Coordinator, the Cluster maintains sub-national coordination structures in priority states and regions across Sudan. These structures, led by designated sub-national coordinators, support localized planning, partner engagement, and response harmonization. Sub-national clusters currently cover the following states: Northern, River Nile, Red Sea, Kassala, Gedaref, Khartoum, Al Jazirah, White Nile, Blue Nile, Sennar, North, South, and West Kordofan, and all five Darfur states (North, South, West, Central, and East). These platforms enable members to respond to area-specific needs, reduce duplication, and escalate issues requiring national-level support.

Cluster Membership: The Shelter and NFI Cluster is composed of a wide and inclusive membership, including national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, Government, donor representatives, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, academic institutions, technical experts, and representatives of the affected population. Cluster members are expected to actively participate in coordination meetings, contribute to data collection and analysis, uphold humanitarian principles, and align their programming with agreed standards and strategic priorities.

Strategic Advisory Group (SAG): This strategic group is established exclusively at the national level and functions as the principal advisory and decision-making body of the Cluster. It currently includes the National Cluster Coordination Team and six members representing UN agencies, national NGOs, and international NGOs, with plans to broaden representation and include technical experts (such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and donors). The SAG develops and adjusts a cluster's strategic framework, priorities, and work plan. A SAG's membership should represent the overall cluster partnership, but should also be limited to improve effectiveness and efficiency. A SAG is expected to ensure a regular and two-way flow of information with its broader cluster membership.

Technical Working Group (TWiG): These Technical Groups are small, task-oriented, and time-limited. They are created on a needs basis, for example, to agree on minimum standards and formulate appropriate technical practices, and should dissolve once they have completed their task. TWiGs are coordinated by a focal point or technical adviser and are composed of relevant technical experts.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

The strategic, operational, and accountability-related expectations of the cluster include:

- Monitor performance of the six core cluster functions, making sure that programmes clearly contribute to the implementation of strategic objectives and are based on sound field practices and agreed international benchmarks and standards.
- Establish and maintain a cluster, which:
 - a. Strengthens pre-existing sectoral coordination by increasing predictability and accountability.
 - b. Reinforces the complementarity of members actions by avoiding duplication and gaps.
 - c. Advocates for adequate resources and ensures that resources are allocated according to agreed priorities and in a manner that fulfils the cluster response plan.
 - d. Ensures effective and comprehensive integration of relevant crosscutting issues, including age, gender, environment, etc.
 - e. Ensures protection and early recovery are mainstreamed and integrated.
- Maintain the cluster's responsiveness to changes in the operating environment, including by adjusting requirements, capacity, and participation.



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- Ensure that information is effectively transferred between cluster members and to and from other stakeholders, and is well used.
- Contribute effectively to inter-cluster coordination forums and cooperate with humanitarian actors, Government counterparts, and relevant authorities (as appropriate) in planning, coordination, and operational activities.
- Be accountable to affected people, by ensuring that women, men, girls, and boys have equal opportunity to participate throughout the programme cycle, including through feedback mechanisms that are inclusive and consultative.

Additionally, the designated Cluster Lead Agency is the Provider of Last Resort (POLR). This means that, where necessary, and depending on access, security, and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan.

VI. PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The Shelter and NFI Cluster in Sudan is open to all interested UN Agencies, National and International NGOs, Government, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, academia, and researchers that are active in Shelter and NFI response and expressing willingness and demonstrating a commitment to carry out their accepted responsibilities within the cluster. Membership is as inclusive as possible, on a voluntary and self-nominated basis. Representatives of local and national authorities and other stakeholders, such as donors, can participate in Shelter and NFI Cluster meetings. In general, the Cluster membership depends on the level of engagement.

The minimum commitments for participation in clusters include:

1. Commitment to humanitarian principles, the *Principles of Partnership*, cluster-specific guidance, and internationally recognized programme standards, including the Secretary-General's *Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*.
2. Commitment to mainstream protection in programme delivery (including respect for principles of non-discrimination, do no harm, etc.).
3. Readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected people, in line with the IASC *Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations* and the related *Operational Framework*.
4. A demonstrated understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with membership of the cluster, which include:
 - a. Regular participation in the national and/or sub-national clusters.
 - b. Complete the Cluster 5Ws (Who is doing What, Where, When, and to Whom) as requested by the cluster coordination team. Contribute to the ad hoc information requests and Cluster flash updates, and situation reports
 - c. Share responsibility for Shelter and NFI Cluster activities, including assessing needs, supporting development, and adherence to strategies, plans, policies, evaluations, standards, and guidelines.
 - d. Participate and contribute to the Cluster relevant technical working groups (TWiGs) and technical review committees of the SHF proposals, for example.
5. Active participation in the cluster and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work.
6. Capacity and willingness to contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities, which must include inter-cluster coordination.
7. Commitment to mainstream key programmatic cross-cutting issues (including age, gender, environment, etc.).
8. Commitment by a relevant senior staff member to work consistently with the cluster to fulfil its mission.
9. Commitment to work cooperatively with other cluster members to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources and share information on organizational resources.
10. Willingness to take on leadership responsibilities in sub-national or working groups as needed, subject to capacity and mandate after agreement with the National Cluster Coordinator, which follows a specific cluster process.
11. Undertake advocacy, and disseminate advocacy messages to affected communities, the host Government, donors, the HCT, CLAs, the media, and other audiences.
12. Ensure that the cluster provides interpretation (in an appropriate language) so that all cluster members are able to participate, including local organizations (and national and local authorities where appropriate)



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VII. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

The Shelter and NFI Cluster at the national level convenes regular coordination meetings on a monthly basis, typically on Mondays, with ad-hoc meetings called as necessary in response to emerging needs or developments. These meetings are convened by the Shelter and NFI Cluster Coordinator and co-chaired with support from the Co-Coordinator. Meetings are conducted in English, with Arabic interpretation provided when needed to ensure inclusive participation.

The Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of the Shelter and NFI Cluster at the national level meets quarterly to provide strategic guidance, with additional ad-hoc meetings held as necessary.

At the sub-national level, the Shelter and NFI Cluster meets more frequently, often on a bi-weekly basis, to maintain a close follow-up on the evolving emergency response and ensure timely coordination among members.

VIII. AGENDA AND ACTION POINTS

The Cluster Coordination Team will circulate a draft agenda to all active cluster members at least five working days prior to each scheduled meeting. Members are encouraged to review the draft and propose comments or additional agenda items to ensure that key issues are adequately addressed.

Draft meeting minutes, including key agreements and action points, will be shared with participants within two working days following the meeting. Members will have three working days to review and provide comments before the minutes are finalized and uploaded to the Shelter and NFI Cluster website for broader access.

All action points will be tracked by the Cluster Coordination Team, with regular updates on progress provided either during subsequent meetings or via email, to ensure accountability and continuity in follow-up.

IX. AMENDMENTS TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference will be periodically reviewed, particularly if there is a change in the situation on the ground or in the structure or activities of the Shelter and NFI Cluster.

Annex I: Key deliverables of the Shelter and NFI Cluster

Core Function	Service	Scope	Deliverables
1. <i>Supporting service delivery</i>	Coordination management	Coordination mechanism (National, Sub-National, SAG, TWiG). Inter-cluster, HCT, OCHA, Government.	Minutes, ToR Cluster org chart
	Information management	Data collection, processing and analysis. Development of IM products that supports planning and decision making in the Cluster. Dissemination of information. Liaison with OCHA and other clusters.	5W matrixes Website update Factsheets Other IM databases and products
	Integration	Participation of national actors. Interaction with the private sector.	
2. <i>Informing HC/HCT strategic decision-making</i>	Coordinated assessments	Common/joint assessment. Needs, capacities, gaps, progress, impact Review of response plans.	Assessment reports Gap analyses
3. <i>Planning and strategy development</i>	Strategic planning	Shelter needs priorities and response informed by evidence-based. Overall strategic objectives (HCT, Government) Cross-cutting issues, Recovery, hand-over, deactivation and exit	Strategic Framework Decision log
	Technical coordination	Technical standards, guidance and liaison with other clusters	Technical Guidelines
	Resource mobilization	Funding requirement for the sector response plan. Criteria and for fund allocation. Submissions to pooled funds (SHF, CERF, etc.).	Cluster sections of appeals tables, maps, graphs
4. <i>Advocacy</i>	Coordinated communication and advocacy	Sector key messages and advocacy priorities. Communication/advocacy campaigns, liaison with stakeholders Beneficiary & communities communications.	Stakeholders mapping Advocacy messages Donor briefings
	Legal and regulatory issues.	National policies, guidelines and standards. Legal & regulatory issues related to HLP, building codes, etc.	
5. <i>Monitoring and reporting</i>	Performance monitoring	Supervision, monitoring and evaluation. Corrective actions to address changes.	Cluster reviews (lessons learned, impact) CCPM action plan
6. <i>Contingency planning / preparedness</i>	Contingency planning	Contingency plans (national, sector). Risk mapping and analysis, DRR	Cluster section of Contingency plan
	Exit-strategy	Support, transition, handover, exit.	
7. <i>Accountability to affected population</i>	Community liaison	Feedback from and to the affected population. Complaint and grievance committees. Participation of communities in the response.	Information leaflets Capacity building