8. THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM AND COORDINATION

WHAT IS IT?

Humanitarian coordination brings together humanitarian actors to ensure coherent and principled response to emergencies. It involves developing and agreeing on roles and responsibilities; adopting and adhering to common standards in response, assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring; assessing needs; setting common priorities; developing common strategies to address issues; mobilizing funding and other resources; clarifying consistent public messaging; and monitoring progress against targets.

UNGA Resolution 46/182, adopted on 19 December 1991 and re-negotiated annually, provides the overarching framework and guiding principles for international humanitarian coordination.

The affected state has the primary role in initiation, organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory\(^{20}\). When the government of an affected state is unable or unwilling to attend to the humanitarian needs of the affected population, UNGA Resolution 46/182 assigns this responsibility to the UN.

In these situations, the international community will usually be requested to support the relief effort. For these contexts, the UN and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have outlined the coordination modalities.\(^{21}\)

UNICEF realizes its commitments to coordinated humanitarian action through IASC and UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children (CCCs).

Where government leads coordination efforts (often called sectoral coordination), UNICEF and other humanitarian actors support coordination platforms, whatever format they may take. As prescribed in the CCCs, UNICEF commits to establishing coordination structures for its areas of programmatic responsibility. Benchmarks for each programme area therefore include

- supporting or establishing coordination leadership.
- Where clusters are activated, UNICEF has specific accountabilities for coordination leadership and co-leadership in support of national authority capacity to coordinate (detailed below).

Coordination structures should complement and support development of local mechanisms rather than create parallel ones which may weaken or undermine national efforts.\(^{22}\)

Regardless of the coordination mechanisms agreed to, the key overarching actions for effective coordination are:

- align sector strategies with a common vision;
- define and ensure there is a common understanding of roles and obligations;
- promote and support national and locally led coordination mechanisms and capacities;
- establish and agree upon common processes and approaches for needs assessment and analysis;
- develop and align humanitarian and development strategies to ensure consistency and complementarity;
- establish common information collection, analysis, sharing and management, monitoring and evaluation processes;
- apply relevant standards and guidance;
- prioritise actions clearly and concisely;
- address cross-cutting issues systematically across sectors;
- be accountable to affected populations.

Information management (IM) is a key enabler of coordination, to facilitate evidence-based decision making. IM activities need to occur throughout the program cycle in conjunction with coordination activities. Consistent with the focus on supporting

\(^{20}\) GA Resolution 46/182 Guiding Principle 4
\(^{21}\) If it is a response involving refugee populations, UNHCR has the mandate to respond and will do so using a refugee coordination model.

\(^{22}\) HumanitarianResponse.info - Coordination
government leadership in coordination, IM activities should support national information systems, promote common standards, build local capacities and maintain appropriate links with government, state and local authorities’ decision-making processes.

IM is a crucial part of preparedness planning. During preparedness planning, the CO should assess the IM capacities and systems of the government, and that of UNICEF across its programmatic areas of responsibility, and their readiness for coordination in an emergency. The CO should work with counterparts to build or strengthen systems to cope with crises rather than having to create them after an emergency occurs.

Key questions for IM are:
   i. What questions are you trying to answer?
   ii. What information and knowledge would help answering those questions?
   iii. What data is needed to form that information?
   iv. Who will collect the data?
   v. Where and how will data be collected, aggregated and processed? (tools and platforms to be used)
   vi. What expertise is needed to turn information into knowledge?
   vii. How often will data be updated?
   viii. To whom, for what purpose, in what format and how frequently is information disseminated?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Coordination is important because it helps UNICEF, its partners and all humanitarian actors work more effectively together to identify, analyse and meet the needs of the affected population in a crisis. It facilitates common identification of priority needs and addressing of gaps, and reduces duplication in the use of resources and capacities, all of which are crucial to delivering results and ensuring accountability of humanitarian action. Coordination in advocacy and resource mobilization helps communicate accurately to donors what the situation is and the requirements to respond.

COORDINATION AND HUMANITARIAN REFORM AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA

Coordination\(^\text{23}\) is a key enabler to achieve predictable, effective and timely collective humanitarian action. Two major reviews of the international humanitarian community’s performance have introduced changes to strengthen and improve coordination:

1. A review of the humanitarian response system in 2005 led to reform in three areas: (i) more adequate, timely, flexible and effective humanitarian financing, including through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); (2) a strengthened Humanitarian Coordinator system, providing more strategic leadership and coordination; and (3) implementation of the ‘cluster approach’ to build capacities in gap areas.

2. Following the large-scale crises in Haiti and Pakistan in 2010, the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) launched the Transformative Agenda (TA), a set of concrete actions aimed at improving the timeliness and effectiveness of the collective response through (i) stronger leadership, (ii) more effective coordination structures, and (iii) improved accountability for performance and to affected populations.

Key elements of the Transformative Agenda include:

- the establishment of a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation process for Level 3 emergencies when the gravity of a crisis requires a rapid mobilization of the entire humanitarian system;
- a mechanism to deploy strong, experienced senior humanitarian leadership to guide the

\(^{23}\) Coordination can be formal (according to defined structures) and informal (what people do regardless of whether a structure is in place or not)
humanitarian response from the outset of a major crisis;

- the strengthening of leadership capacities and rapid deployment of humanitarian leaders at various levels through an Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) to ensure the coordination architecture functions well;

- improved strategic planning at the country level that clarifies the collective results that the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identifies how clusters and organizations will contribute to them;

- enhanced accountability of the inter-agency Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for the achievement of collective results for the affected population;

- stream-lined coordination mechanisms adapted to operational requirements and contexts to better facilitate delivery of results, including through the establishment of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and Common Framework for Preparedness.

THE CLUSTER APPROACH

The cluster approach was adopted in 2005 to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian responses\(^\text{24}\). At country level, it establishes a temporary system for leadership and accountability of the international humanitarian response under the leadership of the humanitarian coordinator (HC). It defines the respective roles and responsibilities of the various agencies and provides a framework for effective partnership among international humanitarian actors, host governments, local authorities, local civil society agencies, affected populations, and other relevant stakeholders (such as the private sector). The cluster approach is applied in relation to internally displaced populations and local populations affected by rapid onset or chronic emergencies, in agreement with governments\(^\text{25}\).

Cluster activation

IASC Clusters can be formally activated in an international response when a government’s capacity to coordinate response to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles is limited or constrained. Even if the government is able to lead and coordinate a response, international coordination capacity may be valuable.

Clusters should continue to operate only while they are strictly needed: plans to deactivate and transition clusters should be prepared as soon as possible after activation. Building capacity of local partners and government should be an objective from the outset.

Cluster activation is recommended to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) by the HC working with the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and in consultation with national authorities.

The ERC decides whether to activate the clusters, in consultation with the IASC Principals, within 24 hours of the request. When clusters are activated, each Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) is responsible for leadership of its own cluster/s. The CLA is accountable for effective functioning and performance of clusters to affected populations, the HC and to national authorities. Importantly, the CLA is expected to act in the interests of the collective cluster membership, and must be careful to avoid bias.

It is important to remember that in the many instances where clusters are not activated, UNICEF still has sectoral accountabilities as a sector lead in support of Government mechanisms.

Core functions of the clusters

The core functions of the clusters are to:

1. support service delivery;
2. inform the HC/HCT strategic decision making process;
3. plan and implement cluster strategies;
4. monitor and evaluate performance;
5. build national capacity in preparedness and

within the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is not part of the cluster approach.

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\(^{24}\) Cluster Coordination Guidance for Country Offices

\(^{25}\) Responsibility for coordination of a humanitarian response in relation to refugees (both within and outside camps) remains
contingency planning;
6. support robust advocacy.

Moreover, clusters must be accountable to the affected population.

CO staff, including programme staff, need to know and be able to undertake the cluster functions in the event of an emergency.

As a support to core cluster functions, dedicated cluster information management (IM) support is essential to ensure availability and access to information on the situation of affected people, their humanitarian needs, and the implementation of the cluster strategy and results.

Cluster lead agency (CLA) responsibilities

The designated CLA (or agencies):

- leads and manages the cluster, including provision of human resources for coordination and IM functions;
- ensures that protection, early recovery and cross-cutting issues are mainstreamed into programming.

The CLA accountabilities include:

- ensuring adequate response and high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership;
- serving as provider of last resort when necessary.

Globally, under the cluster approach, UNICEF is responsible for leading/co-leading three clusters: water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); nutrition; and education (co-led with Save the Children) – as well as one area of responsibility (AOR), child protection under the protection cluster. These leads are reflected at country level unless otherwise indicated by the HCT.

At the global level, UNICEF-led/co-led clusters maintain surge capacity for coordination, build capacity to coordinate at the field level, standardize tools and guidance including for information management, develop agreement on common methods and formats for needs assessment, response planning, monitoring and benchmarking, and develop lessons learned from field response. At the global level, UNICEF is accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) for delivery of the above responsibilities.

When clusters and AORs are activated at country level, UNICEF as the CLA has a responsibility for leadership of the clusters and AORs and is accountable for their effective functioning to affected populations, the HC, and to national authorities.

UNICEF is also an important cluster member with particular technical capacities. It is crucial that UNICEF take part in coordination as a member of the platform whether leading or not, eg in health where UNICEF may be leading vaccination campaigns but the cluster may be led by WHO. Coordination between clusters is also integral to a comprehensive response.

Where UNICEF is CLA, actions need to be taken to ensure the neutrality of the coordinator is not compromised, including during decisions on humanitarian financing. In formally activated clusters and large-scale emergencies (with other coordination modalities), it is recommended that the cluster/sector coordinator and IM are dedicated functions, rather than double-hatting with UNICEF programme positions (see Cluster Coordination Guidance for Country Offices (2015)).

WHEN IS IT NEEDED?

Coordination is required throughout the entire HPC – in preparedness, response and transitions, in sudden onset and protracted emergencies. Agreeing coordination arrangements prior to an emergency based on assessment of existing capacities, as part of preparedness activities, helps deliver an effective and timely response.

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26 See IASC document on ToR for CLA at country level
WHO DOES WHAT?

When the government leads in the coordination of an emergency response through their own sector mechanisms, UNICEF works with and through these, standing ready to offer support as requested. UNICEF has a key role in these countries to invest in strong sector coordination before an emergency and make investments in preparedness and resilience programmes. These may include investment in a government’s own knowledge and skills in emergency preparedness and response; coordination functions; the development of assessment systems and tools; technical support to strengthen IM systems; or the prepositioning of supplies.

When clusters are activated, at country level the UNICEF Representative is ultimately accountable to the HC and/or Resident Coordinator (RC) for the effective functioning of the cluster(s). Cluster coordinators report to the Representative.

UNICEF Representatives are responsible for:

- ensuring accountability to the HC;
- enabling clusters/AoRs to function effectively – those of which UNICEF is a member as well as those which UNICEF leads;
- ensuring quality and coherence of cluster plans in line with the strategic direction agreed by the HCT and in line with the Humanitarian Response Plan;
- monitoring the implementation of corrective strategies and activities to address poor cluster performance against plans, objectives and targets;
- ensuring quality and coherence of UNICEF programmes, preparedness plans and capacity building, in line with and supporting clusters;
- engaging consistently to fulfill cluster functions;
- proactively engaging in discussion, analysis and decision-making on activation of clusters and AoRs in-country, and alerting the GCCU if guidance or support is required;
- in consultation with cluster partners and government sectors, planning for viable and realistic transition/deactivation of clusters and AoRs.

Provider of Last Resort: Where a cluster is activated, the CLA must be ready to fill critical service gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-HCT led Humanitarian Response Plan, when access, security and funds are in place.

The following diagram shows which agency takes the lead in the formal cluster approach.


WORKING WITH INTEGRATED UN PRESENCES

Where there is a UN peacekeeping or special political mission, UNICEF, along with other agencies forming part of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), and the UN mission work together in a strategic partnership referred to as an integrated UN presence. This does not imply any structural arrangement between the UNCT and the mission; however, in some countries there may be structural integration, where the RC/HC is also the Deputy

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27 Such government-led sectoral coordination mechanisms report to designated government bodies. See Cluster Coordination at Country Level Reference Module, p7

28 Cluster Coordination Guidance for Country Offices p12

29 Technical Guidance on Working with Integrated UN Presences and UN Integration FAQs
Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) – “triple hatting” these positions.

UN Integration is the guiding principle in all conflict and post-conflict situations where there is a UNCT and a UN Peacekeeping or Special Political Mission. The purpose of integration is to ensure a coherent and mutually supportive approach among all components of the UN peacekeeping/political mission and the UNCT on issues related to peace consolidation, in order to maximize the individual and collective impact of the UN in the country. UNICEF supports and proactively engages with integrated UN presences. At CO level this may include:

- participating in country-level senior leadership forums for decision-making;
- participating in Integrated Task Forces (ITF) at HQ level, which are responsible for integrated strategic assessments and Integrated Strategic Frameworks (ISF);
- collaborating with peacekeeping operations on: the use of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to monitor and report on grave violations of children’s rights in situations of conflict, as part of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Agenda; the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers; and Protection of Civilians (PoC).

At the same time, UNICEF and humanitarian partners seek to ensure humanitarian principles and humanitarian space are protected when working with integrated UN presences through: clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities within the UNCT, HCT and the mission, that are also understood by affected populations; having strategies on access, protection and advocacy with the mission; agreed set of principles within the HCT on the use of mission assets, premises and common services; and ensuring humanitarian principles are upheld in humanitarian assistance.

SUGGESTED TOOLS / GUIDANCE

- IASC Module - The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)
- IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module
- IASC Operation Guidance on IM
- UNICEF-led Global Clusters/AoRs list IM toolkits
- Common platforms for IM tools and guidance via HR.info, which houses the Indicators Registry; and Assessments Registry; and HDX which houses data sets thematically and by location.
- Technical Guidance on Working with Integrated UN Presences and UN Integration FAQs

TIMELINE

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<tr>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>First 24 hours</th>
<th>First 48 hours</th>
<th>First 72 hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COORDINATION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>Review Contingency Plans and BCP; Designate focal points and spokespersons; Liaise with government; Set up coordination mechanism between CO, RO, HQ Establish sector/cluster coordination Establish Information Management Systems</td>
<td>Develop risk mitigation strategy</td>
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