



GUIDANCE NOTE ON SUPPORTING NGOs' CONTRIBUTION TO NUTRITION CLUSTER LEADERSHIP AT NATIONAL AND SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL

Background and rationale

The cluster approach was adopted in 2005, following an independent Humanitarian Response Review, to address gaps and to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response by building partnerships. It ensures that international responses to humanitarian emergencies are predictable and accountable and have clear leadership by making clearer the division of labour between organizations, and their roles and responsibilities in different areas.

A decision to activate clusters may be made by the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team, when the assessment of humanitarian needs, existing coordination mechanisms and capacity indicates that a Government's capacity to coordinate a humanitarian response is limited or constrained, or when international emergency assistance is needed to support Government-led emergency or crisis sectoral coordination mechanisms.

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA) have been encouraged to co-lead with Governmental bodies whenever appropriate and possible, and share cluster leadership with NGOs wherever feasible. NGOs should be encouraged and supported in sharing leadership of the Cluster Coordination, without displacing the CLA responsibilities and accountabilities as provider of last resort.¹

Evaluation and experience have shown that sharing of cluster leadership strengthens partnerships, advocacy and information transfer, leading to stronger engagement and better coordination. Only 4 of the 11 main sectors of humanitarian action, mandated by the IASC, are co-led at the global level but all clusters have adopted various measures to support their members' contribution to sectoral leadership, and in particular the contribution by NGOs.

UNICEF is mandated by the IASC to lead the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC). The GNC's work is guided by a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) comprising NGOs partners, UN agencies and one national coordination staff.

The GNC reiterates the need and added value of NGOs sharing the leadership of Nutrition Cluster Coordination at national and sub-national level, without displacing the prerogatives of UNICEF as CLA, in particular regarding its role as provider of last resort.

At the national and sub-national level, Nutrition Cluster coordination mechanisms (NCs) have adopted different models to ensure international and national NGOs' contribution to cluster leadership, and currently multiple terms are used to describe this, including co-facilitator, co-coordinator, co-steward and co-lead. The IASC advises CLAs to support harmonization of language

¹ Adapted from: "Guideline Cluster Coordination at Country Level" by IASC (2015).

and provision of guidance to reduce misinterpretations and possibly reducing the effectiveness of the sectoral coordination provided.

Recommendations for harmonization of approaches:

- UNICEF as CLA should ensure that qualified staff are recruited for the functions of Nutrition Cluster Coordinator (NCC) and Information Management Officer (IMO) and that these positions are maintained for as long as the official request for support is requested
- The terms “Cluster Lead” and “Co-Lead” should preferably only be used in reference to the leadership function provided by National Authorities or UNICEF as CLA
- NGOs, including national NGOs, should be encouraged and supported to contribute to the NC leadership by supporting the following critical functions:
 - National Deputy Nutrition Cluster Coordinator (DNCC)
 - Sub-national Cluster Coordinator or Sub-national Deputy Cluster Coordinator
 - Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) Chair, Co-Chair or Member
 - Co-chair of NC meetings
 - Technical Working Group (TWG) Chair, Co-Chair or Member

Additional suggestions for the formalization of NGOs contribution to national and sub-national nutrition cluster coordination:

- The TOR for the function of DNCC or Sub-national Cluster Coordinator or Sub-national Deputy Cluster Coordinator should be agreed and signed by UNICEF and the NGO supporting these critical roles.
- DNCC or the sub-national coordination roles’ reporting lines may adopt a matrix management format, with administrative reporting to the NGO and to the NCC for cluster matters.
- The DNCC should be supported in fulfilling his/her function in the coordination of the Nutrition Cluster and be perceived as an impartial and fair representative of the cluster’s collective interest rather than as a representative of his/her agency.
- The DNCC should avoid participation in meetings or activities in a function other than that of DNCC, but in rare cases when this cannot be avoided, full transparency should be adopted to clarify when they are acting as a representative of the nutrition cluster collective and when of other parties.
- If the support provided by NGOs needs to be formalised, it is suggested to use a Letter of Understanding (LoU). The GNC may provide draft LoUs for adaptation in each country.
- Cluster Coordinators shall advocate for fund mobilisation to cover these positions at all levels to ensure funding constraints do not limit NGOs capacity to second staff to the NC, and contribute to NC leadership.

The above recommendations should be adopted as standard when setting up new Nutrition Cluster Coordination mechanisms but also when international support for pre-existing sectoral coordination mechanisms is officially requested.

Where different format of NGOs support to sectoral/cluster arrangement are already in place, the GNC can provide specific guidance and support to maximise the contribution of international and national NGOs in the leadership of the NCC in ways that also maximise global harmonization of language.