

# Challenges and opportunities of inter-cluster coordination: Somalia's experience

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## Context

Somalia has historically faced significant humanitarian crises driven primarily by ongoing conflict, resulting in widespread instability and displacement. Climate-related hazards, particularly droughts and floods, have increasingly exacerbated this humanitarian situation. These recurrent climate shocks amplify existing vulnerabilities, contributing notably to further displacement of populations. The 2011 famine, driven largely by drought, resulted in over 200,000 deaths, marking a severe humanitarian crisis. Since then, humanitarian actors have consistently addressed both the direct impacts of conflict and the compounding effects of climate-induced displacement. In 2023 alone, floods displaced approximately 1.7 million people, and drought affected over 500,000 individuals. Given Somalia's longstanding exposure to conflict and climate-related emergencies, addressing such crises has inherently been integrated into the day-to-day operations of humanitarian clusters for years.

## IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT CLIMATE WORK OF CLUSTERS

Clusters such as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and Nutrition inherently address climate shocks, though their interventions are often not explicitly labelled as climate action. Given Somalia's persistent exposure to droughts and floods, climate-responsive actions have always been integral to their operations. The WASH cluster consistently incorporates adaptive technologies such as solar-powered water systems and deeper boreholes, reflecting routine practices rather than new, explicitly climate-focused programs. A WASH cluster representative explained, "Explicit climate adaptation programmes have not been central to our daily work; we adapt implicitly because our priority remains saving lives through emergency response." Similarly, the Nutrition cluster integrates climate-related considerations directly into existing frameworks without establishing separate climate-focused structures. A Nutrition cluster coordinator clarified, "We decided not to create a separate technical climate change working group at the country level, as we view climate change as a cross-cutting issue that should be integrated into existing working groups." Their planning includes early warning systems, monitoring harvest projections, and deploying mobile teams to manage climate-related displacement effectively.

In contrast, Education cluster and Child Protection AoR explicitly frame their work in terms of climate adaptation. Education proactively labels its interventions as climate-related through initiatives like the anticipatory action frameworks funded by Education Cannot Wait (ECW). An Education cluster representative highlighted, "Thought leadership is critical for cluster coordinators. We need to strategically position our interventions, clearly demonstrating the climate sensitivity of our activities to leverage necessary resources." The CP AoR explicitly integrates anticipatory action frameworks and climate-informed risk assessments, clearly branding their actions as climate-responsive interventions.

### Box 1: Key climate-responsive actions by clusters

#### WASH:

- Emergency water trucking and flood-resistant sanitation solutions
- Deeper, solar-powered boreholes and water systems (longstanding adaptations)

#### Nutrition:

- Early warning systems and anticipatory mobile nutritional services
- Continuous integration of climate considerations within existing nutritional programs

#### Education:

- Explicit development of education-specific anticipatory action frameworks
- Strategic positioning and independent mobilization of resources for climate-focused interventions

#### Child Protection:

- Deployment of mobile teams explicitly targeting forecasted climate risk areas
- Use of climate-responsive anticipatory frameworks and community-based interventions

## FUNDING CHALLENGES

Clusters face significant funding constraints, partly because their routine climate-responsive actions are not explicitly recognized or labelled as climate adaptation or mitigation. For clusters such as WASH and Nutrition, which have always incorporated climate-responsive measures within their regular operations, the absence of explicit labelling poses a particular challenge. A WASH cluster representative explained, "Our primary focus is immediate service delivery, and because our climate-responsive actions aren't explicitly labelled, accessing climate-specific adaptation funding has been challenging." Similarly, a Nutrition cluster coordinator highlighted that, "Funding specifically for adaptation is not commonly accessed, even though drought and flooding—clear climate impacts—are consistently funded as humanitarian priorities."

Education cluster and Child Protection AoR face other hurdles, as they have traditionally received less attention and fewer resources compared to WASH and Nutrition. A Child Protection representative emphasized this issue, stating, "We create demand for our services by collaborating with other clusters, but when it comes to scaling our own response, we hit a deadlock due to resource constraints."

## LIMITATIONS ON ANTICIPATORY ACTIONS

Early warning systems have substantially improved over recent years due to ongoing collaborative efforts among clusters, government agencies, and technical partners like FAO and regional climate prediction centers such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). However, translating these warnings into effective anticipatory actions remains challenging due to ongoing conflict and logistical constraints. A WASH cluster representative explained, "Early warning has greatly improved, but early response is what's missing. Even when we know drought or flooding is coming, insecurity and financial constraints severely limit our ability to evacuate or assist populations timely."

## INTER-CLUSTER COORDINATION

Climate-related coordination among clusters in Somalia primarily occurs through informal mechanisms and bilateral collaborations rather than structured inter-cluster frameworks. Clusters such as WASH and Nutrition regularly share information and coordinate their responses informally, especially on early warning and anticipatory actions. The Child Protection AoR similarly coordinates informally with Nutrition, CCCM, and GBV clusters and AoR. Education, while independently developing climate-focused frameworks, also engages in informal coordination with other sectors.

A key limitation of current informal coordination efforts is the lack of systematic documentation. A Nutrition representative stated, "A lot is being done regarding inter-cluster collaboration, but much of it isn't systematically documented. There are frequent bilateral discussions, information sharing, and planning efforts, but the primary challenge is documentation." This absence of systematic documentation highlights the need to formalize coordination efforts, as formal processes/structures would facilitate clearer recording and reporting. Improved documentation would enable clusters to better demonstrate the effectiveness of their coordinated approaches, support strategic planning and accountability, help replicate successful practices, and strengthen resource mobilization and funding efforts.

The recent appointment of an OCHA climate change specialist addresses broader strategic coordination needs (see Box 2). This initiative aims to enhance structured coordination and anticipatory planning among priority clusters (WASH, Nutrition, Food Security, and Shelter) through the development of a comprehensive climate crisis roadmap. However, this structured coordination does not currently extend to the Education cluster or Child Protection AoR, leaving these sectors to continue relying primarily on informal coordination mechanisms.

### Box 2: Dedicated OCHA support

From late 2024, OCHA has strengthened its support for priority clusters—WASH, Nutrition, Food Security, and Shelter—in addressing climate-related crises by appointing a dedicated climate change specialist based in Mogadishu. This marked the first climate-focused role within the humanitarian coordination structure in Somalia. The specialist provides critical input on climate-related indicators, facilitates climate-informed discussions across these clusters, and aids in developing a comprehensive climate crisis roadmap. A respondent from the Nutrition cluster noted, "The discussions with OCHA so far have focused primarily on developing a climate crisis roadmap for Somalia. Although these discussions are very recent, the main objective now is clearly establishing this roadmap and identifying actionable indicators across all sectors." This roadmap consolidates climate-related actions and indicators across sectors, enhancing anticipatory planning and coordination among priority clusters.

## ONGOING NEEDS

Each cluster has identified specific ongoing support needs to enhance their climate response capabilities:

- **WASH:** Targeted assistance in developing clear strategic plans that effectively leverage and expand existing adaptive practices.
- **Nutrition:** Dedicated support in crafting tailored strategic plans for climate adaptation, rather than generic guidelines. A Nutrition cluster coordinator explicitly stated, "We require support in developing a clear strategic plan on climate adaptation tailored to our context, rather than generic guidelines."
- **Education:** Continued support in strategically positioning and explicitly labelling their climate-related interventions to improve funding and visibility.
- **Child Protection:** Ongoing needs for scaling responses and resource mobilization to adequately meet the demand generated through collaboration with other clusters, particularly emphasizing strategic planning and explicit labelling of climate-responsive activities.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of UNICEF-led/co-led clusters and AoR reminds us that their regular work often addresses climate considerations, possibly without labelling it a climate crisis. Considering climate crises is not completely new to humanitarians, but with a bit of effort, their work could be further strengthened.

- Clusters inherently addressing longstanding climate vulnerabilities already have foundational adaptive practices and knowledge, making it unnecessary to create entirely new programs. But explicit labelling of climate interventions significantly enhances visibility, making resource mobilization more effective and targeted.
- Thought leadership by cluster and AoR coordinators is essential in strategically positioning their interventions, particularly to highlight their climate relevance, improving advocacy, visibility, and funding opportunities.
- The existence of informal inter-cluster coordination mechanisms presents an opportunity that can be strengthened and formalized to enhance comprehensive and systematic responses.
- Persistent conflict and security constraints severely limit the implementation of anticipatory actions, emphasizing the need for creative solutions and additional resources to overcome logistical barriers.