

Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of Food Security Cluster Coordination

Lesson: The FSC at country level: Principles, roles, functions

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Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the aim, core functions and deliverables of the Food Security Cluster (FSC) at country level;
- describe the main tasks of the FSC's Cluster Lead Agencies;
- illustrate the principles and commitments of the FSC;
- explain how empowered leadership at cluster level enhances coordination; and
- describe how the Food Security Cluster relates to other Clusters in the Inter Cluster Coordination Group.

Introduction

The **Cluster Approach** operates at two levels: global and local.

➡ The **global level** aims to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to ensure response to humanitarian emergencies by designated global Cluster Leads, as well as predictable leadership and accountability in all the main sectors or areas of activity.

➡ The **country level** aims to ensure more coherent and effective response by mobilizing groups of agencies, organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to respond in a strategic manner across all key sectors or areas of activity, each sector having a clearly designated lead, as agreed by the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team.

This lesson focuses on the country level of the cluster system within the Food Security Cluster.



A detailed description of the Global Food Security Cluster is available in **Lesson “The Global Food Security Cluster – Background and Objectives”** of this course.

Aim of the Food Security Cluster

The Food Security Cluster is a means to an end - a coordination structure that supports effective, well-coordinated humanitarian food security action. It is not an end in itself. The **tasks** of a country level FSC are defined by:

① **Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA)**, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP); and

② **FSC partners**, according to the needs of the particular situation.

In general, **the aim of a country level FSC** is to bring together national and international humanitarian partners, who should collaborate to improve the timeliness and impact of appropriate humanitarian food security assistance on the lives of affected communities. In particular, the FSC should be:

- ✓ an **action-oriented forum** that helps to ensure coherent, coordinated and integrated humanitarian responses;
- ✓ driven by the assessed food security needs of the affected population.

Many **examples** of country FSC Terms of Reference can be found on the **gFSC website**

<http://fscluster.org/term-references>, as well as generic TORs, which can be adapted to the context.

Detailed TORs are also available for the responsibilities and accountability of Humanitarian Coordinators (**HC**), Humanitarian Country Teams (**HCT**), Cluster Lead Agencies (**CLA**) and Cluster Coordinators on the Humanitarian Response website

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/who-does-what>

The **Terms of Reference** (TOR) for country Food Security Clusters should include:

Objectives of the cluster

Core functions

Minimum commitments

Roles and responsibilities

Method of work

Deliverables

Aim of the Food Security Cluster

Roles and responsibilities

As stated in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, **national authorities have primary responsibility** for taking care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring in their territory. In December 1991, the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182. It was designed to strengthen the United Nations' response to complex emergencies and natural disasters, while improving the overall effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the field.

These are some useful excerpts on this topic taken from the **IASC Operational Guidance for CLAs on working with national authorities**.

“Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.”

“The magnitude and duration of many emergencies may be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries. International cooperation to address emergency situations and to strengthen the response capacity of affected countries is thus of great importance. Such cooperation should be provided in accordance with international and national laws. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations working impartially and with strictly humanitarian motives should continue to make a significant contribution in supplementing national efforts.”

“States whose populations are in need of humanitarian assistance are called upon to facilitate the work of these organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular the supply of food, medicines, shelter and health care, for which access to victims is essential.”

To provide an effective humanitarian response to the needs of affected populations, it is essential that all **key humanitarian actors** in the sector are **included in the coordination mechanism** and in the process, all have their respective mandates and programme priorities.

The roles and responsibilities of various actors of the FSC at country level.



Observers/donors

Provision is also made in the cluster for those humanitarian actors who may wish to participate as observers, including donors, mainly for information sharing purposes.



NGO co-facilitator

Whenever possible, a co-facilitator from an NGO is seconded to the Food Security Cluster. This practice is encouraged as it helps to enhance the participation and visibility of NGO partners in the cluster. There can be different arrangements for delegating tasks to the co-facilitator. It is therefore important to establish clear ToRs, keeping in mind that the NGO co-facilitator does not report directly to the two Lead Agencies and cannot be held accountable for the general performance of the cluster.



Cluster partners

Cluster partners are from **international and national agencies**, such as the United Nations (UN), NGOs, government, representatives of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. All partners are expected to commit to the minimum participation in clusters, as defined by the IASC reference module for cluster coordination at country Level (see section below). Specifically, FSC partners commit to being proactive in assessing needs, sharing information, developing appropriate strategies and plans for the food security sector, and implementing agreed priority activities.



Cluster Coordinator (CC)

The Food Security Cluster Coordinator is the neutral representative of the cluster as a whole and is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and facilitation of the work of the cluster. Often, at operational level, the FSC is chaired by representatives from the relevant line Ministries (e.g. Agriculture, Social Affairs, Livelihoods), with the support of the Cluster Coordinator (CC). The CC requires skills in human relations, planning and management, a broad understanding of the food security sector, knowledge of the country, and experience in previous emergencies, including the planning and monitoring of inter-agency responses. The Cluster Coordinator reports directly to the FAO Representative and the WFP Country Director.

Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA)

A Cluster Lead Agency is an organization designated – by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) at global level and by the HC at country level – to lead and coordinate international humanitarian response within a particular sector or area of activity. In the cluster system, the FAO Country Representatives and the WFP Country Director are ultimately accountable to the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for

carrying out their Cluster Lead Agency responsibilities (as also specified in the CLAs generic Terms of Reference).

FAO and WFP co-leadership

A CLA commits to ensuring adequate response and high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership. The Food Security Cluster is the only cluster having two UN co-lead agencies at global level. FAO and WFP share **co-leadership**. Where the two agencies are both present and active, co-leadership of FAO and WFP is also applied at country level. In special cases, where one of the two agencies is not present in the country, the role of CLA can be assigned to only one of the two agencies.

! The designation of CLAs with clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities, includes responsibility for identifying gaps in humanitarian response in their sector, and for taking action to fill them (Provider of Last Resort). This is the principal difference between the "cluster approach" and other sector coordination mechanisms.

Cluster Lead Agencies' main tasks

Cluster Lead Agencies' main tasks within the functioning of the Food Security Cluster are to:

⇒ **Act as Provider of Last Resort** where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding. This means that CLAs must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the Humanitarian Response Plan. The Humanitarian Response Plan is the humanitarian community's strategy for addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs. It coordinates the humanitarian activities of UN agencies, international and national NGOs and national government. In addition, it can be used to communicate the scope of the response to an emergency to donors and the public, and thus serve a secondary purpose for resource mobilization.

⇒ **Appoint a Cluster Coordinator (CC)** to facilitate the work of the cluster/sector group and ensure coordination with other clusters/sector groups, as needed. This is a key responsibility of CLAs.

⇒ **Coordinate the food security sector** through the Food Security Cluster, when clusters are formally activated.

⇒ **Ensure predictable leadership** at global and country level by coordinating the response to emergencies in their cluster or area of activity, in collaboration with cluster partners and in accordance with agreed standards and guidelines.

The six core functions

In order to achieve its objectives, IASC members have agreed on six core functions for clusters at country level:

Support service delivery by:

- ✓ providing a platform that ensures service delivery and is driven by the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities;
- ✓ developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of activities.

Inform the HC/HCT's strategic decision-making by:

- ✓ preparing needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities;
- ✓ identifying and finding solutions for (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues, including gender, age, disability/diversity, protection, HIV/AIDS and environment;
- ✓ formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.

Support robust advocacy by:

- ✓ identifying concerns, and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and action;
- ✓ undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

Monitor and evaluate performance by:

- ✓ monitoring and reporting on activities and needs;
- ✓ measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results;
- ✓ recommending corrective action where necessary.

Plan and implement cluster strategies by:

- ✓ developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the overall response's strategic objectives;
- ✓ applying and adhering to common standards and guidelines;
- ✓ clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions to the HC's overall humanitarian funding proposals.

Build capacity in contingency planning and preparedness

Preparedness is a continuous process. Broadly defined, it includes any action, measure or capacity development that is introduced before an emergency to improve the overall effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of a response and recovery. For more information see: **the IASC reference module for Cluster Coordination at country** <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters> level in section 4 and the **Transformative Agenda Protocol: Common framework for preparedness** https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/common_framework_for_preparedness.pdf

Food Security Cluster Deliverables

The outputs expected from a country level Food Security Cluster include:

► Response analysis and response plan linked to FSC situation analysis

The FSC will design an appropriate overall food security response that addresses the priority needs of the affected populations, no matter their gender, age or circumstances, in a timely manner, complementing national efforts, minimizing gaps and duplications, and making efficient use of available resources. The FSC will also provide inputs to inter-sectoral joint appeals.

► Reports of response plan's monitoring on its implementation

Regular joint monitoring and review of partners' achievements to ensure effective implementation of the strategic plan and its revision when necessary.

Principles of the Food Security Cluster

The cluster system derives its strength from the active participation of humanitarian partners and collective decision-making. In order to ensure the efficiency of this system, all cluster partners must be in agreement with a standard set of principles and minimum commitments.

Principles of Partnership

Minimum commitments

Shared leadership

Principles of Partnership

Partnership is the foundation of the humanitarian reform process.

Voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.

The UN General Assembly, 2007

Successful application of the cluster approach depends on all humanitarian actors working in partnership in all aspects of the humanitarian response from assessment, analysis and planning, to resource mobilization, implementation and evaluation.

Its importance was emphasized in 2007 by the Global Humanitarian Platform

<https://icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment>

There are various forms, or levels, of humanitarian partnership, from close coordination and joint programming to looser associations based on the need to share information, avoid duplication and enhance complementarity.

All FSC members, by actively participating in the cluster, commit to:

- striving to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, based on an ethical obligation and accountability to the populations we serve;
- acknowledging diversity as an asset of the humanitarian community and recognizing interdependence among humanitarian organizations;
- committing to building and nurturing an effective partnership.

Humanitarian agencies acknowledge that no single agency can cover all humanitarian needs and that support from all partners is needed. All organizations participating in the Global Humanitarian Platform <http://fscluster.org/document/global-humanitarian-platform-principles> agree to base their partnership on the following principles.

Equality	Equality requires mutual respect among members of a partnership, irrespective of size and power. Partners must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.
Transparency	Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on an equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultation and sharing of information. Communication and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.
Results-oriented approach	Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires results-oriented coordination, based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

Responsibility Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must ensure that they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills and capacity to deliver on their undertakings. Humanitarian organizations should also make constant decisive and robust efforts to prevent any abuses.

Complementarity The diversity of the humanitarian community is a strength, if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part of emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

Minimum commitments

The constant commitment of cluster partners is essential to achieve predictable coordination.

The minimum commitments for participation in country level clusters set out what all local, national and international organizations undertake to contribute. They seek to **encourage the participation of national organizations and authorities** in the work of the clusters.

Cluster Lead Agencies have a reciprocal responsibility to ensure that they lead their clusters in a manner that is **not limited to sharing information**, but ensures **effective coordination** with all counterparts.

! The responsibility of CLAs and Cluster Coordinators is to **provide a forum for humanitarian action** that meets affected people's needs and supports other levels of the strategic response (e.g.: inter-cluster coordination at country and global levels).

The **minimum commitments for participation** in a cluster require that all the participants are committed to:

- **Undertaking advocacy**, and disseminating advocacy messages to affected communities, the host government, donors, the HCT, CLAs, the media and other audiences.
- Willingness to **take on leadership responsibilities** in sub-national or working groups as needed, subject to capacity and mandate.

- Commitment to **working cooperatively with other cluster partners**, to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources, and share information on organizational resources.
- Commitment by a relevant senior staff member to **working consistently with the cluster to fulfil its mission**.
- Commitment to **mainstreaming key programmatic cross-cutting issues** (including age, gender, environment and HIV/AIDs).
- Capacity and willingness to **contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities**, which must include inter-cluster coordination.
- **Active participation in the cluster** and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work.
- A demonstrated understanding of **the duties and responsibilities associated** with membership of the cluster, as defined by IASC **ToRs and guidance notes**, any cluster specific guidance, and country cluster ToRs, where available.
- 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**.
- Commitment to **mainstreaming protection in programme delivery** (including respect for principles of non-discrimination, do no harm, etc.).
- Commitment to humanitarian principles, 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.

All cluster partners (including CLAs in their role as implementer alongside other agencies) have a shared mutual responsibility to meet the humanitarian needs of affected people in a timely manner.

The minimum commitments are not prescriptive and **should be adapted to actual needs and contexts**, since cluster-based responses vary greatly in scale and complexity.

! The minimum commitments are a starting point and should be considered as an absolute minimum.

Shared leadership

The effectiveness of any cluster depends largely on the **quality of leadership** provided by the CLAs and the Cluster Coordinator, the extent to which they are able to generate a **spirit of partnership** and the willingness of **other cluster participants** to enter into that spirit.

"Working together is an urgent life and death issue."

Global Humanitarian Platform, 2007

When disaster strikes, **empowered and accountable leadership** is a prerequisite to an effective humanitarian response.



Terminology for shared leadership

Terms used to describe sharing leadership vary. Co-facilitator, co-chair, sub-national leadership, working group leadership, task force chairs are all used in different contexts. Within the complex and diverse environment of a response, **common understanding** and **harmonization of terminology** should be sought.

Sharing leadership of clusters between UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other humanitarian actors, including international organizations (IO) and national government agencies, **strengthens the overall response**. Shared leadership improves and strengthens:

- ✓ partnership;
- ✓ advocacy;
- ✓ information sharing;
- ✓ engagement; and coordination.



Shared leadership is particularly effective in **remote field locations** with a limited or **non-existent UN presence**.

In such instances, **NGOs** with a strong and consistent presence are well positioned to provide a leadership role in coordination. In addition to **access**, NGO cluster leadership can offer **technical expertise, different approaches** on accountability to affected people and **long-term community involvement** and understanding.

Governmental authorities are an added value to the work of the cluster as they ensure continuity in coordination and they will gain ownership of activities that will continue after the end of the humanitarian operation and the deactivation of clusters.

Sharing leadership requires actors to clearly define **roles and responsibilities**, including the complementary roles of Cluster Lead Agencies, Cluster Coordinators and cluster participants.



The appropriate and transparent sharing of leadership among different actors is a true reflection of the **interdependency of the humanitarian community** to ensure an effective strategic response.

Remember! Sharing leadership can strengthen cluster coordination, but **does not replace the accountability and core responsibilities of the designated in-country CLAs**, including their role as Provider of Last Resort.

When considering sharing the leadership of a cluster, the following points should be taken into account:

- ↪ ToRs or **memorandums of understanding**¹ should be developed, to ensure that parties have a common understanding of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.
- ↪ The actors involved should jointly **determine which shared leadership model works best** for their context. The ToR should be discussed, completed and understood in advance, because organizations that take on a shared leadership role need to dedicate resources to this function (i.e. for example, full or part-time staff).



Some tips on how a Cluster Coordinator can **effectively enhance participation**

- ➔ Adopt a collaborative leadership style and encourage teamwork
- ➔ Make personal contact and maintain regular dialogue with cluster partners
- ➔ Highlight common goals, interests and interdependencies among partners
- ➔ Engage national and local actors as quickly as possible; they are key to accessing local networks and services
- ➔ Promote transparency and accountability through open decision-making and performance

¹ A memorandum of understanding (MoU) describes a bilateral or multilateral agreement between two or more parties. It expresses a convergence of will between the parties, indicating an intended common line of action. It is often used in cases where parties do not have a legal or financial commitment.

- ➔ Facilitate opportunities for pro-active partner involvement and influence

Inter-cluster coordination

Many aspects of disaster response cannot be addressed by one single cluster. Just as it is important to **coordinate within a cluster**, it is crucial to coordinate work across clusters. This is called inter-cluster coordination. Inter-cluster coordination takes place at **national and sub-national level**, to coordinate the design and implementation of the response through each step of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

Inter-cluster coordination is critical to:

- achieving common objectives;
- avoiding duplication among clusters;
- establishing strategies for multi-sector response activities; and
- prioritizing common areas of need.

Humanitarian Programme Cycle

The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) is a coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver humanitarian response. It consists of a number of elements coordinated in a seamless manner, with one step logically building on the previous and leading to the next. The steps in the HPC include:

- Preparedness;
- Needs assessment and analysis;
- Strategic response planning;
- Resource mobilization;
- Implementation and monitoring; and
- Operational peer review and evaluation.

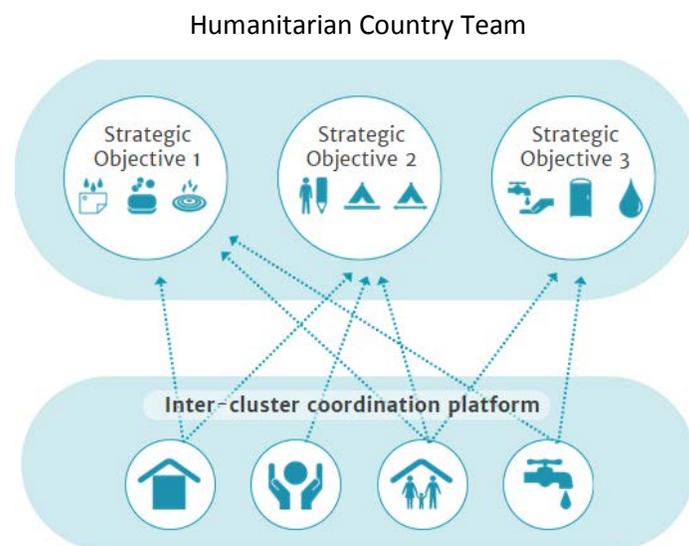
The **inter-cluster coordination platform** is facilitated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and strategically guided by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). It also has a technical advisory role to the HCT. It is formed by the Coordinators of all activated clusters. Inter-cluster coordination is a mechanism that **enables clusters to work together** in proceeding to the delivery of assistance to affected people, effectively and efficiently. It does this by:

- encouraging synergies between sectors;

- enabling a coherent overall approach;
- ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined; closing potential gaps and eliminating duplications;
- addressing cross-cutting issues.

! Inter-cluster coordination plays a critical role in facilitating the development of the Humanitarian Response Plan and assures a coherent and coordinated approach to planning and operationalizing the shared country strategic objectives.

This diagram illustrates the links between the three levels in which inter-cluster coordination occurs.



Strategic Objectives (SO)

Determined by the HCT, relevant clusters group together to develop multi-sectoral strategies with the goal of achieving the SOs and coordinating to implement and monitor their realization.

Inter-cluster coordination platform

Clusters work together throughout the components of the HPC to achieve the humanitarian priorities as set by the SOs. Focusing on key operational issues which impact on an effective and efficient response, clusters highlight issues which require strategic support.

Monitoring cluster coordination

Monitoring cluster coordination at national and sub-national level is necessary **to ensure that clusters are actually fulfilling their purpose, i.e that they:**

- ✓ provide an efficient and effective coordination mechanism;
- ✓ fulfil the core cluster functions;
- ✓ support efficient delivery of relevant services;
- ✓ meet the needs of cluster members;
- ✓ demonstrate accountability to affected people, regardless of their gender, age or circumstances.

Monitoring also ensures that the **architecture of coordination** responds to actual needs.

! Clusters are **timebound** and, when possible, should transition **from emergency to long-term coordination structures** that are led or supported by national authorities.

Cluster coordination monitoring is often done through:

1. Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM)

CCPM is a self-assessment exercise carried out by the cluster team, CLAs and cluster partners. It is a country-led process, supported globally. Clusters assess their performance against the six core cluster functions and accountability to affected people. Ideally, it is carried out by all clusters/sectors at the same time, but it can be implemented on demand by individual clusters.

A CCPM enables all cluster partners, CLAs and coordinators to identify strengths and weaknesses of performance and prompt discussions on paths to improvement.

CCPM is **complementary to humanitarian response monitoring**, which measures the aid delivered to the affected population, as well as the results achieved. These are measured against the objectives set out in the humanitarian response plan. CCPM **reviews cluster functions** to see whether they are being implemented adequately to support the delivery of the joint response plan. It combines an objective description of how the cluster is organized and what its deliverables are, with feedback through a survey from all partners on how they are involved and how they contribute to and make use of these functions and their deliverables.

Timewise, a CCPM should ideally be implemented 3 to 6 months after the onset of, or spike in, an emergency and annually thereafter. In protracted crises, the recommendation is to complete a CCPM annually.



Detailed guidance on each step of a CCPM

<http://fscluster.org/page/country-cluster-performance-monitoring>

1. Cluster Coordination Architecture Review

The Cluster Coordination Architecture Review is initiated and **led by the HC/HCT** and **facilitated by OCHA**. It assesses whether **cluster coordination structures continue to be appropriate** in the light of changes in the humanitarian context. The CCAR determines whether cluster coordination structures should:

- continue as they are;
- be scaled up;
- be streamlined; or if there is a case for
- transition to longer-term structures, with a plan and benchmarks for deactivation.

Cluster Coordination Architecture Reviews may be informed by CCPM results, but decisions on whether a cluster remains "fit for purpose" must be based on an analysis of changes in the humanitarian context and national coordination capacity. OCHA assists RC/HCs in ensuring that reviews at country level are carried out in a timely manner, and monitors the implementation of reviews globally.

Summary

The aim of the FSC is to assemble and analyse information on the situation, agree on priority problems and risks, as well as on objectives, an overall response strategy, standards for assistance, and on who will do what, where and monitor overall progress.

The FSC deliverables are: FSC situation analysis and linked response analysis and plan, and response plan monitoring reports on its implementation.

The main tasks of the CLAs are: to ensure predictable leadership, coordinate the food security sector, appoint a Cluster Coordinator and act as Provider of Last Resort.

The minimum commitments for participation set out what all local, national and international organizations undertake to contribute.

Empowered leadership has a specific meaning and is bound by specific timeframes.

An Inter-cluster coordination platform is a mechanism to enable clusters to work together to proceed to the delivery of assistance to affected people, effectively and efficiently.