

Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of Food Security Cluster Coordination

Lesson: Supporting Service Delivery

Text-only version

In partnership with:



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Learning objectives

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

- outline the criteria for declaring a Level 3 emergency;
- indicate the priority tasks that need to be fulfilled during the first week of a humanitarian crisis; and
- describe how coordination mechanisms are used to identify gaps and avoid duplication.

Introduction

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals have agreed on a list of six core functions for Clusters. These six functions are aimed at "refocusing Clusters on strategic and operational gaps analysis, planning, assessment and results".

(Recommendation 27, IASC, Transformative Agenda)

This lesson focuses on the first of the six core functions for Clusters at country level: **support service delivery**.



The six core functions

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.

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.

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.

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.

Build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning:

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 level** <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters> in section 4 and the **Transformative Agenda Protocol: Common framework for preparedness**

https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/common_framework_for_preparedness.pdf

This lesson explores how coordination mechanisms or platforms can contribute to effective coordination of food security responses, with the ultimate goal of saving lives and livelihoods and reducing suffering. In particular, this lesson describes how the FSC as a coordination platform contributes to identifying and implementing strategic priorities when a food security crisis occurs. You will explore real life examples of how **effective coordination mechanisms** have improved humanitarian responses, particularly in the initial days following the onset of a disaster.

Remember that the ultimate aim of the humanitarian community is to serve vulnerable populations effectively, by integrating accountability to affected populations in policies and operational procedures.

Why coordination platforms and mechanisms?

Clusters' aim is to support and complement the existing coordination mechanisms. Clusters must respect the local coordination mechanism already in place.



The **cluster approach** is intended to strengthen, **not replace**, any existing sectoral **coordination mechanisms**.

It may be necessary to establish clusters where coordination mechanisms are either **non-existent** or **unable to ensure**:

- a coordinated response among all important humanitarian actors;
- the identification and filling of any gaps in that response; and
- accountability to the affected populations.

The local coordination mechanisms must be respected and reinforced through the cluster system.

Level 3 emergency

Whenever a major emergency occurs and the government requests support from the international community, humanitarian actors revise their response capacities and, based on consultations, agree to the declaration of an L3 emergency. Let's consider this kind of emergency in detail, starting with a **definition**.

A Level 3 (or L3) emergency is a major sudden onset humanitarian crisis triggered by natural disasters or conflict that requires system-wide mobilization.

It is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) that determines whether a Level 3 response is required. The IASC is a forum that groups together most key humanitarian actors from the United Nations, NGOs and other international organizations.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), in consultation with the IASC Principals, issues the declaration of activation of a Level 3 emergency, on the basis of a joint analysis of the following **five criteria**:



Scale

This criterion refers to:

- the size of the affected areas;
- the number of affected or potentially affected people; and

the number of countries affected.



Urgency

The criterion of urgency considers:

- the level of population displacement;
- the intensity of armed conflict; and
- crude mortality rates.



Complexity

This element examines the **multi-layered aspect of the emergency**, considering, among other factors:

- whether multiple countries are affected;
- the presence of a multitude of actors;
- lack of humanitarian access; and
- high security risks to staff.



Capacity

This criterion takes into account **low national response capacity**, the status of the affected country as weak or fragile, and the fact that needs may outweigh the capacity of existing country and regional offices to respond. Conversely, **strong country level** or **international capacity** may offset the other criteria when considering an L3 declaration.



Reputational risk

Reputational risk considers:

- media and public attention and visibility;
- expectations of the humanitarian system by donors, the public, national stakeholders and partners.

The declaration of an L3 emergency triggers the activation of several mechanisms and tools to provide **technical** and **management support** and ensure the right **leadership, coordination** mechanisms and **accountability** framework

The example is the deployment of experts from the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM). To ensure that coordination mechanisms function well, humanitarian organizations deploy pre-identified experts, such as emergency coordinators, food security specialists, etc. The procedures specify that any such deployment must take into account existing capacity at field level, and aim to augment and support this - rather than replace it. In any major emergency, additional capacity is required in the early stages of response. The Transformative Agenda makes this deployment more predictable by pre-identifying senior and experienced staff who are on standby through the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM).

Example

A major typhoon has hit the country of Aristopulous. Based on the criteria of scale, urgency, complexity, capacity and reputational risk, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in consultation with the IASC, has just declared a Level 3 (L3) emergency and appointed a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in Aristopulous.

Low national response capacity, weak/fragile state, needs outweigh the capacity to respond.

Capacity criteria

Level of population displacement, intensity of armed conflict, crude mortality rates. *Urgency criteria*

Media and public attention and visibility, expectations of the humanitarian system by donors, the public, national stakeholders and partners. *Reputational Risk criteria*

Multi-layered emergency, multiple affected countries, presence of a multitude of actors, lack of humanitarian access, high security risks to staff, etc. *Complexity criteria*

Size of affected areas, number of affected / potentially affected people, number of countries affected. *Scale criteria*

✗ The declaration of an L3 emergency **does not designate the severity** of humanitarian needs.



Rather than being a direct indication of the severity of the crisis, an L3 declaration means that the situation requires a significant scale-up of the response from the humanitarian system.

However, obviously all countries with L3 designation suffer grave humanitarian consequences.

The activation of Clusters is NOT directly related to the declaration of an L3 emergency.

Clusters are activated whenever assessments show that national authorities are not in a position to cover coordination needs. For example, Clusters can also be activated in contexts of protracted crises that are not declared L3, and remain active after the L3 protocols have been deactivated.

Example | A Cluster is still active in the Central African Republic although the L3 protocols have been deactivated.



When a **government seeks international assistance**, this is NOT an implicit or explicit failure of the government.

On the contrary, it means that the government has made an analysis of the **scale of the disaster** in conjunction with its current **capacity to respond**. By seeking international assistance, governments are **acting responsibly** in their efforts to meet the needs of their people (their main priority).

The Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator (HC/RC) and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) are responsible for ensuring that the **coordination mechanisms adopted** are **aligned** with those of the government as far as possible, and **don't undermine** or duplicate the work of the government.

! Complementarity and support of existing systems are of paramount importance.

Priority tasks in the first week of a food crisis

During the **first week** of a food security crisis, it is important to establish the **appropriate coordination mechanisms** and the capacity required to support service delivery.

Country offices of Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA) jointly assess any **response and coordination capacity gap** for their sector and, in consultation with their HQ and the global clusters, take the following actions:

At the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) meeting, discuss the need for cluster activation, identify gaps and define inputs to joint assessments such as the Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA). The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) is a joint needs assessment tool that can be used in sudden onset emergencies, including IASC system-wide Level 3 emergency responses (L3 responses). It is a precursor to cluster/ sectoral needs assessments and provides a process for collecting and analysing information on affected people and their needs, so as to inform strategic response planning. The MIRA is explained in detail in Lesson “**Informing Common Strategic Decision-Making**”.

↓ If HC and HCT agree on activating the Cluster ↓

The HC communicates the decision to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who, in turn, consults with IASC principals and confirms or declines the decision.

↓ If the decision is confirmed ↓

CLAs immediately select and deploy a Cluster Coordinator and an Information Management Officer.



The Cluster Coordinator, together with partners:

- identifies the need for additional staff;
- defines the resource requirements for the Cluster and activities;
- prepares a response strategy and defines priority projects to be submitted by CLAs for initial Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERE) or pooled funds allocated by the HC.

Let's consider the standard operating procedures (SOP) to be followed in the first two weeks of an emergency, and the actors responsible for each activity.

Week 1 What (main task)	Who (responsibility)						
	OCHA	CLA	g-FSC	CC	IM	Partner	Adm
Establish the necessary cluster operational systems to guarantee secure and quality service delivery (office, communications, transport, staff, etc.).				×	×		×
Be engaged and/or lead the process of establishing/reactivating the Cluster (according to IASC guidance).		×		×	×		
Engage in necessary briefings and establish key initial contacts with stakeholders.				×	×		
Implement priority actions (according to the 48-hour Checklist included in the FS Coordination Handbook).				×			
Draw up a first week/days action plan, including all the key prioritized tasks that must be implemented in collaboration with the CLAs.				×			
Arrange visits and meetings with key actors and encourage them to be proactively integrated within the FSC.				×			
Encourage and organize cluster and inter-cluster coordination in order to avoid duplication and promote synergies and collaboration among partners and clusters.	×			×			
Organize and facilitate regular cluster meetings, according to humanitarian context (especially during the first week).				×	×		
Establish subnational level clusters where appropriate.	×	×		×			
Implement monitoring mechanisms to review progress and performance of the FSC.				×	×		

Establish a regular reporting routine (according to information needs/demands from HC, HCL, CLA , OCHA, partners and other key stakeholders).				X	X		
Develop a funding strategy for the cluster between the CLAs and finalize a CLA agreement to allow for cost sharing between the CLAs; embed the strategy in the resourcing infrastructure of either WFP/FAO (i.e. EMOP, SO - Special Operations, etc.).		X	X	X		X	
Establish a set of criteria among the CLAs, OCH and cluster partners/members for when the cluster should be deactivated.		X				X	
Undertake an Information Management (IM) capacity assessment/analysis.				X	X	X	
Designate and identify an IM Focal Point and facilitate IM (when necessary).				X			
Lead the process to set up an FSC IM System, possibly the FSC IM tool (according to procedures and steps included in the FS Coordination Handbook).					X		
Collect, process and analyse data for the FSC (according to the tasks and procedures described in the FS Coordination Handbook).					X		
Disseminate FSC data and information to key partners and stakeholders (according to standards and guidance provided in the FS Coordination Handbook).					X		
Undertake mapping of food security actors and share the information with key stakeholders at all times.					X		
Prepare reports supported/accompanied by maps and using GIS					X		

Identifying gaps and avoiding duplication

What to do in the event of weak existing national coordination mechanisms?

In the case of an existing national coordination mechanism that needs to be strengthened, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) may designate a **lead agency or co-lead agencies** for each priority sector to work with, and support the existing national coordination structure. Where clusters are found to be required, the HC (or RC) in consultation with HCT members proposes:

- ✓ a **set of clusters** appropriate to the particular country and situation, taking account of local conditions and government structures; and
- ✓ a **cluster lead agency (CLA)** or **co-lead agencies** for each cluster. The selection of CLAs should mirror global arrangements, but can at times differ from the global leadership structure, depending on the in-country presence and coordination capacities.

Example of weak national coordination

There is a crisis situation in Aristopulous; a typhoon has left many people with insufficient food, livelihood destruction and isolation. Essential elements of the cluster approach include close coordination and collaboration with government efforts and the building of national capacities. In Aristopulous, there is a functioning government that is able and willing to lead, help and contribute to the humanitarian response for all affected population groups.

In such cases, effective coordination and accountability should be assured wherever possible through **existing coordination mechanisms**, which should be strengthened as necessary.

What to do when there are too many people working on the same crisis, in the same country?

When there are large numbers of food security actors and stakeholders, decision-making at meetings of all potential cluster partners may be difficult to manage. In such cases, it is advisable to establish more efficient and **separate arrangements** for:

- ✓ **information sharing**, involving all cluster partners;
- ✓ **substantive discussion of issues and decision-making**, with smaller working groups, including representatives of all main actors and stakeholders.

Example

Somalia 2012

The number of food security actors in Somalia in 2012 was over 400, including a large number of national NGOs. While it was essential to have all those partners participating and sharing information, the decision-making process and in-depth analysis of important issues proved inefficient when everyone was involved. It was therefore decided to launch a transparent process, identifying a Strategic Advisory Group. This was a group of agencies which, using a representation system, would be charged with making the most important decisions.

Central African Republic 2013

The number of national organizations active in food security is very high, but after the 2013 crisis, a substantial number of international NGOs also scaled up their activities in the country. Coordination meetings were therefore very crowded and it was difficult for the small national NGOs to make their voices heard and follow strategic discussions effectively. It was therefore agreed among cluster partners for the national NGOs to appoint three representatives, who would participate in the strategic discussions on behalf of national organizations.

A separate meeting was then organized for national NGOs only, where the strategic discussions were reported and their implications discussed in detail. In this way, while they all remained cluster partners and had access to information, the decision-making process became more efficient.

Progress could be made on strategic decisions and priorities for response, while allowing national NGOs to focus on specific issues of concern to them.

The active participation of all partners allows the Food Security Cluster to clearly monitor the sector's performance and **produce a regular analysis of gaps and duplication in the sector's response**. In order for the analysis to be accurate, it is important that all partners, including the FSC co-lead agencies, contribute with information about their planned and achieved activities in a regular and detailed way.

Example

After the typhoon hit Aristopulous, the international NGO *Friends of Aristopulous* has received funding from a donor to provide food rations to families affected by the disaster. Friends of

Aristopulous has approached you as Food Security Cluster Coordinator to enquire about existing needs that are not covered by other organizations.

How do you proceed?

The best would be to check the gap analysis map produced by my Information Management Officer and suggest that *Friends of Aristopulous* intervenes in the area with the highest level of unmet needs.

It would be wrong to assume that all food needs are already covered by the World Food Programme and suggest that *Friends of Aristopulous* shifts its intervention to another sector. Even if the World Food Programme is present, that doesn't mean that all needs are covered. Also, The HRP is an appeal for funding and it is not compulsory for partners to submit a project for funding. As long as their intervention is in line with the sector strategy, they can operate in partnership with the Food Security Cluster

Inter-cluster and sector coordination

In addition to the Food Security Cluster, other clusters are normally activated to respond to the crisis, so **inter-cluster coordination is crucial**. **Inter-cluster coordination** plays a central and critical role in facilitating the development and achievement of an effective country **Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)** and **works across sectors** throughout all components of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) in a coherent and coordinated approach to planning and operationalizing the shared strategic objectives, as set out in the country HRP.



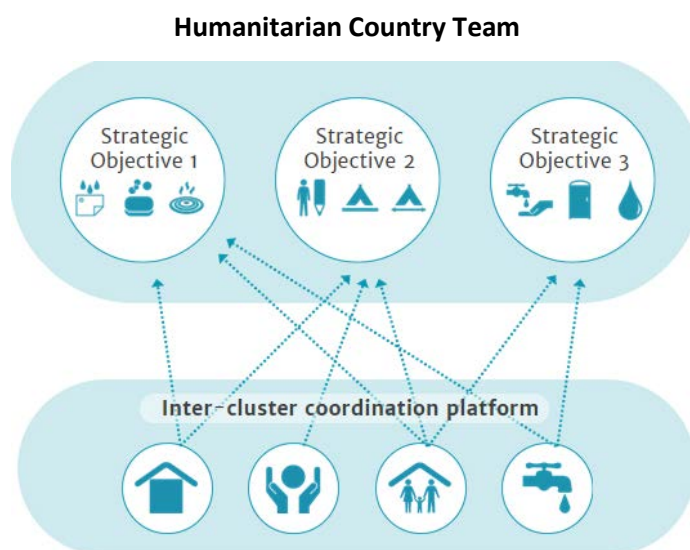
A description of inter-cluster coordination mechanisms is also available in **Lesson “The FSC at country level: Principles, roles, functions”**.

Under the **RC/HC's leadership**, the HCT provides overall strategic direction to the humanitarian community through the articulation of humanitarian response priorities in the form of country **strategic objectives (SO)**.

The SOs and the humanitarian context will determine the **priority sectors** to be targeted for their achievement. Some SOs may require **contributions from all clusters**, while others only from **limited groups of cluster**. This more limited group of clusters, potentially supported by HCT members, may come together to discuss specific strategies, their joint implementation and monitoring.





The country SOs are multi-sectoral in nature. Inter-cluster coordination therefore facilitates a process whereby multi-sectoral strategies are developed to ensure the complete achievement of each of the SOs.



The HCT and **all clusters need to be aware of overall progress** and any challenges, so as to ensure appropriate overall linkages as necessary.

Activities that contribute to the Strategic Objectives in the Inter-Cluster Coordination (ICC).

- 📌 HC or designate chairs inter-cluster coordination meetings on specific issues.
- 📌 The HC consults Cluster Coordinators and CLAs at specific intervals, for example, at regular monthly meetings or through the ICC.
- 📌 Specific HCT members are assigned to support planning, implementation and monitoring of specific strategic objectives.
- 📌 Specific Cluster Coordinators attend HCT meetings on thematic issues to provide technical and operational expertise.
- 📌 Cluster and inter-cluster meetings are sequenced, enabling them to feed issues into the HCT's agenda effectively.
- 📌 The HCT and inter-cluster meetings share notes of their meetings. 📌
- 📌 Cluster Coordinators influence HCT discussions via the ICC and their CLA representative.

-  The chair of the ICC participates in the HCT, to provide a link between the HCT and clusters.
-  The HC assigns mentors from the HCT to support Cluster Coordinators (outside their CLAs).


Linkages are identified between the SOs and sectors:

- ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined;
- encouraging synergies between sectors,
- closing potential gaps; and
- eliminating duplication.

In so doing, progress is made on the objective of delivering assistance to affected people in an effective and efficient manner.

Examples of linkages between SOs and sectors

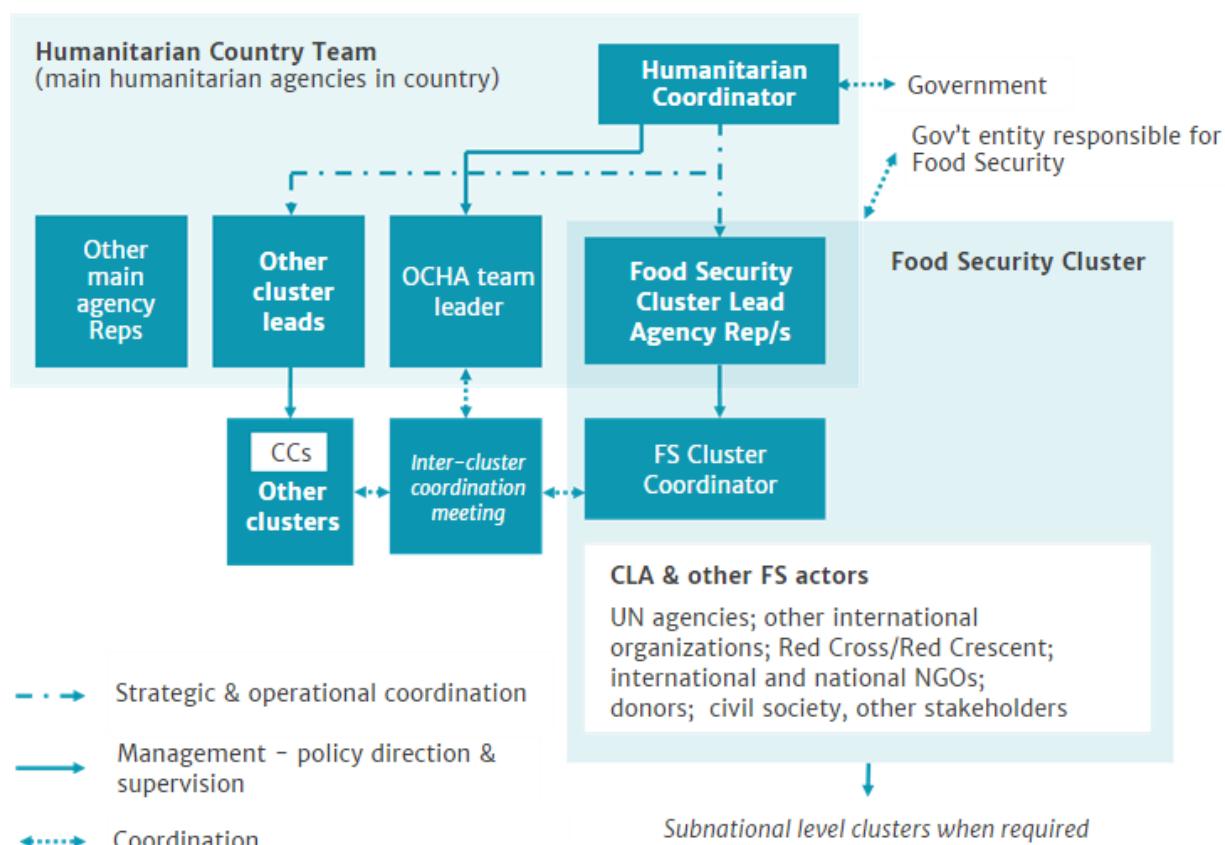
Inter-cluster response issue	Main clusters potentially concerned
Malnutrition	Nutrition, WASH, Food Security, Health.
Cholera	Health, WASH, Shelter, CCCM.
Housing reconstruction strategies	Shelter, WASH, Protection, CCCM.
Child protection	Education, Protection, WASH, Shelter.
Mental health	Health, Protection, Education.
Early recovery strategies -rubble removal	Shelter, Logistics, Protection.
Population movement	CCCM, Protection and potentially all clusters.

 Inter-cluster coordination critically provides linkages between the strategic direction of the HCT and the operationalization and implementation of its strategic objectives by clusters.

Coordination platform and mechanisms

FS Cluster in a typical humanitarian coordination structure at country level

A typical humanitarian coordination structure at country level and how the Food Security



Summary

The **cluster approach** is intended to strengthen, **not replace**, any existing sectoral **coordination mechanisms**.

The declaration of an L3 emergency is a recognition of the **scale**, **complexity** and **urgency** of the crisis, but also the lack of existing **capacity** to effectively respond to the needs and related **reputational risks** for the humanitarian system. An L3 declaration is an assertion by the IASC that a crisis **requires system-wide mobilization**, so as to significantly increase the scale of the response and improve the overall effectiveness of assistance.

During the **first week** of a food security crisis, it is important to establish the **appropriate coordination mechanisms** and the capacity required to support service delivery. If an **existing national coordination mechanism** is already in place, it is critical for the coordination platform to identify gaps and avoid duplication.

When there are large numbers of actors and stakeholders, it is advisable to establish separate arrangements for **information sharing** (involving partners) and for discussing **issues and decision-making** (with small groups of representatives of all the main actor/stakeholder groups).

In addition to the Food Security Cluster, other clusters are normally activated to respond to the crisis, so **inter-cluster coordination is crucial**.