

# NGO CLUSTER CO-COORDINATION

**MANUAL**



**TOOLS AND GUIDANCE**

NORWEGIAN

**NRC**

## Preamble

This manual with tools and guidance on NGO co-coordination<sup>1</sup> of clusters and sector working groups was developed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to guide country offices that engage in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. The manual is the outcome of an NRC survey on cluster co-coordination and a Co-coordinators workshop, carried out in September 2013. It is shared externally to allow other agencies to draw on NRC's experiences, with the aim that such exchange can contribute to joint strengthening and promotion of NGO co-coordination in humanitarian response.

The IASC cluster approach was adopted as a key strategy to address the gaps and coordination problems during a humanitarian response, and it has endorsed NGO co-coordination as a good practice. Numerous evaluations have found that co-coordinated clusters "produce positive benefits by improving partnership, advocacy and information for a better response".<sup>2</sup> Importantly, NRC believes this manual may also be useful for NGO co-coordination of non-cluster mechanisms, e.g. in refugee situations. To-date, NRC has taken on coordination roles for protection, shelter/NFI and education clusters, sector working groups and task forces in a variety of humanitarian contexts.

The manual includes:

1. Key messages from a survey among NRC Co-coordinators
2. Guidance note: Entry and exit criteria for co-coordination
3. Guidance note: Developing a Memorandum of Understanding
4. Guidance note: Developing Co-coordinator Terms of Reference
5. Guidance note: Developing a log frame for an NGO co-coordination proposal
6. Guidance note: Linking clusters at national and provincial level

There are also two more NRC internal documents, namely a full survey analysis and a guidance note on internal set-up within the NRC country office.

The manual is developed with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms co-coordination and co-coordinator are applied in this manual for consistency and to denote an equal partnership.

<sup>2</sup> IASC: Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level (2012):

[https://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/iasc-coordination-reference%20module-en\\_0.pdf](https://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/iasc-coordination-reference%20module-en_0.pdf)

## **NRC AND CLUSTER CO-COORDINATION: KEY MESSAGES BASED ON OUR STAFF'S EXPERIENCES**

*In 2013, The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) carried out a survey on NRC and Cluster Co-coordination<sup>3</sup> among staff members in Co-coordinator roles and Country Directors (CDs). 20 staff members responded to this survey that was supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It aimed to provide an overview of the experiences of NRC country programmes of cluster/sector working group engagement, and to better understand the challenges Co-coordinators encounter in their work, the added value of NRC playing this role, and the need for further guidance and support from NRC. This document provides a summary of key survey findings:*

1. **Added value:** NGO Co-coordinators should be considered an added value to clusters as strategic partners in coordination and decision-making by: Strengthening NGO participation; providing diversity in management, facilitation, technical and programming expertise and geographical access; promoting inclusive cluster priorities and approaches; and facilitating outreach and advocacy. Co-coordinators should not be considered a replacement or substitute for resources from the Lead Agency (e.g. secretarial support). It is generally agreed that NGO co-coordination contributes to increased participation and buy-in from INGOs, but there is less visible effect vis-à-vis local NGOs. An active, visible cluster with a strong NGO voice and where NGOs can pursue their agenda is key to increase buy-in.
2. **Prioritization of tasks and time management:** Secretarial/administrative tasks, meeting facilitation and representation and information exchange are the most time-consuming tasks. 50% of Co-coordinators agree there is a tendency to confine their role to that of a secretariat and time constraints mean that priority is not given to analysis and strategic planning. Co-coordinators would like to share secretarial and 'day-to-day' tasks with the Coordinator and Lead agency to be able to prioritize strategic and technical work.
3. **Formal arrangements:** MOUs with the Lead Agency and TORs for the Co-coordinator role are important to clarify roles, responsibilities and reporting lines, and to ensure both agencies are viewed as equal partners. However, only a minority of clusters/sector working groups surveyed have MOUs in place. MOUs and TORs should be developed and implemented, while regular engagement by senior management in NRC and the Lead Agency is key to manage relationships and expectations.
4. **Conflicts of interest:** The most common conflicts of interest experienced by the Co-coordinators include NRC proposals or projects where the Cluster Lead Agency is the donor, programmatic issues and advocacy, such as pursuing an agenda that goes against the Lead Agency's interests. Pooled funding applications from NRC are not reported to cause major conflicts of interest.
5. **Challenges in coordination:** According to a majority of survey respondents, insufficient resources and support for cluster/sector working group functions are the most challenging coordination issues faced. The need for additional funding and resources for coordination work was raised numerous times.
6. **Co-coordinator skills:** The most important skills to effectively perform in the role are analytical, strategic planning and drafting skills, as well as facilitation and information sharing skills.

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<sup>3</sup> In some countries NRC coordinates, rather than co-coordinates, clusters, sector working groups or task forces, for easy reference, and to denote an equal partnership, the terms 'Co-coordinator' and 'co-coordination' are used. Similarly, 'cluster' is used with reference to different coordination mechanisms.

7. **National and provincial clusters:** Co-coordinators often experience a weak relationship between the national and the provincial clusters, with *ad hoc* information sharing and without shared priorities. If more time were available, national Co-coordinators would like to prioritize support to provincial clusters. Developing best practice, based on an exchange of experiences between countries and clusters, could help generate ideas and systems to strengthen these links.
8. **Interaction with global clusters:** There is infrequent contact with global clusters; 50% of Co-coordinators have not had any contact in the last 12 months, illustrating weak bridging between different levels of coordination. A majority of Co-coordinators would like closer interaction, for example, to share information on field concerns and priorities.
9. **NGO Co-coordinators and Cluster interaction:** The most frequent, varied and comprehensive interaction occurs where NRC Co-coordinators spend 50% or more of their time on coordination work. Funding for a full-time Co-coordinator would strengthen interaction with other NGO Co-coordinators and among clusters in general, as well as the relationship with provincial clusters.
10. **NRC organisational set-up:** Both the dedicated Co-coordinator role and combining co-coordination with an internal NRC role have pros and cons. A 'double-hatted' role is likely to work best if there is:
  - Some alignment between cluster and NRC strategies and priorities;
  - Staff support available for cluster coordination and/or internal NRC tasks;
  - Other NRC staff engaging with clusters and representing NRC in meetings.
11. **Benefits of co-ordination for NRC:** The main benefits are of a strategic character, namely improved access to information, strengthened profile and reputation, access to decision makers and contribution to a more effective humanitarian response; these are also linked to HCT roles. Stronger alignment of cluster and NRC priorities as well as multi-year cluster strategies may facilitate more mutually beneficial synergies in programme and advocacy. It is of note that the main benefits are not related to pooled funding.
12. **Costs of co-ordination for NRC:** Coordination work *can* take time and focus away from internal tasks; in particular this is the experience of some Co-coordinators in combined roles (who are allocated less than 50% of their time to cluster work). The majority did not identify 'reputational risk' or risk to NRC's independence as a main institutional cost.
13. **Entry and exit criteria:** When deciding whether NRC should enter into or exit from a Co-coordinator role, the most important criteria for CDs are:
  - Entry criteria: (1) contribute to improving humanitarian response; (2) strengthen NRC profile and reputation; and (3) improve access to decision-making processes and decision-makers.
  - Exit criteria: (1) negative impact on NRC's profile and reputation; (2) diversion of time and focus from core tasks within NRC; and (3) problematic relationship with the Lead Agency.
14. **Funding of co-ordination:** NRC incurs an estimated annual cost of 750,000 USD on co-ordination work globally (Afghanistan, Colombia, DR Congo, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestine and South Sudan). Donors include DFID (PPA), ECHO, NMFA, PRM (US), SIDA, UNHCR and UNICEF.
15. **Exchanging experiences:** Co-coordinators highlight that exchange of experiences and best practice among clusters/sector working groups is particularly valuable, and helps them perform better in their role. To enable this, NRC held a Co-coordinator workshop in September 2013.

**GUIDANCE NOTE:**  
**ENTRY AND EXIT CRITERIA FOR NRC CO-COORDINATION**

*NOTE: It is recommended that every agency considering engaging in cluster co-coordination carry out an analysis of entry and exit criteria. The specific criteria included here reflect NRC's thinking on the issue, which might or might not be (fully) applicable to other agencies.*

## **A. Purpose and Rationale**

The overarching purpose and added value of NRC cluster/sector co-coordination is to:

- Strengthen coordination and performance to improve effectiveness of the humanitarian response;
- Strengthen the NGO voice and participation in humanitarian coordination;
- Participate in and influence the humanitarian system.

The purpose of NRC co-coordination is *not* to substitute or replace resources and capacity from the Lead Agency. In such cases, it is recommended to explore the possibility for an NRC-secondment. If the Lead Agency phases out of cluster/sector working group (SWG) in a location or province, NRC can consider taking up the Coordinator role. In such cases entry criteria should be applied to avoid taking up a role 'by default'.

### **Guidance:**

- Carefully consider whether each criterion is met before entering into or exiting from a co-coordination arrangement.
- Entry and exit criteria in **bold** are mandatory and must be met, while the remaining are optional.

## **B. Entry and Exit Criteria**

### **Entry Criteria**

All mandatory criteria and a significant total number of entry criteria should be met for NRC senior country management to decide to enter into a co-coordination arrangement.

### **Will NRC co-coordination:**

1. **Support and strengthen cluster/SWG coordination and performance, and contribute to improved effectiveness of the humanitarian response?**
2. **Increase and enhance NGO participation and representation in coordination and joint response?**
3. Improve linkages between national and provincial levels and broaden geographic coverage?
4. Strengthen NGO knowledge, influence and participation in strategic planning and funding processes?
5. Improve transparency in cluster/SWG planning and decision making processes?
6. Improve technical support to the cluster/SWG and partners?
7. Strengthen access to decision-making processes and decision-makers to improve advocacy?
8. Improve NGO access to information on the humanitarian and political/security situation?

**Are the following conditions (prerequisites) in place:**

9. **NRC willingness to commit time, resources (funding) and capacity to co-coordination?**
10. **Availability of, or likelihood to succeed in recruiting, appropriate NRC staff for the role?**
11. **Appropriate (preferably corresponding) level of coordination resources from Lead Agency?**
12. **NGO community and/or cluster/SWG partners' perceived need for co-coordination?**
13. **Support from cluster/SWG NGO partners for NRC taking up Co-coordinator role?**
14. Donor support for NGO co-coordination and available, or opportunities for, funding?
15. Certain degree of cluster/SWG and NRC strategy alignment to enable synergies in programmes and advocacy, and complementarity of roles?

Finally, consider occurrence or risk of exit criteria at this stage. If a significant number of exit criteria are met, NRC should strongly consider *not* entering into co-coordination arrangements.

**Exit Criteria**

If a significant number of exit criteria are met, NRC should review/reconsider its co-coordination role. Senior country management makes the final decision on exit.

**Does NRC co-coordination:**

1. **Negatively impact on NRC's profile and reputation?**
2. **Severely compromise NRC's (and cluster/SWG's) independence?**
3. Suffer under constant belittlement and abuse of the co-coordination role being used purely as a secretariat by the Lead Agency/Coordinator, with no/minor added value of NGO co-coordination (ref. entry criteria)?
4. Lead to diversion of time, focus or resources (funding) from core tasks or programmes within NRC (especially for a combined/double-hatted role)?
5. **Lead to/suffer under an unsustainable relationship with the Lead Agency with all avenues for dispute mitigation and resolution in MOU exhausted?**

**Are the following conditions in place:**

6. **Lack of funding and resources for cluster co-coordination?**
7. **Complete lack of synergies and alignment of strategic priorities (programmes and advocacy)?**
8. Local NGO actor willing and able to take over co-coordination role?
9. **NRC exit from country or sector?**
10. Significant change of coordination set-up (e.g. transition to development/phase out of cluster approach)?

**Possible exit scenarios and strategies:**

11. NRC takes up (co-) coordination role in a task force/sub-working group.
12. NRC hands over to another NGO Co-coordinator.
13. NRC reaches end of term as Co-coordinator and does not take re-election or renew MOU with Lead Agency.

**GUIDANCE NOTE:  
DEVELOPING AN MOU ON CO-COORDINATION  
BETWEEN NRC AND THE LEAD AGENCY**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NRC and the Cluster Lead Agency<sup>4</sup> can help both parties develop a shared understanding of the purpose of, and expectations towards, the co-ordination arrangement. It can also be used to mitigate or address some of the tensions, communication issues or conflicts, which could arise during the course of a co-ordination or partnership arrangement.<sup>5</sup> Such problems can arise due to a lack of clarity and agreement on the purpose or objective of co-ordination, roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, accountability, resource allocation and NRC advocacy concerns.

### **A. MOU Guidance Note**

#### **How can an MOU help?**

- The process of negotiating and developing an MOU can help establish a partnership mentality.
- Addresses difference of expectations between NRC and the Lead Agency and helps to develop a common shared understanding.
- Ensures that both organisations are fully vested in the relationship, including regular engagement at the level of senior managers.
- Provides clarity on reporting lines and accountability. The concerns of both NRC and the Lead Agency should be addressed in the MOU with appropriate recognition of the Lead Agency's role as defined by the IASC.
- Helps promote an equitable partnership by establishing a clear distinction between the cluster co-ordination relationship and a possible donor/implementing partner relationship.
- Provides clarity on resource allocation by both parties, including staffing.
- Helps to provide a standard approach to co-ordination that can vary between individual staff members.
- Promotes trustworthiness in conduct, at the level of organisations as well as individuals, particularly in terms of managing sensitive information and working in accordance with the agreed arrangement.
- Outlines approaches for directly raising advocacy concerns related to the humanitarian response that may arise between the two parties.
- Provides a mechanism for monitoring of the arrangement and dispute resolution if need be.

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<sup>4</sup> This MOU refers to the IASC Cluster approach, which has endorsed NGO co-ordination as a good practice. NRC also co-ordinates sector working groups, e.g. in refugee situations, and recommends the MOU for this coordination mechanism as well.

<sup>5</sup> This MOU uses the terms co-ordination and Co-coordinator throughout. It is recommended that where possible such terms be maintained to denote an equal partnership.

## **Who develops it?**

- Cluster partners should be engaged in initial discussions around the co-coordination agreement, on the added value and their expectations towards coordination.
- The co-coordinating organisations (NRC and Cluster Lead Agency) should reach a common understanding of the expectations towards, and added value of, co-coordination arrangements beyond simply shared workload.

## **Guidance for negotiating an MOU**

### *Process*

- Negotiate details of the MOU with the Cluster Lead Agency before presenting a template or draft.
- When designing and negotiating the MOU keep in mind the above-mentioned problems and predict possible future tension.
- Although negotiation of the MOU should be led by the NRC Country Director and Cluster Lead Agency, where possible the NRC Co-coordinator and cluster Coordinator should be involved in the negotiations and drafting.
- NRC should consider the entry and exit criteria when drafting the MOU and negotiating with the Cluster Lead Agency (see Guidance note on entry and exit criteria).

### *Funding Relationship*

- Keep in mind any donor/implementing partner relationship that you might have with the Cluster Lead Agency. Openly discuss this with the Lead Agency and clarify the importance of keeping a clear distinction between programmatic and coordination issues to maintain an equal co-coordination partnership.
- Funding of the NRC Co-coordinator by the Cluster Lead Agency is strongly discouraged, unless in exceptional circumstances, as this can heavily impact on the equity of the arrangement and can impact on the independence of the NRC Co-coordinator and their added value as an NGO co-chair.

### *Content*

- Be specific.
- Ensure that the MOU gives adequate recognition to the lead role that has been taken on by the Cluster Lead Agency. This could raise certain issues with regards to decision-making, accountability and representation of the Cluster that would require sensitive negotiation.
- Ensure that the MOU does not only outline what NRC will do, but gives equal weight to both partners, also outlining what the Cluster Lead Agency is responsible for.

## **MOU negotiation: Lessons learned on the added value of NGO co-coordination**

The cluster approach was adopted by the IASC as a key strategy to address the gaps and coordination problems during a humanitarian response. The aim of the cluster approach at the country level is to strengthen humanitarian response by setting high standards of predictability, accountability, and

partnership in all sectors or areas of activity. The success of the cluster approach can be judged by the impact it has on improving the humanitarian response for people affected by disasters.<sup>6</sup>

The IASC designated global 'cluster leads' for 11 sectors of humanitarian activity. The cluster leads are UN agencies and IOM.<sup>7</sup> Leads were designated to provide predictable leadership, strengthen coordination and partnership with other humanitarian actors. Co-leadership of clusters by NGO Co-coordinators has been endorsed as good practice by several independent evaluations. The recommendations of the most recent evaluation of the cluster approach stress that 'NGOs, especially if they act as co-leads or co-facilitators, enhance the legitimacy of clusters, facilitate outreach and communication, at times have valuable experiences with participatory approaches and working with local partners'.<sup>8</sup> The same report finds that placing NGOs in co-coordination roles 'improves information sharing, strengthens humanitarian advocacy power and enhances coherence'.<sup>9</sup>

According to independent evaluations the specific added value of NGO co-coordination includes:

- Diversity in management and facilitation skills and style
  - Improves consistency and internal management of cluster activities
  - Increases transparency of cluster management
- Diversification of technical expertise within cluster leadership
  - Improves analysis, use of analysis and reporting
  - Brings specific technical expertise to cluster management
- Diversification within cluster leadership of access to geographical areas and issues of concern
  - Improves links between national and provincial clusters
  - Improves understanding of specific issues or geographical areas that need to be addressed by the cluster
- Broadens partnerships and encourages greater inclusivity and participation by organisations
  - Improves participation of diverse organisations and individuals (national and international), along with greater diversity of capabilities and perspectives
  - Improves links between different clusters and between national and provincial clusters
  - Sends a clear message that humanitarianism works best when based on partnership between UN and non UN actors
- Better programming results
  - More timely and greater relevance of coordinated responses to identified concerns
- Greater capacity and accountability for the cluster to speak out on issues of concern

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<sup>6</sup> IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response, 24 November 2006

<sup>7</sup> IFRC has taken on a convening role for the shelter cluster in situations of natural disaster; however they have not taken on the role of provider of last resort and are not accountable to the UN system. To reflect this, they have an MOU with UN OCHA in which they are defined as a convener.

<sup>8</sup> IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, Synthesis Report 2010:

<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-products-common&tempid=99>

<sup>9</sup> IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, Synthesis Report 2010 (ibid)

## B. MOU template

### Memorandum of Understanding Cluster Lead Agency and NRC Agreement on Cluster Co-Coordination

#### I. Background

- *The background section introduces the two parties to the MOU, describes the specific country context and could briefly outline the added value of cluster co-ordination.*

*[Insert country specific background of cluster structure, launch date, geographical coverage and sub-groups.]*

*[Insert name of the Lead Agency]* is the Global Lead Agency for the *[Insert Cluster Name]* as designated by the IASC and takes overall responsibility for the proper and effective functioning of the Cluster.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent, humanitarian, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, which provides assistance, protection and durable solutions to refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. NRC promotes and protects the rights of people who have been forced to flee their countries, or their homes within their countries. NRC provides humanitarian assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, including through education, shelter, information counselling and legal assistance, food security, water, sanitation and hygiene. To-date, NRC has taken on coordination roles for protection, shelter/NFI and education clusters, sector working groups and task forces in a variety of humanitarian contexts.

*[Insert NRC country-specific experience in the sector and in cluster coordination].*

#### II. Objective of co-ordination of the *[Insert Cluster Name]*

- *The Objective section should outline a shared understanding of the overall purpose and outcomes of co-ordination and what will be achieved.*
- *The specific outcomes will need to be negotiated with the Cluster Lead Agency and should be considered alongside the NRC entry criteria (ref. Guidance note on entry and exit criteria).*
- *Be careful to be specific and realistic so as not to raise expectations of the Lead Agency or overload the NRC Co-coordinator with impossible tasks.*
- *Consider these in parallel with the objectives as laid out in the NRC project proposal and log frame for co-ordination (if applicable).*
- *Below are some suggested outcomes for the MOU and the broader partnership between NRC and the Cluster Lead Agency; note that these will need to be adapted to the specific country context.*

The overarching objective of the co-ordination agreement between *[insert Cluster Lead Agency name]* and NRC is to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response of the *[Insert name of the Cluster]* in accordance with the Cluster TORs and the IASC guidelines to meet high standards of transparency, predictability and accountability to affected communities.

In line with the Cluster activities outlined in the TORs (see attached) it is expected that co-ordination of the *[Insert name of the Cluster]* by Cluster Lead Agency and NRC will result in the following outcomes:

- Increased diversity of organisations participating in the *[Insert name of the Cluster]* and in its various sub-groups, with an improved representation of all its partners
- Broader geographic coverage of response coordination
- Improved monitoring, reporting, and response mechanisms in priority areas where gaps exist
- Improved capacity for regional or provincial clusters to analyse existing information and ensure commitments to meet critical identified gaps
- Increased capacity for strategic planning and funding processes
- Increased capacity for the Cluster to develop key messages for advocacy purposes
- Improved outreach to mainstream sector concerns throughout other Clusters

### **III. Time Frame**

- *This section defines the timeframe of the MOU.*
- *A minimum timeframe of one year is recommend to support predictability and continuity.*
- *The MOU should be a living document that is revisited on a regular basis.*

The timeframe of this MOU will last for one year from the date of signing. After such time it will be reviewed and the agreement can be revised and extended with the consent of both agencies.

### **IV. Geographic Coverage**

- *This section defines the geographic responsibilities of each partner.*
- *It is an advantage to co-ordinate at the provincial as well as national level where possible to reinforce the link with NRC field operations as well as facilitate information sharing.*
- *Consider including an agreement on the applicability of the MOU in situations or geographical locations where either of the parties plans to phase out.*

The Cluster Lead Agency Coordinator and NRC Co-coordinator based at the national level will support and coordinate the Provincial Clusters and facilitate the link between the different levels.

*[Insert geographical areas to be covered by both parties]*

### **V. Roles and Responsibilities**

- *This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of both parties to the MOU. These should be discussed and negotiated between the two organisations, including, where possible, Co-coordinators themselves.*
- *Specific tasks should be based on the strengths of the staff and the needs, and gaps, of the cluster.*
- *You may also need to clarify the roles and responsibilities at different geographical levels.*

#### **a) Generic Tasks**

The NRC Co-coordinator will support the Lead Agency Coordinator to carry out activities outlined in the Cluster TOR. Activities will be shared and divided according to agreed priorities and strengths of the personnel assigned. Both organisations are responsible for undertaking tasks outlined in the IASC cluster guidelines; however, the Lead Agency maintains the sole responsibility for being the provider of last resort.

The Lead Agency Coordinator and NRC Co-coordinator will be equally responsible for coming to an agreement on a joint work plan that outlines their specific tasks and timeframes.

#### **b) Specific Tasks**

- *When developing this section, please refer to country specific TORs for the Cluster as well as for the Co-coordinator (ref. Guidance note on Co-coordinator TOR).*
- *Unless specifically agreed otherwise, information management should be the responsibility of the Lead Agency.*
- *Tasks should be defined in accordance with cluster planning documents (to be attached) and the strengths of NRC and the Lead Agency; this might include emphasis on strengthening NGO participation, supporting provincial clusters, supporting advocacy, developing strategy etc. (ref. Guidance note on developing Co-coordinator TOR).*
- *It is important to ensure that secretarial functions are shared and do not disproportionately fall on the NRC Co-coordinator. NRC should be treated as a strategic partner.*

#### **VI. Representation of the Cluster**

When representing the Cluster both the Lead Agency Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator commit to neutrally representing the Cluster and not their parent organisation.

Whenever possible, meetings that relate to the Cluster, inter-cluster or cluster representation should be attended together. For example, when the Cluster is invited to the HCT and other inter-sector coordination fora, both Coordinators should be able to represent the cluster.

Where this is not possible, representation at meetings should be equally and strategically divided through mutual agreement. In any meeting where one party is not present, key talking points should be agreed prior to the meeting and outcomes or minutes of meetings be communicated afterwards.

#### **VII. Information Sharing**

Both the Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator commit to sharing all information that relates to the management of the Cluster openly with each other. Clear lines of communication will be established to this end.

#### **VIII. Cluster Decision Making**

- *This section has potential to be contentious and it may be worth developing a variety of options for joint or shared decision-making, giving recognition to the lead role of the Cluster Lead Agency.*

Both the Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator commit to aim for joint decision-making in all aspects of cluster management, strategy and activities. In specific cases *[define]* the Lead Agency maintains the right to take a final decision.

#### **IX. Reporting Lines**

The NRC Co-coordinator reports internally to NRC on the development and implementation of work plans.

The Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator reports internally to the Lead Agency.

Both the Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator will ensure that a joint work plan for their activities, including reporting lines and management structures, is developed and adhered to.

The respective line managers of the Coordinators will meet on a quarterly basis to review and discuss the coordination arrangement, with an aim to identify any capacity gaps and address challenges arising.

#### **X. Accountability**

- *When negotiating this section please note that, due to their lead role, and their role as provider of last resort, this can be a sensitive issue for the Lead Agency.*
- *It is recommended that the IASC should develop guidelines on this.*

Both parties are ultimately accountable to the affected populations they commit to serve. The Cluster Coordinator and NRC Co-coordinator commit to promoting and strengthening accountability to affected populations among cluster partners.

Both the Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator, having committed to neutrally representing the views of the Cluster as a whole, are accountable to the Cluster partners for ensuring that the Cluster is functioning to its highest standards.

Both parties will encourage participation of a broad range of stakeholders (including UN Agencies, international and local NGOs, CBOs and government where appropriate) in all cluster meetings, activities and mechanisms, such as the Strategic Advisory Group, Peer Review Teams or similar.

In accordance with the IASC guidelines, the Cluster Lead Agency is accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator and is also the provider of last resort.

#### **XI. Resource Allocation**

- *This section outlines the minimal resources, including staff resources, which both parties commit to provide. This will include the Cluster Coordinator and Co-coordinator themselves.*
- *This section will help you establish predictability of staffing. The IASC guidelines ask for predictability within cluster coordination. High turnover of staff can lead to a loss of institutional memory and can negatively impact on relationships with cluster partners, with the host*

*government as well as placing a strain on the relationship between the Cluster Coordinator and Co-coordinator.*

- *You may also wish to negotiate the additional staff/support staff required (such as an information management officer, reporting, monitoring and secretarial support). As defined by IASC guidelines, the Cluster Lead Agency has overall responsibility for provision of staff to support Information Management. They should also not expect the Co-coordinator to take on more secretarial tasks than the Cluster Coordinator.*

Both parties are responsible for ensuring that staff with adequate skills in coordination, with sufficient access to technical knowledge and ability related to the sector, are in place and actively supported to carry out the roles required for cluster coordination.

To the extent possible, NRC and the Cluster Lead Agency will ensure that they each identify one staff member for cluster coordination. That staff member will be maintained throughout the duration of the MOU to ensure predictability and continuity of coordination.

*[Insert the additional support staff to be provided by the Lead Agency and where applicable by NRC]*

## **XII. Partnership building between NRC and the Cluster Lead Agency**

- *To the extent possible, the Cluster Coordinator and the Co-coordinator should present a common position with one voice; in order to do this they need to develop a strong partnership. Maintaining a strong co-ordination partnership may, in some circumstances, restrict NRC's public advocacy with the Cluster Lead. Alternative forums thus need to be provided to share and express any concerns with the Cluster Lead Agency, and advocate for change.*

Both parties commit to building the relationship between the Cluster Coordinator and NRC Co-coordinator, as well as their capacity to better support the Cluster, for example through the joint attendance of cluster coordination training or through joint meetings with the Global *[Insert name of the Cluster]* Cluster.

The parties should provide each other with space for critical engagement and constructive advice related to Cluster coordination and management of the humanitarian response. The parties must ensure that such advice is shared in an appropriate forum and handled diplomatically to foster partnership and consensus between the agencies. This could take place during the quarterly management meetings outlined above or within specific *ad hoc* meetings as required.

## **XIII. Responsibility to communicate the coordination relationship**

Both parties are responsible for communicating the Cluster co-ordination relationship, including the respective roles and responsibilities of the two parties, to all stakeholders including the Humanitarian Coordinator, Cluster partners, the Global *[Insert name of the Cluster]* Cluster and the host Government.

#### **XIV. Mechanisms for Dispute Mitigation and Resolution**

In case of any disagreement regarding the understanding of the implementation of this MOU, an open dialogue, with reference to the MOU and other supporting documents, will be undertaken between the Lead Agency Cluster Coordinator and the NRC Co-coordinator.

Should this not be successful the issue will be referred to the respective line managers. This can be taken up during the quarterly meetings, unless there is a need for an urgent resolution.

As a last resort, the dispute should be taken to the NRC Country Director and the Lead Agency Country Representative.

#### **XV. Security**

➤ *This section is more important for certain country programmes than others. However, it is important to discuss this with the Cluster Lead Agency. In some countries NRC's low profile means that NRC staff are not allowed to travel in large armed convoys or with UN marked vehicles. This could possibly impact on the ability to attend meetings together or carry out joint assessments.*

Each party maintains responsibility for the security of its staff. Each individual party's security protocol will apply to their respective staff.

All activities that fall under this MOU are proposed on the assumption that security conditions allow, as assessed by the respective agency.

#### **XVI. Phase-out and Exit**

➤ *Situations sometimes arise that lead one of the parties to the MOU to phase out of cluster coordination in certain locations. This may be due to a change in security, funding or the humanitarian situation. If this could be the case in your country context, it is important to discuss this during the preparation of the MOU. Inclusion of this eventuality within the MOU will help avoid tensions that might arise if assumptions are made that one party will continue cluster coordination on their own or with minimum support from the other party.*

In situations where either party is considering phasing out of cluster co-ordination they should inform the other party of this potentiality.

*[Insert information on NRC and/or Cluster Lead response and actions, should the other party exit cluster coordination]*

**Lead Agency Country Representative**

**NRC Country Director**

Place and Date:

Place and Date:

**Annexed Supporting Documents:**

➤ *The following documents should be available to support the Cluster, and the partnership agreement between NRC and the Lead Agency:*

- TORs for the Coordinator and the Co-coordinator role
- Work plan and division of responsibilities between the Cluster Coordinator and the Co-coordinator
- Cluster work plan, strategy and/or TOR
- Other supporting documents for the management of the Cluster

**GUIDANCE NOTE:  
DEVELOPING A CO-COORDINATOR TOR**

This is a generic Terms of reference (TOR) template for NRC country programme staff that co-ordinate clusters or sector working groups (SWG). It should be used as guidance when developing the Co-coordinator TOR specific to the country and cluster/SWG, taking into account:

- Needs and priorities of the cluster/SWG and its partners;
- Areas of cluster work that NRC will emphasize and the added value of NGO co-coordination;
- Co-coordinator is dedicated to the cluster/SWG or combined with an internal NRC role;
- National or provincial level co-coordination;
- Other context specific issues and needs.

For overarching principles on co-coordination arrangements, concerning purpose or objectives, time frame, roles and responsibilities (division of tasks), representation, information sharing, decision-making, reporting lines, accountability, resource allocation, dispute resolution and other issues, please refer to the Guidance note on developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Lead Agency and NRC. The country specific TOR should be based on the MOU.

### **A. TOR Guidance Note**

#### **How can a TOR help?**

- Prioritizes activities based on a shared workload with the Coordinator to mitigate some challenges with co-coordination, such as overwhelming workload, high expectations, insufficient resources and support for cluster functions and ensuring an equal partnership.
- Captures the Co-coordinator's role and responsibilities in a realistic way, taking into account the time available, which is particularly important if the role is combined with internal NRC responsibilities.
- Reflects NRC's focus and the added value of NGO co-coordination, as NRC cannot do *all* cluster/SWG activities. For example, it may be possible to provide more secretarial support in a dedicated role, while prioritizing strategic and/or technical work in a combined role.
- Helps manage expectations to the Co-coordinator as it clarifies which specific coordination activities and outputs NRC intends to support.
- Enables, together with the NRC and the Lead Agency MOU and the cluster/SWG TOR, a common understanding of the Co-coordinator role and addresses any differences in expectations. Coherence among these documents set out a clear direction for the Co-coordinator's work.

#### **Who develops it?**

- The TOR should be developed and approved by NRC management, i.e. the Co-coordinator's line manager and Country Director (CD). Where possible, the NRC Co-coordinator should be involved/consulted in drafting of the TOR.
- It is recommended to consult the Lead Agency and Coordinator to ensure a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and division of labour from the outset of co-coordination. This is in line with the principles of partnership and collaboration in humanitarian coordination.

- If appropriate, the Lead Agency may also be consulted or participate in the recruitment; however, NRC should always have the final word in selection and appointment of any candidate.
- Planning for recruitment is essential to enable staff deployment at commencement of the co-ordination arrangement.

### **Developing a TOR**

- The TOR should be developed based on the principles agreed in the MOU between the Lead Agency and NRC (see Guidance note on developing an MOU).
- Terminology: The template TOR uses 'co-ordination' and 'Co-coordinator' throughout. It is recommended to maintain such terms where possible to denote an equal partnership.
- Reporting lines should be internal to NRC. Dual reporting lines are *not* recommended.
- The generic TOR/job description distinguishes between 'core' and 'optional' activities/outputs:
  - Core activities/outputs are essential to coordination and should, where possible, be included in a TOR, even if the Co-coordinator is not dedicated to the cluster/SWG.
  - Optional activities/outputs should be added or emphasized depending on the time available for coordination (i.e. dedicated or combined role), which areas of work NRC wants to support, the added value of an NGO Co-coordinator and cluster/SWG needs. 'Optional' activities/outputs are not less important but slightly less strategic, and as they are often time consuming certain priority needs to be given first to 'mandatory' coordination activities that the cluster/SWG cannot opt out of.
- As NGO Co-coordinator, NRC should add value to the cluster/SWG. Activities and outputs that demonstrate an added value of NGO co-ordination are considered 'core' and should be prioritised when developing the specific TOR.
- Ensure a common understanding between NRC and the Lead Agency of a *shared workload between Coordinator and Co-coordinator*, in particular of secretarial/administrative tasks if the Lead Agency does not provide this support function (ref. Guidance note and template MOU).
- If appropriate and agreed with the Lead Agency/Coordinator the TOR can specify activities/outputs that the Co-coordinator is responsible for (i.e. division of labour), or responsibilities can be shared with the Coordinator.
- The Coordinator and Co-coordinator should develop a joint work plan that outlines the specific tasks and timeframes in more detail than the TOR, in consultation with cluster/SWG partners.

## B. TOR template

### Terms of Reference NRC Cluster/Sector Working Group Co-coordinator

#### I. Purpose

The purpose of the Co-coordinator role is to support and strengthen the coordination and performance of the *[insert cluster/SWG name]* and add value of NGO co-ordination by complementing the expertise, experience, capacity, competencies and skills of the Coordinator and the Lead Agency (ref. Guidance note and template MOU).

*[Insert country and cluster/SWG specific purpose according to NRC's entry criteria and focus for co-ordination, e.g. strengthen and promote NGO participation and partnership, and strengthen links between provincial and national clusters and support to field level coordination]*

The Co-coordinator shall promote accountability to affected populations and adherence to quality standards and best practices. The role is guided by principles of partnership, collaboration, predictability and transparency.

#### II. Role and Responsibilities

The Co-coordinator reports to *[insert NRC manager position]*. In the absence of the Coordinator, the Co-coordinator can take over, *ad interim*, most responsibilities in the *[insert cluster/SWG name]*.

The Co-coordinator is responsible for performing the following *[insert cluster/SWG name]* activities and outputs alongside and in collaboration with the Coordinator and Lead Agency, and in coordination with sub-groups. The Co-coordinator represents the *[insert cluster/SWG name]* jointly with the Coordinator and ensures an NGO voice in humanitarian coordination.

#### **Meetings, information exchange and representation:**

- *These are core activities/outputs because they emphasize shared workload and responsibilities with the Coordinator and the added value of NGO co-ordination through diversity in facilitation, representation and information exchange.*
- *If the Lead Agency does not provide secretarial support, secretarial and administrative tasks should be shared between the Coordinator and the Co-coordinator.*
- *The Lead Agency should provide information management support (ref. Guidance note and template MOU).*
  - Co-facilitate *[insert cluster/SWG name]* meetings, ensuring agreement and follow up of key decisions and action points.
  - Facilitate timely information exchange and ensure that partners and provincial clusters/SWGs are updated on needs, gap analysis, strategic priorities, planning and funding processes etc.
  - Ensure translation of key documents into local language.

- Carry out secretarial and administrative tasks (prepare meetings and minutes, update contact lists, collate reports/project documents etc.) as needed.
- Ensure coordination and information exchange and represent *[insert cluster/SWG name]* interests and priorities in inter-sector meetings and with other clusters/SWGs, UN, HCT, HC, donors, government counterparts and external stakeholders. Strengthen links with recovery/development partners as appropriate.

**Strategic and emergency planning and reporting:**

- *These are core activities/outputs because they emphasize sharing workload and responsibilities with the Coordinator.*
- *The added value of NGO co-ordination lies in being a strategic partner, ensuring diversification of cluster/SWG management and strengthening NGO participation.*

- Facilitate and contribute to needs assessment and gap analysis, using common tools and ensuring mainstreaming of gender, age and diversity and other crosscutting issues.
- Develop, review and coordinate implementation of, *[insert cluster/SWG name]* strategic, emergency preparedness and response, and contingency plans, in cooperation with partners, sub-groups and provincial clusters/SWGs, while promoting NGO participation.
- Ensure that plans respond to field concerns and priority needs and contribute to objectives, with complementarity between national and provincial plans.
- Ensure that *[insert cluster/SWG name]* analysis and priorities are adequately reflected in humanitarian country strategic plans and joint appeals (e.g. CAP/CHAP).
- Develop joint internal work plans with the Coordinator and ensure effective implementation in consultation with partners and sub-groups.
  - Ensure adequate and common monitoring and reporting systems are in place to review progress and results of *[insert cluster/SWG name]* plans and activities.
- Contribute to inter-sector coordination and planning.
  - *Inter-sector contingency planning should be an optional activity, done if possible.*
    - Compile and review reports on cluster/SWG partner projects (e.g. CAP and pooled funding).
    - *This should be an optional activity for the Co-coordinator if there is support staff for monitoring and reporting. If not, this workload should be shared with the Coordinator.*

**Humanitarian financing and pooled funding:**

- *These are core activities/outputs, except 'direct support to partners', which is optional because it requires more time.*
- *The added value of NGO co-ordination lies in increasing diversity in participation, bringing in additional experience with local partnerships and capacity development for NGO partners.*

- Ensure strengthened *[insert cluster/SWG name]* understanding of, and participation in, joint planning, appeal and pooled funding processes (e.g. CAP/CHAP, CHF/ERF), including by provincial clusters/SWGs.
- Develop strategic priorities and project prioritization criteria, and co-facilitate (project) peer review teams, in a transparent and participatory manner.

- Provide direct support to partners, in particular national NGOs, to enhance project development and implementation and strengthen utilization of funding opportunities.
  - *This is an optional activity/output, due to the time required.*

**Support to provincial clusters/SWGs and sub-groups:**

- *These are core activities/outputs with added value of NGO co-coordination, demonstrated by diversification of field presence, geographical coverage and partner organisations, and improved linkages between national and provincial coordination mechanisms.*
- *These are suggested activities; it should be established at country level which links would benefit national and provincial clusters/SWG and activities needed to strengthen such links (see Guidance note on linking clusters at national and provincial level).*
  - Identify needs and opportunities for support to provincial clusters/SWGs.
  - Conduct field visits to strengthen links between national and provincial levels of the *[insert cluster/SWG name]*.
  - Ensure that common systems and data collection and management tools are in place for monitoring, reporting and information exchange on field level concerns, needs and response.
  - Provide coordination support, guidance and capacity development, including on needs assessment and analysis, strategic and emergency response planning and funding processes to provincial cluster/SWG and partners.
- *This is an optional activity/output due to time required.*

**Technical guidance and support:**

- *Ensuring technical support, guidance and capacity development are core activities/outputs and demonstrate an added value of NGO co-coordination, in particular if the Co-coordinator has technical expertise. Such activities may be emphasised in sub-groups.*
- *Providing technical support, guidance and capacity development is optional because of the time required. If the Coordinator and/or Co-coordinator are not able to provide support directly, they should ensure that partners have access to this, for example through external trainings.*
  - Ensure technical support, guidance and capacity development is provided to partners and provincial clusters/SWGs.
  - Ensure mainstreaming of crosscutting issues (protection, gender, environment etc.) in *[insert cluster/SWG name]* strategy and plans.
  - *[For Protection cluster/SWG only]* Support protection mainstreaming across clusters/SWGs through tools, training and practical guidance.
  - Provide technical support, guidance and capacity development: Develop tools, standards and guidelines, and design, facilitate and/or deliver trainings and workshops, including on needs assessment, gap analysis and response planning.
- *This is an optional activity/output due to time required.*

**Outreach to international and local NGO partners:**

- *These are core activities/outputs as they focus on the core of the added NGO value, i.e. strengthening and broadening NGO participation and ensuring greater inclusivity of issues, thus further enhancing the legitimacy and (advocacy) credibility of clusters.*
- *It is a 'red line' for NRC to have the possibility to reach out to NGO partners.*
  - Promote strong NGO participation in *[insert cluster/SWG name]* coordination and liaise with international and national NGO partners to identify issues of concerns, and consolidate inputs and support for joint positions.
  - Conduct outreach to individual NGOs and NGO forums outside the cluster/SWG to increase participation in coordination and identify issues of concern.

**Information analysis, policy and advocacy:**

- *These are core activities/outputs for Protection cluster/SWG, as advocacy is a key component of protection coordination. For other clusters/SWGs, these are optional activities.*
- *Added value of NGO co-ordination of strengthening advocacy by improving access to field level information and enhancing legitimacy and credibility of the cluster to speak on issues of concern.*
  - Support information collection and analysis, draft reports and briefs on issues of concern for sharing with partners, HCT, donors, government counterparts and other external actors.
  - Identify field level concerns for (national level) advocacy, consolidate joint policy positions among partners and coordinate and/or support advocacy initiatives.

**Resource mobilization:**

- *This is an optional activity, as it requires additional time to do proactive donor outreach in addition to, or outside of, pooled funding processes.*
  - Liaise with donors to mobilise resources for joint response and keep them updated on *[insert cluster/SWG name]* needs and priorities (i.e. outside of pooled funding mechanisms).

**NRC responsibilities:**

- *These are core activities in order to ensure information exchange, consistency in messaging and mutual benefits of co-ordination for NRC.*
  - Attend NRC (management) meetings and regularly update NRC country programme on *[insert cluster/SWG name]* activities and developments.
  - Advise NRC staff on *[insert cluster/SWG name]* strategy, priorities and project development.
  - Meet with NRC programmes and staff to gather information relevant to the *[insert cluster/SWG name]* and understand NRC advocacy concerns.
  - Represent NRC in *[insert cluster/SWG name]* peer review teams as needed.
    - *Other staff should represent NRC to allow the Co-coordinator to neutrally represent the cluster/SWG only.*

**III. Professional background and competencies**

- Minimum of 3-5 years experience from humanitarian work, including needs analysis and strategy development, programme/project planning and implementation (project management), cluster/sector coordination and advocacy. Field experience from complex emergencies essential.
- Sound understanding of the international humanitarian system, including humanitarian coordination, funding and leadership mechanisms.
- Coordination and leadership skills: Information sharing; facilitation of meetings and workshops; analysis and strategic planning and drafting; teamwork/working with people; communication; negotiation (conflict resolution); representation and advocacy.
- Capacity development and training skills *[Should be added if TOR includes this, ref. core/optional activities and outputs]*
- Technical knowledge and skills *[Insert as required; emphasis on technical knowledge and skills depends on NRC's focus and the Co-coordinator's responsibilities in the specific TOR]*

**GUIDANCE NOTE:**  
**DEVELOPING A LOG FRAME FOR AN NGO CO-COORDINATION PROPOSAL**

## **A. Log Frame Guidance Note**

### **How can a Log Frame help?**

- A key challenge in coordination identified by the NRC survey is insufficient resources and support for cluster/SWG functions. To support proposal development and fundraising for NRC Co-ordination staff and activities, it was recommended to develop a generic log-frame.
- Coordination work is often time-consuming and process-oriented, for example meeting facilitation, information exchange, strategic planning and reporting, funding processes and support to provincial clusters. A log frame can detail (process oriented) outputs to get stronger recognition for how they contribute to desired outcomes.

### **Who develops it?**

- The log frame should be developed by the NRC Co-coordinator if s/he is already in place, and/or the line manager if a proposal is developed to seek funding for a Co-coordinator role.
- It is recommended to consult the Lead Agency and Coordinator to ensure a shared understanding of which outputs the Co-coordinator will contribute to or be responsible for.
- Cluster/SWG partners should be consulted to ensure that the NRC Co-ordination project responds to partners' priorities to strengthen cluster/SWG coordination and performance.

### **Developing a log frame for an NRC co-ordination proposal**

- When developing the country and cluster/SWG specific log frame it is important to consider:
  - Needs and priorities of the cluster/SWG and its partners;
  - Areas of cluster work that NRC will emphasize and the added value of co-ordination;
  - Co-coordinator is dedicated to cluster/SWG or combined with an internal NRC role;
  - National or provincial level co-ordination;
  - Other context specific issues and needs.
- The template log frame below contains suggested sub-objectives, outcomes, outputs, indicators and means of verification for co-ordination. These should be adapted to the country and cluster/SWG specific situation, needs and priorities.
- The specific log frame should complement the NRC and Lead Agency MOU and the Co-coordinator TOR developed at country level. This template log frame builds on the MOU and TOR guidance notes and templates.
- Activities are not included in the template log frame because one activity can contribute to several outcomes. Donor formats also usually do not contain activities. (For more detail on Co-coordinator activities, see the Guidance note and template TOR.)
- The theory of change behind the log frame is the assumption that increased participation of NGOs, in particular in groups such as Strategic Advisory groups (SAG), Technical Working Groups (TWG) and Peer Review Teams (PRT), leads to increased ownership of and adherence to cluster/SWG strategies and priorities.

## B. Log Frame template

<b>OBJECTIVE OF CO-COORDINATION:</b>			
Strengthened <i>[insert Cluster/SWG name]</i> coordination and performance to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, in accordance with standards of transparency, predictability and accountability.			
<b>Sub-objective 1:</b>			
Strengthened humanitarian coordination and increased diversity of NGO participation in cluster/SWG.			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Verification</b>
Improved knowledge and shared understanding of cluster/SWG needs, gap analysis and strategic priorities among partners	Cluster documents on strategic priorities, needs analysis etc. are available	# of relevant cluster documents produced and disseminated	Cluster documents
	Partners are informed about cluster/SWG needs, gap analysis, and strategic priorities	# of cluster/SWG meetings co-facilitated	Meeting schedule/minutes
	Partners have opportunity to participate in strategy development and planning processes (e.g. CAP)	# of needs assessment and gap analysis carried out and disseminated	Meeting minutes, info emails, updates, needs assessment reports etc.
		# of information sharing products and activities	SAG meeting minutes/reports
		# of SAG meetings facilitated	
Increased and more consistent NGO participation in cluster/SWG and its subsidiary bodies	Time dedicated to NGO needs and requests, such as responding to questions, clarifying processes, sharing information and NGO outreach	Repeat attendance by NGOs in cluster/SWG meetings (all year/outside funding processes)	Attendance sheets
	NGO partners for subsidiary bodies identified and sensitised on group's role and task	NGO participation in subgroups (e.g. TWGs, SAGs, PRTs)	Meeting minutes
			SAG, TWG, PRT meeting minutes/reports
Increased knowledge of coordination and funding processes among cluster/SWG partners, in particular NGOs (e.g. CAP, CHF)	Partners are informed and sensitised on funding processes and cluster/SWG priorities and criteria	# of coordination or funding processes that include diverse involvement (e.g. INGOs, NNGOs and UN agencies beyond Coordinators, and government counterparts)	Meeting minutes
	Partners are (directly) supported to develop appropriate project proposals	# of capacity support sessions facilitated for NGO partners	Attendance sheets
		# of partner projects revised with Co-coordinator support	Correspondence and project proposals
Increased knowledge of technical standards and guidelines among cluster/SWG partners	Partners have access to standards and guidelines adapted to the context.	# of technical tools, standards and guidelines developed or adapted	Developed or adapted tools, standards and/or guidelines
	Partners receive training in technical standards and guidelines (incl. needs assessment)	% or # of key documents translated and distributed to partners	Translated and distributed documents
		# of trainings delivered	Training schedule and participant lists

		# of persons/partners participated at training	Training presentations Pre-and post-training tests/evaluation forms
Increased NGO response enabled by increased resources obtained through pooled funding (e.g. CHF)	(National) NGOs encouraged and supported to participate in pooled funding processes  NGO project proposals are in line with cluster/SWG strategic priorities and get proposed for funding	# of (national) NGO project proposals in line with cluster/SWG priorities and criteria  # of (national) NGO projects prioritised/proposed by Peer Review Team (PRT) for pooled funding  # of (national) NGO projects accepted for pooled funding  % of cluster/SWG pooled funding allocated to NGOs	Project proposals  PRT reports/minutes  PRT list of prioritized/proposed projects for funding  CHF Steering committee decisions on funding
<b>Sub-objective 2:</b>			
Cluster/SWG has a coherent and unified voice to speak about needs and priorities in a credible way.			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Verification</b>
NGOs participate in, and actively contribute to, drafting and revision of strategies and plans (e.g. CAP, emergency response plans)	SAG meetings facilitated with NGO participation  NGO concerns and priorities are reflected in cluster strategies and plans	# of NGO partners participating in SAG and/or PRT  # of NGO partners commenting on and/or providing input to draft strategies etc.	Attendance sheets  SAG and PRT meeting minutes/reports  Comments received on draft strategies  Cluster strategies and plans
Partners maintain a consistent voice when talking about sector needs and priorities	Agreement on joint (advocacy) positions on priority concerns, incl. by NGO partners  Partners are regularly updated on joint (advocacy) positions and key messages	# of outreach initiatives to consolidate NGO inputs and support for cluster/SWG priorities and positions  # of joint cluster/SWG advocacy positions/briefs/key messages developed and disseminated  # of joint advocacy initiatives	Meeting notes/records  Advocacy positions, briefs, key messages etc.  Emails/updates  Advocacy plans and reports
<b>Sub-objective 3:</b>			
Increased support to provincial clusters/SWGs (field level coordination) and strengthened links between national and provincial level (to broaden geographic coverage)			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Verification</b>
Provincial clusters/SWGs show improved coordination and response	Provincial and national clusters are more closely linked through meeting participation and regular communication Provincial clusters /SWGs are supported with technical and coordination assistance, guidance and training.	# of provincial cluster/SWG meetings attended by national Co-coordinator or national meetings attended by provincial Co-coordinators  # of trainings (technical and/or coordination) facilitated including provincial-level staff	Meeting minutes  Attendance sheets  Training schedules and participant lists

		<p># of provincial-level staff participated in training</p> <p># field visits by national Co-coordinator</p> <p># of weeks with regular communication between national and provincial level</p>	<p>Travel schedules</p> <p>Correspondence between national and provincial level</p>
Improved two-way information exchange between national and provincial clusters/SWG on field level concerns, needs and response	Common systems and data collection and management tools are in place	# of data/information management tools used at both national and provincial level	<p>Shared data/information management tools</p> <p>Situation reports, cluster updates etc.</p>
National strategies appropriately reflect priorities and needs identified by provincial clusters/SWGs	Provincial clusters/SWGs share needs and priorities and input into national strategies	<p># of provincial clusters/SWGs adequately reflected in the national strategy</p> <p># of national meetings in which provincial needs and priorities are highlighted</p>	<p>National level cluster/SWG strategies</p> <p>Meeting minutes</p>

**GUIDANCE NOTE:**  
**LINKING CLUSTERS AT NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVEL**

Strengthening the links between national and provincial clusters is the responsibility of all cluster partners, but specifically the Cluster Lead Agency and the co-coordinating agency with support from UN OCHA. This note lays out some general guidance for NRC on how Coordinators and Co-coordinators can work together to strengthen the links between national and provincial clusters.

### **A. Purpose of Strengthening Links between Provincial and National Clusters**

It first needs to be established at the country level what types of links would benefit the national and provincial clusters. This should happen through a consultative process with the national and provincial cluster partners. Once this has been defined, the types of activities that will need to take place to strengthen such links can be identified and time and resources allocated.

**Among other things, strong links between national and provincial cluster can be used to:**

- Strengthen consultation with a wide range and diversity of organisations to improve cluster responses and strengthen cluster legitimacy, transparency and accountability;
- Improve preparedness procedures as well as strategic and contingency planning by ensuring that national level plans are based on the priority concerns and needs at the provincial level;
- Improve monitoring and evaluation of cluster response and outcomes through the development of common systems;
- Improve evidence based advocacy to support the response to affected populations and adherence to humanitarian principles;
- Provide capacity building to cluster partners at the provincial level to improve technical expertise and strengthen coordination mechanisms, data collection, needs assessment and planning to improve the humanitarian response;
- Mainstream sector specific and cross-cutting concerns through the cluster responses;
- Ensure appropriate and timely responses to sudden changes in the context that could have an impact on the humanitarian response;
- Increase provincial level cluster partners' access to pooled funds and other humanitarian financing mechanisms.

### **B. Challenges Faced in Strengthening Links**

*Management challenges*

- Lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities between the provincial and national clusters, including reporting lines between the two and their respective decision making power;
- Lack of clarity on the reporting lines of provincial cluster Coordinators to the national level cluster versus their internal reporting lines;
- Overall country humanitarian coordination structures (which can sometimes focus more on coordination at one level [national or provincial] than the other), can impact on the necessity and ability of clusters to strengthen their national/provincial links;
- Lack of synergy in concerns/priorities between national and provincial level; sometimes this is due to different political contexts and humanitarian situations within the same country;

- A tendency towards process heavy humanitarian coordination mechanisms, which could be addressed through a greater focus on consultation, evidence based needs and impact assessments.

#### *Logistical and communications challenges*

- Security concerns and other restrictions on movement can prevent travel for the purpose of joint meetings or attendance at cluster meetings in the provincial or national level;
- In some instances, internet and telecommunication lines are weak;
- A lack of common information sharing tools and frameworks.

#### *Resource challenges*

- Lack of financial resources to fund travel, meeting facilitation and trainings for cluster coordination purposes.
- Time and human resources:
  - National cluster Coordinators and Co-coordinators often do not have enough time to develop strong relationships with clusters and cluster partners at the provincial level or to offer substantial support to capacity building;
  - Provincial cluster Coordinators and Co-coordinators are often busy with coordinating (and implementing) a humanitarian response. This does not leave much time to engage in national level concerns, mechanisms or processes.

### **C. Best Practices in Facilitating Links Between Provincial and National Levels**

#### **Shared Strategy Development**

- Strategy development should be based on needs assessments and gap analysis that are carried out using common data collection and data management tools;
- National and provincial cluster strategies should be developed in unison and should ensure complementarity;
- The national cluster strategy should be developed in consultation with the provincial clusters through the identification of common objectives. The national strategy should be based on field priorities, needs and gaps.

#### **Information Management and Information Exchange**

Information should flow in both directions; there is a need for the national clusters to share information with the provinces as well as vice versa.

Information flow between national and provincial clusters can be carried out through:

- Unified data management tools;
- Development of a Google-group for all cluster partners from across the country so that they can access meeting minutes, strategy and technical documents and situation developments from different provinces and from the national level;
- Regular short situation reports and/or monthly Skype calls with the Coordinators to facilitate improved communication of outcomes and activities;
- Permanent inclusion of the provincial cluster Coordinators/Co-coordinators in the national cluster, e.g. including them in the Strategic Advisory Group. This can be carried out through inclusion in the regular e-mail group as well as through physical presence when possible;

- The national cluster can periodically focus attention on specific provinces through:
  - Bringing provincial Coordinators to national meetings on a regular basis to present their concerns and needs;
  - Attendance of one national Coordinator at provincial cluster meetings on a regular basis;
  - Where physical presence is not possible, developing specific situation reports to be shared at cluster meetings or establishing a Skype briefing with Q&A.

### **Capacity Building**

- The national cluster should provide support to provincial clusters in terms of training as well as the development of data collection tools, reporting formats, guidance documents etc.;
- Training or technical workshops (such as developing needs assessment tools) can be designed so that all Coordinators and Co-coordinators are brought together from different provinces to improve skills exchange and develop joint documents;
- The presence of a dedicated cluster Co-coordinator at the provincial level (either a roaming function or a 'permanent' role if the provincial cluster needs continuous support) can provide sustained capacity development in areas such as technical expertise, cluster coordination and/or strengthening synergy between sectors.

### **Allocation of Adequate Time as well as Human and Financial Resources**

- Strengthening links between national and provincial clusters requires time and resources.
- National cluster Coordinators and Co-coordinators working to strengthen links between provincial and national clusters should be granted adequate time and support for this task. In some instances this includes supporting travel to locations outside of NRC's programmatic coverage. In other instances, this may require informing the Cluster Lead Agency that NRC time is being prioritised for strengthening links and support to provincial clusters.
- In strengthening links between national and provincial clusters, it is important that provincial cluster Coordinators and Co-coordinators are not overburdened with excessive reporting requirements and additional tasks, especially if not directly relevant to the immediate needs in their province. In order to address this concern, NRC, the Cluster Lead Agency and other cluster partners may need to mobilise additional staff and resources, either at the national or provincial level, to support capacity building as well as information collection, cluster reporting, strategic planning, pooled funding processes, contingency planning etc.

### **Location of Cluster Co-coordinators**

- To strengthen the links between national and provincial clusters it is good to have NGO Co-coordinators at both the provincial and national level. This facilitates information exchange between the provincial Co-coordinator and national Co-coordinator. Without this link, the national Co-coordinator is often at a disadvantage in terms of access to relevant information.
- In country contexts where one of the main objectives of engaging in cluster co-ordination is to build links between national and provincial clusters and/or build the capacity of cluster partners, it may be more beneficial to have Co-coordinators located at the provincial level, as well as, or even instead of, Co-coordinators based at the national level.