

Inter-Cluster Nutrition and Food Security Working Group

The Inter-Cluster Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition was created with the intention of providing operational/coordination/technical direction and guidance to the gFSC on key areas of synergy between the Nutrition and Food Security Clusters in humanitarian responses. One of the objectives of the Working Group was the development of standard operating procedures between the gFSC and the GNC.

Key Issues

Since the last April 2011 Global Meeting of Partners, the Working Group has worked on a series of key activities and tools. It has developed and conducted a field survey for cluster coordinators in order to identify the present coordination field practices between the Food Security and Nutrition Clusters. Upon careful analysis of the survey results and the dissemination of key findings, the Working Group identified principal synergies and complementarities, gaps and limitations, as well as best practices regarding existing coordination mechanisms between Food Security and Nutrition Clusters at field level.

A key deliverable that was identified during this meeting was the development of a Joint Guidance Note concerning fundamental synergies, complementarities, gaps and lessons learned that were discerned from the survey findings. The objective of the survey was to evaluate the adequacy of coordination between the Nutrition and Food Security Clusters. The survey was sent to nutrition cluster coordinators and food security coordinators (27 responded in total). The survey looked at the priority operational areas where coordination is important and the challenges faced at the field level.

Throughout the past six months, the Working Group was successful in achieving a better understanding of the existing collaboration between Food Security & Nutrition Clusters at global & field level. The feedback received by field-level Cluster Coordinators was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The group was able to develop a mechanism for addressing the coordination gaps between both clusters and develop a stronger communication network between global-level FSC & GNC partners.

Of those 27 colleagues who responded to the survey, 88.9% rated coordination as very important; 84.2% rated coordination on information sharing as very important; 79.2% rated coordination on assessments as very important; and 75% rated response planning coordination as very important. The survey highlighted the need for guidance that is simple, practical, and concrete on how to work more effectively together. Additional guidance and support were requested at global level to improve country cluster coordination and performance in certain program areas (i.e. Assessments). Further items highlighted were the challenges relating to mandates and understanding of roles at field level, as well as the difficulties associated with certain personalities in dealing with coordination issues and information sharing.

Plenary Discussion

During the plenary discussion, it was suggested by the Nutrition Cluster Global Coordinator that greater linkages be created between the two clusters (gFSC & GNC) and the SUN (Scale-up on Nutrition) and REACH initiatives. It was also agreed that as opposed to focussing on mandates, greater attention would be devoted to fostering linkages between the agendas of both clusters.

It was also suggested by the Somalia Food Security Cluster Coordinator that the inter-cluster working group be used to channel the work of other clusters (i.e. shelter, protection). In so doing, the working group could be used as a platform for the development of common strategies and for the collection of Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) that could support programs for food insecure households and the nutritionally insecure.

FAO stressed the importance of joint monitoring efforts at field level between both clusters, whereas ECHO stressed the need to share the working group's TORs and to clearly identify key response domains. Several participants also reiterated the importance of the two clusters working together with one voice and one vision.

Oxfam suggested enlarging the scope of the inter-cluster working group to include issues related not only to food security and nutrition, but also to WASH, health, environment, shelter, protection as well as others. It was decided, however, not to excessively widen the network lest it become unwieldy and unmanageable. In this case, the role of OCHA with regard to the working group action plan would also need to be clarified.

Furthermore, various tools were put forward in an effort to address inter-cluster coordination. The UNICEF malnutrition causal framework was a case in point. Moreover, the field coordinators were adamant regarding the need to foster not only joint programming, joint assessments and joint missions, but especially to promote joint resourcing. In this connection, it was felt that a greater linkage between humanitarian and development domains with regard to both policy and funding could assist in bridging the resource gap.

Actions

In terms of the Working Group Action Plan for the coming 6 months, it was agreed to write a letter clearly defining mandates, roles and responsibilities. This would in turn be shared with cluster coordinators and partners at country as well as headquarter level. The first draft will be produced by the end of November and the final letter to the field will be drafted by the end of year.

There will also be an additional letter signed by Global Nutrition & Food Security Coordinators and addressed to the field Coordinators of both clusters, as well as the field-level co-lead agencies, emphasizing the working principles and linkages between the FSC and GNC. A Joint Guidance Note will also be produced containing both concrete examples of how the Food Security and Nutrition coordination mechanisms look like and the existing coordination best practices. The latter will be collected after careful consultation with field coordinators.

Further action points include the creation of an online discussion group, either via email or via the gFSC website, where Food Security and Nutrition practitioners can ask questions, share information and solve problems. Joint Trainings for the cluster coordinators, as well as joint missions will be promoted. In addition, the working group will ensure that the joint trainings, support missions and assessments are also multi-cluster in nature and that there is sufficient national capacity to address coordination issues between the two clusters, especially when the international workforce retreats.