



## Breaking Down the Silos Webinar Series

### Good Practices and Tips from the Field on Working with National and Local Actors

*Global Cluster Coordinators Group*  
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#### Overview and Background to the Series

The “*Inter-Cluster Coordination: Breaking Down Silos*” webinar series was initiated by the Global Cluster Coordinators Group (Global Clusters and OCHA) to exchange good practices among field coordination staff, encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and share ideas amongst the humanitarian community. The webinar series invites current field based cluster coordinators, inter-cluster coordinators, NGOs, together with Global Cluster Coordinators to provide practical, constructive suggestions around a range of topics that can be applied in daily coordination work.

Taking forward the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit on reinforcing national capacity, this webinar explores practical steps that can be taken by OCHA, Clusters and INGOs to strengthen the role of national<sup>1</sup> actors in humanitarian coordination and response.

This document compiles the main points raised both in preparatory sessions as well as during the webinar.

The following themes were addressed during the webinar:

- *Strengthening the role of national authorities*
- *Strengthening the voice of national NGOs in coordination*
- *Enhancing the role of NGOs in Clusters*
- *Leveraging resources and strengthening the capacity of national NGOs.*

Panelists:

- Kirathi Reuel Mungai, Nutrition Sector Coordinator - Nigeria,
- Muhammad Amad Executive Director of IDEA NGO - Pakistan,
- Michael Copland, Coordinator Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility,
- Charlotte Ashley, OCHA Deputy Head of Office - Afghanistan,
- Halima Adan, Coordinator, Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) and Co-Chair for the Somalia GBV Working Group,
- Bernard Balibuno, Country Representative, CAFOD - Democratic Republic of Congo,
- Jahal B. Rabesahala de Méritens, Global Cluster Coordinator - Early Recovery,
- Tamara Hallaq, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, OCHA - Turkey for Syria Response

#### Strengthening the Role of National Authorities

*Coordination Architecture:*

- Humanitarian actors should first consider government capacity and build on existing structures instead of establishing parallel international coordination mechanisms.
- Consideration should be given to deploying technical capacity within line ministries to support coordination led by national authorities, where appropriate and possible.
- OCHA, Clusters, supported by HCT should consider transition planning to transfer management of coordination structures to national actors at the outset when coordination bodies (e.g. clusters) are set up.
- Transition can take place over a multi-year time frame. Clusters, together with Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) should approach capacity building of national counterparts with a long term vision based on a capacity assessment to identify enabling factors and challenges leading to an action plan on what capacity can be transferred over time.

<sup>1</sup> Pls. note for the sake of brevity, the term “national” in this paper will henceforth include actors involved in humanitarian response in the affected country at either capital or local/sub-national level.

*Engagement with Government Counterpart:*

- Engage with national disaster management counterparts to open lines of communication for effective coordination and response. At the sub-national level, ensure that counterparts within municipalities have been identified and are fully engaged.
- Cluster/Cluster Lead Agency/OCHA to advocate with government counterpart that a senior technical person is allocated to co-lead the cluster (rather than a policy person) to ensure focus remains on operational matters.
  - Work with and engage national counterpart on-going basis. Sensitize them to tools, good practice, the key issues emerging in terms of the humanitarian needs, e.g. where and how to prioritize assessments, sharing of preliminary findings, etc.
  - Ensure that authorities at the operational level (e.g. municipalities) are not neglected in terms of outreach and coordination – OCHA, clusters, INGOs to proactively engage sub-national authorities.
  - Where cluster coordinator is co-leading a cluster with government counterpart, suggest the division of roles and responsibilities and offer support to counterpart on their area.
  - Jointly prepare for the cluster meeting (or other relevant coordination meeting) with government counterpart with prior discussions and briefing on the technical issues. This builds trust and strengthens capacity.
  - Cluster coordinator, cluster members to frequently request government co-lead to provide technical input at the meetings. This will help ensure the discussion sticks to the operational issues instead of political issues. It will also prompt the government counterpart to strengthen their capacity and identify areas where the cluster can offer support.
  - On matters of humanitarian principles, Cluster Coordinator to take a strong stance to ensure clear lines are drawn. If necessary, draw upon support from cluster members, INGOs, donors, OCHA, HCT etc.
- By building trust, awareness and capacity, technical counterparts can sometimes play a moderating role within their government to ensure humanitarian considerations are not swept away by political considerations.
- OCHA can consider the establishment of a body that brings together government sector leads together with international sector leads to build trust and ensure common understanding of the humanitarian situation – e.g. in Ethiopia a forum which convenes cluster coordinators and government co-leads meets regularly to ensure strengthened cross-cluster/sector coordination with the government
- OCHA to arrange multi-sectorial coordination meetings at subnational level in conjunction with government counterpart – e.g. Operational Coordination Teams in Afghanistan
- INGOs can organize visits of government authorities to other countries with advanced capacity and expertise to facilitate information and knowledge sharing. E.G. in DRC one INGO organized such trips to facilitate knowledge sharing between different governments in the region.

*“It is then imperative that UN agencies and INGOs work with relevant national authorities and national NGOs...If the response to meet the needs of affected persons is not led by government institutions, the social contract between the government and population may be undermined.”*

*- Jahal de Meritens,  
Global Early Recovery  
Cluster Coordinator*

**Strengthening the Voice of National<sup>1</sup> NGOs in Coordination**

- OCHA, clusters, HCT members, HC should proactively review level of national NGO engagement in coordination and identify opportunities for greater participation, including ensuring that national NGOs are represented on HCTs, are given the opportunity to be cluster co-facilitators, are represented on pooled fund advisory boards, and have the opportunity to lead Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs), etc.
- OCHA can make a major impact to strengthen the role of national NGOs in coordination and response: e.g. support the establishment of national NGO networks, orienting national NGOs on roles they can play in the HCT, how to engage with international coordination mechanisms etc. OCHA and clusters can train national NGOs on roles and responsibilities as members of coordination bodies and the purpose of these bodies.

- OCHA should designate a focal point to systematically manage relations with national NGOs and support their engagement with the humanitarian system, e.g. OCHA Turkey has a full-time dedicated NGO focal point to promote outreach and strengthen national NGO participation in all levels of coordination.
- National NGO representatives can be invited to participate in key strategic and senior-level meetings/briefings (e.g. with the HC, with national counterpart, with senior external visitors, etc.). This allows more exposure and learning for the national NGO and ensures that meetings reflect national NGO perspectives. It allows the humanitarian system to gain credibility with national counterparts, and to avoid the perception of a “UN” agenda. It will also give a signal to donors, INGOs and the government that localization is being taken seriously.
- OCHA to map the operational presence, contacts, and sectors covered by national NGOs. e.g. in the Philippines, OCHA collected the data on national NGOs in various regions, arranged briefings for national NGOs on the humanitarian system and principles, invited cluster coordinators to brief on their cluster, facilitated clusters contacts with the national NGOs. INGOs were also invited to attend and foster linkages between national NGOs and INGOs.
- OCHA, Clusters and INGOs should facilitate regular networking opportunities between INGOs, donors, etc. to ensure national NGO voice is heard, discuss how to strengthen the participation of local actors in the response, and facilitate their access to funding. E.g. the Somalia NGO Consortium organizes periodic dialogue meetings bringing together national NGOs and senior donor, UN and INGO representatives.
- National NGOs should be encouraged to participate on Humanitarian Pooled Fund advisory boards and cluster technical review committees and be offered orientation to enable them to fulfill those roles.
- OCHA and clusters to hold regular coordination meetings in local languages to brief national organizations on the overall humanitarian response in the country, discussing success, challenges, and collecting feedback from national organizations. This will encourage confidence to participate in meetings and transparency, as well as allowing OCHA and cluster coordinators to gain valuable insight into the context and operational realities.
- To facilitate coordination at the operational level in remote regions, consider encouraging national NGOs to host coordination meetings in their office at sub-national level, with support from OCHA or cluster.
- OCHA to ensure that key documents, meeting reports, etc. are translated into local languages, and humanitarian jargon is avoided as far as possible.
- Involve national NGOs in the planning and roll out of tools and processes, e.g. in Afghanistan, OCHA included national NGOs in the design of a monitoring tool, provided training on the tool and involved national NGOs in its implementation.
- Ensure national NGOs are invited to workshops on HNO, HRP planning etc.
- Encourage links to be made between INGO forum and national NGO forum and seek support from INGO consortia to support national NGO forum with training, orientations, good practice, etc.

*“National organizations that are members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) bring an essential nuance to decision making processes as they have the local expertise and know about underlying risks, challenges and local coping mechanisms.”*

**- Charlotte Ashley, Deputy Head of Office, OCHA Afghanistan**

## Enhancing the Role of National NGOs in Clusters

### *National NGOs in Co-Lead/Co-Facilitation Roles*

- OCHA, together with HC and HCT to support co-facilitation of clusters by national NGOs.
- Cluster Coordinator to ensure national NGO co-facilitator has space to work/make decisions. Cluster Coordinator should not micro-manage the national NGO. Shared responsibilities should be clear. Cluster coordinator should make the best of the national NGO’s comparative advantage to contribute to the cluster.
- Encourage national NGOs to lead Strategic Advisory Groups (SAG) and working groups. This facilitates their engagement and their influence and decision making in planning processes.
- National NGOs taking up leadership roles within clusters or SAGs helps instill a sense of ownership of the

planning processes and promotes continuity given the high level of INGO and UN staff turnover.

#### *National NGOs as Cluster Members*

- Cluster coordinator to be agile: shift the venue of the cluster/sector meeting to different sub-national locations to ensure participation of NGOs and municipal authorities working at the operational level. E.g. Shelter Cluster during the Philippines Haiyan emergency held quarterly meetings in different sub-national locations to ensure participation and input from local level.
- Cluster coordinator to become familiar with the national NGOs working in your sector, map their areas of operation, arrange a briefing on the sector, role and benefits of coordination, encourage connections and partnerships to be made with INGOs. For instance, Nutrition Cluster in Nigeria mapped national NGOs' areas of work and holds regular meetings to support their participation and contributions in coordination mechanisms and the HPC

*“We have very competent and capacitated national NGOs who can showcase their coordination skills if given opportunities... What we require is the space to offer such capacity and lead coordination mechanisms.”*

- **Halima Adan,**  
**Coordinator of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) & GBV Violence Sub-Cluster Co-Coordinator**

- Cluster coordinators to ensure translation is available in meetings. No excuse for not ensuring translation! In Pakistan it is done by asking national staff of INGO to translate, or a national NGO member can translate.
- Cluster coordinator to ensure national NGOs are involved in the design and roll out of needs assessments to ensure response is aligned with field realities.
- Cluster coordinators to ask INGOs to come to cluster (and other coordination) meetings with their national NGO partners.
- Cluster coordinator to inform national NGOs of opportunities to access humanitarian funding
- Encourage national NGO participation in coordination meetings by suggesting they connect via Skype (where connection permits) if transportation to cluster meetings is challenging.
- Cluster coordinator to encourage national NGO participation by holding occasional dedicated meetings with national NGO partners before or after the regular cluster meeting to further explain processes, terminology, and seek their input.
- Clusters should gradually assess national NGOs' capacity to respond in their respective areas of work and have one-on-one technical discussions with them to strengthen their capacity and find solutions to the challenges they are facing.
- Provide national actors adequate time to actively participate and feed into cluster

processes regarding the Humanitarian Needs Overview, Humanitarian Response Plan and other key planning and decision making processes.

- At the Global level, organizations should ensure that Terms of Reference and profiles (e.g. for Cluster Coordinators or other relevant coordination staff) should be geared towards engagement with local and national actors.

### **Leveraging Resources and Strengthening Capacity of National NGOs**

#### *Leveraging Resources*

- OCHA and cluster coordinators should proactively inform national partners of funding opportunities.
- INGOs to introduce national NGOs to donors to facilitate direct funding.
- The Humanitarian Pooled Fund can help capacitate national NGOs directly both in terms of funding and in terms of training and guidance on how to access pooled funds. Ensure documents are translated and national NGOs are given ample time to apply. National NGOs should be offered the possibility to submit applications in the local language. In Myanmar, several outreach meetings were conducted to encourage new national NGOs through national NGO networks. Several meetings were organized in the Burmese language to explain the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund; how it works; and how national NGOs can submit proposals. In Pakistan, the development and wide circulation of guidance notes in Dari and Pashtu resulted in a 50% increase in the number of eligible national NGOs.
- INGO networks and national NGO networks can consider establishing a pooled fund for national NGOs.

- OCHA should provide feedback to national actors on their pooled fund applications so that they can be better prepared for the next call of proposals. In Turkey, the Pooled Fund provides feedback to Syrian NGOs on their funding applications both from a substantive perspective through cluster review committees and from a technical perspective.

#### *Strengthening capacity of national NGOs – INGOs, OCHA and clusters*

- Focus capacity building on “learning by doing” rather than by workshops.
- Build confidence of national NGOs in order that they will have the ability to speak out on certain issues, including in the presence of government counterparts.
- INGO investment in national NGO capacity building needs to be long term and focused on building systems (e.g. governance, administration) not simply technical skills.
- INGO-national NGO mentoring should be encouraged. For example, in Pakistan and Afghanistan a number of INGO Country Directors and their equivalents in a local NGO (same with Program Manager and equivalent in local NGO) will prepare for meetings and attend them jointly, and debrief together. This is a practical way to build capacity through coaching and strengthens exposure to strategic issues.
- Ensure capacity building is jointly designed with national NGO. “Do not try to make national NGOs become a mirror image of the INGO through training – it is not sustainable or realistic.” Conduct a joint capacity building assessment, design the approach jointly with the national NGO, taking into consideration how the national NGO wishes to develop.
- INGOs to invite national NGO partners to participate in joint monitoring missions to enhance knowledge of standards, etc.
- OCHA should provide training and information sessions for national NGOs in local languages on core humanitarian subjects, GIS, humanitarian programme cycle, information management and needs assessments. For instance, OCHA Turkey organizes trainings and briefings on such topics periodically and prepares tip sheets with links to various resources in Arabic for Syrian NGOs.
- Ensure that training is contextualized and customized e.g. OCHA Turkey worked with clusters and the Sphere project to contextualize the Sphere training to the Syrian context, in line with international humanitarian standards.
- OCHA, clusters and INGOs can help build a pool of local trainers through a Training of Trainers (ToTs) scheme to ensure continuity. While training is helpful, ToT helps promote sustainability over the longer term.
- OCHA with clusters and INGOs can put together an overview of all capacity building initiatives available for national NGOs and share widely to ensure national NGOs are aware of the opportunities.
- Clusters (Cluster Coordinators, and INGO cluster members) can support national NGOs with capacity building initiatives on both technical issues and institution building, including how to draft proposals, how to manage programmes.
- Clusters can promote national NGOs coordination and response capacity. e.g. the Early Recovery cluster established a capacity building group to strengthen national NGOs’ role on technical issues in Yemen. The ultimate objective was to increase the number of national NGOs co-facilitating clusters and working groups.
- Clusters may also use technical review committees for pooled fund applications as mechanisms to provide feedback on proposal writing, project management, and administrative issues.
- Clusters should use opportunities/mechanisms such as the global technical rapid response teams to work with national actors for a period of time.

*“Few organizations work with local and national actors on long term capacity building initiatives. The question of having a quality partnership remains unresolved. National and local actors should seek to have quality partnerships, learn by doing, capacitate themselves, and claim their space and role.”*

**- Mohammad Amad,  
Executive Director,  
Pakistan National  
Humanitarian  
Network**