

## GNC commitment to strengthening Inter-sectoral/cluster Collaboration (ISC)

### March 2021 update

#### **Key goals of GNC efforts in ISC include:**

- To build on past and current efforts to ensure closer and more extensive collaboration with Food Security, WASH, Health and other sectors/clusters, to prevent and treat malnutrition and contribute to shared overarching objectives to address multi-dimensional vulnerability;
- To strengthen national and sub-national capacity for Nutrition sectoral coordination, independent of, but working closely with, Health, WASH, Food Security and other sectors/clusters as the best model to prevent malnutrition in all its forms, prior to, during and after crisis;
- To ensure that the collaborative support to national and sub-national capacity also contributes to building linkages between development and humanitarian policies, plans, programmes and funding, as well as to the localization agenda and accountability to affected populations.

#### **Background and Rationale for proposing a new way of working for ISC**

The Global Food Security and Nutrition Clusters have made concerted efforts to strengthen their collaboration since 2012. To consolidate this, a sub-working group of the Global Food Security Cluster (GFSC), known as the Inter-Cluster Nutrition Working Group (ICNWG), was developed to provide technical direction to in-country Food Security Clusters on nutrition-sensitive programming. This group has since provided strong motivation for closer bilateral collaboration.

Building on past achievements and on the overwhelming evidence of the need to create linkages with other sectors, it is critical for the GNC to now expand and strengthen the collaboration with the Health, WASH and other clusters.

Over the last 18 months, several attempts have been made to adapt the scope, ToRs and membership of the ICNWG in order to provide adequate reciprocity among all the interested parties, but also to address some concerns, indicated below, which have been found to hamper some aspects of bilateral collaboration. During this time, the Health WASH and Nutrition cluster coordinators have indicated the need for a more neutral and balanced approach to ensure stronger and more effective ISC.

#### **GNC perspective on the current challenges in maximizing ISC through the Inter-Cluster Nutrition Working Group (ICNWG):**

- **Scope of the ICNWG collaboration:** the original format of the ICNWG as a sub-group of the GFSC, co-led by the GFSC and GNC and focusing on nutrition sensitive programming, has proved to be a challenge for strong and sustained commitment from WASH and Health partners;
- **Lack of adequate sectoral perspective prior to engagement with other clusters:** in order to better define how the GNC collective may contribute to – and benefit from – ISC, the GNC needs adequate space and time to develop, with its partners, the sectoral perspective. The bilateral nature of the ICNWG has not been conducive to this process.
- **Potential for misinterpretation of the ICNWG narrative:** The current ‘co-leadership’ of the ICNWG or the frequent reference to integration between Nutrition and Food Security in the ICNWG narrative, may be misunderstood as a promotion of integration of cluster coordination functions (e.g., where nutrition is a sub-theme under another cluster, such as Food Security or Health), rather

than integration of programmatic priorities and resources according to commonly agreed principles. This calls into question the GNC's advocacy for nutrition specific sectoral/cluster coordination mechanisms, independent of Health or Food Security, as the most effective model.

Effective intersectoral collaboration requires that each sector/cluster must first consider the limits of a single sector in achieving a given outcome and determine whether other sectors also have an interest or a stake in developing a solution. Understanding the limits of one sector's processes, expertise and resources can help identify what other sectors can contribute and help to develop commonly agreed objectives that are more likely to receive a higher and sustained commitment.

### **Proposed Way Forward**

The Health, WASH, Food Security and Nutrition Global Cluster Coordinators (4Cs) are committed to greater collaboration to achieve commonly agreed objectives (rather than only focusing on nutrition sensitive approaches). The need for a more neutral and balanced Inter-sectoral Platform (ISP) for collaboration was discussed and agreed by the 4Cs on a call in September 2020.

In response to this agreement, new ways of working are proposed below:

### **GNC's collaboration with Health, WASH, Food Security and other clusters:**

- **Maintaining and regularizing the interaction of the Health, WASH, Food Security and Nutrition Global Cluster Coordinators (4Cs) and other clusters as needed, with support from respective SAGs, guiding the work of an Inter-sectoral Collaboration Platform (ISP):**
  - The 4Cs have agreed on the need for a neutral and balanced collaboration platform, not led by any one cluster, in which each cluster is on an equal footing in contributing to the agreed priorities and plans;
  - The ISP is complementary to the work of OCHA's Global Cluster Coordinators Group (GCCG), to expand collaborative efforts among three or more clusters on commonly agreed objectives at global, regional and country level;
  - While more frequent discussions have taken place among the Health, WASH, Food Security and Nutrition clusters, the ISP is open to the participation of other clusters, as and when needed;
  - The ISP is created out of the strong interest in collaboration and, at the moment, is not deemed to need specific ToRs, a secretariat or dedicated staff in addition to the ones already available from each cluster and their respective working groups. Chairing of meetings for this new ISP group can rotate among clusters on a regular basis;
  - The ISP is for collaboration among three or more clusters, while bilateral collaboration (among two clusters) will be continued and expanded as opportunities allow.
  
- **Develop a sectoral perspective to better contribute to bilateral/multilateral collaboration.**
  - It is proposed that the **GNC Intersectoral Collaboration (ISC) Helpdesk** is supported by a **Working Group on Intersectoral Collaboration (ISCWG) of GNC partners**. Organizations that are currently members of the ICN WG, and are also GNC partners, have been invited to join the ISCWG, with the invitation extended to the wider GNC membership. The ISCWG will develop the GNC perspective and priorities of how best to collaborate bilaterally and multilaterally, as part of the ISP and support national level adaptation and implementation of guidance and plans.

- WASH, Food Security, Health and Nutrition Clusters have already participated in ISP discussions through small teams including global cluster coordination staff and key partners. The WASH cluster is being represented in the ISP by Global WASH Partnership representatives. The Health Cluster Coordination team, which is overstretched by the COVID-19 response needs, has indicated that they will define more specific capacity for the ISP collaboration during its global partners meeting in April. The Food Security Cluster have not yet officially indicated how they will interface with the ISP but they and key partners have already participated in some discussions on priority countries at risk of famine.
- **Ensure balance and neutrality of ISP, building on comparative advantages.**
  - While the current ICNWG workplan, with funding from USAID's BHA, is co-led by the GNC and the GFSC, further contribution by WASH and Health Cluster partners for the pending project activities, is being discussed as part of the ISP collaboration.
  - Other initiatives currently being discussed by the ISP include:
    - Implementation of WASH roadmap for WASH in Public Health and Nutrition;
    - Ongoing discussions for rapid scaling up of intersectoral collaboration in South Sudan and other countries at risk of famine;
    - Initial discussions for the development of guidance and implementation plans for multi-sectoral approaches to prevent and address cholera.
- **Building on ICNWG efforts and achievements:**
  - As the ICNWG was initially developed as a sub-working group of the GFSC, the path for its continued evolution should be set primarily by the GFSC and the ICNWG members, but it is important to recognize that the initiatives co-led by the GFSC and GNC in the last few years, have taken such a predominance as to redefine the identity of the group for some members.
  - The needs of vulnerable populations attended to by the GNC's approaches would benefit from greater and more sustained convergence of efforts by multiple sectors, beyond the Nutrition and Food Security nexus. The ISP is a valid alternative to the ICNWG in a format that address the challenges raised above, and benefits from wider intersectoral support.
  - ICNWG nutrition partners can continue to actively support intersectoral collaboration from a nutrition perspective (ISC-WG), but also from the perspectives of other sectors according to their organization's mandate, and then again in a multisectoral way under the ISP. While this may be interpreted as an additional layer, it is a necessary step to ensure that multisectoral efforts benefit from reciprocity and build on comparative advantages.
  - The Health, WASH and Nutrition clusters, which have made an early start on WASH initiatives, have indicated a strong preference for the more neutral and balanced approach already in use by the ISP, and a new initiative focusing on countries at risk of famine is also benefitting from increased contributions from the GFSC.

#### **Recap of Proposed way forward:**

- Build on the commitment and work of the ICNWG on nutrition sensitivity by:
  - Inviting the GNC partners who are current ICNWG members to be part of the GNC ISCWG, which will then contribute to bilateral and multilateral initiatives. Extend this invitation for membership to other GNC partners in the event that there are other interested partners.
  - Advocate and support the participation of ISCWG member organizations with mandates in more than one sector to contribute to the sectoral work of other clusters (adding a 'nutrition lens') and to multi-sectoral initiatives.

- With respect to GNC-GFSC bilateral collaboration:
  - The GNC will continue to support the implementation of the current workplan developed under the ICNWG co-leadership with the Food Security Cluster, but also open up opportunities for greater contribution to pending activities by all clusters through the ISP.
  - The GNC is committed to work with the ICNWG or any group or individuals that the GFSC identifies as representatives to continue and expand the priorities identified in the past.
  - Future initiatives will need to benefit from revised and jointly agreed narrative clarifications, shifting the preference of narrative from "co-lead and integration" to "inter-sectoral collaboration".