

Prioritization within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle

Why prioritize?

- ✓ Strengthen operational effectiveness and decision-making.
- ✓ Give clarity on what needs to be done as an operational priority at different stages of implementation.
- ✓ Guide allocation of resources (in-kind, funding, human) in line with current operational must-dos.

Focusing Humanitarian Response Plans: the role of prioritization

Humanitarian response planning begins with boundary setting and is later followed by prioritization.

1. Boundary setting

- Based on an analysis of needs (HNO), planning assumptions, response capacity (including that of others) and operational constraints (access/insecurity), decisions are taken as to the focus of the response plan, and what remains beyond its scope.
- Agreed boundaries help to determine *what is included in the collective response*. They shape actions required to achieve agreed objectives during the implementation period (e.g. 12 months).
- Accountability: the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) outlines the expected outcomes (if fully funded).
- Typical approach:
 1. A Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) decides on boundaries (expressed through a mix of needs-based, demographic, geographic, sectoral and/or temporal dimensions).
 2. Clusters apply agreed boundaries to determine what needs to be done at sector level (typically through a vetting or peer-review process).
- Examples of well-focused response boundaries: HRPs for Pakistan, Somalia, Colombia, Iraq

2. Prioritization

- Prioritization follows boundary-setting. It involves triaging a few response activities amongst those which were already included in the response plan.
- Typical approach:
 1. In addition to boundaries, prioritization criteria are agreed during the planning process. These are ideally informed by an analysis of where needs are most severe (HNO) as well as context-specific considerations (e.g. local capacity-building, strong early recovery focus in protracted settings).

Examples of prioritization criteria include:

- *life-saving (e.g. use CERF Life-Saving Criteria)*
 - *time-critical (e.g. vaccination ahead of epidemics)*
 - *critically-enabling (e.g. logistics, air transport of aid personnel)*
 - *implemented in the most severely affected geographical areas*
 - *cost-efficiency*
 - *others, as determined by context*
2. Agreed prioritization criteria can be applied at different stages throughout the implementation period.
 - For example, a decision may be taken to prioritize based on monitoring information which highlights progress and challenges for meeting objectives; seasonal response cycles; changes in access and the operational context; or the overall resource situation.

Key points to remember:

- Well-defined **boundaries** help to determine what is included in a humanitarian response plan.
- Prioritization supports decision-making around what happens when and where to put resources first.

Prioritization:

- May be reviewed during the year, as required.
- Does not imply the rest of the plan is not important.
- Can be simple, e.g. “priority” and “other” categories.
- Must be objective.
- Needs strong leadership and clear communication.

- **First level: activities** are prioritized, e.g. *water trucking in rural drought-affected areas*. Donors might subsequently take funding decisions based on their understanding of which organization implements this type of activity.
- **Second level: projects** are prioritized, in line with agreed priority activities, e.g. *project by NGO X providing water-trucking to 50,000 affected people over the next 6 months*. This creates a price tag for priorities at any given moment.

Country Examples:

	South Sudan	Somalia	Syria	Yemen
Costing method	Project-based			Activity-based
Prioritization criteria defined	yes	no	Yes (in progress)	yes
Activities prioritized by sector	no	yes	(in progress)	yes
Projects prioritized by sector	Yes (37% of total HRP budget)	Yes (90% of total)	(in progress)	n/a
Timing of prioritization	start of HRP	start	mid-year (Joint Operational Plans)	start
Validity period of identified priorities	first 6 months of 2015 HRP	entire 2015 HRP period	last 6 months of 2015 HRP	Entire 12-month HRP period

Further information

- Visit www.humanitarianresponse.info
- Contact Mr. Ignacio Leon, Chief, Planning and Monitoring Section, Programme Support Branch, OCHA Geneva: leoni@un.org, direct line: +41-22-9174601