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:

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

### Further information

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