

Case Study: Climate Crisis Working Group of the Global Nutrition Cluster

Context

The Global Nutrition Cluster's (GNC) Climate Crisis Working Group emerged informally around 2022, driven by a small number of committed, passionate global cluster members to establish a dedicated platform for technical exchange, and practical guidance on addressing the impact of the climate crisis on nutrition in emergencies (NIE). The case study introduces critical steps the group took to make the group functional and key lessons learned to those intending to create a global, regional, or national level working group related to the climate crisis.

FORMATION AND EVOLUTION

The Climate Crisis Working Group was initiated in late 2022 through informal discussions among members of the GNC who recognized the urgent need to integrate climate issues into their emergency response efforts, and then formally established in September 2023. Broader humanitarian initiatives, such as the Climate Charter for the Humanitarian Sector (2021) and the IASC Roadmap on Climate Crisis (2024), provided an essential contextual backdrop, highlighting sector-wide recognition of climate challenges and reinforcing the importance of dedicated action on climate-related impacts. An initial brief survey conducted in October 2022 through the Emergency Nutrition Network's (ENN) platform and the GNC newsletter confirmed stakeholders' strong interest in having a dedicated platform to voice concerns and share experiences at country, regional, and global levels regarding how nutrition programming could become climate-adaptive and potentially contribute to climate mitigation efforts.

Box A. Key roles and responsibilities of the GNC Climate Crisis Working Group

- Raise awareness among GNC partners and the broader humanitarian community regarding the intersection of the climate crisis and nutrition.
- Promote technical collaboration, knowledge exchange, and sharing of evidence and experiences to facilitate translation into actionable programming and coordination efforts supporting country-led NiE responses in the context of the climate crisis.
- Identify gaps in current approaches and develop relevant guidance by mobilizing necessary resources, including expertise and financial support.
- Establish connections with existing climate-related initiatives, particularly within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster System, to identify collaboration opportunities and joint efforts.
- Regularly update the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) and its partners on the achievements, lessons learned, and challenges encountered in executing the Climate Crisis Working Group's work plan.

Membership criteria and diversity: Participation in the Working Group is intentionally broad, welcoming representatives from across the GNC ecosystem (including the GNC Coordination Team, Programming Team, global partner agencies), research institutes, academia, donors, national governments, international and national organizations, and individual experts. Members are expected to demonstrate clear interest or expertise in climate crisis and NIE, actively contributing to the group's objectives and implementation of its workplan. The group particularly encourages participation from climate experts, facilitating essential dialogue and collaboration between climate and nutrition specialists to identify practical opportunities and solutions.

Refer to [their ToR](#) for more details.

The group has taken various actions since its establishment (see Annex B for the timeline). The comprehensive scoping study (see Box B) to explore the relationship between climate change and nutrition in humanitarian contexts, commissioned in 2024, help further clarified strategic objectives for the Working Group. Actionable areas for future operational and strategic focus were then identified through a participatory work planning exercise using an online collaborative whiteboard platform.

Box B. Highlights from the GNC Climate Crisis Scoping Report

Key climate threats to nutrition in humanitarian contexts identified

- Increased frequency and severity of climate-related disasters such as floods and droughts.
- Disruption of food production and supply chains, leading to heightened food insecurity.
- Rising temperatures contributing to increased incidence of malnutrition and climate-sensitive infectious diseases.
- Displacement of communities, compounding nutritional vulnerabilities and overstressing humanitarian response systems.
- Shifts in seasonality and slow-onset events, undermining resilience and disrupting early warning and forecasting systems.
- Unequal distribution of climate impacts, with those contributing least to climate change—such as displaced populations, smallholder farmers, and marginalized groups—often most affected.
- Disruptions in access to basic services such as health, nutrition, WASH, and education in climate-affected areas, increasing risks to child and maternal nutrition.

Insights from stakeholders: Stakeholders highlighted "the urgent need for clear, practical tools rather than theoretical frameworks." A key informant emphasized, "**Climate considerations can no longer be optional—they must become a core component of our response to nutrition emergencies.**" Participants also highlighted the importance of integrating local knowledge and existing community coping strategies to ensure that climate-responsive nutrition action is effective and contextually appropriate. There was a strong call to shift from reactive approaches to more forward-looking, anticipatory planning that integrates climate risk into nutrition emergency preparedness and response.

STRATEGIC APPROACH AND WAYS OF WORKING

The Working Group's efforts are guided by several strategic principles, explicitly positioning their focus on short- to medium-term responses to immediate humanitarian impacts and urgent needs. These principles provide a structured framework for action, engagement, and decision-making:

- **Clear framing and positioning:** The deliberate use of the term "climate crisis" instead of "climate change" clarified urgent humanitarian priorities, explicitly positioning the group's work within immediate responses and short-to-medium-term adaptations. This framing was intentionally aligned with the humanitarian mandate, clearly differentiating their scope from broader debates around long-term climate policy and attribution. As one Working Group member noted, "From the start, we deliberately avoided using the term 'climate change,' opting instead for 'climate crisis.' Given our humanitarian context, we have chosen to focus on immediate responses to climate shocks and short-to-medium-term adaptations. We felt this framing better aligns with our humanitarian mandate and donor engagement. Clarifying this positioning early on helped us clearly define our scope and effectively engage stakeholders."
- **Structured yet realistic work planning:** The group's approach included developing structured, participatory work plans from the outset, with clearly defined measurable objectives and timelines. Early comprehensive scoping exercises—including surveys and detailed stakeholder mapping—provided crucial operational clarity, informing strategic decisions. As one stakeholder highlighted, "Having a clear work plan with specific deliverables and defined responsibilities among members has been essential. It allowed us to remain focused and effective despite resource constraints."
- **Engagement of diverse stakeholders:** From its inception, the group proactively engaged stakeholders with specific expertise in climate and nutrition, including academics, climate specialists, and non-traditional humanitarian actors. This deliberate outreach helped expand the conversation beyond the usual NIE actors and brought valuable new perspectives into the group's work. As a result, strategic discussions were significantly enriched, and operational planning was strengthened. One stakeholder noted, "Early intentional engagement with academia and external climate experts significantly deepened our strategic understanding."
- **Localisation and principled approach:** The group explicitly supports a principled rather than prescriptive approach and recognises that the localisation and climate agendas are closely interlinked. It views the expertise of local and national actors as essential to driving effective action. While this remains an area of ongoing work, the group has taken steps to incorporate local perspectives and promote meaningful participation from country-level stakeholders. As one representative remarked, "Actively including local voices is not just strategic but essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of our actions."
- **Manageable group composition:** Recognizing the voluntary nature of contributions, the working group deliberately maintained a manageable size with members committed to active participation. This enabled clearer accountability, streamlined decision-making, and consistent progress. As one member noted, "Maintaining a small but committed membership allowed us to move forward effectively despite voluntary contributions and limited time."
- **Targeted initial funding:** The working group's initial strategic direction was shaped by a GNC-funded consultancy that supported the Climate and Nutrition Scoping Study. This provided early clarity on priorities and helped define the group's operational focus. Since then, the group has functioned as a platform to identify and amplify the work of its members, which has been central to maintaining momentum and achieving progress despite the absence of dedicated funding.

CHALLENGES TO INFLUENCING THE WORK AT COUNTRY LEVEL

At the global level, the working group has clearly defined objectives for integrating climate considerations into nutrition emergency responses. Despite these strong strategic ambitions, translating them into practical implementation at the country level remains challenging. Nutrition cluster coordinators on the ground often face overwhelming immediate humanitarian demands, leaving limited capacity, resources, or incentives for proactive climate-responsive planning and actions.

The GNC scoping report highlighted several key areas requiring attention to bridge this gap effectively, including strengthening coordination between clusters, improving information-sharing mechanisms, building robust capacity at the country level, and creating practical, actionable tools specifically tailored to field contexts. Ensuring sufficient and sustained operational funding beyond initial consultancies and voluntary contributions remains critical to enabling meaningful, long-term impact at the country level.

CONCLUSION

The GNC's experience provides practical examples that others can learn from. The lessons and approaches outlined above can serve as guidance for humanitarian coordinators seeking to establish or strengthen their own working groups. The group deliberately adopted the term "climate crisis" to maintain a clear link to its humanitarian mandate, distinguishing its work from longer-term climate and development programming. This framing also acknowledged that other actors are already leading on integration of nutrition into national policies and development-focused climate agendas, including those related to food systems and adaptation. Using "climate crisis" has helped ensure the group remains focused on acute needs and humanitarian response, without becoming entangled in broader debates about attribution or long-term policy processes.

ANNEX I. RESOURCES

Climate Change and Nutrition Pathways – Asia-Pacific Region, 3 June 2025:

<https://www.nutritioncluster.net/news-and-events/events/climate-change-and-nutrition-pathways-asia-pacific-region>

Nutrition in emergencies climate crisis scoping paper:

<https://www.nutritioncluster.net/sites/nutritioncluster.com/files/2024-08/GNC-NIE-Climate-Crisis-final.pdf>

COP 28 – What does it mean for NIE practitioners (webinar)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48sk5wynMxo&list=PLgaJD9KLkq2J7tLanC_DtDF9PqjydNwiu

GNC Climate Working Group Terms of Reference: <https://www.nutritioncluster.net/resources/climate-working-group-tor>

GNC Climate Crisis Working Group Workplan for 2024:

<https://www.nutritioncluster.net/sites/nutritioncluster.com/files/2024-06/2024-early%202025%20GNC%20Climate%20WG%20Workplan%20%281%29.pdf>

ANNEX II. TIMELINE OF KEY MILESTONES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Late 2022: Informal discussions initiated among dedicated GNC staff, leading to a stakeholder survey to gauge interest and identify priority areas of work.

January 2023: Presentation at the GNC Annual Meeting, highlighting initial priority areas identified through stakeholder consultations.

September 2023: Formal establishment of the Climate Crisis Working Group under the GNC Technical Alliance, clearly defining governance structures and reinforcing operational clarity.

May 2024: Comprehensive 2024 work plan finalized and disseminated.

January - June 2024: Comprehensive scoping report commissioned and conducted, exploring the relationship between climate change and nutrition in humanitarian contexts. Clarified strategic objectives for the Working Group and identified actionable areas for future operational and strategic focus (see Box for more details).

February - June 2024: The West and Central Africa Regional Nutrition and Climate Working Group was established, drawing on global guidance to inform regionally relevant actions (see Annex C for details). The process reflects increasing regional engagement in operationalising the climate and nutrition agenda.

March 2024: Facilitated a global webinar on the implications of COP28 for NIE practitioners. This event raised awareness of progress in integrating nutrition issues into global climate change discussions, and highlighted opportunities for NiE stakeholders to further advocate for the explicit inclusion of nutrition emergency responses in global climate agendas.

2025: Successfully secured funding from Sida (Sweden) for a project, set to run through 2025, focused on locally led nutrition anticipatory actions. While not directly managed by the Working Group, the group played a pivotal role in shaping the proposal. The project includes potential for establishing a dedicated help desk position, designed to strengthen and sustain the operational capacity and strategic effectiveness of the Working Group.

June 2025: Facilitated the event “Climate Change and Nutrition Pathways – Asia Pacific Region” on 3 June, focusing on the impacts of climate change on nutrition in humanitarian settings and practical approaches for climate-responsive action in the region.

ANNEX III. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REGIONAL CLIMATE WORKING GROUP

The West and Central Africa Regional Climate Working Group

Established in February 2024, with Terms of Reference validated by June 2024, the West and Central Africa Regional Nutrition and Climate Working Group operates under the broader Regional Nutrition Working Group. It aligns closely with the Global Nutrition Cluster's Climate Crisis Working Group and aims to address region-specific nutrition and climate challenges effectively.

Membership and Structure: The Working Group consists of NGOs, private organisations, and regional experts, specifically aligning its membership to complement the Global Nutrition Cluster's strategic priorities.

Focus Areas:

- Environmental impacts of nutrition programmes, specifically in the context of planetary boundaries.
- Connections between climate issues, geopolitics, security, conflicts, displacement, and food insecurity.
- Developing and disseminating guidelines and operational recommendations for regional nutritional security actors to implement climate-smart responses tailored to local contexts.

Operational achievements:

- Facilitated evidence generation and knowledge sharing, including the development of environmental markers to reduce carbon impacts of nutrition programmes.
- Influenced public health policies to support sustainable and healthy diets.
- Supported country clusters through targeted guidance on technical adaptations in nutrition programming, responding to specific country requests.

Challenges and responses:

- **Managing membership dynamics to balance inclusivity with effectiveness.** A Working Group member explained, "This group is under a larger nutrition regional working group, and many people are asking if they can join. We have to be smart—not to make too many barriers like saying 'no, you cannot come,' but we have to be selective...we invest a lot of time speaking with people, doing extra meetings to explain where we are, what we are working for, what is expected." Addressing this includes careful selection processes, setting clear expectations, and frequent, detailed communications with prospective members.
- **There is a persistent gap in specialised expertise, particularly from outside the traditional humanitarian sector.** A Working Group member highlighted, "The people who know the group is open are always from the same sector. So it's more difficult to open to outside the humanitarian sector." Efforts to mitigate this involve actively recruiting experts with specific climate and nutrition knowledge.
- **Key projects may stall as team members vanish—not by choice, but due to external pressures like funding cuts.** One member highlighted, "In another group I lead, a critical task is stuck after a team member was abruptly let go due to funding issues. Now, just two leaders and three part-timers are left to handle a mountain of work. This is a growing concern for volunteer-driven groups like ours." Efforts to manage this include clearly documenting roles and responsibilities and advocating for sustainable funding to stabilise the team's composition and workload.