

Call for applicants

Research Specialist – Global WASH Cluster/Field Support Team

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Introduction

ACF is currently looking for a consultant, or consultant team, to undertake a research and analysis assignment. This assignment sits within the Field Support Team mechanism, in support of the Global WASH Cluster.

General Background

The **Field Support Team (FST)** is a surge and remote support mechanism for National Coordination Platforms (NCPs) and other WASH coordination arrangements in humanitarian contexts. The FST operates under the aegis of the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and under the strategic leadership of the GWC Cluster Advocacy and Support Team (CAST).

The FST provides reliable and predictable coordination support to enable effective, efficient, and accountable WASH response coordination at national and sub-national levels. The team is composed of surge cluster coordinators, information management officers and an assessment specialist.

Support is delivered through in-country and virtual deployments, as well as through remote, task-based technical assistance and global services provided to multiple countries through online platforms, guidance, tools, and capacity strengthening activities.

Objectives

Building on the existing evidence generated by the Global WASH Cluster, the objectives of this consultancy are:

1. Identify, compare and analyze operational transition pathways across different humanitarian contexts to develop practical recommendations for strengthening National Coordination Platforms in the context of the Humanitarian Reset, with particular attention to Area-Based Coordination (ABC), localization, multisectoral coordination and sustainable national leadership.
2. Examine how coordination arrangements evolve across different crisis trajectories, identifying the factors that enable or hinder sustainable transition.

3. Identify the institutional, governance and financing arrangements that enable sustainable coordination, including the contribution of government institutions, development actors and appropriate financing mechanisms.
4. Identify effective models for engaging Women-Led Organizations (WLOs), Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) and other nationally rooted actors in coordination and assess which approaches can be adapted across different contexts.

The consultancy is expected to build on the substantial body of evidence already generated by the Global WASH Cluster. Rather than repeating previous analyses, it should focus on translating existing knowledge into forward-looking operational recommendations and practical coordination models.

Assignment Duration and Indicative Workplan

The assignment is expected to run for approximately three months, from mid-September to mid-December 2026. Given the timeframe, the research should adopt a focused and iterative approach, building on the existing GWC evidence base rather than undertaking a new comprehensive literature review.

A **Research Committee (RC)** will be established to steer the process, comprising one member of the GWC SAG, one to two members from CAST and two to three members from ACF (around five people in total).

The work will be organized according to the following indicative schedule:

Phase 1 – Inception and research design (mid to end September 2026)

The researcher will:

- Review the existing GWC Secondary Data Reviews on Transition and Area-Based Coordination, the related workshop findings and other priority reference materials;
- Review existing UNICEF materials related to systems strengthening, emergency preparedness and contingency planning, and sectoral coordination;
- Refine the analytical framework and research questions;
- Propose a focused sample of countries and/or contexts representing different crisis trajectories and levels of transition progress;
- Develop the stakeholder-engagement and data-collection plan;
- Confirm the proposed methodology, interview tools and comparative analysis framework;
- Assess the added value of field visits in November, subject to feasibility and approval.
- Present the progress to the Research Committee (RC) for validation (1st touch point with the RC).

Deliverables: Inception report, including the refined methodology, country or context-selection rationale, detailed workplan, tools (e.g. questionnaires, etc.) and, if relevant, initial proposal for any field visits.

Phase 2 – Initial data collection and interim analysis (October 2026)

The researcher will conduct focused data collection through:

- Key informant interviews;
- Targeted review of country-level documentation;
- Consultations with NCPs, UNICEF country offices/program, government counterparts, local and national actors, development partners and other relevant stakeholders;
- Comparative analysis of countries progressing towards transition, countries where transition has stalled or reversed and countries adapting to changing crisis trajectories.

The analysis should begin identifying:

- Barriers to / Factors of a successful transition;
- How progress has been achieved in practice, and which coordination functions have been key;
- Which enabling conditions are transferable;
- How coordination models or pathways differ across improving, protracted, deteriorating, recurrent-shock and mixed humanitarian-development contexts;
- Emerging options for rethinking/supporting emergency coordination functions across sectoral stakeholders and defining governance and escalation arrangements.

Phase 3 – Sense-making and complementary data collection (End of October to November 2026)

An **online sense-making workshop will be held at the end of October** to review the initial findings, challenge emerging assumptions and refine the areas requiring further investigation (2nd touch point with the RC).

Following the workshop, the researcher will:

- Adjust the analytical framework based on participant feedback;
- Conduct additional interviews and targeted follow-up research;
- Deepen the comparative analysis of selected country cases;
- Refine the proposed context-specific coordination models/pathways and practical options;
- Confirm the relevance of any proposed field visits.

Any field visits should provide evidence that cannot reasonably be gathered remotely, particularly through direct engagement with government, development and locally rooted actors. Destinations will be proposed during the inception phase and validated by ACF and the GWC based on analytical value, country-office engagement, security, operational feasibility and budget availability.

Deliverable: Interim findings and presentation for the sense-making workshop, followed by a short note outlining the conclusions of the workshop and any resulting adjustments to the research.

Phase 4 – Final analysis, operational recommendations and restitution (Late November to mid-December 2026)

The researcher will consolidate and translate the evidence into forward-looking and practical findings. The final analysis should:

- Identify key factors of / barriers to a successful transition of humanitarian coordination functions;
- Identify how the foci of coordination transition changes as crisis trajectories (or capacities) evolve;
- Propose practical approaches for identifying, retaining, sharing or transferring core coordination functions;
- Set out workable governance, accountability, financing and institutional arrangements that support sustainable coordination models;
- Identify practical ways to preserve WASH analytical leadership within ABC and other multisectoral structures;
- Define transition-readiness considerations and safeguards against stalled, reversed or funding-driven transition.

A **final in-person restitution workshop will be held in mid-December** to present and discuss the research findings and proposed operational ways forward (3rd touch point with the RC, potentially in Rome or Geneva or Berlin or Paris, t.b.d.).

Final deliverables, due by mid-December 2026:

- Present the final research findings at an in-person international workshop in December, supported by a presentation (**PowerPoint or equivalent**).
- Produce a comprehensive **comparative research report**, including key findings, lessons learned, good practices, strategic recommendations, comparative typology of context-specific coordination pathways and the enabling conditions that support them;
- Produce a concise **signposting note**, framed through the Transition and Area-Based Coordination (ABC) lens, directing National Coordination Platforms (NCPs), Women-Led Organizations (WLOs), and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) to existing guidance and resources (e.g. IASC Localization Guidance, GWC Localization Roadmap etc.).
- Present the research findings during a global webinar for National Coordination Platforms and other relevant members of the Global WASH Cluster community (online, date to be confirmed).
- Present the research outcomes at an internal ACF learning event (online, date to be confirmed).

Throughout the consultancy, findings should be interpreted in relation to the operational context in which coordination takes place. Rather than seeking a single transition model, the research should examine how coordination models/pathways adapt to different humanitarian contexts and capacities—including conflict, protracted crises, recurrent climatic shocks, mixed humanitarian-development settings and recovery contexts—and identify which operational approaches appear transferable or adaptable across contexts.

Ways of Working

The researcher is expected to:

- Maintain an adaptive research approach, refining the scope and priorities in response to emerging evidence and ongoing discussions on transition, localization, and multisectoral coordination.
- Work closely with the Global WASH Cluster, its relevant working groups (including WIA/Climate Change), and ACF's Emergency Response and Recovery Unit (ERRU) and WASH Department to ensure complementarity, maximize synergies, and avoid duplication of efforts.
- Where agreed during the inception phase, undertake a limited number of field visits (indicatively two, subject to confirmation) to engage directly with government counterparts, development partners, and other key stakeholders. Proposed destinations should be identified based on the initial research findings, thematic priorities, and the enabling environment confirmed by the relevant country offices and will be validated by ACF and the Global WASH Cluster, taking into account operational feasibility, security considerations, and budget availability. Highly insecure or operationally complex contexts requiring extended lead times are not expected to be included.

Evaluation Criteria

Selection criteria are organised into **six components** to support a transparent and evidence-based evaluation process:

1. Assessment of the application form;
2. Review of previous work samples;
3. Financial proposal;
4. Availability;
5. Interview.

Only applicants meeting the requirements of the first five evaluation components will be shortlisted for an interview.

Evaluation Criterion 1 – Application Form Review

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Master's degree (or higher) in a relevant discipline, such as humanitarian or development studies, political science, international relations, public policy, social sciences or a related field. Experience in academia and/or having a PhD are considered assets.
- Minimum five (5) years of professional experience in humanitarian and/or development research, policy analysis, operational research or similar assignments.
- In-depth experience in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including previous experience with the Global WASH Cluster (GWC), the Field Support Team (FST), UNICEF, cluster coordination or other relevant humanitarian coordination architecture. Having coordinated with the cluster as WASH partner is not considered as an in-depth experience.
- Excellent written and spoken English.
- Working knowledge of French.
- Working knowledge of Spanish (desirable).

Evaluation Criterion 2 – Draft methodology

Applicants are requested to submit a **brief methodology note** (maximum **2 pages**) outlining how they would approach the assignment.

The note is not expected to provide a detailed research proposal but should demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the assignment and their proposed approach to delivering it within the available timeframe.

Evaluation Criterion 3 – Sample of previous work

- Sample 1: **One research report, analytical paper or similar publication** demonstrating the applicant's experience in conducting applied research relevant to this consultancy. Work samples may be submitted in **English, French or Spanish**.
- Sample 2: **One presentation** (PowerPoint or equivalent) prepared for a high-level workshop, conference or similar event, demonstrating the applicant's ability to communicate complex findings effectively. Work samples may be submitted in **English, French or Spanish**.

Evaluation Criterion 4 – Daily rate

Applicants should provide their proposed **daily consultancy rate (USD)**, inclusive of all applicable taxes and professional fees. Travel costs and mission-related expenses should **not** be included at this stage, as these will be managed separately in accordance with ACF procedures. The financial proposal will be assessed based on overall value for money rather than lowest cost alone.

Evaluation Criterion 5 - Availability

Applicants should clearly indicate:

- availability to undertake the assignment between mid-September and mid-December 2026;
- ability to commit sufficient time to complete the assignment within the proposed timeframe;
- availability to participate in the in-person final restitution workshop (mid-December);
- willingness and ability to undertake international travel, if required, during November.

Evaluation Criterion 6 – Quality of the interview

Shortlisted candidates will be assessed on their ability to demonstrate:

- Strong understanding of the humanitarian coordination architecture and the cluster system.
- Proven ability to conduct secondary data reviews and synthesise complex material into clear, actionable findings.
- Experience conducting key informant interviews and light qualitative data collection
- Familiarity with the development donor and financing landscape (institutional donors, IFIs, Nexus funding instruments)
- Demonstrated experience with the humanitarian-development nexus, transition, localization or area-based approaches
- Demonstrated ability to use Artificial Intelligence responsibly to support research, evidence synthesis and comparative analysis.

Application process

Applicants shall submit the following documents to **madadamo@actioncontrelafaim.org** in a single PDF file named **Surname_Name_Researcher_ApplicationDocuments**:

- Completed Application Form - (Evaluation Criterion 1): 28 august 2026
- CV(s);
- Draft methodology (maximum two pages) - (Evaluation Criterion 2);
- One research sample - (Evaluation Criterion 3);
- One presentation sample - (Evaluation Criterion 3).