SOUTH SUDAN HUMANITARIAN FUND

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR STRATEGIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEWS

DECEMBER, 2016
1. **Introduction**

1.1 This document aims to standardise the approach to undertaking Strategic and Technical Reviews during South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) allocation processes, strengthening accountability, consistency and prevention of undue influence during project selection and quality control processes.

1.2 The primary intended audiences are; Cluster Coordinators and Co-coordinators, implementing partners, OCHA and UNDP (within the joint SSHF Technical Secretariat), as well as the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and interested donors.

1.3 The SOP describes the typical process for review, selection and quality control of projects during Strategic and Technical Reviews, and describes the purpose, attributes and composition of review committees. The document also outlines a feedback and complaints mechanism in cases of concern regarding review processes.

1.4 The information provided here is based on a typical, indicative process for a standard allocation. The details of any particular allocation process, both for standard and reserve allocations, may vary to meet circumstances. Notwithstanding, in every case the spirit and intent of the approach to safeguard the accountability and objectivity of the process of project review, selection and approval will be upheld.

2. **Strategic Review**

**Aim**

2.1 The Strategic Review (SR) prioritises and recommends concept notes for funding in line with the overarching Allocation Strategy Paper, and with cluster-specific priorities and technical requirements for any given allocation round. Amounts to be allocated against each concept note are also recommended, within the total amount available to the cluster. The process must be credible, transparent, fair and efficient.

**Strategic Review Committee**

2.2 Strategic Review Committee (SRC) members are selected through a consultative process from amongst active members of the cluster, charged with the responsibility of reviewing and recommending concept notes for funding, typically using scorecards developed by the cluster and the SSHF Technical Secretariat to reflect the key criteria for prioritisation.

2.3 Membership of the SRC should be kept to the minimum required in order to properly discharge its functions. Limiting the number of members will help to streamline discussions, and reinforce that members participate in representation of the wider membership and the different constituencies within the cluster, and not in representation of their own agencies or mandates. The SRC should ideally be comprised of the Cluster Coordinator and Co-coordinator, one UN agency representative, one INGO representative and one NNGO representative. In recognition of the varied character and membership of the different clusters (for example, some clusters encompass sub-clusters), and that the number of projects to be reviewed by any given may vary, where there is a requirement to have more members in the SRC the TS should be consulted to agree on the appropriate composition.

2.4 Membership should be established in line with the date specified in the allocation timeline.

2.5 Members should be knowledgeable of humanitarian operations in general and of the specific programmatic areas and approaches of the cluster. They should demonstrate the general attributes expected of members (see end note), and should contribute to the process with a view to upholding the best interests of the Fund in order to optimise its operations and use of resources.

2.6 At least one OCHA representative (typically from the SSHF Technical Secretariat or the Field Coordination Unit) and any other interested donor representative may attend the SRC meetings as observers. M&R Specialists from the SSHF TS, while not formal members of the SRC, will be available to provide advice and support to the Cluster Coordinator and Co-coordinator.
Where the Cluster Coordinator or Co-Coordinator may be absent, alternates should be designated to lead SR. Alternates should be endorsed by the SAG, in line with the above.

**Process**

In line with the preceding clauses and under the facilitation of the Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator the membership of the SRC will be established.

The SRC will agree on the final working version of the scorecard\(^1\) to support the objective prioritisation of concept notes, based on the specificities of the allocation round. This should be completed before proceeding to call for concept notes from implementing partners. The scorecard will be shared with the SHFF TS so that it can be set up accordingly in the on-line Grant Management System (GMS).

Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator will call for concept notes from implementing partners in line with the established allocation timeline. Cluster partners will submit concept notes using the GMS. These will be pre-screened by the SHFF TS against any general eligibility requirements for the allocation\(^2\), and will be either cleared for consideration under the Strategic Review or rejected. Rejected concept notes will not proceed any further in the allocation process.

The Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator will provide copies of eligible concept notes to SRC members ahead of the SR meeting. Each SRC member should review each concept note using the agreed scorecard, off-line and prior to the SR meeting. M&R Specialists from the SSHF TS will also prepare comments on each concept note, which may be used to inform the discussion in the SR meeting.

During the SR meeting, Cluster coordinators / Co-coordinators will brief participants on the process of review and selection; provide an overview of the most relevant documents to be used, including the overarching Allocation Strategy Paper and cluster-specific priorities; and explain the next steps to be taken following the meeting. SRC members will be reminded of their expected attributes and behaviours in order to strengthen the transparency and accountability of the process. Each member of the SRC will present and justify her/his individual review and scoring of the concept notes. SRC members will have an opportunity to ask questions of each other in order to challenge and clarify. Under the leadership of the Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator, for each concept note the SRC will agree on the final scoring which represents the overall, consolidated view of the SRC. To avoid potential conflict of interest and undue influence, a member of the SRC is not allowed to review and score a concept note submitted by her/his organisation, and should leave the room and abstain from participating in the discussion of the concept note.

By the end of the SR meeting, concept notes are prioritised and either recommended for funding or rejected. For those concept notes that are recommended for funding, the SRC must also recommend the monetary amount that should be allocated, and any required changes to the programmatic design and / or cost structure of the proposal.

Where members of the SRC fail to reach consensus on a particular issue a vote may be necessary – however such cases are expected to be few and extraordinary. OCHA representatives and other observers to the meeting will not participate in the voting. Any issues that cannot ultimately be resolved by the SRC must be referred through the feedback and complaints mechanism explained below.

After the SR meeting, Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators will provide feedback to partners. This should include the total number and monetary amount of concept notes received, recommended, rejected, final scores for each, and information about the mechanism for feedback and complaints. Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators will inform partners with concept notes recommended for

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\(^1\) This document pre-supposes the use of a scorecard to support the objective prioritisation of proposals – however the particular approach to any given allocation round may vary to best meet circumstances.

\(^2\) For example, the allocation may exclude a particular sector or type of activity, or projects that are given low priority in the Humanitarian Response Plan.
funding that – subject to validation (see next section below) – they should prepare and submit full project proposals through the GMS, in line with the allocation timeline. Where the SRC has made comments related to a concept note, they should be addressed by the partner when submitting the full project proposal.

2.16 Using templates provided, Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators will provide the SSHF TS with minutes of the SR process, including the portfolio of recommended concept notes and corresponding recommended amounts, and an explanation of how the selected projects are linked to the overarching Allocation Strategy Paper and the cluster-specific priorities. The Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator must record in the GMS feedback for each of the concept notes reviewed.

2.17 Each Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator is encouraged to share with the SSHF TS any lessons learnt or recommendations related to the SR process, to help improve future processes.

3. **Validation of recommended cluster portfolios**

**Aim**

3.1 Following the SR, the recommended concept notes will be validated. The purpose of this step is to check that the recommended concept notes are in fact consistent with the overarching Allocation Strategy Paper and any cluster-specific priorities as previously determined. The validation will also check the completeness of the scoring applied to each concept note, in order to reinforce the credibility, transparency and fairness of the review and selection process.

**Process**

3.2 The SSHF TS will review of the conformity of the recommended concept notes with the overarching Allocation Strategy Paper and cluster-specific priorities as previously determined, as well as the completeness of the scoring, and when satisfied will recommend to the HC that the proposed portfolio of concept notes will proceed to the next stage.

3.3 The HC shall endorse or reject the recommended concept notes, and those endorsed shall move to the next stage and be developed into full project proposals for Technical Review. Rejected concept notes will not proceed any further in the allocation process.

4. **Technical Review**

**Aim**

4.1 The Technical Review (TR) aims to ensure proposals are of the highest possible quality before final approval by the HC. This involves assessing technical soundness, as well as making a thorough review of the budget to ensure value for money and compliance with budgetary requirements. The SSHF TS and Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators will review the proposals including the log frame, M&R details and budget to ensure there is coherence between inputs, activities, outputs and indicators, and that costs are reasonable and realistic.

**Technical Review Committee**

4.2 The TRC is a small group of technical experts to review the details and technical aspects of fully developed project proposals. Members of the Technical Review Committee (TRC) should be selected based on demonstrated technical knowledge as relevant to the specific cluster. They should demonstrate the general attributes expected of members (see end note), and should contribute to the process with a view to upholding the best interests of the Fund in order to optimise its operations and use of resources.

4.3 The TRC will be comprised of the Cluster Coordinator and / or the Co-coordinator, representatives from SSHF TS including the assigned M&R Specialist, and if need be a maximum of two other people with specialised technical expertise from the cluster.
4.4 Other reference people and experts on cross-cutting issues such as gender and protection may provide support as deemed appropriate by the Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator.

**Process**

4.5 Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators will convene the first Technical Review (TR1) meeting for the TRC to review full project proposals. During the TR1 meeting, TRC members will be reminded about the process of reviewing proposals, given an overview of the most relevant reference documents to be used, and given and explanation about the following steps in the overall allocation process. TRC members will also be reminded of their expected attributes and behaviours.

4.6 The Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator and the SSHF TS will record comments on each proposal in the GMS. For each proposal the SSHF TS will then perform one of two actions in the GMS on behalf of the TRC; recommend for final HC approval, or send back to the partner for revision and re-submission.

4.7 Where the proposal is sent back to the partner, the partner will address the comments and resubmit the proposal at which point a second Technical Review (TR2) will take place. The Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator and one member of the SSHF TS will normally be sufficient to review the resubmitted proposal on behalf of the TRC, to ensure all comments previously made have been addressed.

4.8 The Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator and the SSHF TS will record comments on each proposal in the GMS. For each proposal the SSHF TS will then perform one of two actions in the GMS on behalf of the TRC; recommend for final HC approval, or send back to the partner for revision and re-submission.

4.9 Where the proposal is sent back to the submitting partner, the partner will address the comments and resubmit the proposal at which point a final Technical Review will take place. For the final TR the Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator and one member of the SSHF TS will normally be sufficient to review the resubmitted proposal on behalf of the TRC, to ensure all comments previously made have been addressed.

4.10 After the final TR, the SSHF TS will perform one of two actions in the GMS on behalf of the TRC; recommend the proposal for final HC approval, or reject it. Rejected proposals will not move any further in the process.

4.11 Where a proposal is rejected (or in extraordinary cases where during the Technical Review process the partner decides to withdraw) there is no automatic entitlement for the cluster to reallocate the funds elsewhere. Any such arrangement must be discussed and agreed in advance with the SSHF TS and endorsed by the HC.

4.12 Each Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator is encouraged to share with the SSHF TS any lessons learnt or recommendations related to the TR process, to help improve future processes.

5. **Feedback and Complaints Mechanism**

5.1 Stakeholders with insufficiently addressed concerns or complaints regarding SSHF Strategic and Technical review processes can approach the SSHF TS at any time. The e-mail address SSHF-Feedback@un.org is also available to receive feedback and complaints from partners who believe they have been treated incorrectly or unfairly during any of the SHFF processes.

5.2 The OCHA Head of Office or his/her delegate will review and compile the information received at that email address, taking appropriate measures to address issues and / or raising issues as necessary to the HC, who will then determine appropriate action.
End note: Expected attributes of Strategic and Technical Review Committee members

i. **Active partner**: members should be drawn from active cluster partners, identified through a consultative process to represent the wider cluster membership and constituencies.

ii. **Technical knowledge**: members should be knowledgeable of humanitarian operations in general, and of cluster-specific approaches.

iii. **Objective**: members should offer an objective and un-biased review of concept notes and project proposals, upholding the best interests of the Fund.

iv. **Independent**: members should be independent and refrain from undue influence in favour of their own agencies or mandates.

v. **Dedicate time resource**: members should be ready to dedicate the time required for the proper review of concept notes and / or full project proposals.

vi. **Collaborative**: members should collaborate with other members and in a way that supports the Cluster Coordinator / Co-coordinator to successfully conclude high quality review processes.

vii. **Leadership**: Cluster Coordinators / Co-coordinators should ensure smooth and purposeful review processes, seeking support and procedural clarifications from the SSHF TS as required.