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**THE UNALLOCATED INTERFACE: HOW UNICEF, WFP AND FAO COORDINATE FOOD
AND NUTRITION CRISIS RESPONSE,
AND WHETHER COORDINATION BREAKDOWN IS ARCHITECTURAL OR CONTEXTUAL
*EVIDENCE FROM UKRAINE, YEMEN AND NIGER***

Relatore:

Chiar.mo Prof. Marco CLEMENTI

Correlatore:

Prof. Mario DE PROSPERO

Tesi di laurea di:

Radina KEMALOVA

Matricola n. 532293

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Abstract

This thesis examines coordination between UNICEF, WFP and FAO in food and nutrition crises, where complementary mandates and an elaborate architecture repeatedly fail to produce coordination. It asks how they coordinate the interfaces between their responsibilities, when coordination breaks down, and whether the failures are systemic or context-specific.

It develops the concept of the **unallocated interface**: a point at which two clearly defined mandates meet and for which no body holds responsibility. Situated within the global governance premise of authority without hierarchy, it is distinguished from regime complexity's usual explanation through overlapping mandates and contested authority. The same absence of hierarchy produces opposite evidence and requires opposite remedies.

The design is a qualitative comparative case study using process tracing across three cases of maximum variation: Ukraine, Yemen and Niger. Each is reconstructed through four response phases against its formal baseline and assessed against hypotheses on mandate allocation, funding structure, state authority and crisis intensity.

The unallocated-interface account is supported in all three cases. Coordination proved durable where participation was obligatory, as in the IPC and Cadre Harmonisé, and fragile where discretionary. Integration occurred only where a dedicated financing instrument constituted it. Funding rigidity, state authority and crisis intensity did not create the weakness but determined its consequences: a gap in Ukraine, a persistent deficit in Yemen, and in Niger in late 2023 a failure that left moderately wasted children untreated while severe cases were reached.

The weakness is therefore systemic, its consequences context-specific: a systemic vulnerability activated by context.

Sommario

La tesi esamina il coordinamento tra UNICEF, WFP e FAO nelle crisi alimentari e nutrizionali, dove mandati complementari e un'architettura articolata non bastano a produrlo. Si chiede come coordinino le interfacce tra le proprie responsabilità, quando il coordinamento venga meno e se i fallimenti siano sistemici o contestuali.

Elabora il concetto di **interfaccia non allocata**: un punto in cui due mandati chiaramente definiti si incontrano e di cui nessun organismo è responsabile. Collocata nel presupposto di un'autorità priva di gerarchia, si distingue dalla spiegazione consueta della complessità di regime, fondata su sovrapposizione dei mandati e contestazione dell'autorità: la stessa assenza di gerarchia produce evidenze e rimedi opposti.

Studio di caso comparato qualitativo con *process tracing* su tre casi a massima variazione, Ucraina, Yemen e Niger, ricostruiti in quattro fasi rispetto alla base formale e valutati su ipotesi relative a mandati, finanziamenti, autorità statale e intensità della crisi.

L'interfaccia non allocata trova conferma nei tre casi: il coordinamento è risultato duraturo dove la partecipazione era obbligatoria (IPC, Cadre Harmonisé) e fragile dove discrezionale; l'integrazione solo dove uno strumento di finanziamento dedicato la costituiva. Rigidità dei finanziamenti, autorità statale e intensità della crisi ne hanno determinato, non generato, le conseguenze: una lacuna in Ucraina, un deficit persistente nello Yemen e, in Niger a fine 2023, un fallimento che ha lasciato senza trattamento la malnutrizione acuta moderata mentre i casi gravi venivano raggiunti.

La debolezza è dunque sistemica, le sue conseguenze contestuali: una vulnerabilità sistemica attivata dal contesto.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CILSS	Comité permanent Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ERRY	Enhanced Rural Resilience in Yemen
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FSAC	Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
FSIN	Food Security Information Network
FSL	Food security and livelihoods
FSLC	Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster
GAP	Global Action Plan on Child Wasting
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System
GNAFC	Global Network Against Food Crises
GNC	Global Nutrition Cluster
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IYCF	Infant and young child feeding
L3	Level 3 emergency
MAM	Moderate acute malnutrition
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MUAC	Mid-upper arm circumference
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RPCA	Réseau de Prévention des Crises Alimentaires
RUSF	Ready-to-use supplementary food

RUTF	Ready-to-use therapeutic food
SAM	Severe acute malnutrition
SMART	Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID/BHA	United States Agency for International Development, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WHZ	Weight-for-height z-score
YHF	Yemen Humanitarian Fund

INTRODUCTION

Every year, hundreds of millions of people are affected by food and nutrition crises — in 2024 alone, 295.3 million people across 53 countries and territories faced high levels of acute food insecurity, the highest figure in the report's history (FSIN and GNAFC, 2025) — acute food insecurity and malnutrition driven by conflict, climate shocks, and displacement, requiring an emergency response distinct from long-term development programming.

The international community has built an elaborate institutional architecture to respond — a system of United Nations agencies, donor governments, non-governmental organisations, and coordination mechanisms designed to deliver food and nutrition assistance to those who need it most.

At the centre of this architecture sit three agencies whose mandates were designed to be complementary: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). Together, they constitute the principal tripartite institutional framework for food and nutrition crisis response at the global level.

Theoretically, the division of labour among the three is logical and coherent. UNICEF holds the mandate for child nutrition — the treatment of severe and moderate acute malnutrition, infant and young child feeding, and micronutrient supplementation.

WFP delivers emergency food assistance, manages the logistics infrastructure that keeps humanitarian supply chains functioning, and leads prevention-oriented nutrition programming through specialised nutritious foods.

FAO addresses the upstream structural drivers of food insecurity — agricultural livelihoods, food systems, and early warning — providing the analytical and programmatic foundation on which acute responses are supposed to rest.

Taken together, the three mandates were designed to be complementary across different points of the food-security and nutrition continuum: FAO addressing upstream food systems and livelihoods, WFP addressing immediate food access and food assistance, and UNICEF addressing acute child nutrition and related services. The analytical difficulty, however, lies not only in the boundaries between mandates themselves, but in the relationships between activities that those boundaries create. The formal architecture

allocates sectors, functions and caseloads more readily than it allocates the transitions and interfaces between them.

The mandates are broadly distinct and the formal coordination architecture is elaborate, but the existence of coordination mechanisms does not mean that every relationship between mandates is itself assigned or governed. The cluster system, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, joint planning mechanisms and analytical frameworks provide platforms for coordination, but their ability to manage the interfaces between specialised responsibilities varies across contexts.

Still, evaluations and empirical evidence from different crisis settings repeatedly point to a gap between formal coordination design and the way relationships between specialised programmes are managed in practice. The problem is therefore not simply the absence of coordination mechanisms. It is that formal mechanisms may coexist with interfaces that remain weakly managed, inconsistently connected, or entirely unassigned.

The relevant analytical object is therefore not only the agency or the mandate, but the interface at which responsibilities meet. These interfaces include food-security and nutrition analysis, food assistance and nutrition programming, agriculture and livelihoods and nutrition outcomes, cash and nutrition objectives, prevention and treatment, the SAM/MAM division, and geographic and beneficiary targeting. The central question is whether the formal architecture assigns responsibility for managing these relationships, and what happens when it does not.

This thesis investigates the gap between the formal architecture of UN food and nutrition governance and its operational reality in crisis settings. Its central theoretical proposition is that coordination problems may arise not only where mandates overlap or compete, but where clearly allocated responsibilities meet at an interface for which no institution, mechanism or instrument is responsible. The thesis therefore moves beyond documenting coordination problems to establish the institutional and political mechanisms through which such problems emerge, persist, or become consequential, and the conditions under which they are more or less likely to occur.

The Research Question

The primary research question guiding this thesis is:

How do UNICEF, WFP and FAO coordinate responsibilities and interfaces in food and nutrition crises, and under what conditions does coordination break down?

This question has two analytically distinct dimensions. The first is descriptive — how the three agencies formally divide and operationally enact their responsibilities, and how the interfaces between those responsibilities are organised across crisis response phases. The second is explanatory — what drives divergence between formal design and operational practice, including whether coordination problems arise from overlapping claims, from unallocated interfaces between otherwise distinct responsibilities, or from funding, state-capacity and crisis-intensity mechanisms that condition how those structures operate.

The core sub-question that structures the comparative design of the thesis is:

Are coordination failures systemic properties of the three-agency nutrition governance architecture, or context-specific outcomes shaped by the political and operational conditions of each crisis?

If coordination problems recur across radically different crisis contexts, this would strengthen the interpretation that they arise from structural features of the institutional architecture rather than from any single crisis environment. If, however, particular mechanisms appear only under specific configurations of state capacity, crisis type, donor and funding conditions, or coordination arrangements, the evidence would support a more context-dependent explanation. The comparative task is therefore not to determine whether coordination is simply systemic or context-specific, but to establish which mechanisms recur across configurations and which are activated only under particular conditions.

The Central Argument

This thesis argues that the formal division of labour among UNICEF, WFP and FAO reflects functional specialisation at the global governance level, but that this allocation does not necessarily extend to the interfaces between specialised responsibilities. Coordination problems may therefore arise even where individual mandates are

comparatively clear: responsibility is assigned to each side of a boundary, while responsibility for the relationship between them remains unassigned. The thesis examines this unallocated-interface mechanism alongside alternative explanations based on mandate overlap, funding structure, state capacity and crisis intensity, asking how these mechanisms interact to produce different coordination outcomes across crisis settings.

A particularly important interface is the division of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) within the wasting continuum. UNICEF and WFP hold legitimate but differently grounded claims over MAM: UNICEF approaches it through child nutrition and the malnutrition continuum, while WFP approaches it through food insecurity and food-based intervention. The resulting institutional arrangement does not necessarily constitute simple mandate overlap. Rather, the formal architecture can allocate different responsibilities along the continuum without assigning responsibility for the relationship between them. This distinction is central to the thesis: where the relationship between adjacent responsibilities is unassigned, separate supply chains, funding streams, procurement arrangements and programme systems may operate without a mechanism for managing transitions, substitution or joint contingency. Whether this produces duplication, gaps, deficits or consequential coordination failure is an empirical question for the case chapters.

A second, structurally different interface separates FAO's multi-year agricultural and food-systems timelines from the acute response cycles of UNICEF and WFP. The resulting problem is conceptually different from contested or overlapping mandates: it concerns the integration of upstream and downstream activities operating on different temporal and institutional logics. The empirical analysis therefore examines whether FAO's food-security, livelihoods and resilience work is integrated with acute nutrition responses or develops as a parallel track.

The analytical contribution of this thesis is to move beyond documenting coordination problems to explaining them through a theoretically grounded causal account. It distinguishes between overlapping mandates and unallocated interfaces, identifies the mechanisms through which funding structures, state authority and crisis intensity may condition coordination, and assesses the relative explanatory weight of four hypotheses across materially different crisis contexts.

The Four Hypotheses

Four hypotheses are tested, each isolating a distinct independent variable and causal mechanism. The dependent variable throughout is **coordination outcome** — the degree to which agencies delineate roles, avoid duplication, produce coherent joint nutrition programming and maintain strategic alignment across crisis response phases.

H1 — The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis. Clearer allocation of responsibilities and of the interfaces between them produces better coordination outcomes. H1 is tested through two competing mechanisms. The first is a mandate-ambiguity mechanism, in which overlapping or insufficiently differentiated responsibilities generate contestation, competing claims and parallel programming. The second is the unallocated-interface mechanism, in which responsibilities are comparatively clear but no institution or instrument is assigned responsibility for the relationship between them. The hypothesis therefore asks not only whether mandates are clear, but whether the relationships between those mandates are institutionally assigned and managed.

H2 — The Funding Structure Hypothesis. Funding structures shape coordination outcomes by influencing both organisational incentives and adaptive capacity. Heavily earmarked and short-term funding may create incentives for agencies to protect or expand their own programme space where multiple organisations are eligible for the same resources, but it may also leave the work between mandates — such as referral systems, shared data, joint supply arrangements and common contingency mechanisms — without a clear funding home. H2 therefore distinguishes between a competition mechanism and a funding-rigidity mechanism, and asks whether funding conditions can be traced to observable changes in coordination behaviour.

H3 — The State Capacity Hypothesis. The presence, capacity and disposition of national authority shape the ability of the coordination system to allocate responsibility, arbitrate between organisations and resolve coordination problems. Weak, fragmented or contested authority may remove an external mechanism capable of enforcing coordination, while capable national institutions may themselves structure coordination by leading sectoral systems or imposing regulatory requirements. H3 therefore does not assume that weak state capacity automatically produces coordination failure, or that

strong capacity guarantees coherence; it tests whether changes in national authority alter the way coordination mechanisms operate.

H4 — The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis. Higher crisis intensity amplifies existing coordination weaknesses by increasing pressure on agencies to expand, contract or adapt operations under compressed conditions. The mechanism may operate through more than one pathway: crisis pressure may produce operational convergence, strategic incoherence, or volatility in the coordination architecture itself. Because these pathways imply different outcomes, the empirical analysis establishes which of them the evidence supports in each case and returns a single verdict rather than separate findings for each, while remaining open to crisis-intensity pathways not anticipated in the framework.

These four hypotheses are not mutually exclusive. The thesis treats them as potentially interacting mechanisms rather than as rival explanations that must operate independently. The comparative analysis therefore assesses which mechanisms recur across materially different contexts, which are conditional on particular configurations of state authority, funding, crisis intensity or interface structure, and how combinations of mechanisms may amplify or constrain one another.

A Note on Terminology

The thesis uses coordination problem as the broadest term for weaknesses or difficulties identified in the relationship between agencies and their programmes. Where the evidence permits greater precision, it distinguishes between four analytically different forms. A **coordination gap** refers to an interface for which no coordinating arrangement existed. A **translation failure** refers to a formal expectation of complementarity that was not converted into practice. A **coordination deficit** refers to a sustained and material weakness in an arrangement the system intended to function. **Coordination failure** is reserved for cases in which an identifiable coordination weakness is linked to a documented consequential negative outcome through an established causal mechanism. These categories are therefore distinguished by evidentiary threshold and causal attribution, not simply by severity. The term coordination failure is retained as the thesis's headline question because it is used in the evaluation literature, but it is not applied to every instance of imperfect coordination.

Scope and Timeframe

The thesis examines three crisis contexts across case-specific analytical windows.

Yemen and Niger are examined across 2019–2024, while Ukraine is examined across 2022–2024, beginning with the full-scale invasion that produced the institutional configuration under examination. The primary window was selected for three reasons. First, 2019 provides the pre-Global Action Plan on Child Wasting baseline — the period immediately before the most significant formal attempt to resolve the MAM mandate boundary was launched in 2020, allowing the thesis to assess whether that reform produced observable changes in operational practice. Second, the 2019–2024 window captures three analytically distinct phases of the international humanitarian financing cycle: a period of relative stability (2019–2020), the COVID-19 system stress-test (2020–2021), and the period of donor reorientation and intensified funding competition following the Ukraine crisis (2022–2024). Third, 2024 represents the most recent year for which sufficiently complete evaluation, funding, and nutrition classification data is available across all three cases.

Case Selection

Three cases are examined through qualitative comparative process tracing: Ukraine, Yemen and Niger. Each is treated as a longitudinal country-level coordination system involving UNICEF, WFP and FAO, observed across its defined analytical window and reconstructed through four common phases of response. The cases are not intended to represent successful or unsuccessful responses as wholes; they provide variation in the institutional and contextual conditions under which coordination mechanisms operate.

The cases were selected through maximum variation sampling across state capacity, crisis type, donor and funding conditions, and the institutional form of coordination arrangements at the interfaces under examination.

Ukraine represents a comparatively high-capacity state confronting an acute, sudden-onset crisis with substantial and unusually flexible international financing.

Yemen represents a context of prolonged conflict, fragmented and contested authority, severe food insecurity and malnutrition, and substantial but increasingly constrained and fragmented humanitarian financing.

Niger represents a weaker but functioning state facing chronic and seasonally intensified food-security and nutrition needs under more constrained financing conditions, with a sharp shift in the governmental counterpart following the change of government of 26 July 2023. This within-case change provides a particularly useful basis for examining how changes in state authority affect coordination arrangements.

This selection of cases directly addresses the core sub-question. If comparable coordination mechanisms or problems recur across Ukraine, Yemen and Niger despite substantial differences in state authority, crisis type, funding conditions and institutional arrangements, the evidence strengthens the interpretation that they arise from structural features of the governance architecture. If particular mechanisms instead track specific configurations of these conditions, the evidence supports a context-dependent explanation. The purpose of the comparison is therefore to distinguish recurring structural mechanisms from mechanisms activated only under particular conditions.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One maps the institutional architecture of UN food and nutrition governance — the mandates of the three agencies, the formal coordination mechanisms, the MAM fault line, and the financing architecture. This chapter establishes the baseline against which operational deliverables are measured throughout the empirical analysis.

Chapter Two develops the theoretical framework. Drawing on global governance theory, regime complexity, humanitarian coordination scholarship, and food security and nutrition governance literature, it builds the analytical tools used to explain coordination failure and connects them explicitly to the four hypotheses.

Chapter Three presents the methodology — the process tracing design, the funding flow analysis, the case selection logic, the analytical timeframe, and the data sources.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the three primary case studies — Ukraine, Yemen, and Niger respectively — each traced through four crisis response phases with embedded funding flow analysis and hypothesis assessment.

Chapter Seven synthesises the findings across all three cases, delivers the final hypothesis verdicts, and answers the core sub-question about systemic versus context-specific failure. It also presents the conclusions — the theoretical contributions, policy implications, limitations, and agenda for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

MANDATES AND INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF UN FOOD AND NUTRITION GOVERNANCE

1.1 The Three Agencies and Their Mandates

The global response to food and nutrition crises is not managed by a single institution but is distributed across an assemblage of United Nations agencies, each possessing a distinct founding mandate and operational model. At the centre of this grouping sit three agencies whose combined reach spans the full spectrum of food and nutrition crisis response: UNICEF, WFP, and FAO. Understanding what each agency is formally mandated to do — and where those mandates were designed to meet — is the necessary starting point for understanding why coordination between them so frequently fails.

UNICEF: child nutrition, SAM and MAM treatment, IYCF

The United Nations Children's Fund was established in 1946, originally as an emergency relief body for children affected by the Second World War. Over the following decades its mandate broadened into a permanent development and humanitarian organisation focused on child survival, development, and protection. Within the food and nutrition domain, UNICEF's mandate centres on child nutrition — a specific, clinically defined programmatic space that distinguishes it from both WFP and FAO.

UNICEF's primary nutrition mandate encompasses three interconnected areas. The first is the treatment of severe acute malnutrition, the most life-threatening form of acute undernutrition, defined by a weight-for-height z-score below minus three, a mid-upper arm circumference below 115 millimetres in children under five, or the presence of bilateral pitting oedema (WHO and UNICEF, 2009). SAM carries a high risk of death — WHO estimates the case fatality rate of untreated SAM at between 10 and 20 per cent (WHO et al., 2007) — and its treatment — through community-based therapeutic care using ready-to-use therapeutic food — lies unambiguously within UNICEF's mandate. UNICEF procures and supplies RUTF, supports national governments in establishing outpatient therapeutic care protocols, trains community health workers in MUAC screening, and leads the global evidence base on SAM management.

The second area is the prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, defined by a weight-for-height z-score between minus two and minus three, or a MUAC between 115 and 125 millimetres. MAM does not carry the immediate case fatality risk of SAM, but it substantially increases vulnerability to infectious disease, impairs cognitive development, and if untreated progresses to SAM. UNICEF frames MAM as a child survival outcome and treats it as an extension of its core nutrition mandate, particularly for children under two and for pregnant and lactating women.

The third area is infant and young child feeding: the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, appropriate complementary feeding, and the protection of breastfeeding practices in emergency settings where commercial formula distribution poses risks to infant health. IYCF programming falls within UNICEF's mandate and represents one of the cleaner institutional boundaries in the nutrition governance architecture.

Beyond these three programmatic areas, UNICEF is the designated Cluster Lead Agency for the Global Nutrition Cluster, the inter-agency coordination mechanism for nutrition in humanitarian emergencies. The designation is sole rather than shared: WFP participates as one of the cluster's partners, and the GNC's own coordination team is led by UNICEF with Save the Children as co-lead. This gives UNICEF a formal coordination function extending beyond its own operational programming, and positions it as the primary institutional anchor of global nutrition governance in crisis settings. At country level the arrangement varies, with UNICEF leading or co-leading nutrition clusters depending on context, and WFP or a national ministry co-coordinating in some responses.

WFP: food assistance, MAM prevention and logistics

The World Food Programme was established in 1961 as the food assistance arm of the United Nations system. It is the world's largest humanitarian organisation by operational scale, reaching over 150 million people annually across more than 80 countries, and its mandate encompasses emergency food assistance, school feeding, and the management of the humanitarian logistics infrastructure that enables the broader humanitarian system to function.

Within the nutrition domain, WFP's mandate operates across two distinct but connected areas. The first is general food assistance — the provision of food rations or cash and

voucher equivalents to populations facing acute food insecurity. In nutrition terms, general food assistance is preventive rather than therapeutic: it addresses the immediate food consumption gap that, if sustained, produces acute malnutrition. WFP frames this as its primary nutrition contribution, preventing the deterioration of food security that drives malnutrition at population level.

The second area is MAM prevention through specialised nutritious foods, delivered through blanket and targeted supplementary feeding programmes using ready-to-use supplementary food. This is where WFP's mandate meets UNICEF's. WFP frames MAM not as a child survival outcome but as a food insecurity outcome — a manifestation of insufficient dietary quality and quantity, appropriately addressed through food-based interventions. The distinction sounds technical but carries significant operational and financial consequences: it means that both UNICEF and WFP hold defensible claims over the same population of moderately acutely malnourished children. What follows from that dual claim is the subject of §1.2.

Beyond its nutrition programming, WFP manages the humanitarian logistics infrastructure on which the broader system depends. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, managed by WFP, provides air transport to humanitarian actors in access-constrained environments, and WFP manages common logistics services, warehouse capacity, and supply chain coordination across crisis settings. This logistics function gives WFP structural leverage over the broader humanitarian response that extends well beyond its formal mandate.

WFP's formal coordination roles lie outside nutrition. It co-leads the Global Food Security Cluster with FAO and holds sole leadership of the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters, while participating in the Global Nutrition Cluster as a partner rather than as a lead. The resulting configuration is asymmetric in a way that matters for what follows: WFP holds a substantial share of the wasting caseload within a coordination structure it does not lead, and leads a coordination structure in which its principal counterpart is FAO rather than UNICEF. The two agencies most directly engaged at the MAM boundary therefore meet within a venue that only one of them controls.

FAO: food systems, livelihoods and early warning

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was established in 1945 as the primary UN agency for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and rural development. Its mandate is the broadest of the three agencies in geographic and temporal scope, but the narrowest in terms of direct humanitarian response capacity. FAO's role in food and nutrition crisis response is anchored in three interconnected functions.

The first is agricultural livelihoods support: the provision of seeds, tools, livestock, and technical assistance to farm households whose productive capacity has been disrupted by conflict, drought, or displacement. FAO's livelihoods programming operates on a different temporal logic from that of UNICEF or WFP. Where they measure their response cycles in weeks and months, FAO's agricultural interventions operate on seasonal and multi-year timelines. This temporal mismatch is the second major structural fault line in the three-agency architecture, and it establishes the conditions for a systematic disconnection between FAO's upstream programming and the acute response cycles of its two partners.

The second function is early warning and food security analysis. FAO manages the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), which monitors food supply and demand and issues regular food security updates on countries at risk. FAO's early warning function is formally embedded in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system, the primary joint framework through which the humanitarian community classifies the severity of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition. This analytical mandate is one of FAO's clearest institutional contributions to joint response architecture, and one of the few areas in which its role is not claimed by either partner. The institutional form of that framework, which differs in kind from the cluster arrangements described in §1.3, is examined there.

The third function is food systems governance: the normative and technical work of supporting national governments in building food systems capable of sustaining nutritional outcomes over the long term. This includes policy advice on agricultural investment, food safety regulation, market development, and the structural drivers of chronic food insecurity. In nutrition terms, FAO's food systems mandate addresses the environmental and structural conditions that determine whether populations are

nutritionally vulnerable in the first place — a contribution essential for durable solutions but largely invisible in acute crisis response.

FAO co-leads the Global Food Security Cluster with WFP, formalising the partnership in the humanitarian coordination architecture. Its engagement with the cluster system is nonetheless structurally different from that of either partner, reflecting both its operational model and the tension between a development-oriented mandate and the short-term humanitarian response logic that dominates cluster coordination.

The designed complementarity and its limits

Taken together, the three mandates were designed to be complementary rather than competitive. FAO addresses the structural and upstream dimensions of food insecurity, creating conditions for food system resilience. WFP delivers food assistance to populations facing immediate food gaps and prevents the deterioration that produces acute malnutrition. UNICEF treats the acute malnutrition that food assistance alone cannot reverse and protects the infant feeding practices that determine nutritional outcomes in the earliest stages of life. The division is conceptually coherent: upstream structural work, midstream food assistance, downstream nutrition treatment, each occupying a distinct programmatic space along the food security and nutrition continuum. The boundaries between upstream, midstream and downstream are not, however, self-enforcing. They require institutional deference, shared operational frameworks, and compatible incentive structures to hold in practice. Whether those conditions obtain in the crisis settings examined here is a question for the empirical chapters rather than one this chapter can settle.

A further feature of the design deserves emphasis at the outset, because it recurs throughout the analysis that follows. The architecture allocates caseloads and sectors. It does not allocate the transitions between them. A child moving from moderate to severe wasting crosses an institutional boundary; a household moving from acute food insecurity to agricultural recovery crosses another; a health facility receiving supplies from two agencies sits at a third. Nothing in the formal division of labour assigns responsibility for what happens at those transitions. Whether this, rather than contested ownership of caseloads, is the more consequential source of coordination failure is a question the empirical chapters are designed to answer.

1.2 The Primary Fault Line: the MAM Boundary

Of all the boundaries in the three-agency architecture, one is analytically primary: the point at which responsibility for acute malnutrition passes from one agency to the other. This section explains what moderate acute malnutrition is, why both UNICEF and WFP hold legitimate claims over it, and what the resulting division makes possible.

What moderate acute malnutrition is

Acute malnutrition, also referred to as wasting, is a form of undernutrition characterised by rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight relative to height. It is measured primarily through two anthropometric indicators: weight-for-height z-score and mid-upper arm circumference, the latter a simpler field measurement that correlates strongly with child mortality risk.

Acute malnutrition is classified into two categories of severity. Severe acute malnutrition — WHZ below minus three, or MUAC below 115mm — represents the life-threatening end of the spectrum and requires immediate therapeutic intervention. Moderate acute malnutrition — WHZ between minus two and minus three, or MUAC between 115 and 125mm — represents a less immediately life-threatening but clinically significant condition that substantially elevates mortality risk if untreated, impairs child development, and frequently progresses to SAM in contexts of continued food insecurity and disease exposure.

The clinical distinction between SAM and MAM is clear. Its translation into institutional practice is not, and the question of which agency bears responsibility for MAM programming marks the point at which a settled medical classification becomes a site of overlapping mandate and discretionary interpretation.

Why both UNICEF and WFP hold legitimate claims

UNICEF's claim over MAM derives from its child survival mandate. MAM in children under five, and particularly in children under two and in pregnant and lactating women, is a direct child health outcome falling within UNICEF's programmatic responsibility for child nutrition. UNICEF treats MAM through targeted supplementary feeding using RUSF, following protocols developed within its broader community management of acute malnutrition framework. **From UNICEF's institutional perspective, MAM is**

part of the malnutrition continuum: a condition on the same clinical spectrum as SAM, requiring the same community-based therapeutic approach and managed within the same programmatic framework.

WFP's claim over MAM derives from its food security mandate. MAM, in WFP's institutional framing, is a manifestation of food insecurity — an outcome of insufficient dietary quantity and quality, appropriately addressed through food-based interventions. WFP treats MAM through blanket and targeted supplementary feeding using RUSF and specialised nutritious foods, framing this as prevention of further nutritional deterioration rather than treatment of a clinical condition. **From WFP's institutional perspective, MAM is a food security outcome falling squarely within its mandate for food assistance and nutrition-sensitive programming.**

Both framings are technically defensible. Clinical evidence supports both a nutrition-treatment approach and a food-based prevention approach to MAM, and the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting acknowledges the legitimacy of both while calling for their integration. The matter is not that one agency is right and the other wrong about MAM, but that two agencies with different institutional identities, different financing structures and different accountability chains are both legitimately present in the same programmatic space, without a binding mechanism for determining who leads, who follows, and how their respective contributions relate to one another.

What the division of the caseload makes possible

The conditions follow from that arrangement. They are not four descriptions of the same problem, and they do not all point in the same direction. Which of them obtains in a given response, and with what consequences, is what the empirical chapters establish.

Divided delivery. UNICEF and WFP may run separate supplementary feeding programmes addressing the same clinical continuum, each within its own protocol, product range and targeting criteria. Where those programmes reach the same children, the result is duplication. Where each assumes the other is covering ground that neither in fact covers, the result is a gap. And where the two halves of the continuum are served adequately but separately, the result is neither, until something disturbs one half and not the other. The three outcomes have different causes and different remedies, and

distinguishing between them in a given response requires evidence of what each agency actually delivered and where.

Separate operational infrastructure. Because each agency serves its own portion of the caseload, each maintains its own supply chain, its own procurement arrangements, its own beneficiary registration and its own agreements with the facilities through which treatment is delivered. This is not duplication in the sense of two agencies performing the same work; it is two operational systems serving one clinical continuum. Whether that separation produces efficiency, redundancy or vulnerability is a question about what happens under stress rather than about the arrangement itself.

The question of substitution. Two pipelines serving one caseload might be expected to supply resilience: where one is interrupted, the other could carry part of the load. This is the proposition Chapter Two takes from the regime complexity literature's account of institutional redundancy, and it is testable. Substitution requires an instrument — shared stock, a procurement facility, a mutual protocol, a body empowered to authorise a transfer. Whether any such instrument exists in a given response, and whether it operates when needed, is an empirical question the case chapters address directly.

Fragmented visibility. UNICEF and WFP report their nutrition programming separately: to separate governing boards, through separate donor channels, within separate evaluation frameworks. Each agency can demonstrate its own programmatic achievements; neither can demonstrate the effectiveness of the joint response. The consequence extends beyond an incomplete picture for donors. An evaluation architecture organised by agency examines what agencies do, which raises the question of whether a weakness located between them can come to the system's attention at all.

Two readings of the MAM boundary are therefore available, and they are not the same. **The first is that the architecture produces contestation, with two agencies claiming the same ground and coordination failing through friction between them. The second is that it produces separation, with two agencies holding adjacent ground and nothing holding the line between them.** The coordination literature

anticipates the first. Whether the second is the more consequential condition, and under what circumstances, is what the empirical chapters are designed to determine.

1.3 The Coordination Architecture

Recognising the coordination challenges inherent in a multi-agency humanitarian system, the international community has developed an elaborate formal architecture for managing inter-agency relations in crisis settings. This section describes the primary components of that architecture as they apply to food and nutrition governance. It distinguishes throughout between two kinds of mechanism, because the distinction becomes analytically consequential in the empirical chapters: **mechanisms in which participation is undertaken voluntarily by the organisations concerned, and mechanisms in which participation carries a procedural obligation independent of any participant's continuing judgement about its value.**

The cluster system

The cluster system was introduced in 2005 following the Humanitarian Reform process initiated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. Before 2005, humanitarian coordination was ad hoc: different lead agencies took responsibility for different sectors in different crises without a consistent global framework. The cluster system was designed to impose predictability and accountability by assigning global leadership responsibility for specific humanitarian sectors to designated UN agencies, with the expectation that the same agency would lead coordination in that sector across all crisis contexts.

The system operates at two levels. At the global level, designated lead agencies convene global clusters: inter-agency platforms that develop standards, guidelines and tools for their respective sectors and support country-level coordination. At the country level, clusters are activated in specific crisis contexts, bringing together UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors operating in the same sector under a common coordination framework managed by the cluster lead agency.

The logic of the system rests on three assumptions: that fixed sector leadership **improves coordination; that common standards and tools reduce duplication; and that collective outcome monitoring through shared platforms improves accountability.**

Two features of the system's design require flagging at the outset. The first is that **cluster activation is not automatic. Where a host government elects to lead a response itself, or where a sector is coordinated through national structures, sectors may operate on cluster principles without formal activation and without the accountability obligations that activation carries. The presence or absence of an activated cluster is therefore itself a variable rather than a constant across the cases examined here.** The second is that **cluster membership is voluntary in a specific and consequential sense.** The IASC Reference Module sets out **minimum commitments that participating organisations undertake** — to participate actively, to contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities, to work cooperatively with other members, and to assume leadership responsibilities as required — but these are undertakings entered into rather than obligations imposed, and coordination can accordingly be undermined by non-participation (IASC, 2015). Nothing in the architecture compels an organisation to raise a question at a cluster, to attend a meeting, or to submit information it would prefer to retain, and no cluster holds authority to allocate responsibility between the organisations within it. Coordination through the cluster system is therefore discretionary at the point of participation, and what follows from that is examined in Chapter Two.

The Global Nutrition Cluster: UNICEF cluster leadership

The Global Nutrition Cluster is the primary inter-agency coordination platform for nutrition in humanitarian emergencies. UNICEF was designated its Cluster Lead Agency by the IASC in 2005 and holds that role alone; the cluster's 39 partners and 13 observers include WFP alongside international NGOs, research institutions, donors and other UN agencies, and the GNC coordination team is hosted within UNICEF's Office of Emergency Programmes (Global Nutrition Cluster, n.d.).

This produces a structural condition distinct from the co-leadership arrangements found elsewhere in the cluster system. Where the Global Education Cluster is co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, and the Global Food Security Cluster by WFP and FAO, the coordination venue for nutrition belongs to one of the two agencies operating within the wasting caseload. UNICEF is therefore simultaneously the coordinator of the sector and an operational actor within it, holding a caseload adjacent to one held by a partner with no leadership standing in the same venue. Whether that asymmetry affects how the

boundary between the two caseloads is managed at country level is an empirical question the case chapters address, and it is complicated by the variation in country arrangements: nutrition coordination may be UNICEF-led, co-coordinated with WFP or a national ministry, or run through a government structure without cluster activation at all.

The Global Food Security Cluster: WFP and FAO co-leadership

The Global Food Security Cluster, co-led by WFP and FAO, coordinates food security response in humanitarian emergencies. The co-leadership reflects the intended complementarity between WFP's operational food assistance mandate and FAO's food systems and livelihoods mandate — a division considerably cleaner than the UNICEF–WFP nutrition arrangement, because WFP and FAO occupy less overlapping programmatic space.

The arrangement nonetheless carries its own structural tension. It places two functions with different temporal logics, different operational models and different funding profiles inside a single coordination structure, and the cluster must hold the boundary between immediate food assistance and longer-horizon livelihoods support. Whether that boundary is managed effectively, and whether the two sides of it receive comparable weight, is examined in the case chapters.

The analytical mechanisms: IPC and Cadre Harmonisé

Alongside the cluster system, and constituted on a different basis, sit the mechanisms through which the severity of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition is classified. **These are of particular importance to the analysis that follows, because they are the only part of the coordination architecture examined here in which participation carries a procedural obligation rather than a voluntary commitment, and because they operate precisely at the food-security and nutrition interface that the cluster arrangements divide between two structures.**

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification is a multi-partner initiative governed at global level by a Steering Committee composed of senior officers from its partner organisations, and implemented at country level through Technical Working Groups hosted by government and composed of representatives of government, UN agencies, specialised agencies and NGOs. Classification is not a matter of professional judgement

exercised freely. IPC analyses are protocol-driven and consensus-led, governed by a technical manual, with every analysis following the same steps in the same order and trained facilitators responsible for ensuring the protocols are observed. The framework carries its own compliance machinery: quality reviews and compliance reviews exist to uphold the standards, processes and consensus attaching to IPC products, countries are expected to act on the recommendations these mechanisms generate, and an independent Famine Review Committee may be activated as an additional validation step, in part to insulate the analysis from political influence.

Its outputs are jointly owned and individually uncontrollable: an agency submitting data to an IPC process contributes to a classification it cannot itself determine.

Its authority derives from the framework rather than from the relationship between any agency and its national counterpart, which means it does not depend for its continuation on the state of that relationship.

And it operates across the food-security and nutrition boundary by design, incorporating nutrition and mortality evidence alongside food consumption, livelihoods and market data within a single classification.

The Cadre Harmonisé performs the equivalent function across the Sahel and West Africa and is anchored differently again. It is produced through a regional multi-stakeholder process involving national governments, UN agencies and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, which locates its institutional standing at regional level rather than within any single national administration.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee and OCHA

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the primary inter-agency coordination body for humanitarian response at the global level. Chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, it brings together the heads of the principal UN humanitarian agencies, including UNICEF, WFP and FAO, alongside representatives of major NGO consortia and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The IASC is responsible for system-wide humanitarian policy, the activation of the cluster system in specific crises, and inter-agency coordination at strategic level.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provides the secretariat function for the IASC and manages the coordination architecture at country level through

Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams. OCHA's coordinating role is formally authoritative but limited in practice: it can convene, facilitate and advocate, but it has no operational capacity of its own and no binding authority over the agencies it is supposed to coordinate. This structural limitation — coordination authority without coordination power — is a recurring subject in the humanitarian coordination literature and a structural feature of the system present in every case examined here.

The Global Action Plan on Child Wasting

The Global Action Plan on Child Wasting: A Framework for Action to Accelerate Progress in Preventing and Managing Child Wasting and the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals was launched in 2020, under WHO coordination and as a joint initiative of UNICEF, WFP, FAO and UNHCR (UNICEF et al., 2020). It is the most significant formal attempt to address the MAM mandate question in the period covered by this thesis.

It is important to be precise about what it does and does not allocate. The GAP assigns UNICEF the lead coordinating role for the operationalisation of wasting prevention and treatment, WFP a supporting role with particular focus on fragile contexts, WHO responsibility for normative guidance, and FAO the transformation of food systems. It does not assign severe acute malnutrition treatment to UNICEF and moderate acute malnutrition treatment to WFP. That division is a matter of operational practice rather than of formal instrument, and the country roadmaps issued under the plan set undifferentiated coverage targets for wasted children as a single category. The distinction bears directly on the empirical analysis: where a governing instrument treats the continuum as one and delivery runs through two agencies, the relationship between the halves is allocated to nothing.

The GAP articulates a unified framework for the prevention and treatment of wasting across the full severity spectrum, from MAM prevention through food-based interventions to SAM treatment through therapeutic protocols. It calls for integrated programming bridging the UNICEF and WFP approaches to MAM, links acute wasting response to FAO's food systems programming, and embeds nutrition response within broader health, WASH and social protection systems.

Its operative commitment at country level is joint targeting: the same geographic areas, the same communities, the same households. FAO's country operational plans under the GAP state this explicitly, targeting households with production capacity on the stated understanding that those households are simultaneously supported by UNICEF or WFP for treatment and food assistance. Whether the households FAO reached and the children UNICEF and WFP treated were in fact the same households is the question the joint-targeting commitment invites, and it is examined in each case so far as the documentary record permits. Where the record does not permit an answer, that is recorded as a limitation of the evidence rather than resolved by inference; a costed commitment whose delivery cannot be verified is itself a finding about the reporting architecture.

The GAP represents a genuine normative achievement: for the first time, the five major UN agencies with a nutrition mandate formally agreed a shared framework for wasting response. Whether that consensus translated into operational coordination improvements is an empirical question this thesis is positioned to answer, since its analytical windows span both the pre-GAP baseline and the years of implementation that followed.

1.4 The Financing Architecture

Any analysis of inter-agency coordination in the UN humanitarian system that does not engage with the financing architecture is analytically incomplete. **How agencies are funded is a primary structural determinant of agency behaviour, programmatic priorities and inter-agency dynamics.**

How each agency is funded

All three agencies are funded through a combination of assessed contributions from member states and voluntary contributions from donor governments, the private sector and other sources. The balance between these streams, and the degree of earmarking attached to voluntary contributions, differs significantly across the three, with important consequences for their functioning.

UNICEF is funded entirely through voluntary contributions rather than assessed dues. Of its US\$8.26 billion in total 2024 income, 74 per cent came from public-sector partners and 22 per cent from private-sector sources including National Committees (UNICEF, 2025). A substantial portion of the public-sector funding takes the form of thematic

contributions — resources earmarked to broad programmatic areas such as nutrition, but not to specific countries or activities — alongside more tightly earmarked country- and programme-specific funding from bilateral donors.

WFP is likewise an almost entirely voluntarily funded programme rather than a treaty-based specialised agency with member-state dues. It is therefore structurally dependent on donor contributions for virtually all its operational capacity, and the terms on which donors provide those contributions directly shape its operational priorities and geographic presence. In 2024, WFP's US\$9.8 billion contribution revenue covered 54 per cent of its US\$18.2 billion in operational requirements, forcing ration reductions and the scaling back of programmes across its largest operations (WFP, 2025a). WFP remains the largest recipient of humanitarian funding globally, which gives it significant resource mobilisation capacity while making it acutely sensitive to donor preferences.

FAO has a markedly different structure: 26 per cent of its 2024–25 budget of US\$4 billion is drawn from assessed member-state contributions, with the remaining 74 per cent mobilised through voluntary contributions (FAO, 2023a). This is still a minority-assessed structure overall, but a meaningfully larger assessed share than either partner. FAO's voluntary contributions are heavily project-based and tend to be more tightly earmarked to specific activities, countries and timeframes than either UNICEF's or WFP's core humanitarian contributions.

Earmarked and unearmarked contributions

The distinction between earmarked and unearmarked contributions is analytically central to this thesis.

Unearmarked contributions — core resources, or flexible funding — give agencies discretion to allocate according to their own assessment of need and strategic priority. They enable agencies to respond to emerging crises before donor-specific contributions arrive, to fill gaps between donor-funded programmes, and to invest in coordination activities that no individual donor is willing to fund specifically.

Earmarked contributions — tied to specific countries, sectors or programme activities — give donors control over how their resources are used. From a donor accountability perspective, earmarking is often justified as ensuring that contributions are used for their intended purpose and that donor strategic priorities are reflected in agency programming.

From a coordination perspective it creates a structural problem: agencies must design and implement programmes satisfying the specific requirements of their respective donors, rather than the collective requirements of a jointly planned response.

In the nutrition sector, the three dominant earmarked funding streams — from USAID/BHA, ECHO and FCDO — are accessible to both UNICEF and WFP simultaneously. Both agencies can apply for, receive and report on nutrition-coded earmarks from the same donor programmes. This establishes the financial architecture within which direct inter-agency competition becomes possible: two agencies with overlapping mandates drawing on the same restricted funding pools, with incentives to maximise their individual capture of available resources rather than to plan jointly how those resources should be allocated. Whether that possibility is realised is an empirical question, assessed case by case under H2.

Pooled funding mechanisms

Pooled funding mechanisms represent the primary institutional response to the coordination problems created by bilateral earmarking. The Central Emergency Response Fund, managed by OCHA, provides rapid, flexible funding to UN agencies at the onset of humanitarian emergencies and for underfunded crises. CERF contributions are unearmarked — allocations are made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator based on need rather than donor preference — and CERF requires joint needs assessments and response plan alignment as conditions for allocation.

Country-Based Pooled Funds provide a second layer at country level, with allocations managed by the Humanitarian Coordinator and distributed to both UN agencies and NGOs based on cluster priorities. Among this thesis's cases, CBPFs are active in Yemen and Ukraine; Niger has no standalone CBPF, relying instead on CERF, which operates in all three.

Pooled funding is a genuine coordination instrument, and its distinctive feature is that allocation decisions are taken independently of agency mandates. Because a Humanitarian Coordinator and an advisory board decide what is funded on a view of country-level need rather than on the basis of which agency holds which global responsibility, agencies must argue for resources on the ground of priority and delivery capacity rather than mandate entitlement. This gives such instruments a function beyond

supplying money: they are among the few devices in the architecture capable of constituting work that sits between mandates as a fundable object, specifying the parties to it and rendering the relationship contractually visible.

Why financing structures shape behaviour

The financing architecture carries substantial weight in this thesis because **it shapes agency behaviour at every level of the system**, from executive board priorities in Rome and New York to field programme decisions in Niamey and Sana'a. Agencies depending on voluntary contributions for virtually all their operational capacity must continuously demonstrate relevance and results to the donors whose contributions sustain them. Where multiple agencies are eligible for the same earmarked pools, this may create structural incentives for mandate expansion — for claiming programmatic authority over contested spaces such as MAM — and structural disincentives for mandate deference. On this account an agency that consistently defers to its partners in contested mandate spaces will over time receive less funding in those spaces, employ fewer staff with relevant expertise, and lose institutional credibility with the donors on whose support it depends.

The same structure generates a second and less obvious constraint, distinct from the incentive to compete. Activity-level earmarking finances activities, not the connections between them. Referral systems, shared data platforms, joint supply chains and common facility arrangements sit between contracted activities and belong to no single grant. When funding tightens there is therefore a structural reason to expect agencies to protect what is contracted and shed what is not — and what is not contracted is precisely the interface work. Earmarking on this account does not principally set agencies against one another; it confines each agency's capacity to adapt within the boundary of its own funded programme, so that a shortfall in one agency's component cannot be met from another's, whatever either intends.

The financing architecture may therefore bear on coordination through two distinct channels: by rewarding mandate expansion, and by leaving the work between mandates unfunded. The two are not equivalent. The first predicts competitive behaviour and is weakened by its absence; the second predicts constrained behaviour and is compatible with entirely cooperative relations between agencies. Which channel operates more consistently, and whether either can be traced from funding condition through to an

observable programmatic decision, is assessed case by case in the empirical chapters under H2.

1.5 The Delivery Layer

One further structural feature must be established before the empirical analysis, because it is easily obscured by an account organised around three agencies.

UNICEF, WFP and FAO very largely do not deliver services directly. They contract international and national non-governmental organisations, national ministries and, increasingly, local partners.

Three consequences follow for the analysis.

The first is that duplication and integration are realised at partner level. Two agencies with separate supply chains meeting at the same clinic meet there because a partner holds two sub-agreements. A child referred across the wasting threshold is referred by a partner, or is not. The interfaces this thesis examines are, in operational terms, interfaces between contracts held by implementing organisations.

The second is that **partner allocation is itself a coordination instrument, and one of the few through which an interface can be assigned.** Where a single partner holds contracts from two agencies for services meeting at the same facility, the relationship between those services is managed within one organisation rather than between two. Decisions about how partners are allocated, and about which services are co-located, are therefore decisions about interfaces, taken through the delivery layer rather than between agency headquarters.

The third is that this thesis treats partner arrangements as evidence wherever the documentary record establishes them, but does not examine the partner layer as an institutional field in its own right; its own incentives, capacities and coordination problems lie outside the scope. Where a coordination finding turns on a partner arrangement, this is stated explicitly rather than absorbed into an account of agency behaviour.

The same qualification applies to the institutional field. The triad is the unit of analysis, but the wasting continuum is not governed by three agencies everywhere — UNHCR holds substantial nutrition responsibility in refugee settings, and WHO in therapeutic

feeding — and other agencies therefore enter the analysis where the evidence places them at an interface under examination.

1.6 The Gap Between Formal Design and Operational Reality

The institutional architecture described in this chapter is, in formal terms, genuinely well designed. Mandates are broadly complementary. Coordination mechanisms — the cluster system, the Global Nutrition Cluster, the Global Food Security Cluster, the classification frameworks, OCHA's coordinating role — provide formal platforms for inter-agency collaboration. The Global Action Plan on Child Wasting represents a genuine normative achievement in establishing a shared framework for wasting response. Pooled funding mechanisms provide at least partial incentives for joint planning.

And yet field evaluations, independent reviews and academic literature consistently document the same conclusion: formal institutional design does not translate into effective operational coordination.

This distinction is central to Knox Clarke and Campbell's (2018) evaluation of cluster coordination, which finds the cluster system structurally better equipped to resolve information gaps than to resolve coordination problems rooted in competing institutional mandates and funding streams — the tension this thesis identifies at the WFP–UNICEF MAM boundary. WFP's 2024 Emergency Response Evaluation for the Sahel and Central Africa, covering eight countries, identifies the MAM boundary as a persistent operational fault line and documents insufficient integration between WFP's food assistance and UNICEF's nutrition programming across multiple national contexts (WFP, 2024c). The 2022 Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Yemen crisis (Sida et al., 2022) finds that coordination mechanisms functioned better at capital level than in the field, with agencies maintaining separate programmatic tracks even where joint programming had been formally planned. These findings illustrate the gap between formal coordination design and operational reality; they do not, in themselves, establish why coordination failed.

Two cautions therefore govern how the empirical chapters interpret the evidence.

First, coordination cannot be inferred from institutional presence or formal participation alone. The joint presence of UNICEF, WFP and FAO in a response does not demonstrate coordination; attendance at cluster meetings is not evidence of

coordination performance; the signature of a joint plan does not establish implementation coordination; shared beneficiaries do not necessarily indicate duplication; and parallel programmes are not automatically evidence of failure. In each instance the analysis must identify a specific coordination mechanism and demonstrate its consequences rather than infer either from institutional arrangements alone.

Second, the architecture established above serves as the formal baseline for the thesis as a whole, but no individual case is assessed against the entire framework.

Each case chapter begins by identifying the formal commitments applicable to that context: the relevant GAP provisions, the operative cluster or non-cluster arrangements, the analytical mechanisms present or absent, the national coordination structures, and the division of SAM and MAM responsibilities recorded in country-level planning documents. These establish the expectations against which implementation is assessed. The empirical sections then establish what occurred in practice. Every major coordination finding is therefore traceable to a stated expectation, allowing the analysis to move beyond the general claim that coordination was imperfect and to ask instead whether a specific institutional commitment produced the outcome it was designed to generate — and, where it did not, which mechanism best explains the divergence.

This approach makes it possible to interpret the gap between formal design and operational reality through the structural conditions identified in this chapter: overlapping claims at the MAM boundary and the absence of any allocation of responsibility for the interfaces between mandates; a financing architecture that may reward mandate expansion and that leaves interface work unfunded; coordination mechanisms whose participation is discretionary and which hold no authority to allocate between the organisations within them; and an evaluation architecture organised by agency in a system whose weaknesses may lie between agencies. Documenting these conditions is not an end in itself, but the necessary starting point for moving from a description of coordination failures to an explanation of the mechanisms that produce them.

CHAPTER TWO. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Documenting that coordination fractures between UNICEF, WFP and FAO is a necessary starting point but offers limited theoretical value on its own, since field evaluations have documented such instances repeatedly. What the existing literature offers less consistently is a theoretically grounded explanation of why the failures occur, through which mechanisms they are produced, and under what conditions they differ. This chapter builds that explanatory framework.

Chapter One closed by identifying two readings of the boundary at which responsibility for acute malnutrition passes from one agency to the other. The first is that the architecture produces contestation, with two agencies claiming the same ground and coordination failing through friction between them. The second is that it produces separation, with two agencies holding adjacent ground and nothing holding the line between them. The coordination literature anticipates the first. This chapter develops both into testable propositions and specifies what evidence would distinguish them.

The framework is organised across three analytical levels.

The macro level establishes the structural context in which coordination between international organisations takes place: a governance system without hierarchy, populated by organisations that are autonomous actors rather than instruments of member states, and structured by a division of labour that allocates responsibilities without allocating the relationships between them. This is where **the chapter's central concept, the unallocated interface, is developed.**

The meso level specifies the mechanisms through which coordination is or is not managed in practice: the institutional form of coordination bodies, the distinction between obligatory and discretionary participation, the financing instruments through which work between mandates is constituted as fundable, the evaluative architecture through which weaknesses are perceived or missed, and the configuration these assume in food security and nutrition governance.

The micro level translates the framework into four hypotheses about agency behaviour, each stated with the alternative it is tested against and the causal chain the evidence must display.

Two closing sections specify how coordination outcomes are classified and what the comparative design is expected to show. Both are written so that Chapter Three can operationalise them directly.

2.1 The Macro Level: Governance Without Hierarchy

Fragmentation and the absence of hierarchy

The international management of food and nutrition crises does not take place within a unified, hierarchically organised governance system. It takes place within what scholars of international relations call global governance: a system of formal and informal rules, institutions, norms and practices through which collective action problems are managed at the international level in the absence of a world government (Rosenau, 1995; Held and McGrew, 2002).

The defining characteristic of global governance, and the feature that distinguishes it analytically from domestic governance, is the absence of hierarchy. In domestic political systems, authority is ultimately anchored in the state: a sovereign entity with a monopoly on legitimate coercion, capable of enforcing compliance with collective decisions, allocating responsibilities with binding effect, and holding institutions accountable for their performance. Global governance has none of these features. Authority is dispersed across states, international organisations, non-governmental actors and hybrid bodies, and no single institution can compel compliance, enforce coordination, or resolve disputes between competing institutional actors with binding effect. Rosenau (1992) termed the result *governance without government*: an order in which collective action problems are managed through negotiation, persuasion and institutional design rather than through hierarchy and enforcement.

The implication for this thesis is specific and narrow. In a hierarchically ordered system, a superior authority could assign binding programmatic responsibility across a divided caseload, enforce coordination requirements through budgetary control, and hold agencies accountable for coordination performance through management mechanisms. The closest approximation, OCHA's coordinating role, is explicitly non-hierarchical: OCHA can convene, facilitate and advocate, but has no authority to direct agency operations or enforce coordination requirements.

Non-hierarchy therefore functions in this thesis as a scope condition. It establishes that responsibility for anything not allocated by agreement will remain unallocated, because no body holds standing to allocate it. It does not determine what goes unallocated, or with what consequence; those are the questions the remainder of the framework addresses. Chapter Three accordingly treats the macro level as specifying the environment within which the meso- and micro-level mechanisms become possible rather than as itself an object of testing.

International organisations as autonomous actors

The dominant liberal institutionalist tradition treats international organisations primarily as instruments of state preference: bodies created by states to manage collective action problems, whose behaviour reflects the interests of their member states (Keohane, 1984). On that view, coordination failures between international organisations are at bottom failures of interstate negotiation rather than problems generated by the organisations themselves.

Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 2004) offer a more analytically productive alternative. Drawing on sociological institutionalism and principal-agent theory, they argue that international organisations are not merely instruments of state preference but autonomous actors with their own bureaucratic interests, organisational rules and survival imperatives. Organisations pursue mandates not only because states direct them to, but because mandate execution is how they justify their existence, secure their funding and reproduce their institutional identity.

This premise licenses treating UNICEF, WFP and FAO as the units of analysis rather than as venues within which states pursue interests. **The behaviour the framework seeks to explain — how an agency allocates scarce coordination capacity, what it is able to finance, where it retains room to adapt — is agency behaviour, intelligible by reference to each organisation's own constraints and incentives rather than to the preferences of its principals.**

Autonomy is not opportunism. Nothing in the account developed here requires agencies to act in bad faith, to contest one another's mandates, or to compete for beneficiaries. Agencies are treated as acting rationally within their constraints, and where coordination fails the explanation is sought in the structure of those constraints. This is a substantive

commitment rather than a courtesy, because an explanation resting on institutional conduct predicts different evidence from one resting on institutional structure, and the two are distinguishable in the record.

The UN system as a fragmented governance architecture

The United Nations system is a collection of legally distinct entities — funds, programmes, specialised agencies and departments — each with its own governing board, its own membership, its own budget and its own accountability structure. UNICEF reports to its Executive Board. WFP reports to its Executive Board. FAO reports to its Conference and Council. None of these governing bodies holds authority over the others, and none can direct another agency's operations or enforce inter-agency coordination requirements. This matters operationally, because even where agency heads agree at inter-agency level that coordination should improve, the implementing authority — the ability to direct field operations, allocate budgets and hold staff accountable for coordination performance — remains with each individual agency. System-level commitments must therefore be implemented through each agency's own internal management systems, where they compete with agency-specific programmatic priorities, donor reporting requirements and performance frameworks that do not reward coordination behaviour.

Konyndyk (2018) locates the resulting incentive problem precisely. Humanitarian reform efforts, he argues, have underperformed because they concentrated on improving coordination without realigning funding incentives, and the sector's prevailing business model encourages UN agencies to merge their designated normative and technical leadership roles with their own programmatic fundraising in ways that obstruct a cohesive, end-user-centred response.

The consequence for the framework is a proposition that recurs throughout the meso-level analysis and is the structural foundation of H2: **adaptive capacity is bounded by the agency. Where a problem spans two organisations, any solution to it must be found, designed and financed within one organisation's programme space, because that is the only space any actor commands.**

Regime complexity as core analytical lens

Regime complexity

The concept of regime complexity was introduced by Raustiala and Victor (2004) in their analysis of the international governance of plant genetic resources. Challenging the prevailing assumption that individual international regimes are analytically separable from one another, they argued that an increasingly common feature of global governance is the *regime complex*: **a collective of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions governing a single issue area**. Crucially, they specify that what defines a regime complex is not institutional overlap as such, but the absence of a clear hierarchy ordering the overlapping institutions, so that no single authority can definitively resolve conflicts between the rules, mandates or jurisdictions of the bodies involved. This structural indeterminacy, they contend, generates legal and political inconsistency, since rules developed within one regime are rarely coordinated closely with overlapping rules developed within another. Although formulated for plant genetic resources, the concept captures a structural condition — rule density combined with fragmented authority — that recurs across issue areas.

Alter and Meunier (2009) extend the concept into its political consequences, asking **what analytical purchase is gained by treating any single international agreement as embedded within a wider web of overlapping rules and institutions rather than as a self-contained regime**. Their central claim for present purposes is that **overlapping authority is not merely administratively untidy but politically generative: where more than one institution holds a claim over the same ground, actors have both opportunity and incentive to interpret, prioritise or contest their respective roles in ways serving institutional interests rather than a jointly agreed division of labour**.

Alter and Raustiala (2018), reviewing fifteen years of subsequent research, argue that the **signature feature of twenty-first-century international cooperation is arguably not the regime but the regime complex**, and note that later scholarship has identified **potential benefits of institutional complexity alongside its dysfunctions, including flexibility, adaptability and the pooling of specialised expertise**. This thesis does not treat institutional complexity as inherently pathological but investigates the conditions under which it produces coordination weakness rather than functional flexibility.

Regime complexity applied to the inter-bureaucratic level

The original literature focuses on states as the actors navigating overlapping institutional frameworks. This thesis applies the account to international organisations navigating overlapping mandates, treating UNICEF, WFP and FAO not as the venues within which states compete but as the actors themselves.

The extension follows from the autonomy premise: if states behave strategically when confronted with overlapping institutional frameworks, there is no reason in principle to expect organisations facing overlapping mandates, drawing on the same donor pool and accountable to separate governing boards to behave differently. The three agencies also satisfy the structural description, holding nested, partially overlapping and parallel mandates in food and nutrition governance that do not add up to a single comprehensive arrangement, with no hierarchy ordering them.

The account accordingly specifies a definite set of things to look for where two institutions claim the same ground: **contestation over responsibility, competing claims to the same caseload, disputes over who does what, and parallel programmes pursuing the same beneficiaries**. These observables constitute the first variant of H1, and Chapter Three tests them in every case. They are the analytical statement that the architecture produces friction between agencies claiming the same ground.

The Interstitial Condition

The regime complexity literature is concerned throughout with what happens where two institutions claim the same ground. Its analytical object is contested authority, and the pathology it describes is that too many bodies hold a claim.

A second condition is available within the same structural logic and has received considerably less attention. **Where a division of labour allocates responsibilities cleanly, it does not thereby allocate the relationships between them.** A clinical continuum can be divided without the transition between its halves being assigned to anyone. **Two sectors can be given clear leads without any body holding the boundary they share. A supply chain can be split without a mechanism for reallocating across the split.**

These are not ambiguities in the sense the literature describes. Nobody contests them, no rule set competes with another, and no agency is behaving badly. They are interstices:

spaces the allocation did not reach, unowned precisely because the allocation on either side of them was successful. **The condition they constitute is interstitial non-allocation, and the sites at which it obtains are, in the language used throughout the remainder of this thesis, unallocated interfaces.**

The terminology is deliberate and the two terms do different work. *Interstice* names the structural condition and marks its derivation from, and difference to, the regime complexity literature. ***Unallocated interface* names the observable object and is the operational term the empirical analysis requires.**

An interface is any point at which two agencies' allocated responsibilities meet and where the relationship between them bears on outcomes: the transition between two halves of a divided caseload, the boundary between two sectors, the junction of two supply chains, the point at which one agency's withdrawal alters another's caseload. An interface is allocated where some body holds responsibility for the relationship across it, and unallocated where none does. The framework's central claim is that this property, rather than the clarity of the mandates on either side, determines whether the relationship is managed.

Chapter Three converts this into a design requirement: the formal coordination baseline in each case records, for every interface identified, not only what the architecture required of each side but whether any body held responsibility for the relationship across it.

Distinguishing the two conditions

The two conditions share a structural precondition and both require the absence of a hierarchy able to order institutional relations. But regime complexity describes a surplus of claims over a shared jurisdiction, while **interstitial non-allocation describes the absence of any claim over the relationship between separated jurisdictions.** Their observables are opposite — contestation against silence — and their remedies are opposite, since clarification resolves the first and is inert against the second. **The unallocated interface is therefore not regime complexity applied more finely; it is a second condition available under the same structural precondition, and the empirical task is to establish which obtains in a given case.**

The distinction can be stated with more precision using the vocabulary developed by Abbott, Keohane, Moravcsik, Slaughter and Snidal (2000). They treat institutionalisation

as varying along three dimensions: obligation, meaning that actors are bound by a rule or commitment; precision, meaning that rules unambiguously define the conduct they require, authorise or proscribe; and delegation, meaning that authority is granted to third parties to implement, interpret and apply the rules and to settle disputes. The three dimensions are conceptually independent, each a matter of degree, so that their combinations produce widely varying institutional forms.

Three properties of the unallocated interface

Three properties follow, each directly assessable against case evidence and each generating an expectation the empirical chapters can meet or fail to meet.

Unallocated interfaces are not remedied by mandate clarity. Where the problem is the absence of an assignment rather than a contest over one, clarifying the responsibilities on either side leaves the interface exactly where it was. This distinguishes the two variants of H1 empirically: the ambiguity variant predicts contestation, and its documented absence weakens it, while the interstitial variant predicts competent parallel operation punctuated by difficulty at the boundary.

Unallocated interfaces are not remedied by resources. An unallocated relationship is not underfunded; it is unowned. Additional resources flow through existing assignments and reach an interface only where an instrument is separately constituted for it. This yields a strong prediction — that the condition should persist under abundant and flexible financing — and the comparative design is constructed to supply that configuration.

Unallocated interfaces are not visible to actors organised around the allocation. Where planning, implementation and evaluation are all structured by the same division of labour, an interface between two organisations falls inside no participant's frame. This generates a diagnostic prediction about what independent evaluation will and will not detect.

2.2 The Meso Level: Mechanisms of Humanitarian Coordination

The macro level establishes that unallocated interfaces are structurally available in a non-hierarchical system of autonomous, specialised organisations. It does not establish that every interface is unallocated, and the empirical variation this thesis examines lies

precisely there. This part specifies four mechanisms that determine whether an interface acquires a body responsible for it, and what follows when it does not.

The Coordination Architecture

Successive evaluations of the cluster system, introduced in 2005, trace a persistent tension between the coordination architecture and the incentives beneath it. Stoddard et al. (2007) found the approach had improved information-sharing and needs assessment but had not, two years in, produced a single instance of the Provider of Last Resort accountability mechanism being invoked. Steets et al. (2010) found continued strength in technical standard-setting but limited progress in resolving overlapping responsibilities between agencies with long-established mandates. Knox Clarke and Campbell (2018) hold that the system was designed to resolve information gaps and unclaimed sectors and is structurally less equipped to resolve coordination failures rooted in competing institutional mandates and funding streams.

Two features of the architecture bear directly on the allocation of interfaces.

Clusters are organised by sector. A cluster holds a sector; it does not hold the boundary between its sector and another. Where two sectors are coordinated through two structures, the relationship between them belongs to neither by design, and the architecture supplies no body above them constituted to hold it. This is a property of sectoral organisation rather than a defect in any cluster's performance, and it is the principal route by which unallocated interfaces enter the humanitarian coordination system.

Sector leadership may be sole or shared. Knox Clarke and Campbell (2015) identify cluster-lead double-hatting: the structural ambiguity created where a lead agency is simultaneously a sector's coordinator and an operational actor within it. Co-leadership places two agencies in a negotiated relationship over responsibilities they share; sole leadership places the venue in the hands of one of them, so that a party without standing in the venue has no forum in which to raise the relationship between its own responsibilities and the lead's. The predicted observable is silence rather than contestation — not a dispute the record would capture, but a question never put. The empirical chapters test this across different institutional configurations of the nutrition function.

Obligation and Discretion

Coordination mechanisms differ in whether participation is obligatory or discretionary, and this thesis argues the distinction is more consequential than a mechanism's design, resourcing or convening authority. In the vocabulary of Abbott et al. (2000), it is the distinction between arrangements high on obligation and delegation and arrangements high only on precision.

The humanitarian coordination architecture is discretionary by construction. The IASC Reference Module sets out minimum commitments that participating organisations undertake — active participation, contribution to the response plan, cooperative working — but these are undertakings entered into rather than obligations imposed, and participation is voluntary (IASC, 2015). Knox Clarke and Campbell (2016) trace the consequence: directive coordination is difficult to achieve among a voluntary grouping of independent organisations, and the risk of looser arrangements is that agencies base their activities on their own organisational capacities and interests rather than on the needs of the affected population.

Where coordination is discretionary, programming therefore defaults to the shape of the agency rather than the shape of the need — and, critically for the design, the default leaves no record. A joint product that no actor decided to make is not documented as a decision not to make it. Chapter Three carries this forward as both an analytical instruction and a stated limitation.

Standing analytical mechanisms are constituted differently. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification is a protocol-driven, consensus-led process governed by technical guidance, in which every analysis follows the same steps in the same order, undertaken by Technical Working Groups drawn from partner organisations, NGOs, governments and academia and run by trained facilitators responsible for ensuring the protocols are observed. It carries compliance machinery: quality and compliance reviews uphold the standards attaching to its products, and an independent Famine Review Committee may be activated as an additional validation step, in part to insulate the analysis from political influence. Governance is formalised at both levels, with a Global Steering Committee of partner organisations and country-level Technical Working Groups hosted by government (IPC Global Partners, 2021). The Cadre Harmonisé performs the equivalent

function across the Sahel and West Africa, anchored in a regional multi-stakeholder process whose standing does not derive from any single national administration.

Financing Instruments as Assignment Devices

The macro level establishes that adaptive capacity is agency-bounded because authority is agency-bounded. What the meso level adds is that financing instruments are among the few devices capable of altering that boundary in a specific case. Financing therefore belongs with the mechanisms that determine whether an interface is allocated, not with the structural conditions that make interfaces available.

The rigidity mechanism

The humanitarian financing literature treats earmarking primarily as a constraint on flexibility and pooled funding primarily as a corrective to underfunding. By 2023, earmarked contributions constituted approximately 81 per cent of total UN development and humanitarian assistance (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and UN MPTF Office, 2025), a proportion high enough that any mechanism operating through earmarking should be observable across nearly the entire funding base of all three agencies.

The framework identifies a mechanism distinct from competition and compatible with entirely cooperative relations between agencies. Activity-level earmarking finances activities, not the connections between them. Resources attached to specified activities cannot be moved to unspecified ones, which bears on reallocation whatever volume of money arrives. Two consequences follow: a shortfall in one agency's component cannot be met from another's, whatever either intends; and when funding tightens, agencies have structural reason to protect what is contracted and shed what is not — which is precisely the work that falls between mandates.

The assignment function

Konyndyk (2018) supplies the mechanism through which financing can allocate an interface. Pooled-fund allocations are decided by the humanitarian coordinator and an advisory board independently of agency mandates, which realigns incentives by forcing field-level priority setting across agencies and sectors, so that agencies must argue for

funding on the basis of ground-level priorities and delivery capacity rather than global mandate entitlement.

The extension this framework makes is that such instruments do more than reallocate. A dedicated instrument constitutes work between mandates as a fundable object: it specifies an interface, names the parties to it, and renders the relationship contractually visible. Hawkins et al. (2006) supply the logic — where a single principal contracts several agents jointly against a shared results framework, the interface between them becomes contractually specified and therefore enforceable.

Poole and Culbert (2019) support the distinction between flexibility and assignment, recording that donor instruments offering greater flexibility in crisis settings are often thematically earmarked and managed from headquarters and therefore do not encourage country-level prioritisation and coordination. Flexible money accelerates each agency within its own space; only an instrument constituted at the interface reaches the interface.

The Evaluative Blind Spot

Evaluation is commissioned by organisations and scoped to their operations. Where an interface falls between two organisations, it falls inside neither evaluative frame, and a weakness at that interface persists unexamined not because evaluation functions poorly but because it functions exactly as constituted.

Hawkins et al. (2006) supply the underlying condition. Information asymmetry is a defining feature of the delegation relationship: donors cannot directly observe agency behaviour and depend on agency reporting, which creates incentives to manage that information in ways reflecting well on the reporting agency rather than providing a complete picture of the collective response. The consequence is twofold. It bears on the evidentiary strategy Chapter Three adopts — agency self-reporting is a reliable record of what an agency did and an unreliable record of whether the joint response cohered. And it bears on the evaluative architecture itself, since the same asymmetry shapes what evaluation is commissioned to examine.

The prediction is diagnostic: a coordination weakness should be capable of surviving a full cycle of independent evaluation by every agency involved, with each evaluation correctly identifying problems within its own commissioner's boundary and none examining the boundary between them.

This supplies the rationale for treating the evaluation phase as evidentially decisive, which Chapter Three adopts as its Phase Four logic. A weakness that survives identification and attempted correction is structurally grounded rather than conduct-based, and the distinction between a weakness in a response and a weakness in the system's capacity to perceive it is what would explain why the first goes uncorrected.

The Empirical Domain: Food Security and Nutrition Governance

The mechanisms specified above are general. This section establishes the configuration they assume in the domain this thesis examines.

The blurring of the boundary

The concept of food security has evolved since the 1974 World Food Conference from a supply-side definition focused on the availability of adequate food, through the incorporation of access, utilisation and stability, to the four-pillar definition adopted in 1996. As the definition expanded toward demand-side access and individual-level utilisation, the boundary between food security and nutrition blurred, and mandates that once occupied distinct conceptual spaces came to claim authority over adjacent territory.

Fragmented authority

The 2008 *Lancet* Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition described the international nutrition system as fragmented and dysfunctional, with authority distributed across institutions rather than concentrated in any single body (Morris et al., 2008). No single institution integrates the normative, operational and food-systems functions the domain requires.

Two consequences follow. The weaknesses this thesis examines would be local expressions of a fragmentation characterising the governance landscape as a whole rather than isolated dysfunctions within an otherwise coherent system. And, more usefully for the comparative design, **the institutional location of the nutrition function is not fixed** — it varies across settings, while food-security coordination is comparatively stable in form. Because the two sectors are differently constituted, disruptions to the wider institutional environment should reach them asymmetrically. This is stated as a specific prediction under H3.

The wasting continuum as an unallocated interface

Severe and moderate acute malnutrition are two points on one clinical continuum, untreated moderate acute malnutrition being the principal pathway into severe. Its division between two agencies is the sharpest interface this thesis examines, and three properties make it analytically productive: it is clinically precise, resolving to a specific anthropometric threshold, so the boundary can be located exactly rather than inferred; it is operationally consequential, since the two halves are delivered to the same children in the same facilities in sequence; and it is documented, through financial disclosure, supply records and admission data, with unusual specificity.

The governing global instrument frames commitments for the continuum as a whole while allocating no operational responsibility between agencies.

FAO's structural position

Linking acute nutrition response to sustainable food systems requires interventions operating on timelines incompatible with humanitarian response cycles. This establishes the appropriate analytical treatment of FAO. It holds no wasting-treatment responsibility and does not compete for the wasting caseload, and reading its role through the severe/moderate boundary would misdescribe it. The relevant question is whether its food security, livelihoods, resilience and early-warning work was operationally integrated with the nutrition response or ran as a parallel track. This is an unallocated interface of a different kind from the one within treatment: not competition but disconnection.

2.3 Micro Level: Propositions About Agency Behaviour

The four hypotheses translate the framework into propositions about how agencies behave under specified conditions. They do not derive from a single unified theory: each isolates a mechanism and draws on the literature best equipped to specify it, which reflects the interdisciplinary character of the problem and allows each to be assessed independently.

The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis. Coordination problems arise where responsibility for the relationship between allocated mandates is itself unallocated. It is tested against the hypothesis as conventionally stated in the regime complexity literature,

in which ambiguity or overlap in roles generates coordination problems. Its observables are contestation over responsibility, competing caseload claims, disputes over who does what, and parallel programmes pursuing the same beneficiaries. It draws additional support from humanitarian coordination research on how overlap is contested in practice, where disputes over who does what frequently become sites of inter-agency conflict, as agencies retain functions rather than cede them, since maintaining direct control over programming is understood internally as having the greatest impact on affected populations (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016).

The Funding Structure Hypothesis. Rigidity in financing confines each agency's adaptive capacity to its own programme space, so that work falling between agency programmes is undertaken only where a dedicated instrument finances it. H2 proposes a single mechanism, stated in terms of rigidity rather than scarcity and in terms of constraint rather than competition.

The State Capacity Hypothesis. The presence, capacity and disposition of national authority shapes coordination outcomes, and does so in both directions. H3 derives from the global governance framework's analysis of the conditions under which collective action problems can be managed in the absence of hierarchy. Much of the relevant scholarship treats the binding constraint as political willingness to coordinate with international actors rather than administrative capability alone (ALNAP, 2022).

The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis. Increasing crisis intensity alters the effect of institutional fragmentation by increasing pressure on agencies to expand, contract or adapt operations. H4 derives from the famine and food security governance literature's analysis of how emergency pressure shapes agency behaviour. Maxwell and Majid (2016) characterise famine, from the perspective of the actors responding to it, as the dramatic manifestation of response failure. De Waal (2018) argues in *Mass Starvation* that starvation is fundamentally political rather than natural, and that the international system's central failure is to respond to the symptoms of famine while leaving its political causes unaddressed — a diagnosis implying intense operational activity coexisting with strategic incoherence.

This thesis measures coordination outcomes, not the humanitarian outcomes coordination is meant to serve. The sub-question — whether coordination failures are systemic properties of the architecture or context-specific outcomes — is addressed through the comparative design. The macro-level drivers are present across all crisis contexts: non-hierarchy, agency-bounded authority and financing, and a division of labour that allocates responsibilities without allocating the relationships between them. The meso-level mechanisms are expected to vary, since whether an interface has an assigned body, whether participation is obligatory, whether a dedicated financing instrument exists, and how the nutrition function is located all differ across settings.

The expectation is therefore a division rather than a uniform result: some mechanisms recurring across configurations, others activating only under particular conditions.

This chapter has located the coordination problem at three levels and specified what would count as evidence of it. Chapter Three sets out the design through which the empirical chapters test them.

CHAPTER THREE. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The four hypotheses developed in the preceding chapter each specify a mechanism through which unallocated interfaces between clearly allocated mandates may generate coordination problems in food security and nutrition responses. Assessing them empirically calls for a design capable of two things at once: reconstructing coordination as a system that operates over time within a single crisis, and comparing those systems across crises that differ on every dimension the framework identifies as consequential. This chapter sets out that design, to explain why the analysis takes the country-level coordination system as its unit, how the formal institutional expectation against which practice is assessed is established, how funding conditions are treated as a distinct object of analysis rather than as contextual background, how process tracing is organised across four phases of response, how coordination outcomes are classified, and how the four hypotheses are assessed at country level before the cases are brought together comparatively.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative comparative case study

The research question concerns causal mechanisms rather than average effects. The aim is to establish how mandates, funding structures, institutional capacities and crisis conditions translate into organisational behaviour and coordination outcomes in particular crises, rather than to estimate whether mandate overlap is statistically associated with coordination failure across humanitarian responses. As Gerring (2007) argues, case study research is most appropriate where the objective is to understand mechanisms in context, and where the number of theoretically relevant conditions is large relative to the number of observable instances.

The study is therefore comparative, examining three country cases selected to vary on theoretically relevant contextual dimensions; qualitative, in that its principal evidence is documentary, institutional and interpretive rather than statistical; and case-based, reconstructing the operation of a coordination system within each case before drawing on cross-case comparison to assess whether mechanisms recur and under what conditions. Two levels of inference operate together. Within cases, process tracing reconstructs the

sequences linking institutional conditions, organisational decisions, observable behaviour and coordination consequences. Across cases, comparison assesses whether the same mechanisms appear under materially different contextual configurations.

The empirical analysis consists of three cases: Ukraine, Yemen and Niger. Each is examined as a longitudinal coordination system involving the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), observed across its defined analytical window and reconstructed through four common phases of response. The design does not treat coordination as a static property of an institutional structure. Coordination may be formally established but operationally weak; it may improve or deteriorate over the life of a response; and a problem identified in one phase may be corrected, reproduced or intensified in a subsequent one. Only a longitudinal treatment of the country system can capture that movement, which is why the analysis is organised around the trajectory of coordination within each country rather than around the accumulation of individual incidents.

Epistemological and analytical position

The thesis adopts a pragmatic realist stance. It takes coordination arrangements, organisational incentives, funding structures, institutional capacities and operational outcomes to be real features of humanitarian governance, capable of producing observable effects, while treating their operation as context-dependent rather than governed by invariant laws. Mandate allocation may leave interfaces unmanaged, and funding structures may create incentives for competitive behaviour or constraints on integrative work, though neither is assumed to operate identically across all crises, since state capacity, crisis intensity, donor politics and the institutional form of coordination mechanisms are each expected to condition whether and how the mechanisms are activated.

This position carries a methodological consequence that runs through the whole of the empirical analysis. Coordination is observed through documentary evidence produced by institutions with different interests, different reporting incentives and different vantage points on the same events. The analysis therefore distinguishes systematically between formal institutional claims and observed organisational behaviour. A coordination

mechanism appearing in a strategy, a cluster document, a memorandum of understanding or a humanitarian response plan establishes a formal expectation; it does not establish that coordination occurred in practice. Conversely, evidence of parallel programming, unresolved mandate boundaries, fragmented targeting or limited information sharing cannot be interpreted in isolation, and must be read against the institutional arrangements that were formally intended to govern the response.

The macro-level global governance framework developed earlier functions as a scope condition rather than as a tested variable, specifying the environment within which the meso- and micro-level mechanisms become possible. The unallocated-interface framework set out in Chapter Two functions in turn as the theoretical framework for the empirical analysis and is not itself tested as a separate hypothesis.

Two accounts within that framework are nonetheless assessed directly against one another, and the distinction between them structures the assessment of H1. The regime complexity account of institutional overlap describes a surplus of claims over a shared jurisdiction, and generates observables of contestation: disputes over responsibility, competing caseload claims, and parallel programmes pursuing the same beneficiaries. The unallocated interface account describes the absence of any claim over the relationship between separated jurisdictions, and generates observables of silence: competent parallel operation punctuated by difficulty at a boundary when something crosses it. The two accounts share the structural precondition of non-hierarchy and nothing else; the unallocated interface is not regime complexity applied more finely, and their observables are opposite. Both are tested in every case and recorded where found, and neither is assumed in advance.

The four hypotheses operationalise the framework's mechanisms — mandate and interface allocation, funding structure, state capacity and crisis intensity — and are assessed against the evidence generated by the country cases. This grounds the combination of methods used here: process tracing to examine causal sequences within cases, comparative analysis to assess recurrence and conditionality across them, and a focused treatment of the funding conditions that form part of the mechanism proposed by H2.

The empirical sequence

The empirical strategy follows a fixed sequence, applied identically in each case chapter: formal coordination baseline → funding environment → needs assessment → response planning → implementation → evaluation and institutional learning → country-level assessment of H1–H4 → country-level causal synthesis

The final comparative chapter then brings the three cases together to assess the extent to which the observed patterns are systemic or context-specific, and to answer the thesis's main and sub-questions.

The sequence deliberately separates three operations that are frequently conflated in the humanitarian coordination literature: description of what occurred, classification of the coordination problem, and causal explanation of the pattern.

The four phases establish what happened; the coordination verdicts classify the observed problem; the country-level hypothesis assessment explains the pattern; and the comparative chapter determines what can be inferred across the three cases.

3.2 Case selection and analytical windows

Selection and comparative logic

The three cases were selected through maximum variation sampling on the contextual dimensions identified in Chapter Two as potentially conditioning the operation of the mechanisms: state capacity, crisis type, donor and funding conditions, and the institutional form of the coordination arrangements at the interfaces under examination. Ukraine, Yemen and Niger differ substantially on each, and it is that variation which makes them analytically useful, since it allows outcomes associated with the institutional architecture to be distinguished from outcomes better explained by particular crisis conditions.

Ukraine represents a comparatively high-capacity state confronting an acute, sudden-onset crisis with substantial and unusually flexible international financing.

Yemen represents a context of prolonged conflict, fragmented and contested authority, severe food insecurity and malnutrition, and substantial but increasingly constrained and fragmented humanitarian financing.

Niger represents a weaker but functioning state facing chronic and seasonally intensified food-security and nutrition needs under more constrained financing conditions, with a

further sharp shift in the governmental counterpart following the change of government of 26 July 2023.

This variation is what allows the design to address the sub-question. The purpose is not to rank the countries, nor to identify a single successful or unsuccessful response, but to assess whether comparable coordination problems occur under materially different conditions. Since none of the dimensions is held constant across the cases, a coordination problem that appears consistently in all three cannot be attributed to a shared contextual condition, and recurrence across materially different configurations therefore strengthens the interpretation that the problem arises from features of the institutional architecture itself. Where a mechanism's occurrence instead tracks particular contextual conditions — appearing where state capacity is weakest, or where funding is most tightly earmarked, and receding where those conditions do not obtain — the evidence supports a context-dependent interpretation. The likelier result is a division between the two, with some mechanisms recurring across configurations and others activating only under particular conditions, and establishing which fall on which side is the analytical work of the comparative chapter.

The three cases are all comparatively high-visibility humanitarian settings. This is simultaneously a strength and a limitation of the design. The claim made for the comparison is one of analytical rather than statistical generalisation: the object is to assess whether the mechanisms provide a plausible and evidenced explanation for observed coordination outcomes across materially different settings, not to establish that those outcomes are representative of humanitarian responses generally.

Analytical windows

Analytical windows are case-specific, aligned with the periods in which each case's coordination arrangements and mechanisms can be meaningfully observed.

Yemen and Niger are examined across 2019–2024. The start of the window provides a baseline preceding the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting, while capturing the shifts in financing conditions associated with COVID-19, the subsequent reorientation of donor priorities, and the changes in coordination arrangements that followed. It closes in 2024, beyond which financial and evaluative evidence is less complete.

Ukraine is examined across 2022–2024, beginning with the full-scale invasion of February 2022, when the humanitarian coordination architecture under examination emerged. Earlier years fall outside the window because they do not reflect the same institutional configuration, and including them would compare arrangements that are not analytically equivalent.

The shorter Ukraine window is a recognised asymmetry, offering a compressed observation of the fourth phase in particular, since evaluation and institutional learning require time to become visible in the documentary record.

3.3 Analytical scope

The empirical analysis examines food security, nutrition, and the interaction between FAO, WFP and UNICEF at their interfaces. It does not seek to evaluate the overall humanitarian performance of the three organisations, and does not assess sectors, programmes or partnerships that fall outside the food-security and nutrition system under examination. Other sectors, donors and actors enter the analysis only where the documentary record places them at an interface that bears on that system.

The unit of analysis is the country-level coordination system, observed over time across four sequential response phases.

For each country, the analysis establishes:

- the formal coordination architecture and the institutional expectations it creates;
- the formal and functional roles of FAO, WFP and UNICEF within that architecture;
- the interfaces at which those roles meet, and whether any structure was assigned to each;
- the funding environment and the structural conditions relevant to H2;
- the operational pattern across the four response phases;
- the coordination problems that emerge, and their classification;
- the mechanisms that may explain those problems;
- the strength and consistency of the evidence supporting each explanation;
- the case's contribution to the emerging cross-case comparison.

UNICEF, WFP and FAO define the institutional field; nevertheless, not every coordination problem examined involves all three. FAO's analytical position differs from

that of its two partners in acute malnutrition, since it holds no responsibility for the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition and is not treated as equivalent to the agencies operating on the SAM/MAM division. Its relevance lies instead in whether its food security, livelihoods, resilience and early warning activities were integrated with the wider nutrition response or developed as a parallel track — a question that can inform H1, H3 or H4 without assuming a mandate equivalence that does not exist. This asymmetry is carried consistently through the case chapters, and findings concerning FAO are framed in terms of integration and interface rather than in terms of the caseload division that structures the UNICEF–WFP relationship.

Two boundary rules govern which further actors enter the analysis. Agencies outside the triad — UNHCR, WHO, IOM, IFAD — are included where the documentary record places them at an interface under examination, since the wasting continuum is not governed by the same agency configuration in every setting, and that variation is itself analytically relevant. Implementing partners are treated as evidence where the record documents the arrangement, since coordination outcomes are frequently realised at partner level, though the partner layer is not examined as an institutional field in its own right.

3.4 The formal coordination baseline

Before tracing what occurred in each country, the analysis establishes a formal coordination baseline. This is necessary because coordination can only be assessed against an identifiable institutional expectation. Without such a baseline, any observed overlap or divergence can be characterised as a failure by assertion, and any observed cooperation as a success, with the standard supplied retrospectively by the analyst.

The baseline is case-specific, and each case chapter opens by establishing the formal commitments that governed the response under examination: the relevant provisions of the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting and any country operational plan issued under it, the applicable cluster or sector arrangements, the analytical mechanisms operating at the food-security and nutrition interface or their absence, the national coordination structures and government-led mechanisms, inter-agency agreements and memoranda of understanding, humanitarian response plans and their successors, and the division of SAM and MAM responsibilities recorded in country-level planning documents.

Within that architecture, the baseline identifies the expected roles of the three agencies. The roles are not treated as mutually exclusive, and the analytical focus falls instead on the interfaces between them: food security and nutrition analysis; food assistance and nutrition programming; agriculture or livelihoods and nutrition outcomes; cash transfers and nutrition objectives; prevention and treatment; the division between severe and moderate acute malnutrition within treatment; and geographic and beneficiary targeting. The baseline records, for each interface, two things: what the formal architecture required, and whether any body held responsibility for the relationship across it. The second is the principal variable the design is constructed to observe, following the second variant of H1. An interface may be clearly bounded on both sides and assigned to nothing, and the case chapters record that condition explicitly wherever the documentary record establishes it, so that the presence or absence of an assigned mechanism is fixed in the baseline before any observation of practice.

The baseline establishes the expectation that the three agencies should operate through complementary rather than systematically parallel functions. Coordination should therefore be observable through mechanisms such as shared or compatible assessments, complementary planning, explicit delineation of responsibilities, routine information exchange, linked programming, functioning referral systems, geographic or beneficiary complementarity, and adaptation where mandates intersect.

Two interpretive constraints follow, and they apply throughout the empirical chapters. The existence of a formal coordination mechanism is not treated as evidence that coordination occurred. The existence of overlapping activities is not automatically treated as failure. The question in each instance is whether the arrangement produced the outcome it was intended to produce and, where it did not, which mechanism best explains the divergence. The formal baseline is not itself evidence of successful coordination; it provides the standard against which operational practice is assessed, so that parallel programming, mandate expansion, overlapping activities or coordination breakdown can be examined as departures from specific and documented institutional arrangements rather than from an abstract standard of good practice.

3.5 The funding environment and the operationalisation of H2

For each country, the analysis establishes the funding environment along four dimensions: funding volume and trajectory; donor concentration; earmarking and flexibility; and funding volatility. Where the evidence permits, it also examines the relative financing position of FAO, WFP and UNICEF within the response, and the role of pooled funding mechanisms.

The evidence used to assess H2 is drawn principally from the conditions attached to agency resources rather than from the financing environment at appeal level. Earmarking and flexibility are established from agency financial disclosures together with independent evaluations and external assessments including MOPAN, which provide an externally sourced check on agency-reported figures and, more importantly, evidence of how funding conditions were experienced operationally within the response. Pooled-fund allocations recorded in Country-Based Pooled Fund and Country Humanitarian Fund annual reports and in CERF records serve as a supplementary indicator, and are drawn on where the records permit rather than constructed as a complete series.

Together these indicators establish the structural conditions under which the mechanism proposed by H2 is more or less likely to operate, along the sequence:

funding structure → institutional incentives or constraints → observable agency behaviour → coordination outcome

The rigidity mechanism, which is the hypothesis proper, predicts that resources attached to specified activities cannot be moved to unspecified ones, so that each agency's capacity to adapt is confined to the boundary of its own funded programme and work falling between programmes is financed only where a dedicated instrument constitutes it. The observable traces are correspondingly different: whether uncontracted interface work was shed when funding tightened; whether a shortfall in one agency's component could be met from another's; whether the boundary of an adaptive solution to a shared problem tracked the boundary of the financial instrument available to the agency devising it; and, in the reverse direction, whether every documented instance of cross-agency integration depended on a dedicated financing instrument rather than on ordinary agency resources. That last test carries particular weight, because a mechanism confirmed in both directions within a single case is more strongly evidenced than one confirmed only where it produced a negative outcome.

The mechanism and its alternative are assessed together and reported as a single verdict, stating which the evidence supports. The analysis examines equally whether flexible or pooled funding facilitated coordination, since a mechanism that operates only in one direction is weakly evidenced, and whether interface weaknesses persisted under abundant and flexible financing, which would weaken the hypothesis on either account. This approach distinguishes the amount of funding from the structure of funding. A poorly funded response is not automatically a poorly coordinated response, just as a well-funded response is not necessarily well coordinated, and conflating the two would make H2 unfalsifiable in any constrained setting. Where the record shows a funding condition and a coordination outcome without documenting the decision that connects them, H2 is assessed as untested for that country rather than inferred from the conditions alone.

3.6 Process tracing and the four response phases

Process tracing

The mechanisms proposed by the hypotheses are not directly observable and must be inferred from their manifestations in institutional behaviour. Process tracing reconstructs the sequence linking a relevant condition to an institutional decision or interaction, and from there to a coordination consequence, seeking in the manner Beach and Pedersen (2013) describe the specific empirical traces that a given mechanism should leave:

condition → institutional response → interaction or behaviour → consequence

Evidence that two agencies operated overlapping programmes establishes a fact without showing that mandate allocation or funding structure caused it. Causal interpretation requires evidence connecting the relevant condition to the observed behaviour and, where possible, evidence connecting that behaviour to a consequential coordination outcome. Causal claims are therefore not inferred from overlap or temporal association alone.

Chapter Two specifies, for each hypothesis, the critical link in its chain — the step at which the mechanism becomes observable rather than merely plausible. The analysis identifies that step explicitly in each assessment and states whether the evidence establishes it, since a chain evidenced at every point except the critical link supports narrative plausibility rather than mechanism identification.

The four phases as a shared structure

Process tracing is organised across four phases of crisis response, applied consistently to all three countries:

1. Needs assessment
2. Response planning
3. Implementation
4. Evaluation and institutional learning

The phases are analytically sequential but not strictly chronological. Humanitarian responses revisit assessments, revise plans, adapt implementation and conduct evaluation while earlier activities continue. The phases therefore represent distinct functions in the response process rather than rigid periods, and their purpose is to locate where in that process a coordination problem emerged, how it developed, and whether it was corrected or reproduced.

Within each phase, the analysis follows five questions:

What was formally expected?

What happened in practice?

How did the position change across the phase?

What coordination pattern resulted?

What coordination verdict can the evidence support?

Each phase closes with a coordination verdict and with the causal sequence, stated compactly, that the verdict rests on.

The phases generate the empirical material from which the four hypotheses are assessed once, at the end of the country analysis.

Phase One — Needs assessment

Examines how food-security and nutrition needs were identified, measured, classified, shared and prioritised, and how a common evidence base was — or was not — produced.

The analysis considers food-security assessments; nutrition assessments and surveillance systems; IPC, Cadre Harmonisé or comparable analytical systems, or their absence; agency-specific assessments; joint assessments; arrangements for information sharing; the use of common indicators and analytical frameworks; the relative prioritisation of

food-security and nutrition needs; and the interaction of FAO, WFP and UNICEF within these processes.

The central question is whether the formal assessment architecture produced sufficiently compatible and shared understandings of needs to support coordinated action. Divergent caseload estimates, contested classifications, parallel assessment exercises and asymmetric access to data are of particular interest, since an assessment phase that fails to produce a common evidence base transmits that failure forward into planning and implementation.

This phase also carries particular weight for the assignment proposition. Because the analytical interface is the one interface at which a standing, protocol-governed mechanism operates in two of the three cases and in neither form in the third, the phase provides the clearest available comparison between an interface with an assigned mechanism and one without. The analysis therefore records not only what evidence was produced but whether its production was obligatory or discretionary — whether the mechanism required agencies to submit data to a process none of them individually controlled, or whether convergence depended on some actor deciding in each instance that a joint product was worth producing. This also establishes whether the analytical interface was institutionally allocated or left to discretionary inter-agency cooperation.

Phase Two — Response planning

Examines how identified needs were translated into response priorities, strategies, caseloads and resource requirements.

The analysis considers humanitarian response plans; nutrition and food-security sector plans; government strategies; agency strategies and country programme documents; stated targets; geographic allocation; beneficiary targeting; the recorded division of labour, including the division of SAM and MAM caseloads; the intended complementarity between food-security and nutrition interventions and between livelihoods and nutrition programming; and the funding allocations attached to those plans.

Particular attention is given to whether the formal differentiation between FAO, WFP and UNICEF established in the baseline translated into complementary planning, and whether any planning instrument addressed the relationship between the agencies' respective

components — a joint contingency arrangement, a substitution protocol, a shared stock or procurement facility, or a body empowered to take decisions across a sectoral boundary. Planning is the phase in which institutional expectations are converted into operational commitments, and it is therefore the phase in which unresolved interface questions most often become visible, either through explicit contestation or through silence, where a boundary that required allocation is simply not addressed.

Phase Three — Implementation

Examines whether planned coordination was reflected in operational practice.

The analysis considers food assistance; cash-based assistance; nutrition treatment and prevention; agriculture and livelihoods programming; resilience activities; nutrition-sensitive programming; beneficiary overlap; geographic overlap and gaps; parallel programming and parallel supply arrangements; referral systems and programmatic linkages; information sharing between agencies; the adaptation of programmes over time; and changes resulting from funding conditions.

The central analytical distinction in this phase is between planned coordination and actual implementation. The phase is accordingly the most important site for identifying translation failures: situations in which formal commitments to coordination or complementarity do not correspond to operational practice. It is also the phase in which the H2 sequence is most often observable, since funding conditions typically register as operational decisions — a programme protected, a caseload retained, a joint activity deferred — rather than as declared positions.

Where an interface was not assigned a coordinating mechanism, the analysis looks for the characteristic consequence predicted by the framework: parallel operation that remains competent within each mandate but encounters difficulty when a shock, caseload, supply problem or other operational change crosses the boundary.

Phase Four — Evaluation and institutional learning

Examines whether coordination problems were identified by the system itself, and whether the system responded to them.

The analysis considers independent and inter-agency evaluations; agency evaluations; coordination reviews and cluster performance monitoring; lessons-learned exercises;

subsequent changes in strategies, institutional responsibilities, coordination structures and funding arrangements; and documented adaptations in later programming.

Particular attention is given to whether identified coordination problems were corrected, reproduced or left unresolved. This distinction carries significant evidentiary weight for the thesis's central question. A coordination problem that persists after it has been identified, and after correction has been attempted, provides considerably stronger evidence of a sustained and structurally grounded weakness than an isolated problem that is recognised and resolved. The former suggests a weakness the system cannot correct from within; the latter suggests a functioning system encountering ordinary operational difficulty.

An interface may therefore remain unallocated not only because no operational mechanism was created, but because no institutional process exists with responsibility for identifying and correcting problems located between otherwise functioning organisations. The phase also examines the scope of the evaluative frame itself. Because evaluations are commissioned by organisations and scoped to their operations, a weakness located between two organisations may fall inside neither frame. The analysis therefore records, for each case, what the available evaluations examined and what fell outside their terms of reference, and treats the absence of any frame within which an interface could have come under examination as a finding about the system's capacity to perceive its own weaknesses rather than as a gap in the evidence available to this study.

3.7 Assessing coordination outcomes

Each phase closes with one of five verdicts. The categories are distinguished by evidentiary threshold rather than by degree of severity alone, and each carries a specific requirement that the evidence must meet.

No coordination problem established. The evidence does not demonstrate a weakness in the coordination arrangements for that phase. This is a positive finding about the state of the evidence rather than a residual applied where no other category fits, and it carries analytical weight: a phase in which coordination demonstrably functioned forecloses explanations of subsequent phases resting on incapacity, unwillingness, or the impossibility of joint working under the conditions obtaining in that case.

Coordination gap. No arrangement existed spanning the relevant interface. Because no commitment was made, there is nothing from which the response could diverge, and the weakness lies in the absence of the arrangement rather than in the malfunction of one. A gap is therefore not any identifiable weakness in institutional design; it is specifically the condition in which the architecture is silent at a point where a relationship required managing.

Translation failure. A formal expectation of complementarity existed and was not converted into practice. The divergence between commitment and execution is documented, but is not shown to be sustained across the window or material to the functioning of the arrangement.

Coordination deficit. A sustained and material weakness in the functioning of an arrangement the system intended. Both qualifiers are required and neither is sufficient alone: the weakness must persist across the window rather than within a single planning or programme cycle, and it must affect the operation of the arrangement rather than its presentation. A translation failure that meets both conditions is also a deficit, and is recorded as such. Persistence after identification and after attempted correction raises a translation failure to a deficit, since a weakness that survives the system's own diagnosis and remedy is by that fact sustained and material.

Coordination failure. Requires three elements in combination: an identifiable coordination weakness antecedent to the outcome; a documented and where possible quantified consequential negative outcome; and an established causal link between them. The causal link must be shown rather than inferred from sequence, and the finding must specify what the coordination weakness contributed that the precipitating event did not. Where an external shock caused the disruption, the finding is not that coordination caused the shock but that the coordination arrangement determined how its effects were distributed, and the evidence for that must be the asymmetry between differently arranged parts of the response rather than the severity of the outcome alone. Failure is not assigned simply because coordination was imperfect.

Two conventions govern application. Verdicts are not aggregated into a case-level score, because a case may show strong formal arrangements and weak operational ones, and collapsing that combination would conceal the divergence between formal and operational governance that the thesis exists to examine. And where two verdicts of the

same class arise at the same interface in different phases, the analysis states what distinguishes them, so that a single weakness is not counted twice.

The analysis must in every instance identify a specific divergence from a documented expectation and, where failure is claimed, link it to a consequential outcome. This discipline matters because the thesis is concerned with explaining coordination failures rather than with treating every instance of imperfect coordination as failure, and a classification scheme that resolves upward by default would make the argument circular.

3.8 Country-level application of the hypotheses

The four hypotheses are assessed once, after all four response phases have been traced, using the complete empirical sequence. Each assessment identifies the evidence relied on, the causal reasoning applied to it, and the critical link on which the chain depends.

H1 — The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis.

H1 carries two variants, and the assessment establishes which the evidence supports rather than assuming either.

The ambiguity variant holds that overlapping or insufficiently differentiated mandates generate coordination problems. Its observables are contestation over responsibility, competing caseload claims, disputes over who does what, and parallel programmes pursuing the same beneficiaries. Overlap alone is not sufficient to support it: the evidence must establish that responsibility was resolved unilaterally because no binding allocation mechanism existed, which is the critical link, and must distinguish an interface that was contested from one that was simply shared.

The unallocated interface variant holds that clear allocation displaces the coordination problem to the relationships between allocated responsibilities, which remain unmanaged because no participant's mandate reaches them. Its observables are different: competent parallel operation in ordinary conditions, punctuated by failure at a boundary when something crosses it. Its critical link is the demonstration that management tracked the presence of an assigned mechanism rather than the clarity of the mandates on either side, and that demonstration imposes a specific evidentiary requirement. It cannot be met by observing that an interface was unmanaged and that no structure held it, since that is a description rather than a comparison. It requires either a within-case comparison across

interfaces, in which some had an assigned structure and others did not under otherwise similar conditions, or an observed change in whether a mechanism was present at a single interface, with the coordination outcome moving accordingly. Where neither is available in a case, the variant is assessed on the strength of the descriptive evidence and the limitation is stated.

The two variants are not alternatives to be chosen in advance and both may operate within a single case. A verdict of partially supported is available where the hypothesis's conclusion is confirmed by a route it did not specify, and where that occurs the assessment states the restatement the evidence supports.

H2 — The Funding Structure Hypothesis.

H2 examines whether funding conditions influence coordination by shaping organisational incentives and constraints, along the mechanism and alternative set out in §3.5.

Evidence is sought concerning donor concentration, earmarking, flexibility, volatility, the relative financing position of each agency, and pooled funding. The hypothesis is strengthened where adverse funding conditions coincide with observable competitive or constrained behaviour and where the intervening decision is documented, and weakened where comparable funding pressures coexist with effective coordination or where interface weaknesses persist under abundant and flexible financing. The critical link is the translation of a financial condition into an observable programmatic decision, dated and attributed; absent that step, the analysis has established scarcity rather than mechanism, and the hypothesis is recorded as untested for that case rather than inferred from the funding conditions alone.

Where the evidence supports the hypothesis, the assessment states whether it supports the rigidity mechanism or the competition alternative, and states explicitly where competition is not evidenced and none is claimed.

H3 — The State Capacity Hypothesis

H3 examines whether the presence, capacity and disposition of national authority affects the ability of the coordination system to allocate responsibility, arbitrate between organisations and resolve coordination problems.

The assessment does not assume that weak state capacity automatically produces coordination failure, nor that strong state capacity guarantees coherence. Weak, fragmented or contested authority may remove the external arbiter capable of enforcing a division of labour, in which case the critical link is the demonstration that allocation actually defaulted to inter-agency negotiation or to parallel operation, rather than merely that the state was weak. Capable and present authority may equally shape coordination, by supplying an institutional argument for mobilising less international coordination or by imposing regulatory requirements that bind humanitarian programming, in which case the critical link is the demonstration that the authority actually bound a specific arrangement.

The assessment also examines the channel Chapter Two specifies. Because the institutional location of nutrition coordination varies across settings while food-security coordination is comparatively stable in form, a change in the standing of national authorities is expected to affect the two sectors asymmetrically, reaching hardest the sector coordinated through national rather than humanitarian structures. Where a case supplies a dated discontinuity in national authority, that asymmetry is tested directly.

H4 — The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis

H4 examines whether crisis intensity amplifies existing weaknesses by increasing pressure on agencies to expand, contract or adapt operations. It is treated as an amplifying or conditioning mechanism rather than as a sufficient explanation, and its assessment therefore requires the interaction with each other mechanism to be documented at a specific point rather than asserted in general terms.

Chapter Two specifies three pathways, and the assessment states which the evidence supports and on what basis, returning a single verdict rather than separate findings for each.

Operational convergence, in which agencies move into increasingly similar functions under pressure, evidenced by an agency performing activities previously belonging to a partner, in the same locations, at the same time.

Strategic incoherence, in which agencies respond through increasingly divergent priorities, evidenced by divergence in stated priorities, targets and appeal messaging over

a period in which need was rising, and by corrections designed and financed entirely within one agency's boundary.

Architectural volatility, in which pressure acts on the coordination structures themselves, evidenced by structures mobilised on assumed rather than assessed need and subsequently withdrawn when the assumption failed.

The first two pathways are derived from the theoretical literature. The third is derived from the case evidence and is retained because it is a distinct and specifiable form of the same mechanism, though it is confirmed by the case from which it was drawn and is therefore not independently corroborated within this study.

The pathways are not competing hypotheses requiring independent confirmation, and any, all or none may be present. The critical link in each case is distinguishing a consequence of intensification from a consequence of fragmentation that would have obtained regardless.

Verdicts and the country-level assessment

Each case chapter closes its hypothesis assessment, stating for each hypothesis the evidence relied on, the causal assessment reached, and the strength of that assessment. Case-level conclusions are expressed in terms of the degree of support for each mechanism:

- **supported** — a convincing sequence links the hypothesised condition to behaviour and outcome, and the critical link is evidenced;
- **partially supported** — the mechanism is plausible but significant uncertainty or competing explanations remain, or the hypothesis holds for one component of its claim and not another, or its conclusion is confirmed by a route it did not specify;
- **not supported** — the evidence points clearly away from the proposed mechanism;
- **untested** — the evidence is insufficient to assess the mechanism in this case.

The distinction between not supported and untested is maintained throughout. A hypothesis is assessed where the case provides relevant evidence, and where the evidence is insufficient it is recorded as untested rather than as unsupported, so that gaps in the record do not present themselves as findings. Where a hypothesis is supported for two

agencies and untested for a third, the verdict states the restriction rather than generalising across the triad.

Each case chapter then closes with a country-level causal synthesis stating how the supported mechanisms combined to produce the observed outcome, and identifying the components that remain untested and are therefore not absorbed into the account.

3.9 Evidence, sources and triangulation

Principles of weighting

The empirical analysis reconstructs institutional expectations, operational behaviour, consequences and financing conditions through triangulation across several categories of documentary and quantitative evidence, weighted by independence from the actors being assessed, proximity to the event, and relevance to the specific claim being made.

The strongest findings are those where independent or differently situated sources converge. Where documents disagree, the disagreement is treated as part of the empirical problem rather than resolved by default hierarchy. The same care distinguishes description from causation, since a planning document can establish intended roles and an evaluation can show divergence in practice, while neither alone establishes a mechanism, which requires a sequence of evidence linking condition, behaviour and outcome.

Independent evaluations and assessments

Independent evaluations constitute the principal external source for assessing coordination outcomes, supplemented by agency evaluations and management responses where relevant. The analysis draws on inter-agency, corporate and country-level evaluations covering the selected responses, with MOPAN assessments providing an additional cross-case institutional perspective. These sources are used primarily to assess whether documented coordination arrangements translated into observable operational outcomes.

Evaluations are also read as evidence of the scope of the evaluative frame itself. What an evaluation examined, and what its terms of reference excluded, is treated as data bearing on Phase Four rather than as a limitation of the source.

Institutional and coordination documentation

Coordination documentation provides the empirical record of how formal arrangements operated at country level and carries most weight in the planning and implementation phases. These sources establish how formal commitments translated into operational decisions about the allocation of caseloads between UNICEF and WFP, the integration of FAO livelihoods and resilience programming into the nutrition response, and instances in which coordination mechanisms failed to produce the outcome they were designed to produce.

Nutrition classification data occupy a related position. IPC Acute Malnutrition classification reports for Yemen, and Cadre Harmonisé and interphase acute-malnutrition analyses for Niger, document the severity of the nutrition situation across the analytical windows, establish whether joint needs-assessment processes produced a shared evidence base, and identify moments of contested classification or divergent assessment. Because FAO's early-warning function is formally embedded in these systems, the data also provide a direct empirical trace of whether that institutional linkage functioned in practice. The Cadre Harmonisé is of particular relevance to Niger, being produced through a regional multi-stakeholder process involving national governments, UN agencies and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, an anchoring that locates its standing beyond the relationship between any individual agency and the national counterpart. Ukraine was not subject to an IPC or Cadre Harmonisé analysis during its analytical window, and the absence of that mechanism is treated in the Ukraine chapter as an analytically relevant feature of the case rather than as a gap in the evidence.

Agency reporting

FAO, WFP and UNICEF reports, situation reports, programme reports and annual reports provide evidence of agency activities and operational practice. Agency-produced documents are strong evidence of what an agency decided or implemented, but they cannot on their own sustain causal claims about performance or coordination behaviour, a limitation that follows from the information asymmetry between donors and agencies. They are accordingly read with corresponding caution and, where they make claims about an agency's own coordination performance, triangulated against independent or differently situated evidence.

Financial evidence

Financial Tracking Service data, pooled-fund records and agency financial reporting are used primarily to establish the funding environment and to support the H2 causal analysis, as set out in §3.5. Financial evidence establishes conditions rather than behaviour, and is not used to infer organisational conduct in the absence of documentation of the decisions that connect the two.

Academic literature

Academic literature on regime complexity and interface allocation in non-hierarchical institutional systems, humanitarian coordination, international organisation behaviour, humanitarian financing, food security and nutrition governance, and process-tracing methodology provides the theoretical and methodological framework for interpreting the empirical evidence. It is applied within the empirical chapters at the points where an observed mechanism is read against the proposition that generated it, rather than confined to the theoretical chapter.

Triangulation

Triangulation is used to distinguish institutional claims from observable coordination patterns. Where possible, significant findings are supported by more than one type of evidence: an agency report describing strengthened coordination is compared with coordination documentation and with an independent evaluation covering the same period.

3.10 Comparative logic and final synthesis

The final comparative chapter uses the findings from Ukraine, Yemen and Niger to assess variation and commonality across the cases.

First, it compares coordination outcomes across the four response phases, so that the phase at which weakness appears and the form it takes can be compared directly.

Second, it compares the assessment of H1–H4, including which variant of H1 and which pathway of H4 the evidence supported in each case, and which components were recorded as untested and why. Where the same variant is disconfirmed across all three cases, that convergence is reported as a finding in its own right rather than distributed across the case chapters, since a received account whose observables appear under no configuration of the contextual variables is more strongly disconfirmed than one that fails in a single setting.

Third, it characterises each case along four descriptive dimensions of coordination outcome — role delineation, duplication avoidance, joint programming coherence, and strategic alignment. These dimensions are used to describe and compare the shape of the outcome in each response. Their function is to make visible the pattern by which formal delineation may be strong while operational coherence is weak, which is the divergence between formal and operational governance the thesis exists to examine.

The comparison then assesses whether the identified mechanisms recur across materially different contexts or are context-dependent, leading to a systemic, context-specific, or combined explanation of coordination outcomes and an answer to the research questions.

3.11 Limitations

Triangulation carries particular weight in this design because many of the documents are produced by the organisations being assessed, and independent evaluations, coordination records, financial data, classification systems and documents originating from other actors serve as checks on agency self-reporting.

The community of evaluators working on these crises is small, and in Yemen the same individuals appear across the inter-agency evaluation and two of the three agency evaluations, so convergence between those sources does not constitute fully independent triangulation. FAO's institutional perspective is also less fully represented in the available record than those of UNICEF and WFP, so that findings concerning FAO rest more heavily on partner reporting and on coordination documentation, and FAO's country-level funding composition is not published for any of the three cases.

A limitation follows directly from the framework itself and cuts at the thesis's own claims. The unallocated interface condition is by definition invisible in ordinary operation, because each party is discharging its own responsibility correctly and no participant experiences a problem. It follows that an unmanaged interface generates a documentary record only when something crosses it — a shock absorbed on one side and not the other, a withdrawal with no corresponding adjustment, a question that finds no body constituted to answer it. The design can therefore identify unmanaged interfaces where such an event occurred, and is considerably weaker at identifying those where none did. The absence of documented difficulty at an interface is accordingly weak evidence that the interface was managed, and the analysis does not treat it as evidence of coordination. This asymmetry

means the findings are more likely to understate than to overstate the prevalence of the condition, and comparative statements about the number of unmanaged interfaces in a case are avoided in favour of statements about those the record establishes.

Where a source does not permit a reliable figure or finding the gap is stated in the text and its effect on the relevant assessment noted. Cross-agency and cross-case earmarking figures are accordingly treated as indicative of directional shifts in structural exposure rather than as equivalent statistics, and robustness for H2 rests correspondingly on connecting evidence of earmarking and funding flexibility to documented institutional decisions.

The asymmetry between analytical windows imposes a further constraint. The Ukraine window is shorter than those for Yemen and Niger, and the fourth phase is correspondingly less developed there, since evaluation and institutional learning become visible in the record only after time has passed. Comparative statements involving the fourth phase are qualified accordingly, and the absence of documented learning in a compressed window is not treated as equivalent to documented failure to learn.

Generalisability is correspondingly limited and should not be overstated. The thesis does not claim that its findings apply to all food-security and nutrition crises, or that the mechanisms identified operate identically in contexts not examined. It claims that the structural conditions identified — unallocated interfaces between clearly allocated mandates, funding structure, variation in state authority, and the effects of crisis intensity — are present in the cases examined, that the process tracing establishes whether they account for the coordination outcomes observed, and that the mechanisms are theoretically grounded in ways suggesting they will operate where similar structural conditions obtain. The comparatively high visibility of all three crises is both a strength and a limitation, since the documentary record is unusually rich, while lower-visibility crises with different combinations of funding constraint, institutional capacity and coordination problem may not generate comparable evidence, and the thesis cannot speak to whether the same mechanisms operate there with equal force.

3.12 Summary of the analytical strategy

The empirical strategy can be summarised as follows:

Three country cases (Ukraine, Yemen, Niger)



Case context and analytical window



Formal coordination baseline

(roles → interfaces → assigned or unassigned)



Funding environment and H2 conditions



Phase 1: Needs assessment → coordination verdict



Phase 2: Response planning → coordination verdict



Phase 3: Implementation → coordination verdict



Phase 4: Evaluation and learning → coordination verdict



Country-level application of H1–H4



Case causal synthesis



Final cross-case synthesis and conclusion

CHAPTER FOUR. UKRAINE: CLEAR MANDATES, FUNCTIONING INSTITUTIONS, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF INTERFACE GAPS

4.1 Case context

The analytical window begins with the full-scale Russian invasion of 24 February 2022 and runs through December 2024. The invasion rapidly disrupted household access to food through displacement, loss of income, damaged infrastructure, disrupted markets and supply chains, and the destruction of productive assets. The initial food-security problem was therefore principally one of access and affordability rather than national food availability. In a March–April 2022 assessment based on interviews with more than 4,700 Ukrainians, WFP found that approximately one in three families was food insecure, with displaced households particularly affected (WFP, 2022a). FAO likewise reported in March 2022 that insecurity, displacement, damaged infrastructure and disrupted supply chains threatened households' ability to obtain food even where food remained available in national markets (FAO, 2022c).

The food-security response consequently had to address two related but distinct dimensions. The first was **immediate household access to food, particularly for people who had lost income, been displaced or become unable to access functioning markets**. This became a central area of WFP activity through food assistance and cash-based transfers. The second was the **protection of food production and rural livelihoods, which affected both household income and the availability of food at local level**. FAO's 2022 nationwide survey of 5,200 rural households found that one in four households had reduced or ceased agricultural production, with the proportion exceeding 40 per cent in some oblasts. The same survey found that 72 per cent of households faced higher crop-production costs and 64 per cent higher livestock-production costs. More than half reported declining incomes, while 57 per cent had adopted negative coping strategies. These pressures were directly relevant to food security because they reduced households' ability to produce food, earn income and maintain stable access to food (FAO, 2023d).

Food insecurity remained strongly geographically differentiated. National food availability proved considerably more resilient than household food access in frontline and recently affected areas. Conflict-related restrictions on movement, infrastructure damage, loss of employment and disruption of local markets produced substantially

greater risks in eastern and southern areas. By 2024, the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan identified 7.3 million people in need of food-security and livelihood assistance, with 3.4 million targeted for assistance, including 2.9 million for food assistance and 1.8 million for livelihood interventions. Food security therefore remained a major component of the humanitarian response even though Ukraine did not experience a nationwide collapse of food availability.

The food-security shock also had important **nutrition consequences, particularly for children. Ukraine entered the war with relatively low levels of acute child wasting, so the nutrition challenge was not primarily a large-scale treatment response to severe acute malnutrition.** The SAM/MAM division is accordingly not the operative interface in this case, and its near-absence is analytically useful rather than limiting: it isolates the food-security and nutrition boundary from the caseload-allocation problem that dominates it elsewhere, leaving prevention, feeding practices and household access as the relationship the coordination architecture had to manage.

Instead, **conflict affected the conditions through which young children obtained adequate and appropriate food, including household purchasing power, availability of suitable foods, health and social services, displacement, and infant and young child feeding practices.** UNICEF's 2024 situation analysis identified persistent weaknesses in nutrition-related systems, including fragmented information systems and uneven sub-national capacity (UNICEF Ukraine, 2024b).

Infant and young child feeding provides particularly clear evidence of these pressures. A UNICEF-commissioned survey of parents conducted between September 2023 and February 2024 found that only 28 per cent of mothers with children under three were breastfeeding, and that 51 per cent of families using infant formula lacked stable access to the baby food they needed (UNICEF Ukraine, 2024a). Among internally displaced households, the latter proportion increased to 68 per cent. These findings demonstrate that the nutrition effects of the war extended beyond conventional measures of acute malnutrition. Conflict affected the quality, stability and accessibility of children's diets and feeding environments, particularly among displaced families.

This creates an important analytical distinction between food security and nutrition in the Ukrainian case. **Food assistance could address immediate household access to food, while agricultural and livelihood interventions could protect productive capacity**

and income. Nutrition, however, also depended on whether children could access appropriate foods, whether caregivers could maintain recommended feeding practices, and whether health and nutrition services remained functional. These dimensions were related but were not automatically integrated through the same operational mechanisms. The resulting coordination question was therefore not simply whether FAO, WFP and UNICEF had distinct mandates, but whether mechanisms existed to connect food access, food production, child feeding and nutrition outcomes where these areas intersected.

Ukraine was not subject to an IPC analysis during the analytical window. Nevertheless, the absence of this common analytical process did not mean that food-security or nutrition information was unavailable. FAO, WFP and UNICEF each generated substantial sector-specific evidence, and joint analytical exercises also occurred during the response. This was therefore an unassigned analytical interface rather than an information deficit. FAO, WFP and UNICEF each produced relevant evidence, and joint analytical exercises were possible, but no standing mechanism was assigned responsibility for reconciling food-security and nutrition evidence across the boundary.

The Ukrainian state remained operational throughout the analytical period and continued to provide public services and participate in humanitarian planning and delivery. National and local institutions remained important channels for health, social protection, agricultural support and other services affecting household food access and child wellbeing. At the same time, frontline authorities faced severe security, infrastructure and access constraints. State capacity was therefore relatively strong at national level but uneven geographically. This reduced the need for humanitarian actors to construct entirely parallel systems while increasing coordination demands in areas where government capacity and service access had been disrupted.

The response consequently combined government structures, the UN-led coordination system, international organisations, national NGOs and local authorities. Within this system, WFP concentrated primarily on emergency food assistance and cash-based support; FAO focused on agricultural production, inputs and livelihoods; and UNICEF addressed nutrition, child health and infant and young child feeding. These areas were functionally differentiated but substantively interconnected. A household's food access could affect the quality of a child's diet; loss of agricultural income could increase dependence on food assistance; displacement could disrupt both food access and feeding

practices; and weaknesses in health and nutrition services could compound food-related vulnerabilities.

The analytical conditions therefore provide a demanding test of the coordination framework. Ukraine combined large-scale food-security needs with significant child-nutrition and feeding pressures, while retaining relatively high state capacity, substantial humanitarian financing and comparatively clear functional differentiation among FAO, WFP and UNICEF. The central analytical issue is consequently not whether the three agencies had different responsibilities, but whether effective mechanisms existed for coordinating the interfaces between food assistance, agricultural livelihoods, household food access, child feeding and nutrition. This makes Ukraine particularly useful for testing whether coordination problems can persist where mandates are comparatively clear, state institutions remain operational and financial resources are substantial.

4.2 Formal coordination baseline

Institutional coordination architecture

Under the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting, Ukraine is not among the twenty-four frontrunner countries that developed a costed national roadmap under the plan and was not included in the fifteen countries covered by FAO's own Global Action Plan to prevent child wasting launched in December 2022 (UNICEF et al., 2021; FAO, 2022a).

The country-level architecture was established by OCHA, with sectoral and inter-sectoral structures providing mechanisms for information exchange, prioritisation and organisation of activities, and successive planning instruments setting out the response's collective commitments. The architecture was not static: its nutrition component changed substantially within the first eight months, and the baseline must therefore be stated at two points rather than one.

Food security and livelihoods. FAO had held a Food Security Cluster Coordinator post since April 2020. Shortly after the full-scale invasion WFP added a cluster co-ordinator, and coordination was thereafter split between food production and livelihoods, led by FAO, and food assistance, largely cash-based, led by WFP. The cluster operated through decentralised hubs and local partners across oblasts, and subsequently sub-divided into a food assistance working group chaired by WFP, a livelihoods technical working group chaired by an NGO, and an agricultural technical working group chaired

by FAO. By 2023 the cluster had 34 reporting members under the livelihoods pillar, and 50 by 2024.

Nutrition, March to October 2022. A Nutrition Cluster existed before the full-scale war, focused on the conflict in the east. In March 2022 a UNICEF-led whole-of-response Nutrition Cluster was created, on a decision taken by the Global Nutrition Cluster at headquarters rather than by the country office or the resident coordinator. A cluster appeal document assembled in April requested US\$23.5 million, and nutrition was included in the initial Flash Appeal on that basis.

Nutrition, from October 2022. Cluster activity stopped around September 2022, and the Nutrition Cluster was formally deactivated on 13 October 2022 and transformed into a technical working group under the Health Cluster.

From October 2022, therefore, the architecture placed food security and livelihoods in a cluster with an internal division of labour between FAO and WFP, and nutrition as a technical working group inside a different cluster. No structure at any point held the relationship between them, and after October 2022 there was no nutrition coordination body at cluster level.

Government and inter-agency arrangements. National institutions remained an operative part of the architecture. FAO cooperated with the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food and signed an agreement with the Government establishing a project office; UNICEF worked through government systems and local authorities, particularly outside frontline areas. Cash was coordinated across sectors through the Cash Working Group, which set transfer values applied response-wide.

FAO, WFP and UNICEF roles

FAO's role centred on food security, agriculture, livelihoods and the productive side of the food system, redirecting existing programmes after the invasion towards seeds and agricultural inputs, support to livestock and small-scale producers, cash and livelihood assistance, and agricultural recovery. Its assessment function was substantial and is examined further.

WFP's role centred on food assistance and food-security support — food, vouchers, cash assistance and nutrition-related food packages delivered through local partners,

increasingly concentrated in areas of highest food insecurity near the frontline — and it became a major actor in cash-based assistance and logistics.

UNICEF's role concerned children, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and related social services. At the food-security and nutrition interface its relevant functions were child nutrition, infant and young child feeding, prevention and management of malnutrition, and maintaining access to essential services. Nutrition was integrated into health and protection programming and remained limited in scale.

No contest over mandate appears anywhere in the record.

Interfaces

The interfaces at which the three mandates met were: **food-security and nutrition analysis; food assistance and nutrition programming; agriculture and livelihoods and nutrition outcomes; cash transfers and nutrition objectives; prevention and treatment; and geographic and beneficiary targeting.**

4.3 Funding environment

Volume and trajectory. The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan requested US\$3.1 billion to target 8.5 million people and was approximately 73 per cent funded by the end of the year, with more than 8 million people assisted. The Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster's 2024 requirements were US\$700.6 million for 3.4 million people targeted. Nutrition entered the 2022 Flash Appeal at US\$23.5 million (OCHA, 2024b; OCHA, 2025a). The WFP evaluation records donors' clarity that, absent major new displacement, humanitarian funding for Ukraine would decline, and notes that the moderate nature of food insecurity in Ukraine raised questions as to whether the scale of the response was justified relative to other global crises (WFP, 2025b).

Donor concentration. The response drew exceptionally broad support, including private contributions at a scale not seen in the other cases. UNICEF's 2023 Funding Compendium attributes an exceptional spike in its global humanitarian thematic income that year to private-sector support for Ukraine (UNICEF, 2024a). FAO's Ukraine funding came in bilateral, project-coded tranches — Japan at US\$5.25 million, US\$5 million and later US\$1.095 million, the Minderoo Foundation at US\$3 million, Germany at US\$900,000

and Ireland at EUR 850,300 — alongside a transfer of US\$303,425 from WFP to support 556 mine-affected rural households in Mykolaivska oblast in spring 2024 (FAO, n.d.).

Earmarking and flexibility. UNICEF reported that 55 per cent of funding received against its Humanitarian Action for Children appeal for the Ukraine and refugee crisis in 2022 was humanitarian thematic funding — softly earmarked resources allocable at its discretion within the appeal — and attributed to it the ability to prioritise support quickly and strategically (UNICEF, 2023a).

WFP's corporate flexible funding, comprising unearmarked multilateral contributions, Immediate Response Account contributions and softly earmarked contributions permitting flexibility beyond country level, stood at 9.2 per cent of total contributions in 2022 and 14 per cent in 2023, most funding remaining earmarked at activity level; WFP identifies Ukraine as a setting where those flexible resources were actively used, advance purchase of commodities enabling dispatch of ready-to-eat food within hours of the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023 (WFP, 2023a; WFP, 2024b). The L3 evaluation records the corresponding hazard, finding that rapid scale-up and a large funding influx enabled significant interventions while straining planning and risk management, and that pressure to spend resources mobilised during the L3 did not always permit thorough planning and budgeting (Featherstone et al., 2024).

Volatility. Flexibility was concentrated in the opening phase and did not persist. UNICEF's global thematic income, having risen 126 per cent above 2021 in 2022, fell to 37 per cent below the 2021 level by 2023. FAO's within-year mobilisation was equally uneven: against its 2023 requirement it had raised US\$30.5 million by 20 April, during the spring planting season, and reached US\$45.3 million only by 30 November (UNICEF, 2023b; FAO, 2023c).

Relative financing position. The three agencies did not experience the same funding environment. FAO's revised Rapid Response Plan sought US\$115.4 million for 327,209 farming households through December 2022; its 2023 Response Programme required US\$205 million and closed the year having mobilised US\$45.3 million, a gap of US\$159.7 million and coverage of roughly 22 per cent; its 2024 Emergency Response Programme required US\$151 million for 315,800 rural families, some 821,080 people, across ten frontline oblasts. FAO therefore operated at approximately a fifth of its stated requirement in a response funded overall at 73 per cent. It delivered at scale nonetheless,

supporting more than 185,000 rural families with seeds, animal feed, poultry, vouchers and cash between February 2022 and late 2023, and 10,000 farmers with grain storage equipment, cereal seeds and generators (FAO, 2022c; FAO, 2023c; FAO, 2023e).

Pooled funding. Ukraine was the largest recipient of CERF funding in 2022, with US\$60 million allocated from 24 February and US\$20 million released within hours of the invasion. The Ukraine Humanitarian Fund became the largest country-based pooled fund in the world, disbursing US\$192 million in its first year and, in 2023, receiving nearly 17 per cent of global CBPF contributions and supplying 7 per cent of all HRP funding for Ukraine. Its 2023 allocations included US\$52 million in January, US\$69 million in March for multi-sectoral assistance in frontline rural areas, rapid support following the Kakhovka Dam destruction, and US\$60 million for winter in August, with roughly US\$40 million channelled as cash and voucher assistance. In March 2023 the fund financed agricultural mine action with US\$4 million to FAO and US\$6 million to WFP — the only joint programme in the response, paid for from pooled rather than agency resources (CERF, 2023; OCHA, 2023b; OCHA, 2024a).

4.4 Process tracing and coordination assessment

Phase One — Needs assessment

Formal expectation. Food-security and nutrition needs were to be assessed through complementary information systems and incorporated into common humanitarian planning, with the FSL Cluster providing a mechanism for food-security analysis and nutrition information generated through UNICEF and the health and nutrition structures. Because FAO and WFP jointly occupied central positions in food-security coordination, their assessments should have been mutually reinforcing, and UNICEF's nutrition information should have informed the understanding of household and child vulnerability.

Observed practice on the food-security side. FAO had conducted a food security and livelihoods assessment in areas of Luhansk and Donetsk under Russian military control in 2021, but this was largely redundant given the change in context, and conducting new assessments was difficult amid hostilities and large-scale population movement.

WFP published a first national food security report in March 2022 on the basis of two web-based surveys, and established a partnership with the REACH initiative formalised

through annual framework agreements from 2022 to 2024 to conduct a multi-sector needs assessment at the request of the Humanitarian Country Team, in coordination with OCHA and the cluster lead agencies. Multi-sector needs assessments followed in 2022 and 2023, and because these were not designed to substitute for detailed sectoral assessment, a decision was taken to design more detailed food-security assessments, with a further food and livelihoods assessment with FAO planned for 2024.

FAO's assessment output was substantial and independently well regarded: ten technical assessments since 2022, including the December 2022 nationwide rural household survey and contributions to three World Bank-led Rapid Damage and Needs Assessments, cited by donors, government and other UN agencies. The FAO programme assessment also records an internal constraint on that output — support for assessments was marred by poor coordination between business units with different roles in assessment, resulting in delays and duplicated effort — which is a coordination finding internal to one agency rather than between agencies, and is recorded as such.

The food-security evidence base was therefore built rapidly, jointly and to independent approval, from a starting position of near-total absence.

Observed practice on the nutrition side. The nutrition evidence base was not built at all. The UNICEF L3 evaluation records that, to the evaluation team's knowledge, there was no needs assessment underlying the April 2022 Nutrition Cluster appeal, but rather a broad estimate of the numbers of young children and women likely to need nutritional supplements. On that basis nutrition entered the Ukraine Flash Appeal at US\$23.5 million.

This asymmetry is the phase's principal finding. The two sides of the **food-security/nutrition interface** did not merely generate different kinds of evidence through different mechanisms. **One side generated an evidence base of sufficient quality to be cited across the response; the other generated a resource requirement without an assessment.** Nothing in the architecture required the second to meet the standard of the first before entering a common appeal, and no mechanism existed to notice that it had not.

Changes over the phase. Food-security assessment activity intensified and became more geographically differentiated as the frontline moved and previously inaccessible areas became reachable, moving from rapid appraisal towards recurring survey work and, by

2024, towards a planned joint FAO–WFP food and livelihoods assessment. Nutrition assessment did not develop, and after the Nutrition Cluster's deactivation in October 2022 no sectoral body existed to commission it. The WFP evaluation identifies a persistent geographic limitation on the food-security side that also worsened rather than resolved: in the first half of 2024, FSL cluster partners responded in 24 oblasts and 122 raions, while people-in-need and target data were available for fewer than half of those areas, concentrated along the front line.

Coordination pattern. Rapid, collaborative and externally credible evidence generation on one side of the interface; an unevidenced resource requirement on the other; and nothing obliging either side to meet the evidentiary standard the other had met. Convergence, where it occurred, was achieved through discrete joint exercises — the multi-sector needs assessments, the 2023 Human Impact Assessment involving FAO, WFP and UNICEF among others — each of which required an actor to decide that a joint product was worth producing. Convergence was therefore discretionary, and its absence would have gone unrecorded.

The contrast with an obligatory mechanism is the operative one. Where a standing analytical framework requires participation as a property of the arrangement, evidence is produced whether or not any participant judges it worth producing in a given cycle; where convergence depends on that judgement, its absence leaves no trace and cannot be distinguished from a decision that none was needed.

no standing analytical mechanism at the interface → each sector generates evidence to its own standard → food-security evidence built rapidly and jointly, nutrition requirement entered on an estimate → a common appeal carrying two claims of incommensurable evidentiary weight

Coordination verdict: Coordination gap.

The assessment architecture contained no mechanism obliging food-security and nutrition evidence to be reconciled, and no requirement that a sectoral resource requirement entering a common appeal rest on an assessment. The consequence was an appeal in which one sector's claim was evidenced to a standard cited across the response and the other's was a broad estimate. This is a weakness in the arrangements rather than in any agency's conduct, and no consequential negative outcome is established.

Phase Two — Response planning

Formal expectation. Planning should have converted the assessment system into complementary programming, with FSL Cluster plans defining priorities for food assistance and livelihoods, nutrition planning addressing child nutrition and related services, and cross-sector coordination ensuring that activities targeting the same populations were mutually reinforcing.

Observed practice. Within food security, planning was substantial and adaptive. The 2022 Flash Appeal combined food assistance, cash and agricultural support, envisaging assistance for vulnerable populations while supporting agricultural production among rural households. The 2024 HNRP set out the **FSL Cluster's two complementary objectives — immediate life-saving food assistance, and protection and restoration of food production and livelihoods — described as a twin-track strategy**. Geographic prioritisation became increasingly focused on frontline areas: FAO's 2024 programme, for example, concentrated on ten frontline oblasts.

The internal division of the cluster was nonetheless contested in a specific way. The WFP evaluation finds that the intrinsic duality spanning food security and livelihoods proved challenging to bridge, that dedicated working groups were progressively established to cover the different issues, and that livelihoods actors reported feeling overshadowed by food assistance priorities and needs. The evaluation also records high turnover among national-level cluster coordinators with limited or no handover, stabilising only from 2024, and inconsistent engagement from significant new food-security actors operating countrywide outside the cluster system.

Nutrition planning was included in the Flash Appeal in April 2022 on the basis described above, and the UNICEF L3 evaluation records considerable Nutrition Cluster activity in the first months: infant and young child feeding guidance translated and distributed, infant formula and energy biscuits distributed, one nutrition sector project approved through the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, IYCF training delivered to partners, an IYCF social media campaign, and a guidance note on IYCF in situations of mass movement (OCHA, 2022a). **From October 2022 nutrition planning proceeded as a technical working group within the Health Cluster.**

On integration across sectors, the L3 evaluation is direct: the nature of planning during the L3 response was perceived as siloed throughout much of 2022, with positive

exceptions in UNICEF's own integrated initiatives, and its overall conclusion holds that greater progress is required to strengthen joint assessment and planning. This is independent evidence, produced by one of the three agencies' own evaluation office, that planning integration was weak during the period in which the coordination architecture for nutrition was still in place.

Changes over the phase. Food-security planning adapted substantially: from an undifferentiated emergency posture in 2022 towards sharper geographical targeting and growing weight on livelihood protection, the twin-track formulation of 2024 being the clearest expression. The food-security/nutrition planning relationship did not develop; the structure on one side of it was removed partway through the window.

Coordination pattern. Within food security, a common planning framework with an internal division of labour that functioned but was persistently strained between its two halves. Across the food-security and nutrition boundary, planning proceeded in separate structures which, on independent evidence, did not consult one another. National authorities remained involved in planning and local administrations became important implementation partners, reducing the extent to which humanitarian actors had to arbitrate priority and responsibility among themselves.

planning authority vested wholly within each sector → priorities set without reference across the boundary → adaptive twin-track development inside food security, siloed planning across the boundary → sectoral plans that do not reference one another's populations or coverage

Coordination verdict: Coordination gap.

Planning arrangements within each sector functioned; none existed across them, and independent evaluation characterises planning in the critical first year as siloed. The finding is a gap rather than a deficit because no cross-sector planning mechanism was assigned in the first place. The weakness therefore lies in the absence of an arrangement governing the relationship between the two planning systems, rather than in the malfunction of an arrangement that the response had formally established. It is distinct from the gap recorded at assessment, which concerns the evidentiary standard applied to a sectoral claim rather than the connection between sectoral plans; both arise from the same architectural silence, and neither is evidence for the other.

Phase Three — Implementation

Formal expectation. No country instrument under the Global Action Plan applied in Ukraine, so the governing commitments are those recorded in the 2022 Flash Appeal and the subsequent Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans, together with the cluster arrangements set out in the baseline. Those instruments committed the response to combining immediate food assistance with the protection of food production and livelihoods, and to linking interventions where objectives intersected. WFP was to provide food assistance and cash-based support, FAO to protect agricultural production and rural livelihoods, and UNICEF to maintain child nutrition and related services, coordinating where the same households or areas were targeted. No instrument allocated responsibility for the relationship between food-security and nutrition programming.

Observed practice. WFP scaled up food assistance rapidly from a standing start, having closed its Ukraine office in 2018; by mid-2022 it reported having provided food assistance to 3.4 million internally displaced people through food, vouchers and cash (WFP, 2022b), together with integrated nutrition packages for children aged six to twenty-three months (UN-Nutrition, 2022). FAO distributed seed potato kits to 17,740 rural households across ten oblasts in spring 2022 and reached the second-largest number of recipients under the FSLC livelihoods pillar in 2023 and the third-largest in 2024. UNICEF's 2024 response reached 9.8 million people including 2.5 million children, working through government and implementing partners and using national systems where these remained functional (UNICEF Ukraine, 2025). Three interfaces between agency mandates operated during the window. Two were assigned to a structure; the third had a structure and lost it. Once the Nutrition Cluster was deactivated, the food-security/nutrition relationship became an unassigned interface for the remainder of the analytical window.

The FAO–WFP boundary. This interface sat inside the FSLC with a named coordinator on each side, and it produced the response's only joint initiative. Agricultural mine action was conceived by WFP at the end of 2022 and funded in March 2023 by the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, with US\$4 million to FAO and US\$6 million to WFP, on the premise that land contamination was a shared constraint neither mandate covered alone. FAO's mapping identified over one million craters across 25,000 km² in three pilot oblasts, and it provided livelihoods cash to 5,172 households awaiting clearance. Joint advocacy secured agreement that households and small farmers would not bear clearance costs.

Nevertheless, the FAO programme assessment finds the initiative challenged by **slow land clearance and weak inter-agency coordination**: by late 2024, more than a year into implementation, 2,500 hectares had been marked, 74 were being cleared and 18 had returned to production against an objective of clearing substantial area for the 2023 season. The principal obstacle was a government regulation requiring official release of land in the eight-million-hectare orange zone before it became eligible for insurance, loans, equipment rental or employment, with government declining to accept non-technical survey as the basis for release. **An assigned interface therefore produced joint programming that an unassigned interface did not, and that programming then underdelivered against its own objective (FAO, 2025).**

The cash interface. Cash was the most crowded interface, with WFP delivering it as a food-security modality, UNICEF within child-focused and social-protection programming, FAO within livelihoods, and multipurpose cash coordinated through the Cash Working Group rather than belonging to any sector. That structure achieved alignment on transfer parameters: FAO delivered multipurpose cash at the standard values agreed by all cash actors, exceeding its targets, and the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund channelled more than a fifth of its 2023 allocations through the same framework. Alignment did not extend to purpose. The WFP evaluation concludes that the advantages of cash modalities were only partially realised, that constraints on coordinated use of multipurpose cash require collective attention, and that inter-agency alignment on the objectives of such assistance needs to be pursued through the IASC cash advisory group.

The food-security/nutrition interface. The Nutrition Cluster activated in March 2022 was, for six months, the only body in the response holding a sectoral mandate on the nutrition side of this boundary. Its activity stopped around September 2022, and the L3 evaluation records that this occurred without warning or consultation with cluster members, though with the agreement of the UNICEF representative and the resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator, both of whom considered a Nutrition Cluster unnecessary in a middle-income country that was a global food exporter. Formal deactivation followed on 13 October 2022, nutrition becoming a technical working group under the Health Cluster (Featherstone et al., 2024).

The reasoning is the significant element. Middle-income status and export capacity are judgements about national food availability, **applied here to settle a question about the**

coordination of child nutrition. FAO's own March 2022 assessment had already established that Ukraine's food-security problem was one of access rather than availability, and child nutritional status turns on household access, feeding practices, health services and the care environment. The decision treated a food-security answer as dispositive of a nutrition question, and in doing so removed the structure that might have managed the relationship between the two.

Two constraints operated on implementation without being coordination weaknesses. Occupied territories remained largely inaccessible and frontline conditions restricted movement, affecting all agencies alike. And the shift from emergency assistance towards livelihood restoration created a moving boundary between humanitarian and recovery-oriented programming, which the FSLC absorbed imperfectly through its working-group structure.

Changes over the phase. Assistance concentrated progressively on frontline and recently accessible communities, with modality shifting towards cash where markets functioned and towards livelihood restoration where production was recoverable. The FSLC's internal structure elaborated across the window. The nutrition side of the interface contracted from a cluster to a technical working group within eight months of the invasion and remained there.

Coordination pattern. Assignment determined whether coordination was attempted; it did not determine whether it succeeded. Both propositions are needed, since the two assigned interfaces produced joint work that fell short — the mine-action programme against its own objective, the cash arrangement against its own purpose — while the interface stripped of its structure produced none at all. The variable is therefore not the quality of the agencies' cooperation, which was demonstrably good where a body convened it, but whether any body was convened.

unassigned interface → no forum constituted to ask the linking questions → each agency programmes within its own sector → household food assistance and child nutrition operate on the same populations without connection

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

The finding concerns the functioning of arrangements the response intended rather than the absence of arrangements it never made, and it rests on two elements. The FAO–WFP mine action programme was an intended coordination arrangement whose functioning

was independently assessed as weak, sustained across more than a year of implementation and returning eighteen hectares to production against an objective of clearing substantial area in time for the 2023 season. The deactivation of the Nutrition Cluster removed the only structure holding a sectoral mandate on the nutrition side of the food-security interface, on reasoning that conflated national food availability with child nutritional need, and left that interface without any coordinating body for the remainder of the window. Both constitute sustained and material weaknesses in the functioning of intended arrangements. No coordination failure is found, since neither element can be linked to a consequential negative outcome on the available evidence: the mine-action shortfall is attributed principally to a binding government land-release regulation and to the cost and speed of clearance rather than to the coordination weakness, and no consequential outcome is demonstrably attributable to the absence of nutrition coordination in a setting where the wasting caseload remained small throughout.

Phase Four — Evaluation and institutional learning

Formal expectation. Implementation experience should have fed into subsequent planning and adaptation, with coordination problems identified during the response generating changes in targeting, priorities, modalities, division of labour or institutional arrangements. The phase asks whether the coordination problem was identified and whether it was corrected, reproduced or left unresolved.

Observed practice. Ukraine's evaluation record is unusually substantial for a compressed window, and its striking feature is that interface problems were identified — three times, by three organisations, each within its own frame.

The UNICEF Level 3 evaluation, drawing on 143 interviews, 86 focus group discussions, an online survey with a 67 per cent response rate and 1,224 documents, found that UNICEF was generally light and late in its initial support for cluster coordination; that its decision to place national cluster coordinators in Dnipro was on balance more detrimental to system-level coordination than beneficial; that UNICEF-led clusters were by the time of evaluation performing well; that planning was perceived as siloed throughout much of 2022; and that greater progress is required to strengthen joint assessment and planning, with significant opportunity to take stock of weaknesses implicit in the way UNICEF's sectors functioned and planned.

The WFP corporate emergency evaluation found that coordinating across the large and complex food security and livelihoods subsectors proved challenging, that the duality spanning food security and livelihoods was difficult to bridge, that livelihoods actors felt overshadowed, that data made available for coordination fell well short of the geographic coverage of the response (WFP, 2025b). It recommended engagement with the global food security cluster on emerging food-assistance actors, dialogue within the IASC cash advisory group on inter-agency alignment on multipurpose cash objectives, and increased transparency and participation in the analysis of food needs in conjunction with the FSL cluster. It also recorded that plans were not yet in place for the transition from humanitarian coordination to government-led sectoral coordination.

The FAO programme assessment found that FAO had stepped up support for the FSLC, which was a key mechanism coordinating a large number of actors and sustaining a role for national NGOs; that agricultural mine action was challenged by slow delivery and weak inter-agency coordination; and that FAO's own assessment function was impaired by poor coordination between its internal business units, producing delays and duplicated effort.

The L3 evaluation also reviewed the Nutrition Cluster's activation and deactivation, judging the six-month closure to UNICEF's credit and criticising the manner of dissolution rather than the decision itself.

Together they establish that the system was capable of identifying coordination weakness.

What none of them examined is the relationship between food security and nutrition.

The UNICEF evaluation assessed integration within UNICEF's own sectors; the WFP evaluation assessed coordination within and around the FSL cluster and multipurpose cash; the FAO assessment assessed FAO's cluster role and its bilateral programme with WFP. Each recommendation is addressed to the commissioning organisation. The food-security/nutrition interface fell inside no organisation's evaluative frame because responsibility for evaluating the relationship between the two sectors had not been assigned. An evaluation architecture organised by agency therefore reproduced the underlying allocation structure: each organisation could examine its own performance, while no actor was responsible for examining the interface itself.

Changes over the phase. Adaptation within sectors was continuous and substantial: geographic targeting, delivery modality and programme mix all changed in response to

evidence, and the FSLC's coordination stabilised from 2024 with the consolidation of leadership, more regular meetings, renewed synergies with other clusters and a strengthened information management system. No change was made to cross-sector coordination arrangements, and the mine-action programme's difficulties were being addressed by FAO through stepped-up advocacy and broader partnerships with mine-action stakeholders rather than through revision of the FAO–WFP arrangement.

Coordination pattern. Identification within agency frames, correction recommended to the identifying agency, and every question of scope drawn at the edge of the commissioner's own operations. The one decision taken at the boundary came under review and was endorsed.

evaluation commissioned by agency → each frame bounded by its commissioner's mandate → three evaluations identify coordination problems, none looks outside its commissioner's operations → the interface weakness persists unexamined and its removal is endorsed

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

The coordination problems identified were identified within organisational boundaries and addressed to the organisations that identified them, while the interface weakness persisted unexamined and the structure that had existed there was reviewed and endorsed as rightly removed. The persistence of that weakness through a full cycle of independent evaluation by all three agencies is what raises the finding above a gap. The weakness is sustained, having run the length of the window, and material, in that it governed whether the interface could come under examination at all. The deficit is distinct from the one established at implementation, notwithstanding that both concern the same interface: the implementation finding turns on the removal of the structure and its operational consequences, whereas this one turns on the evaluative endorsement of that removal and on the absence of any frame within which the interface could have come under examination. The first is a weakness in the response; the second is a weakness in the system's capacity to perceive it, and it is the second that explains why the first went uncorrected.

4.5 Country-level application of H1–H4

H1 — The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

The evidence does not show that FAO, WFP and UNICEF lacked identifiable mandates. It shows the opposite: no contest over mandate, no competing caseload claim, and no instance of one agency obstructing another appears anywhere in the record. The coordination problem arose at the boundaries between mandates. Ukraine provides an unusually direct test of what determines whether those boundaries are managed because one such interface had a coordination structure that was later removed while other conditions remained largely unchanged.

This is the evidentiary configuration the interstitial variant requires. A demonstration that management tracked the presence of an assigned mechanism rather than the clarity of the mandates either side of it cannot rest on the observation that an interface was unmanaged, which is description rather than comparison. It requires either variation across interfaces within a case or an observed change in whether a mechanism was present at one. Ukraine supplies both.

Where a structure was assigned, joint work occurred. The FAO–WFP boundary produced a joint programme that neither mandate covered and no instrument required. The Cash Working Group produced alignment on transfer values across agencies, including one whose primary mandate lies outside the cash domain. Where the structure was removed — nutrition, from 13 October 2022 — no comparable joint work occurred, and the questions at that interface were no longer addressed.

Neither assigned interface performed well. **Assignment therefore determined whether coordination was attempted, not whether it succeeded.** The FSLC's internal relationship between food security and livelihoods was also persistently strained, with livelihoods actors reporting that they felt overshadowed. **Assignment within a single cluster therefore did not ensure that the two sides of an interface received equal weight.** The reasoning by which the nutrition structure was removed, set out at §4.6, is the clearest evidence in the case that the interface problem operated inside decisions rather than only in their consequences: a judgement about national food availability was treated as dispositive of a question about the coordination of child nutrition.

The gap then persisted because Ukraine's wasting caseload was small in absolute terms and relative to its food-security caseload. For each agency separately, this made the nutrition interface a low-value place to invest scarce coordination capacity. The case shows this calculation being made explicitly at senior level by a UNICEF representative and the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator acting in agreement, and it was subsequently endorsed by an independent evaluation. The gap was therefore not produced by oversight, competition, or poor relations. It resulted from a defensible judgement about where limited coordination capacity should be invested, made by actors best placed to make that judgement, but one that left an important cross-sector boundary without a functioning coordination mechanism. That is the strongest available form of the mechanism. This is the default Knox Clarke and Campbell (2016) identify in discretionary coordination, where agencies base their activities on their own capacities and interests rather than on assessed need — arrived at here not through indifference but through a reasoned allocation of scarce coordination capacity. A gap that persists because everyone is behaving rationally cannot be closed by exhortation, clearer mandates, better relationships or more money, none of which alters any participant's calculation.

It can be closed only by assignment, which relocates the decision from the participants to the architecture — and in Ukraine the architecture relocated it back to the participants.

clear but non-exhaustive mandate allocation → relationships between mandates unallocated → structures assigned to some interfaces produce joint work; the structure at one interface is removed on food-availability reasoning → each participant rationally declines to reinstate a low-value interface → persistent unmanaged gap, subsequently endorsed in evaluation

H2 — The Funding Structure Hypothesis

Verdict: Not supported.

The hypothesis proposes that funding conditions shape organisational incentives and constraints, and thereby behaviour and coordination outcomes. It is strengthened where adverse conditions coincide with competitive, parallel or less coordinated behaviour, and weakened where comparable pressures coexist with effective coordination. Ukraine

supplies both halves of that test within a single response, and the result runs against the hypothesis in each.

The funding conditions established at §4.3 were, for UNICEF and WFP, close to the inverse of those the hypothesis identifies as constraining. If constrained funding produces protective behaviour, its absence should produce the opposite, and coordination should have been correspondingly better. The first expectation holds and the second does not. No instance of programme-space protection, competition over beneficiaries or geography, or withdrawal from a coordinated activity is documented anywhere in the record. Yet the coordination weakness at the food-security and nutrition interface persisted throughout the window, and the Nutrition Cluster was deactivated in the year in which UNICEF held more discretionary resource than in any comparable operation. Flexible money let agencies move faster within their own mandates. It did not create a relationship between mandates that the architecture had not established.

The second half concerns FAO, and it is the more demanding test because FAO faced the adverse conditions the hypothesis specifies inside a generously funded response. FAO operated at roughly a fifth of its stated requirement inside a response funded at 73 per cent, on small bilateral tranches arriving behind the agricultural calendar. On the hypothesis, an agency in that position has every incentive to protect its programme space and withdraw from collective arrangements. FAO did the reverse. It aligned its multipurpose cash to the transfer values agreed across all cash actors, pooled donor resources to procure in bulk and exceed its beneficiary targets, was credited by other agencies and donors with keeping national NGOs engaged in cluster coordination rather than allowing international NGOs to crowd them out, and entered the response's only joint programme. It also accepted a direct transfer from WFP for mine-affected households in Mykolaivska oblast — a cross-agency financing flow of the kind the hypothesis predicts scarcity should discourage.

Funding conditions plainly shaped the response in other respects: the L3 evaluation finds that the pressure to spend rapidly strained planning and budgeting, which is a funding effect on programme quality rather than on coordination. And the sole cross-agency initiative was financed by the pooled fund rather than from either agency's own resources despite both holding flexible funds, which suggests that dedicated instruments have an enabling role in financing work that sits between mandates even where core resources are

adequate. Konyndyk's (2018) account of pooled funding as a device that forces priority setting across agencies rather than within them is borne out here in an unexpected form: the instrument did its assignment work in a setting where its redistributive function was least needed. That is an observation about what pooled funding can do, not evidence that funding structure generated either the gaps or the deficits recorded here.

The gaps recorded in assessment and planning arose from the absence of any arrangement spanning the two sectors, and the deficits in implementation and evaluation from the withdrawal and non-replacement of the one arrangement that existed. No funding condition documented here explains either.

funding flexibility and abundance → adaptive capacity available within and beyond each agency's programme → no protective, competitive or withdrawal behaviour documented → interface gap nonetheless persists, unaffected by the funding conditions in either direction

H3 — The State Capacity Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

State capacity shaped whether the international coordination architecture was mobilised at all. The L3 evaluation records active discussion within the humanitarian community about whether to hold back and leave space for the government to coordinate the response or to press ahead with mobilising the international architecture, and identifies this as a factor in UNICEF's slow mobilisation of cluster coordination — the finding that UNICEF was light and late. A capable national counterpart therefore did not merely reduce the demand for humanitarian coordination; its presence generated an explicit institutional argument for supplying less of it, and that argument had traceable effects on the speed at which coordination structures were established.

State capacity also determined the outcome of the response's only joint programme. The central obstacle to agricultural mine action was a government regulation requiring official release of land in the eight-million-hectare orange zone before it became eligible for insurance, loans, equipment rental and employment, with government declining to accept non-technical survey as the basis for release. FAO's mapping had identified which land could be released to production; the state's regulatory requirement determined that it would not be. A functioning state's regulatory apparatus was thus the binding constraint

on the one initiative that spanned two agencies' mandates — an effect only available in a setting where the state is capable enough to enforce a regulation.

The countervailing effects are real and were recorded earlier: national systems were used for delivery where functional, national authorities participated in assessment and planning, and the humanitarian system was relieved of arbitration functions it would otherwise have performed. Capacity was also unevenly expressed, with frontline hostilities, occupation and infrastructure damage sharply constraining public institutions in the areas of greatest need. The WFP evaluation further records that no plans were yet in place for the transition from humanitarian to government-led sectoral coordination, indicating that the relationship between the two systems remained unresolved at the end of the window.

State capacity operated in both directions and through documented decisions at each step. It did not, however, close the interface gap: a capable state supplied authority within sectors and constraints upon them, and supplied nothing to the relationship between them. capable and present state counterpart → institutional argument for supplying less international coordination, and a regulatory apparatus able to bind humanitarian programming → delayed cluster mobilisation, and land release withheld from the one cross-agency programme → coordination shaped in both directions by state authority, with the food-security and nutrition interface untouched by it

H4 — The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

The intensity and speed of the 2022 escalation increased the coordination burden, and the L3 evaluation documents the effect on coordination structures directly: initial coordination was chaotic as clusters re-established themselves in Lviv, often with new staff and new partners, with information management systems rebuilt from the bottom up; displaced populations were themselves on the move, necessitating new needs assessments and 5W mapping; and although the clusters technically continued into the new phase, in practice they were reset. The WFP evaluation records high turnover of national-level cluster coordinators with limited handovers, stabilising only from 2024.

Interaction with the other mechanisms is documented at three points. With state capacity: the areas of greatest intensity were those where public institutions functioned least well,

so reliance on humanitarian coordination mechanisms was highest where those mechanisms were most strained. With interface structure: the Nutrition Cluster's activation is itself described by the evaluation as a global humanitarian reflex to mobilise all conventional clusters in a large-scale L3 crisis, an assumed need combined with resources and supplies — that is, crisis intensity produced a coordination structure on no evidence base, which then had to be dismantled, and the dismantling removed the interface mechanism. And with the assessment gap: the compressed timeline that forced WFP to build a food-security evidence base from web surveys within weeks is the same timeline within which nutrition's requirement entered the appeal on a broad estimate. Crisis intensity did not independently cause the coordination weakness, and the hypothesis does not claim it should. Its role was amplifying, and the interaction is documented at each point.

Of the three pathways specified in Chapter Two, the evidence supports architectural volatility. Operational convergence is not established: FAO, WFP and UNICEF did not move into one another's functions under pressure, and the record contains no instance of an agency performing activities previously belonging to a partner. Strategic incoherence is likewise weakly evidenced, since the food-security strategy became more rather than less coherent across the window and no divergence in stated priorities is documented. What crisis pressure produced instead was reflexive structure-creation followed by correction: the full cluster architecture was mobilised on the assumption that a large-scale L3 emergency required it, and when that assumption proved unfounded for nutrition the structure was withdrawn, taking the interface mechanism with it. The pathway is neither convergence nor divergence in programming but volatility in the coordination architecture itself, and Ukraine is the case from which that pathway is derived.

high crisis intensity → clusters reset and rebuilt under compressed timelines → structures mobilised reflexively without evidence and dismantled when the assumption failed → the interface loses its mechanism as a by-product of correcting a crisis-driven over-mobilisation

Case causal synthesis

The case is explained by the interaction of interface structure, state capacity and crisis pressure, all three supported on the evidence, while funding structure is not supported.

Clear mandates allocated tasks throughout without allocating the relationships between them, and crisis intensity then determined which relationships acquired a structure and which lost one. Where a structure was convened the interface generated joint work, imperfect in both instances; where it was withdrawn, on reasoning drawn from one side of the boundary it existed to span, nothing followed. State capacity operated in both directions, supplying an argument for restraint in mobilising international coordination and the regulation that blocked the one cross-agency programme, while supplying nothing to the boundary between sectors. Funding did not emerge as a mechanism at all: resources were abundant and unusually flexible, agencies used that flexibility to accelerate and to collaborate, and every weakness identified here persisted under conditions that should, on the hypothesis, have dissolved it. The account is complete for UNICEF and WFP and partial for FAO, whose country-level funding composition is not published.

crisis intensity mobilises structures reflexively → a nutrition structure is created without evidence and removed on food-availability reasoning → clear mandates continue to allocate tasks but not the relationships between them → state capacity supplies both restraint and binding constraint → a coordination deficit persists at the food-security and nutrition interface

4.6 Country-level conclusion.

Ukraine shows that clear mandates, a capable state and abundant funding did not secure coordination at an unassigned interface, and no coordination failure is established. The evidence provisionally suggests that the unallocated interface is architectural, while the funding pathway is conditional and absent here.

The full-scale invasion produced a food-security shock defined by access rather than availability. Displacement, lost income, damaged infrastructure and disrupted markets left households unable to obtain adequate food in a country that remained a major food producer. In rural areas, rising costs, contaminated land and damaged assets forced many households to reduce or abandon agricultural production.

The nutritional consequences for children took the form of degraded feeding conditions rather than a large wasting caseload: low breastfeeding, heavy reliance on infant formula and unstable access to appropriate foods, particularly among displaced families. The SAM/MAM division is therefore not the operative interface. The analytically relevant boundary is the one between household food access, agricultural livelihoods and children's diets.

The three agencies responded along clearly differentiated lines. WFP led on household access to food, scaling up food, voucher and cash assistance within weeks and progressively concentrating it near the frontline. FAO led on production and rural livelihoods, redirecting its programmes towards seeds, feed, livestock support, grain storage and cash for farming households. UNICEF led on child nutrition, infant feeding and access to services, working largely through government and local-authority systems. Across the four phases, the way these responses related to one another moves from gap to deficit, and never to failure.

CHAPTER FIVE. YEMEN: SPECIALISATION WITHOUT INTEGRATION

5.1 Case context

The analytical window covers 2019–2024, capturing the response before the COVID-19 shock, the funding contraction of 2020–2021, subsequent changes in humanitarian prioritisation, and the increasingly constrained operating environment through 2024.

The crisis was already exceptionally severe at the start of the period. The 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimated that 24 million people, approximately 80 per cent of the population, required humanitarian or protection assistance. More than 20 million were food insecure, including almost 10 million experiencing extreme hunger, while 7.4 million required services to prevent or treat malnutrition. The HNO identified the collapse of public institutions and basic services as a major factor increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance — a finding that matters for this analysis because it establishes at the outset that the coordination system under examination was operating without a functioning national counterpart across much of the country (OCHA, 2019a).

The food-security situation remained volatile. In 2021, IPC analysis estimated 16.2 million people in IPC Phase 3 or above, including approximately 5 million in Phase 4 and 47,000 in Phase 5, attributing the deterioration to the interaction of conflict, economic decline, environmental shocks and weak social, economic and governance systems. **Nutrition conditions** were similarly severe: in 2021, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO reported that nearly 2.3 million children under five were projected to experience acute malnutrition, including approximately 400,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition, recording a 16 per cent increase in acute malnutrition and a 22 per cent increase in severe acute malnutrition on 2020 (IPC, 2020; FAO et al., 2021).

By 2024 the crisis remained acute despite reduced intensity of large-scale fighting following the 2022 truce. The Humanitarian Response Plan estimated 18.2 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and protection, with 17.6 million facing food and nutrition insecurity, requiring US\$2.7 billion and targeting 11.2 million people through a more prioritised and risk-informed approach. **Food insecurity remained particularly severe in areas under the internationally recognised government's control**, where the July–September 2024 IPC analysis estimated 4.7 million people in IPC Phase 3 or above, including 1.2 million in Phase 4, identifying economic decline, currency depreciation, high food prices, conflict and irregular humanitarian food assistance among the drivers.

The 2024 IPC acute-malnutrition analysis for Government-controlled areas projected 609,808 children acutely malnourished by the end of 2024, including 118,570 with severe acute malnutrition — a 34 per cent increase on 2023 (OCHA, 2024c; IPC, 2024a; IPC, 2024b).

Two features of the 2024 evidence are relevant to the analysis. The IPC identified irregular humanitarian food assistance among the drivers of food insecurity in Government-controlled areas, where acute malnutrition was projected to increase by 34 per cent between 2023 and 2024. In the same period WFP suspended general food distributions in areas under the Sana'a-based authorities, for which no comparable acute-malnutrition analysis is available. The evidence therefore does not establish a causal contribution from the suspension to the nutrition trend, but the sequence provides a relevant test of whether the response could adjust across the food-security/nutrition interface.

The operating environment was shaped by fragmented authority. Humanitarian organisations worked across areas controlled by different authorities, while administrative restrictions, insecurity, movement restrictions and other access constraints affected assessment, targeting, implementation and monitoring. The 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan identified access constraints as a continuing factor requiring adaptation. These conditions establish the context in which coordination is assessed, but do not themselves constitute evidence of coordination failure. The analytical question is how the three agencies' institutional roles interacted with these conditions and whether formal coordination arrangements were translated into complementary practice.

5.2 Formal coordination baseline

Institutional coordination architecture

Under the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting, Yemen is a frontrunner country with a government-endorsed costed roadmap covering prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition. The analytical window begins in 2019 to establish a baseline preceding these commitments (UNICEF et al., 2021).

The country-level system combined the Humanitarian Country Team and successive Humanitarian Response Plans with specialised sectoral and technical mechanisms. The 2019 plan was presented as the Humanitarian Country Team's shared understanding of

the crisis and its joint response plan, with FAO, UNICEF and WFP among the organisations formally involved, and successive plans through 2024 carried the collective commitments applicable to each year.

Food security and nutrition were coordinated through two separate cluster structures. The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster covered food security, agriculture and related livelihoods, with FAO holding a technical and coordination role and WFP the principal operational one. The Nutrition Cluster covered the prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition, with UNICEF as lead agency and the Ministry of Public Health and Population as national counterpart; caseload allocation and targeting decisions within the wasting continuum were taken within it, alongside WHO. No structure sat above the two clusters with responsibility for the relationship between them. The resulting allocation is therefore asymmetric across interfaces. The IPC provides an assigned mechanism for the analytical relationship between food-security and nutrition evidence, while no equivalent mechanism is assigned responsibility for the operational relationship between food-security programming and nutrition programming.

A third mechanism operated across both. Yemen has used the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification since 2011, and its national technical working group brought together more than ten organisations including FAO, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA and both clusters, drawing on expertise across agriculture, livestock, nutrition, food security and markets. The 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview shows the arrangement in operation: food-security analysis combined outcome indicators with livelihoods, expenditure, asset and WASH data; market information came from WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping system and FAO food-security monitoring; and malnutrition and mortality data came from the Nutrition Cluster, UNICEF and the Ministry. FAO's early-warning function is institutionally embedded in the IPC system.

Government and inter-agency arrangements. Government institutions participated in all three structures, and the response worked with national counterparts where possible. A Yemen Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan for 2020–2023, examined at §5.5, was the principal inter-agency instrument spanning the determinants of malnutrition during the window. Authority was divided across territories throughout, no single body could arbitrate priorities across the country, and classifications were produced separately for areas under different control.

FAO, WFP and UNICEF roles

FAO's role centred on food security, agriculture, livelihoods, food systems and food-security analysis, with a particularly important technical position in the IPC process and in early-warning and monitoring systems. FAO holds no wasting-treatment responsibility and is not treated as equivalent to the agencies operating the SAM/MAM division; the question asked of FAO is whether its food-security, livelihoods and resilience work was integrated with the nutrition response or ran as a parallel track.

WFP operated across food assistance and food security: general food assistance, cash and voucher assistance, school feeding, resilience and livelihoods activities, and nutrition-sensitive interventions. It also held the moderate acute malnutrition caseload, which placed it on both sides of the food-security and nutrition boundary — the largest food-security actor in the country and one of the two agencies operating the wasting continuum.

UNICEF's role centred on child nutrition: prevention and treatment of wasting, community-based nutrition, nutrition supplies and support to health and community systems, including the severe acute malnutrition caseload.

The SAM/MAM division. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan records the division as it applied at the opening of the window, with the Nutrition Cluster planning treatment of both severe and moderate acute malnutrition alongside referral and screening, supplementary feeding, micronutrient interventions, surveillance and community-based activities. The two halves were held by different agencies and coordinated within a single cluster together with WHO and the Ministry (OCHA, 2019b).

The mandates were substantively interdependent. Food insecurity affects household consumption and therefore nutritional status; food assistance influences household food access; agricultural and livelihood interventions affect income, food availability and resilience; nutrition programming depends partly on the food, health, WASH and care environment. The formal division established specialised responsibilities within a single response, and the benchmark is complementarity rather than organisational merger.

Interfaces

The interfaces at which the three mandates met were: **food-security and nutrition analysis; food assistance and nutrition programming; agriculture and livelihoods and nutrition outcomes; cash transfers and nutrition objectives; prevention and**

treatment; the division between severe and moderate acute malnutrition within treatment; and geographic and beneficiary targeting.

5.3 Funding environment

Volume and trajectory. Yemen's inter-agency Humanitarian Response Plan received US\$3.6 billion in 2019, 88 per cent of requirements. Receipts fell to US\$2.0 billion in 2020, recovered modestly in 2021 and 2022, and declined thereafter, averaging US\$2.2 billion annually across 2019–2024. Requirements moved on a different path: US\$4.27 billion sought in 2022 against 23.4 million people in need, US\$4.3 billion in 2023 to assist 17.3 million of 21.6 million assessed as in need, and US\$2.7 billion in 2024, of which US\$1.3 billion, 47 per cent, had been received by 30 October. The lower 2024 requirement reflects OCHA's boundary-setting initiative, which confines response plans to life-saving and life-sustaining activities in areas of most severe need; 17.6 million people remained severely food insecure that year (OCHA, n.d.; OCHA, 2022b; OCHA, 2023a; OCHA, 2023c; OCHA, 2024c). WFP revised its own 2024 needs-based plan down by 62 per cent, from US\$2.89 billion to US\$1.11 billion (WFP, 2025e). Requirement figures before and after 2024 are not directly comparable as a continuous series because the 2024 boundary-setting exercise changed the scope of the response plan.

Donor concentration. Food security was consistently among the best-funded sectors of the response, drawing on a donor base concentrated in a small number of large contributors.

Earmarking and flexibility. UNICEF's Yemen Humanitarian Action for Children appeal sought US\$484.4 million in 2022; US\$131 million was received, with US\$63.8 million carried forward, leaving a 60 per cent gap. At the end of the first quarter only US\$26.8 million had arrived, a gap of 81 per cent at that point in the year. UNICEF's Yemen financing came overwhelmingly as earmarked contributions, with only small amounts from its global thematic humanitarian fund (UNICEF Yemen, 2022; 2023).

For WFP, flexible funding — unearmarked multilateral contributions, Immediate Response Account contributions and softly earmarked contributions permitting flexibility beyond country level — stood at 9.2 per cent of total contributions in 2022 and 14 per cent in 2023, the remainder earmarked at activity level. WFP's synthesis of sixteen evaluations completed in 2023 found that heavily earmarked and short-term funding

constrained the intended shift to an enabling role under country strategic plans and limited delivery of food and nutrition security solutions, an externally produced finding on how those conditions were experienced operationally (WFP, 2023a; WFP, 2024a; WFP, 2024b).

For FAO, more than fifty resource partners contributed US\$901 million to emergency and resilience programmes in 2023, of which US\$50 million — around five and a half per cent — was flexible funding through the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities. Roughly a third of FAO's emergency funding came from international financial institutions, directly or through recipient governments, a structurally different composition from that of either partner agency (FAO, 2024).

Volatility. Within-year receipts were markedly uneven, as UNICEF's first-quarter position illustrates, and the sharpest movements in the series were the halving of receipts between 2019 and 2020 and the decline from 2023. At activity level the volatility was greater still: in 2024 WFP's moderate acute malnutrition treatment was funded at 84 per cent of revised requirement, school feeding at 41 per cent, and malnutrition prevention at 15 per cent, the last suspended altogether; resilience and livelihoods, funded at 23 per cent of requirement in 2023, reached a tenth of the two million people planned in 2024 (WFP, 2025e).

Relative financing position. FAO's Yemen programming ran substantially through project instruments rather than appeal financing — ERRY II and III funded by the European Union and Sweden, PROACT II by the European Union, and the Food Security Response and Resilience Project by the World Bank, which committed a further US\$150 million grant in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). FAO's global humanitarian appeals were 28 per cent funded in 2023 against US\$2.5 billion required, and FAO records that only four per cent of humanitarian food-sector funding goes to emergency agriculture FAO (2024).

Pooled funding. CERF allocated US\$18 million in March 2023 through the Integrated Famine Risk Reduction mechanism for combined in-kind and multipurpose cash assistance with the stated objective of reducing global acute malnutrition among children under five by one to two percentage points while improving food security. A further US\$20 million followed in September 2023 for multi-sectoral support of which US\$17 million went to return and local integration areas and US\$3 million to a rapid response mechanism, supporting 4,260 farming and herding households and food production for

30,776 individuals. In 2024 the Yemen Humanitarian Fund's first standard allocation of US\$30 million ran in parallel with a US\$20 million CERF Underfunded Emergencies grant under a single joint strategy, the combined US\$50 million directed at integrated multi-sectoral response in the 32 most severely affected districts (CERF, n.d.; OCHA, 2025b).

5.4 Process tracing and coordination assessment

Phase One — Needs assessment

Formal expectation. The Humanitarian Needs Overview was to provide a consolidated evidence base for joint planning, and the IPC system was to bring together food-security, nutrition, market, agricultural and other evidence, with all three agencies represented in the national technical working group. The expected process was that FAO's food-security expertise, WFP's food-security and market analysis and UNICEF's nutrition data would contribute to a shared framework. The 2019 response already reflected this logic, with the Nutrition Cluster using SMART surveys, emergency food-security and nutrition assessments and other evidence to identify areas requiring nutrition interventions.

Observed practice. The evidence indicates substantial and institutionalised coordination. The 2021 HNO documents the integration in operation: FSAC's IPC analysis used food-security outcome indicators alongside livelihoods, expenditure, asset and WASH information; WFP and FAO contributed market data; nutrition and mortality data came from the Nutrition Cluster, UNICEF and government sources (OCHA, 2021). The 2021 acute-malnutrition analysis involved FAO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and partners, projecting 2.3 million children under five to experience acute malnutrition.

Three things are established here on which the later phases depend. The agencies were capable of joint technical work at a food-security and nutrition interface; they were willing to submit their own data to a process whose outputs they did not individually control; and they sustained that arrangement for six years across a funding collapse, a truce and progressive deterioration in access. Together these foreclose any explanation of the later phases resting on incapacity, unwillingness, or the impossibility of joint working under Yemeni conditions, which is what allows the later findings to be attributed to structure rather than to conduct. Assessment coordination was therefore sustained despite severe operating pressures.

Changes over the phase. The IPC process continued through the funding contraction, the truce and the access restrictions of the later years, and analytical products became more granular over time: the 2024 acute-malnutrition analysis incorporated SMART survey data collected between November 2023 and February 2024 and produced district-level classifications.

Coordination pattern. Durable integration at the analytical interface, achieved through a standing multi-agency mechanism with formal institutional standing and sustained under severe pressure. FAO's early-warning function operated as institutionally intended. The mechanism produced not merely information exchange but a shared analytical classification of severity across participating actors. The analytical interface was therefore institutionally assigned rather than unallocated: the IPC provided a standing process responsible for bringing the relevant food-security and nutrition evidence together.

standing multi-agency mechanism with formal institutional standing → participation obligatory rather than discretionary → agencies submit their own data to a process none controls → a single agreed classification of severity shared across all three

Coordination verdict: No coordination problem established.

The assessment architecture produced compatible and shared understandings of food-security and nutrition needs, consistently, across six years and through repeated shocks. This is the strongest coordination performance in the case.

Phase Two — Response planning

Formal expectation. Planning should have translated the common evidence base into complementary responses. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan illustrates the intended approach, with the Nutrition Cluster identifying priority populations and districts and linking treatment, prevention, screening, referral and supplementary feeding to assessed needs. The same principle applied to food security, with FAO and WFP addressing food access, agricultural production, livelihoods and resilience while UNICEF and nutrition partners addressed acute malnutrition and its prevention. Where needs overlapped, planning should have connected geographic priorities, targeting and interventions. The 2024 HRP made this explicit, with the Nutrition Cluster calling for nutrition activities to

be integrated with multisectoral approaches involving food security and livelihoods, and seeking more nexus-oriented resources.

Observed practice. Planning mechanisms generated instances of complementarity. The 2024 HRP was designed around a more targeted and prioritised response, explicitly calling for integrated multi-sectoral approaches while targeting 11.2 million people and adapting programming to funding and access constraints. Nutrition planning increasingly recognised its relationship with food security, and the 2024 Nutrition Cluster plan sought to strengthen links with Food Security and Livelihoods and other clusters. The plan presented the cluster's funding shortfall as part of the case for nexus-oriented resourcing, linking the financing constraint to the stated need for greater multisectoral integration. Food-security planning continued to centre on food assistance, markets, livelihoods, agriculture and resilience; nutrition planning remained centred on treatment and prevention of wasting, community-based nutrition and nutrition services. Integration depended on coordination *between* systems rather than occurring *within* a single planning structure.

The multi-sectoral planning instrument. A Yemen Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan for 2020–2023 was developed through the Scaling Up Nutrition process led by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, with the Ministry of Public Health and Population, WFP, other United Nations partners and stakeholders (Republic of Yemen, 2020), and constituted a genuine attempt at a planning instrument spanning the determinants of malnutrition. The WFP evaluation nevertheless records inconsistent engagement with the Scaling Up Nutrition movement and limited WFP involvement in developing the successor plan for 2025–2030. The existence of a multi-sectoral instrument therefore did not produce sustained cross-agency planning authority over the food-security/nutrition interface.

The deficit is specific: planning arrangements existed, but nobody was routinely assigned responsibility for taking decisions across the operational food-security/nutrition boundary. Within nutrition, the cluster did determine how caseloads were allocated and how targeting should respond to nutritional deterioration. Across the sectoral boundary, no equivalent authority existed. No instrument determined how a reduction in food-security coverage should be reflected in nutrition targeting, whether a district losing food assistance should receive additional nutrition prevention, or whether a district with

deteriorating malnutrition classifications should receive priority in food-assistance targeting. Each of these is a decision the shared IPC analysis had made technically possible and none was assigned to any planning body.

Changes over the phase. The trajectory is of increasing formal commitment to integration alongside decreasing capacity to act on it. Successive plans from 2021 reference multisectoral approaches with growing explicitness, culminating in the 2024 HRP's nexus framing, while the resources available to fund cross-sector programming contracted and planning became progressively more concerned with prioritisation and programme survival. The 2024 plan acknowledged that insufficient funding and access constraints required adaptation. Declared ambition and operational capacity moved in opposite directions across the window, and the widening distance between them is the phase's principal finding.

Coordination pattern. The intended arrangement — that shared evidence would generate complementary sectoral priorities — existed, was repeatedly invoked, and functioned materially less well than the arrangements within each sector. The weakness was sustained across the whole window rather than isolated to a planning cycle, and it was material in that it governed how the two sectors' caseloads and geographies related to one another. Fragmented authority contributed directly: where no national body could arbitrate priorities across territories, humanitarian actors were required to perform that function through coordination arrangements that did not extend to cross-sector allocation. shared evidence base but no body empowered to allocate across sectors → each sector plans to its own caseload → multisectoral language rises in successive plans while the instruments to act on it remain absent → declared complementarity without operational reconciliation of caseloads or geographies

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

Planning arrangements provided mechanisms for complementarity and these were used, but integration of food-security and nutrition planning remained materially and persistently weaker than integration within each sector. The weakness was sustained and affected the functioning of an arrangement the system explicitly intended.

Phase Three — Implementation

Formal expectation. The governing instrument for the wasting continuum in this phase is Yemen's country roadmap under the Global Action Plan, which does not allocate operational responsibility between agencies. Implementation should have translated the planned division of labour into connected programmes. The agencies did not need to implement the same activities — FAO on agriculture and livelihoods, WFP on food assistance and MAM, UNICEF on child nutrition and SAM — but the interventions should have been sufficiently connected to prevent major gaps at their interfaces. Where food insecurity and acute malnutrition concentrated in the same areas, complementary targeting and sequencing should have been possible; where food assistance was reduced, the implications for nutrition should have been visible in subsequent prioritisation and adaptation.

Observed practice. Implementation remained strongly specialised. WFP operated large-scale food assistance and food-security programmes while maintaining resilience, livelihoods, school feeding and nutrition-related activities; FAO worked across agriculture, food security and livelihoods; UNICEF maintained the principal child nutrition response. Specialisation was not itself a coordination problem and was necessary to maintain technical and operational capacity. The problem was the limited extent to which these systems could adjust in relation to one another when conditions changed.

The December 2023 suspension. WFP paused general food distributions in areas controlled by the Sana'a-based authorities, recording the decision as the largest assistance pause in its fifty-six-year history in Yemen, affecting 9.5 million people against a funding gap of US\$1.66 billion, and attributing it primarily to a severe funding crisis (WFP, 2023b; WFP, 2024e). The subsequent WFP evaluation confirms the pause was unprecedented in scale and duration (WFP, 2025c) and affected millions of people, and records that a retargeting exercise based on updated vulnerability data was piloted in selected areas in 2024, allowing food assistance to resume there (WFP, 2024f).

Coordination is visible at three points. The decision was preceded by a negotiation over caseload size rather than taken unilaterally. The subsequent retargeting drew on updated vulnerability data generated through the shared analytical system — the IPC architecture performing exactly the function it was built for. And WFP explicitly preserved its nutrition, school-feeding and resilience activities while suspending general distributions,

which indicates deliberate prioritisation across its own portfolio rather than undifferentiated withdrawal.

The withdrawal of the largest food-assistance programme in the country, from areas containing millions of food-insecure people, produced no joint adjustment between the food-security and nutrition systems operating in the same areas. The coordinated response to the pause was located on the food-security side of the boundary. WFP conducted an assessment of the impact of the general food assistance pause in northern Yemen, published in April 2024, and the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster presented a mitigation plan to its partners in April 2024 to alleviate the most severe impacts of the pause in areas controlled by the de facto authorities over the period to December 2024 (WFP, 2024f; FSAC Yemen, 2024). The system therefore assessed the consequences of the withdrawal and planned to mitigate them — through the cluster whose programme had been withdrawn, on the timescale of that cluster's own recovery.

On the nutrition side, the adjustment that did occur was made unilaterally. In its July 2024 revision of the Yemen appeal, UNICEF increased its nutrition requirement to include an expected additional caseload of 54,000 severely wasted children attributed to the suspension of general food assistance, together with treatment for an estimated 88,664 moderately wasted children at high risk of mortality (UNICEF, 2024b). The consequences of the pause were therefore recognised on both sides of the boundary, but through separate instruments: a mitigation plan within the food-security cluster, and a budget revision within one agency's appeal. No joint review between the two systems is recorded, and no instrument connected WFP's withdrawal to UNICEF's revised caseload. This is not a criticism of agency conduct: both responses were appropriate and prompt, and each remained within its own organisational boundary.

The WFP evaluation finds that a more inclusive and collaborative approach to planning and coordination was needed to mitigate the impact on other actors and beneficiaries, and records that even where coordination was strongest — the acute malnutrition continuum of care — technical alignment coexisted with operational separation. WFP and UNICEF employed separate methods for paying incentives to health facilities and used distinct supply chains for their nutrition interventions. Specialisation in Yemen was therefore a matter of agencies working on the same problem through duplicated operational

infrastructure, aligned at the level of technical protocol and unconsolidated at the level of delivery.

The limits of causal attribution. The 2024 IPC analysis, which covers Government-controlled areas, identifies food insecurity among the drivers of worsening nutrition and projects a 34 per cent increase in acute malnutrition between 2023 and 2024. Because the suspension applied to areas under the Sana'a-based authorities, the two cannot be linked geographically, and the evidence does not isolate the contribution of WFP's suspension from other determinants, including disease, WASH conditions, access to health services, economic deterioration, currency depreciation and food prices. The coordination finding is institutional: the response contained no mechanism through which a major change in food assistance would trigger coordinated assessment or adjustment in nutrition programming.

Integration was nevertheless achievable through dedicated multi-agency programmes. ERRY II and III brought WFP and FAO together with ILO across sixteen districts; the World Bank-funded Food Security Response and Resilience Project combined WFP, FAO and UNDP; and PROACT II brought WFP, FAO and UNICEF together in an integrated food security, nutrition and resilience programme. PROACT II operated in four districts across three governorates and supported 31,600 people.

These programmes demonstrate that integration was possible, but only within discrete, separately financed instruments covering a small fraction of the overall caseload. The general response architecture remained sectorally organised.

The WFP evaluation's own assessment of these efforts is correspondingly qualified. It identifies good collaboration across sectors through partnerships with United Nations agencies and cooperating partners, and simultaneously finds limited information sharing and a lack of true joint programming in multi-partner efforts, affecting overall effectiveness (WFP, 2025c). On FAO specifically, it concludes that stronger collaboration on livelihoods and resilience could enhance the effectiveness of interventions — a finding of unrealised complementarity between two agencies that were already partners in three named programmes.

Changes over the phase. The trajectory is one of a sharp break followed by increasing rigidity rather than steady decline. As funding constraints accumulated, the room to adjust programmes narrowed; by late 2023 the constraint had become severe enough to force

withdrawal of a core food-assistance programme rather than further modification. The 2024 retargeting pilot represented an attempt to rebuild coverage on a revised analytical basis, but remained within the food-security system.

Coordination pattern. Formal commitment to complementary action was not translated into integrated implementation, and the divergence was sustained and material. Specialised operational systems generated dependence on inter-agency coordination at shared interfaces; funding and access constraints reduced the flexibility available to adjust; fragmented authority limited the capacity for common arbitration; and the result was continued sectoral implementation despite substantive interdependence. The evidence does not support a claim that the agencies competed. It supports the finding that their organisational systems remained capable of operating independently even where the outcomes they addressed were interconnected — and that under sufficient pressure, independent operation is what occurred.

funding contraction → withdrawal of general food assistance in the north → mitigation planned within the food-security cluster, caseload revision made within UNICEF's own appeal → no joint adjustment across the boundary

Coordination verdict: Translation failure.

The formal commitment to complementary action was not translated into integrated implementation. Because the divergence was sustained across the window and materially affected the functioning of an intended arrangement, it also constitutes a coordination deficit. The evidence does not support a finding of coordination failure, for the reasons of causal attribution set out above.

Phase Four — Evaluation and institutional learning

Formal expectation. Evaluation and learning should have identified weaknesses in coordination and generated corrective changes. The phase asks whether the coordination problem was identified and whether it was corrected, reproduced or left unresolved, with persistence after identification and attempted correction treated as the stronger evidence of a structurally grounded weakness.

Observed practice. Yemen demonstrates substantial institutional learning within the existing architecture and — unusually — clear evidence that the coordination problem itself was identified and acted upon. Assessment systems were repeatedly updated, with

the IPC process continuing to provide common analysis and acute-malnutrition assessments revised as new evidence became available. Planning changed: the 2024 HRP adopted a more targeted, prioritised and risk-informed approach and explicitly called for integrated multisectoral responses, while the Nutrition Cluster sought stronger integration with food security and livelihoods. Programme-level learning is documented in WFP's retargeting and prioritisation exercise following the suspension.

The pooled-fund record provides the clearest evidence of system-level recognition. The March 2023 CERF allocation explicitly combined food-security and nutrition objectives, while the 2024 YHF/CERF pairing funded an integrated multi-sectoral strategy across 32 severely affected districts.

These instruments constitute documented attempts to address the identified interface weakness through financing. They establish that the problem was recognised in planning, evaluation and funding decisions, and that the principal corrective response took the form of financing rather than institutional restructuring. The underlying sectoral architecture nevertheless remained unchanged.

The mechanisms for managing interfaces between sectors did not develop to the degree the mechanisms within sectors did, and continued underfunding limited the extent to which learning could be converted into implementation capacity.

Changes over the phase. The direction of change is towards explicit recognition and partial, instrument-level correction. From roughly 2023 the language of integration moves out of planning documents and into funding decisions, which is a meaningful escalation: a commitment expressed in an allocation is more consequential than one expressed in a plan. It did not reach institutional restructuring, and the sectoral coordination architecture at the end of the window was the same as at its start.

Coordination pattern. The problem was correctly identified, correction was attempted at the level of financing rather than institutional design, and the problem persisted. This is the strongest available evidence of a structurally grounded weakness. The persistence of the problem after identification and attempted correction is consistent with a structurally grounded weakness rather than a problem of individual agency conduct.

interface weakness identified by the system itself → correction available only through the financing instrument → pooled funds directed at the interface at roughly US\$50 million

against a US\$2.7 billion requirement → integration purchased where the money reached, sectoral architecture unchanged

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

The evidence establishes genuine learning and attempted correction, and equally establishes that the separation between specialised food-security and nutrition systems persisted after identification and after correction was attempted. Persistence through the learning phase is what distinguishes a deficit from an isolated problem.

5.5 Country-level application of H1–H4

H1 — The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis

Verdict: Partially supported.

The evidence does not establish ambiguity or overlap in the formal mandates. It instead identifies an unallocated relationship between otherwise clear mandates: a division of labour specifies what each agency does, but not what happens where their activities meet. Coordination was sustained where a standing mechanism assigned responsibility for the interface, as in the IPC, and remained weak where no equivalent mechanism existed. The ambiguity variant of H1 attributes coordination problems to ambiguity or overlap in the roles themselves, and the Yemen evidence does not establish it: no contest over the roles is documented, and the documented absence of contestation is what weakens that variant. It establishes that the roles were adequately clear and that the problem lay in the relationships between them, which no role allocation addressed and no structure owned. In Yemen those relationships were left unassigned everywhere except where the IPC assigned them, and the pattern of coordination outcomes follows that assignment exactly. clear mandates with substantively overlapping effects → relationships between mandates unallocated → management occurs only where a standing mechanism assigns it → sectorally organised planning and implementation → coordination deficit at points of interdependence

H1 is partially supported. The ambiguity variant is not supported; the interstitial variant is, on the within-case evidence that coordination held exactly where the IPC assigned responsibility for the interface and was weak everywhere else, which is variation across interfaces under otherwise common conditions.

H2 — The Funding Structure Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

For the mechanism traced here, the relevant condition is funding rigidity rather than scarcity alone. Resources attached to specified activities cannot be moved to unspecified ones: an agency short in one component cannot cover it from another, and cannot contribute to an activity outside its own appeal at all. That constraint bears on reallocation, and so operates whatever the volume of money arriving.

Its organisational effect is stated by the agencies rather than inferred from the figures. UNICEF identifies its funding gap as having constrained its capacity to scale up critical interventions; WFP's evaluation synthesis identifies earmarked and short-term funding as having limited what it could deliver, a finding reached independently of this response and applying across sixteen operations.

The intervening decision is documented. In December 2023 WFP paused general food distributions in northern Yemen, stating that the pause followed from limited funding and the absence of agreement on a smaller programme matching available resources to the neediest families. This is a dated decision with a funding rationale attached to it, not a coincidence of a funding condition with a coordination outcome.

Rigid financing narrowed each agency's room for adjustment to its own programme space, which is the agency-bounded adaptive capacity the framework derives from Konyndyk's (2018) account of a business model that ties normative leadership to programmatic fundraising. WFP could reprioritise internally, preserving nutrition, school feeding and resilience while reducing general distributions, but no instrument allowed a shortfall in WFP food assistance to be compensated through expanded UNICEF prevention coverage. Earmarking therefore constrained adaptation within agency portfolios and made cross-agency adjustment structurally difficult.

The reverse pattern is also visible, and it is the stronger half of the finding. Every documented instance of cross-agency integration depended on a dedicated financing instrument rather than on ordinary agency resources. Integration therefore occurred where financing explicitly created space for it.

One feature of the record appears to cut the other way and repays attention. The response was funded at 88 per cent of requirements in 2019, and the separation between food-security and nutrition operational systems was already in place. If generous funding

produced integration, it should have done so then. The separation instead survived both the best-funded and the worst-funded years of the window, which locates the mechanism in how funding is structured rather than in how much of it arrives, and identifies volume as the wrong variable. The 2019 position sharpens the hypothesis rather than weakening it.

The evidence does not establish competition between agencies, and the funding mechanism traced here is constraint rather than rivalry. Nor can the finding be extended evenly to FAO: its financing structure differed materially, and the available evidence does not establish whether those conditions shaped its coordination behaviour. The H2 finding therefore rests primarily on the UNICEF and WFP evidence.

funding rigidity → adaptation confined within each agency's programme space → withdrawal of general food assistance on stated funding grounds → no cross-agency compensation possible → integration only where dedicated instruments financed it.

H3 — The State Capacity Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

The national institutional environment was fragmented across authorities, and organisations faced administrative and access constraints affecting implementation, with the 2024 HRP identifying access constraints as requiring continued adaptation. The response did not, however, operate in the absence of government institutions: the IPC system involved government technical structures, and the response worked through and alongside national institutions where possible.

The operative effect of fragmented state capacity was the absence of an authority capable of arbitrating between specialised international organisations across the territory. Humanitarian coordination structures were required to substitute for that function and were not constituted to perform it: they could convene, analyse and plan within sectors, but held no authority to allocate between organisations.

Fragmented authority therefore left no national authority with a clear capacity to arbitrate across the specialised humanitarian structures, while those structures themselves lacked equivalent allocative authority. The deficits in Phases Two, Three and Four consequently took the form of unresolved cross-sector decisions rather than simply poorly executed decisions.

fragmented state authority → no arbitration across sectors or territories → the function devolves to sectoral humanitarian structures lacking allocative authority → persistent cross-sector interface problems.

H4 — The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

Crisis pressure was severe and sustained across the whole window: conflict, economic deterioration, food insecurity, acute malnutrition, displacement and access constraints operating simultaneously, with 18.2 million people requiring assistance in 2024 and 17.6 million facing food and nutrition insecurity. Severity increased the consequences of coordination weakness, since a weak connection between food assistance and nutrition mattered more where large numbers of children were simultaneously exposed to both.

Interaction with each of the other mechanisms is documented. With funding structure: sustained severity meant constrained resources were rationed against a caseload that never contracted, and it is this that converted a funding shortfall into withdrawal rather than proportionate reduction, since a static caseload forecloses the option of scaling down.

With state capacity: prolonged conflict was itself the cause of the fragmentation of authority that removed the arbitration function, so the two mechanisms are not independent in this case. With interface structure: sustained pressure removed the time and institutional space in which unassigned interfaces might have been noticed and managed, requiring agencies to make rapid decisions within their own programmes.

Of the three pathways specified in Chapter Two, the evidence supports strategic incoherence rather than operational convergence. Architectural volatility is not evidenced: the sectoral coordination architecture at the end of the window was the same as at its start. Operational convergence is not established. The one documented movement across the boundary — UNICEF's inclusion in its July 2024 appeal of treatment for moderately wasted children at high risk of mortality — was made within its own appeal and without a joint arrangement with WFP, and is too limited to indicate convergence; the December 2023 suspension shows WFP contracting within its own portfolio rather than expanding into UNICEF's. What diverged was strategic direction. As pressure intensified, each agency prioritised within its own mandate — WFP preserving nutrition, school feeding and resilience while abandoning general distributions, UNICEF sustaining

treatment as prevention funding collapsed — and the multisectoral commitments in successive response plans moved further from the sectorally organised reality with each cycle. Convergence would have required a common frame in which to converge; the pressure removed the space in which one might have been built.

sustained high need → resources rationed against a non-contracting caseload → funding constraint converts into programme withdrawal rather than reduction → sectoral separation means the withdrawal cannot be compensated → consequences of the unassigned interface magnified

Case causal synthesis

Sectoral planning remained specialised because no body was constituted to take cross-sector decisions. Rigid and contracting funding confined adaptation largely to each agency's own programme space, while fragmented state authority removed the possibility of authoritative arbitration across sectors and territories. Sustained crisis pressure intensified these constraints and contributed to programme withdrawal. Pooled funding subsequently enabled some integrated action, but only at the margin and without changing the underlying architecture.

Specialised but interdependent mandates → relationships between them unassigned except analytically → integration achieved in analysis, not in operations → earmarked and contracting funding confines adaptation to each agency's own space → fragmented authority removes arbitration → sustained crisis converts constraint into withdrawal → coordination present but incomplete at operational interfaces, and unresolved after identification

5.6 Country-level conclusion.

Yemen shows coordination sustained in analysis but not translated into operations, and no coordination failure is established. The evidence provisionally suggests that the unallocated operational interface is architectural, with its severity conditional on rigid funding, fragmented authority and sustained crisis.

Protracted conflict, economic collapse, currency depreciation, high food prices, loss of livelihoods and displacement combined with the breakdown of public health, water and sanitation services. Together they produced severe and simultaneous food insecurity and acute malnutrition, reaching the same populations through shared determinants.

Fragmented territorial authority and severe access restrictions shaped every phase of the response.

The formal division of labour was clear. WFP operated the largest food-assistance programme in the country, combining general distributions, cash and vouchers, school feeding, resilience activities and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition. UNICEF led the Nutrition Cluster with the Ministry of Public Health and carried the severe acute malnutrition caseload through treatment, community-based nutrition, supplies and support to health systems. FAO held a technical and coordination role in food security and agriculture, a central position in the IPC and early warning, and livelihoods programming delivered largely through multi-agency projects. Two separate clusters organised food security and nutrition, and no structure sat above them. Across the four phases, coordination is strong in analysis and weakens progressively as it moves into operations.

CHAPTER SIX. NIGER: COORDINATION UNDER CHRONIC CRISIS, FUNDING CONSTRAINTS AND POLITICAL DISRUPTION

6.1 Case context

Niger presents **chronic food insecurity and malnutrition sustained over more than a decade** rather than a crisis with a discrete onset, and it is the only case in this study in which the same coordination system can be observed before and after a discontinuity in national authority. **The analytical window runs from 2019 to 2024**, its beginning providing an institutional baseline preceding the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting and its later years capturing increasing insecurity, funding pressure and the institutional change following July 2023.

Food insecurity across the period resulted from the interaction of conflict and insecurity, climatic variability, disrupted livelihoods, high food prices and displacement. Cadre Harmonisé analysis in November 2023 recorded 2.3 million people in crisis or emergency food insecurity, projected to rise to 3.2 million between June and August 2024.

The nutrition situation was severe throughout, and its scale distinguishes the case. Global acute malnutrition stood at 12.7 per cent nationally and severe acute malnutrition at 2.6 per cent, rates persisting for a decade, with over one million children wasted each year and five of eight regions at high or very high prevalence. In 2023 alone, 459,434 children under five with severe acute malnutrition were admitted for treatment. Nutrition needs were driven not only by food availability but by disease, inadequate diets, limited access to health and sanitation services, displacement and broader household vulnerability — a multi-causal structure that matters analytically, since it means **nutrition outcomes in Niger were never within the control of the nutrition sector alone** (WFP, 2021; UNICEF Niger, 2024).

The operating environment changed materially over time. Insecurity and access restrictions affected operations throughout, and COVID-19 added pressure in 2020 and 2021. The change of government of 26 July 2023 marked a significant institutional disruption, and the subsequent deterioration in relations between the new authorities and international humanitarian actors, together with regional sanctions, border closures and disruption to trade and supply routes, affected planning, access and implementation (WFP, 2024d). The state remained an important institutional actor throughout, but its

relationship with the international humanitarian system changed decisively, and that change is central to the assessment of whether state capacity and institutional authority affected coordination.

6.2 Formal coordination baseline

Institutional coordination architecture

Under the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting Niger is one of the frontrunner countries. Its costed roadmap, dated 14 November 2021 and developed under government leadership, is explicitly aligned with the National Nutrition Security Policy for 2017–2025 and sets out priority interventions across health, food, WASH and social protection systems. It prioritises the five regions where wasting prevalence is highest, and carries a total annual cost of US\$146.3 million, of which US\$34.4 million is allocated to treatment (Gouvernement du Niger, 2021).

Three features of the instrument bear directly on the analysis that follows. **Its treatment target is undifferentiated:** coverage is to rise above 75 per cent for wasted children as a single category, with no distinction drawn between the severe and moderate halves of the continuum.

Its treatment outcome contains an explicit supply commitment — to strengthen supply chain management so as to ensure the timely availability of nutrition and medical supplies for the management of child wasting at health facility level.

And **it allocates no operational responsibility to any named agency**, so that a commitment framed for the continuum as a whole is left to be delivered by two organisations whose supply chains, funding and procurement it does not address.

The country-level response operated through a combination of government institutions, humanitarian coordination structures and sectoral mechanisms, with successive Plans de Réponse Humanitaire setting out the collective commitments for each year. No single institution was responsible for coordinating both domains; **food security and nutrition were institutionally differentiated but substantively interconnected.**

Food-security coordination operated through national and humanitarian mechanisms with FAO and WFP occupying central positions, the Food Security Cluster providing the principal humanitarian coordination mechanism.

Nutrition coordination followed a different institutional form: nationally it was government-led, with UNICEF in a central coordination role, integrated with the health system at sub-national level rather than operating as a separate cluster.

At the analytical interface, Niger possessed the **Cadre Harmonisé**, produced through a regional multi-stakeholder process involving national governments, UN agencies and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel. FAO's early-warning function is institutionally embedded in that process. **Nutrition classification was conducted** through interphase acute-malnutrition analysis and SMART surveys, producing departmental classifications used across the response.

Government institutions were part of both systems, **nutrition coordination involving the Ministry of Public Health and associated technical structures and food-security planning involving government food-security institutions** alongside humanitarian actors. Joint programming arrangements between WFP and UNICEF operated in Diffa around resilience and social cohesion, involving government technical services and local actors (WFP Niger and UNICEF Niger, 2024).

FAO, WFP and UNICEF roles

FAO was principally responsible for food security, agriculture, livelihoods, resilience and food-security analysis, focusing on protecting agricultural production, supporting vulnerable livelihoods, strengthening resilience and responding to shocks affecting rural households. FAO holds no wasting-treatment responsibility and is not treated as equivalent to the agencies operating the SAM/MAM division; the question asked of FAO is whether its work was integrated with the nutrition response or ran as a parallel track.

WFP occupied a broader food-assistance and food-security role, combining emergency food assistance and cash-based transfers with resilience, school feeding, nutrition, social protection, logistics and common services, and holding a coordination function within the Food Security Cluster. Operationally it held the moderate acute malnutrition caseload and the supply chain for the specialised nutritious foods on which MAM treatment depends.

UNICEF occupied the principal child-nutrition role, including prevention and treatment of severe acute malnutrition, nutrition surveillance, community-based nutrition, strengthening of nutrition systems and support to government institutions, together with the supply chain for therapeutic products.

The SAM/MAM division. This is the sharpest mandate boundary examined in this study, and it becomes the site of the case's central finding. Severe and moderate acute malnutrition are not two conditions but two points on one clinical continuum, untreated moderate acute malnutrition being the principal pathway into severe. The **formal instruments establish coordination responsibilities for prevention and treatment but do not themselves specify the operational division of the SAM and MAM caseloads between agencies**. The Global Action Plan places coordination of prevention and treatment with UNICEF as lead and WFP in support, and Niger's roadmap sets a single coverage target for wasted children without distinguishing severe from moderate. The **division is a matter of operational practice rather than of formal assignment, and in Niger it meant that a caseload the governing instrument treated as one was delivered by two organisations operating separate supply chains, separate funding streams, separate procurement systems and separate contingency arrangements — for children presenting at the same facilities, in sequence**. Nothing in the roadmap, and no structure above the two agencies, addressed the relationship between them.

Interfaces

The interfaces at which the three mandates met were: **food-security and nutrition analysis; food assistance and nutrition programming; agriculture, livelihoods and nutrition; cash and social protection and nutrition objectives; prevention and treatment; the division between severe and moderate acute malnutrition within treatment; and geographic and beneficiary targeting**.

6.3 Funding environment

Volume and trajectory. Niger experienced persistent shortfalls against identified needs, deteriorating markedly in the later years of the window. As of 26 September 2023 the US\$584 million national humanitarian response plan had received 40 per cent of its requirement, while UNICEF's US\$72.6 million Humanitarian Action for Children appeal stood at 11 per cent. Requirements rose as coverage fell: UNICEF's 2024 appeal was 51 per cent above 2023, driven by epidemics, displacement, conflict, drought and political unrest, and by cost increases inside the nutrition response itself, including US\$11.5 million for air freight alone to sustain treatment for approximately 107,000 severely

wasted children after ground supply routes were disrupted (UNICEF Niger, 2023; UNICEF, 2023c).

Donor concentration. WFP's independent evaluation of its Niger country strategic plan identifies concentration among a small number of major donors, together with difficulty in maintaining predictable resources for longer-term programming (WFP, 2025d).

Earmarking and flexibility. The same evaluation found that WFP's funding in Niger was heavily earmarked, that only a small proportion was available for flexible use, and that relatively little covered more than one year. Set against WFP's corporate position — flexible funding at 9.2 per cent of total contributions in 2022 and 14 per cent in 2023, the majority earmarked at activity level — Niger sat at the constrained end of an already constrained distribution. WFP's synthesis of sixteen evaluations completed in 2023 found that heavily earmarked and short-term funding constrained the intended shift to an enabling role under country strategic plans and limited delivery of food and nutrition security solutions. UNICEF's position shows the same structure from the other side: no material flexible thematic share is recorded for Niger, and the global thematic pool from which such funding is drawn had contracted 37 per cent below 2021 levels by 2023 (WFP, 2023a; WFP, 2024a; WFP, 2024b; UNICEF, 2024a).

Volatility. Sub-sector financing moved sharply and unpredictably. Child protection received 16 per cent of its required budget in 2023 and 13 per cent in 2024. Nutrition supply financing was precarious throughout: UNICEF reported having secured only about 30 per cent of nutrition supply needs for the second quarter of 2024 and foresaw a further gap from April. The 2023 supply disruption shows what that volatility produced when it met a shock (UNICEF Niger, 2024).

Relative financing position. FAO sought US\$1.9 billion within humanitarian response plans in 2023 to assist 48 million people and US\$1.8 billion in 2024 for 43 million; in 2022 it received 43 per cent of the funds requested under those plans, a figure FAO itself describes as concealing a substantial imbalance between countries. Emergency agricultural assistance accounted for around four per cent of humanitarian funding to food sectors (FAO, 2022b; FAO, 2023b).

Pooled funding. CERF allocations were made, including US\$8 million from the Rapid Response window on 15 June 2022 reaching 320,000 people across food security,

agricultural livelihoods, nutrition, protection and shelter, of which more than US\$1 million, some 13 per cent, was delivered as cash and voucher assistance (CERF, n.d.).

6.4 Process tracing and coordination assessment

Phase One — Needs assessment

Formal expectation. The architecture required food-security and nutrition information to be generated through complementary assessment systems and made sufficiently available for common prioritisation. Food-security analysis operated through the Cadre Harmonisé alongside agricultural and food-security monitoring by FAO and WFP; nutrition analysis relied on national surveillance, SMART surveys, programme data and other health and nutrition information systems supported by UNICEF and government institutions. The expectation was not that these systems would be identical but that differentiated assessments would inform a sufficiently shared understanding of food and nutrition needs.

Observed practice. Niger maintained an established assessment infrastructure throughout most of the window. Food-security analysis was conducted regularly through the Cadre Harmonisé; nutrition conditions were monitored through national surveys and surveillance, with UNICEF supporting the strengthening of nutrition information systems and emergency preparedness while FAO and WFP contributed to food-security analysis and monitoring.

The November 2023 Cadre Harmonisé analysis, recording 2.3 million people in crisis or emergency food insecurity with a projection to 3.2 million for mid-2024, entered subsequent planning directly, and the November 2024 analysis similarly informed 2025 planning. Interphase classification of acute malnutrition conducted in November 2024 produced departmental classifications — 39 departments in nutrition crisis for December to April, rising to 42 in crisis and 12 in emergency for May to July — that were used across the response (CILSS/RPCA, 2023; CILSS/RPCA, 2024; IPC, 2025).

The evidence also demonstrates direct inter-agency engagement. In early 2020 UNICEF and WFP jointly hosted a USAID Food for Peace mission to the Maradi region, meeting their nutrition teams, government technical staff and health workers to review the malnutrition prevention and treatment package and the challenges of planning and implementing it (UNICEF Niger, 2020). The engagement was convened by a donor,

outside the coordination architecture, but it shows the two agencies holding the wasting continuum presenting their prevention and treatment work as a joint package.

Food-security and nutrition information remained institutionally differentiated, but the available evidence does not demonstrate that this produced a sustained or material coordination weakness during the phase.

Changes over the phase. The assessment environment became more difficult as insecurity, displacement and access constraints increased, and COVID-19 affected data collection in 2020–2021. Assessment and surveillance mechanisms nevertheless continued to operate, and food-security and nutrition information continued to be used for prioritisation. The July 2023 disruption altered the wider institutional environment; notably, the Cadre Harmonisé and the acute-malnutrition classification continued to be produced and used after it.

Coordination pattern. Differentiated assessment with a standing mechanism at the analytical interface, sustained through political rupture and access deterioration. The Cadre Harmonisé survived a change of government that disrupted planning endorsement, supply chains and operational access — which indicates that a mechanism with formal standing and regional institutional anchoring is considerably more robust to political shock than arrangements resting on the relationship between national authorities and individual agencies. The Cadre Harmonisé is produced through a regional process whose standing does not derive from any single national administration, and participation in it is governed by protocol rather than by continuing agreement between the parties.

regionally anchored standing mechanism → analytical obligation independent of the national counterpart relationship → Cadre Harmonisé and acute-malnutrition classification continue through the change of government → shared evidence base sustained across a political discontinuity

Coordination verdict: No coordination problem established.

The evidence establishes differentiated assessment systems, a functioning standing mechanism at the analytical interface that survived a political discontinuity, and documented joint engagement between the agencies holding the wasting continuum. It does not establish a coordination gap, deficit or failure in needs assessment.

Phase Two — Response planning

Formal expectation. The planning architecture required the three agencies to translate differentiated mandates into complementary food-security and nutrition activities. Humanitarian Response Plans provided the overarching framework, sectoral and technical mechanisms shaped food-security and nutrition planning, and agency strategies provided further frameworks for emergency assistance, livelihoods, resilience, nutrition and social protection. Planning was expected to coordinate geographical coverage, beneficiary targeting, food assistance, nutrition prevention and treatment, agriculture and livelihoods, resilience, social protection and nutrition-sensitive programming.

Observed practice. There is evidence of deliberate efforts to produce complementary planning. In Diffa, UNICEF and WFP undertook joint planning around resilience and social cohesion involving government technical services and local actors, seeking to establish complementary activities aligned with local priorities. The wider programming architecture created opportunities for complementarity: WFP's strategic planning explicitly combined emergency response with longer-term resilience activities, FAO programming addressed agricultural livelihoods and food security, and UNICEF focused on nutrition systems and child nutrition.

The architecture did not, however, generally produce integration. The WFP evaluation identified weaknesses in the coherence of its strategic plan, including difficulties integrating different components of the response and achieving sufficient complementarity across partnerships, particularly where emergency response, resilience, livelihoods and nutrition-sensitive activities intersected.

No planning instrument addressed the continuity of the wasting response if either agency became unable to supply its assigned caseload. The roadmap's supply commitment was framed for the continuum as a whole and assigned to no agency. No plan in the window converted it into a joint contingency arrangement across the SAM/MAM division, a shared stock or procurement facility, a mutual substitution protocol, or a mechanism for reallocating either agency's logistics capacity to the other's caseload. The omission became consequential when the two supply chains were exposed differently to the 2023 disruption.

Changes over the phase. The funding environment increasingly constrained planning flexibility, with short-term and earmarked funding making longer-term integrated

approaches harder to sustain and requiring prioritisation among activities. The July 2023 disruption altered the environment further: relations between national authorities and international actors deteriorated, planning and operational access became more difficult, and the absence of government endorsement affected the formal 2024 planning process. The trajectory runs from a functioning but imperfect planning architecture towards materially greater constraint on translating formal complementarity into operational planning.

Coordination pattern. The formal system established expectations of complementary planning and demonstrated, through the Diffa work, that those expectations could be operationalised where specifically arranged and specifically funded. The general translation of differentiated mandates into integrated planning was incomplete, particularly at the interfaces between emergency response, resilience, livelihoods and nutrition, and — with the clearest consequences — at the SAM/MAM division within treatment.

roadmap commitment framed for the continuum and assigned to no agency → planning proceeds through each agency's own instruments → complementarity achieved where specifically arranged and funded, absent otherwise → the supply undertaking enters no plan as a joint arrangement

Coordination verdict: Translation failure.

There is a documented divergence between the formal expectation of complementarity and its practical expression in planning. The evidence does not support describing planning across Niger as a uniform coordination deficit: the divergence was real and recurrent but was accompanied by working instances of complementary planning where specifically arranged, and the planning arrangements themselves functioned where used.

Phase Three — Implementation

Formal expectation. The governing instrument for the wasting continuum in this phase is the country roadmap of November 2021, which committed the response to raising treatment coverage above 75 per cent for wasted children as a single category and to strengthening supply chain management so as to ensure the timely availability of nutrition and medical supplies for the management of child wasting at health facility level. That

commitment is undifferentiated as to severity and unassigned as to agency. Implementation was expected to deliver it.

Observed practice. There were documented examples of joint or complementary implementation. UNICEF and WFP worked together on nutrition-related activities and resilience programming, including joint engagement with government and local actors, and the WFP evaluation found that where joint funding was available the two agencies could operate in the same areas, target the same beneficiaries and provide complementary assistance. These examples demonstrate that the formal division of labour could be translated into operational complementarity where joint arrangements and resources were available.

Implementation also exposed the limits of that capacity. WFP's evaluation identifies persistent constraints on implementation of its country strategic plan, including insufficient funding, earmarking, limited flexibility, insecurity, access restrictions, supply-chain problems and weaknesses in partnership and information-sharing arrangements. These became severe following the July 2023 change of government: border closures and regional restrictions disrupted supply chains and reduced the availability of humanitarian commodities, and WFP's nutrition interventions were particularly affected by disruption to the supply of specialised nutritious foods. WFP had to prioritise children in the youngest age groups and areas of greatest need, and many children requiring assistance could not be reached (WFP, 2025d).

The fourth quarter of 2023. UNICEF's end-2023 reporting records that in the fourth quarter more than 156,756 children aged 6–59 months with moderate acute malnutrition did not receive the treatment they needed, owing to severe shortages of supplies affecting 90 per cent of care centres. The same reporting records that severely acutely malnourished children continued to receive treatment through the end of the fourth quarter, because UNICEF had received its therapeutic inputs before the change of government and held them in country (UNICEF Niger, 2024).

The two halves of a single clinical continuum therefore failed asymmetrically, in the same facilities, in the same quarter, for the same population of children. A child presenting with severe acute malnutrition was treated. A child presenting at the same centre with moderate acute malnutrition — whose condition, untreated, is the principal pathway into severe acute malnutrition — was not.

The proximate cause of the MAM shortfall was supply-chain disruption following border closures. But supply-chain disruption does not by itself explain the asymmetry, and the asymmetry is the analytically significant fact. The border closures were a common shock: they affected the routes on which both agencies depended, at the same time, in the same way. What differed was not the exposure but the position of each agency at the moment of exposure — UNICEF held stock procured before the disruption, WFP did not — and, critically, that nothing existed to transfer the advantage of the one to the deficit of the other. There was no shared stock, no substitution protocol, no joint procurement facility, no mechanism by which UNICEF's therapeutic pipeline or, later, its air-freight arrangements could be brought to bear on the MAM caseload, and no forum empowered to authorise such a transfer had anyone proposed it. Each agency optimised within its own supply chain because each agency's supply chain was the only thing it had authority and funding to optimise. This is the point at which the redundancy proposition Alter and Raustiala (2018) identify in the regime complexity literature — that overlapping institutions supply flexibility and fallback capacity — fails in practice: two pipelines serving one caseload produced no substitution, because redundancy without an instrument to activate it is not resilience.

The subsequent correction confirms the diagnosis. UNICEF's 2024 appeal carried US\$11.5 million for air freight to secure therapeutic supply for approximately 107,000 severely wasted children — a competent, expensive and rapidly executed solution reached entirely within one agency's supply chain, for one half of the continuum.

The concurrent food-security position compounds the picture. UNICEF reporting for the same period records that at least 3 million people, 91 per cent of the 3.3 million targeted by the national response plan, did not receive the assistance they needed, with 2.5 million receiving only partial aid and 500,000 none, as the food security sector reduced rations and duration of aid. Household food assistance and MAM treatment contracted simultaneously, in the same populations, with no coordinated adjustment between them and no body constituted to make one.

Changes over the phase. Before the political disruption the evidence shows recurring and functioning collaboration among the agencies and government institutions, with joint work where funding permitted. After July 2023 the environment deteriorated sharply: access and supply chains were disrupted, funding uncertainty increased, and relations

between national authorities and international actors became more difficult. The asymmetry between the two sectors' coordination arrangements now told: food-security coordination ran through a humanitarian cluster and continued to function in its own terms, while nutrition coordination ran through a national government system whose relationship with international actors had just changed. Coordination became increasingly dependent on each organisation's ability to adapt to constraints outside the coordination architecture, and the fourth quarter of 2023 is where that dependence produced a measurable consequence.

Coordination pattern. A coordination arrangement that functioned adequately under normal conditions and had no capacity to redistribute risk under shock. Where joint funding existed, complementarity was achieved; where it did not, each agency optimised within its own programme space. The SAM/MAM division — a clinical continuum split between two agencies without a joint contingency mechanism — converted a common external shock into an asymmetric programmatic failure falling on the specific caseload whose supply chain happened to be exposed.

common supply shock → each agency optimises within its own pipeline → UNICEF holds pre-positioned therapeutic stock, WFP does not → asymmetric failure across a single clinical continuum

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

A coordination failure is additionally established at the SAM/MAM interface in the fourth quarter of 2023, on the evidence set out below; the deficit is the primary classification for the phase and the failure is confined to that interface.

The formal expectation is stated in the roadmap: a single treatment coverage target for wasted children as a category, and an explicit undertaking to strengthen supply chain management to ensure timely availability of supplies for the management of child wasting at facility level. The coordination weakness is identifiable and antecedent: that commitment was made for the continuum as a whole while delivery ran through two agencies' separate supply chains, with no joint contingency arrangement and no responsibility allocated for the relationship between them — a configuration documented in the planning phase before the shock occurred. The consequential negative outcome is documented and quantified: 156,756 children with moderate acute malnutrition untreated in a single quarter, with supply shortages in 90 per cent of care centres, in a caseload

whose untreated progression is into severe acute malnutrition. The causal link is established by the asymmetry set out above: what differed between the two halves was not the shock, which was identical, but the arrangement through which each was supplied. The finding does not establish that coordination weakness caused the supply disruption, which was caused by border closures and regional restrictions; it establishes that the coordination arrangement determined how the disruption was distributed, and that the distribution was consequential. And it does not extend beyond the SAM/MAM interface: the wider shortfall in food assistance in the same period was driven by funding and access constraints affecting the sector as a whole, and no comparable causal chain from coordination weakness to that outcome is established.

Phase Four — Evaluation and institutional learning

Formal expectation. The evaluation and learning system should identify coordination problems, assess their causes, feed lessons into subsequent planning and produce changes in programming or institutional arrangements. The phase asks whether the coordination problem was corrected, reproduced or left unresolved, treating persistence after identification and attempted correction as the stronger evidence of a structurally grounded weakness. Niger's long window makes this test unusually informative, because it permits observation of a full cycle from problem to evaluation to subsequent planning.

Observed practice. The evidence demonstrates substantial institutional recognition of operational and coordination problems.

The independent WFP evaluation identified weaknesses involving strategic coherence, integration, partnerships, communication, data sharing, funding, supply chains and adaptation, and recommended improvements in programme integration, partnership complementarity, evidence generation, funding diversification and supply-chain management. These problems were neither invisible nor unrecognised: they were documented through formal evaluation and translated into recommendations, and the list includes precisely the elements — integration, partnership complementarity, supply-chain management — whose absence produced the Q4 2023 outcome.

Institutional adaptation also continued. UNICEF worked with government nutrition institutions through 2024 despite the altered political environment, and nutrition governance mechanisms continued to operate under substantially more difficult

conditions. UNICEF's 2024 appeal incorporated the lessons of the supply disruption directly, budgeting US\$11.5 million for air freight to secure therapeutic supply routes and adding preventive small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements for 115,000 children aged 6–23 months at a cost of US\$2.3 million.

The significance of that adaptation for this phase lies in what it did and did not address. The air-freight solution secured UNICEF's own supply chain for the SAM caseload. The preventive supplementation addressed upstream determinants of wasting within UNICEF's own programme. Both are intelligent responses to the previous year's experience, executed quickly and at material cost. Neither established a joint contingency arrangement across the SAM/MAM division, and no instrument in the 2024 planning cycle assigned responsibility for the interface at which the previous year's failure had occurred. The correction was real, competently designed, and executed entirely within one agency's programme space — which is the same shape as the problem it was correcting.

Changes over the phase. The record shows problems identified, recommendations issued and practices adapted, alongside structural constraints — funding, access, supply chains, the changed political environment — that limited the extent to which weaknesses could be resolved. Recurrence should not automatically be read as evaluation failure: in several instances the evidence indicates that organisations recognised the problem and lacked the institutional or material capacity to remove its underlying cause.

Coordination pattern. The coordination weakness was identified, correction was attempted within agency programme space, and the weakness persisted in the form in which it had produced a consequential outcome. Learning occurred, within the specialised architecture, and the interface that failed was not the object of it.

failure identified and its causes correctly diagnosed → correction designed within the boundary of one agency's resources → air freight secures the severe caseload, preventive supplementation addresses upstream determinants → the unassigned interface enters the 2024 cycle unchanged

Coordination verdict: Coordination deficit.

The evaluation function performed adequately: the problems were identified, documented and recommended against. The coordination problem nevertheless persisted after identification and after correction was attempted, and the specific arrangement that

produced a documented failure in the fourth quarter of 2023 — the unassigned SAM/MAM interface — was unchanged at the end of the window. A weakness that survives identification and attempted correction is a sustained and material weakness in the functioning of an intended arrangement.

6.5 Country-level application of H1–H4

H1 — The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis

Verdict: Partially supported.

Niger contains several substantive interfaces between the mandates of the three agencies: food security and nutrition, food assistance and nutrition, agriculture and livelihoods and nutrition, resilience and nutrition, prevention and treatment, and the SAM/MAM division within treatment.

The existence of these interfaces created potential for ambiguity. WFP's role was particularly broad, encompassing food assistance, food security, resilience, social protection and nutrition-related activities, while FAO's agricultural and livelihood work also had implications for nutrition.

The agencies nevertheless developed joint activities and complementary programming where mechanisms were arranged, as the jointly hosted 2020 Maradi mission and the Diffa joint programme demonstrate.

The evidence does not establish mandate overlap producing systematic coordination failure, nor ambiguity in the mandates themselves. The SAM/MAM division was clear in operational practice, while the relationship between the two caseloads and their supply chains remained unallocated. A division of labour allocates tasks; it does not thereby allocate the relationship between tasks, and where that relationship is a clinical continuum running through the same children in the same facilities, leaving it unallocated is a structural vulnerability that no amount of mandate clarity addresses.

H1 is therefore partially supported. The ambiguity variant is not supported: no contest over the mandates is documented, and the SAM/MAM division was clear in operational practice. The unallocated interface variant is supported on the strength of the descriptive evidence and of the Q4 2023 sequence, in which a common shock met two differently positioned pipelines with no mechanism between them. Niger does not supply the within-case comparison across interfaces that the variant's critical link ideally requires, and the

finding accordingly rests on the demonstrated absence of any assigned mechanism together with the observed consequence when the interface was crossed, rather than on variation in assignment within the case.

clear mandates with substantively overlapping effects, and a clearly divided but unbridged wasting continuum → relationships between mandates unallocated → management occurs only where specifically arranged → incomplete integration, and failure at the interface when a shock exposed the absence of contingency

H2 — The Funding Structure Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

The hypothesis requires evidence linking funding conditions to organisational constraints, those constraints to agency behaviour, and that behaviour to a coordination outcome. Niger supplies the sequence, and it supplies it in both directions.

The organisational constraint is stated in the evaluative record rather than inferred from coverage figures. WFP's country strategic plan evaluation found that limited flexible funding constrained its ability to implement the plan in an agile manner, and that funding limitations affected both the scale and the timeliness of assistance. UNICEF's own reporting records securing roughly a third of the nutrition supply needs it had identified for a single quarter.

Agency behaviour is documented on both sides of the mechanism. Where joint funding was available, WFP and UNICEF operated in the same areas, targeted the same beneficiaries and delivered complementary assistance. Where funding was restricted and unpredictable, each agency's capacity to sustain integrated and adaptive programming contracted to what it could finance within its own programme.

The coordination outcome is the deficit recorded across the planning, implementation and learning phases, and the failure at the SAM/MAM interface in the fourth quarter of 2023 — and the funding structure is what connects the two. Three properties of that structure did the work. Short funding horizons constrained the ability to maintain resources and contingency capacity beyond immediate programme requirements. Earmarking and agency-specific financing limited the scope for reallocating resources across programme boundaries. Agency-specific financing meant that when UNICEF found a solution to the supply crisis, at US\$11.5 million for air freight, that solution was necessarily confined to

its own half of the wasting continuum, because no financial instrument existed through which it could have covered the other half. The claim is therefore not that scarcity caused the failure. It is that the structure of the available money determined the boundary within which any solution could be found, and that boundary ran directly through the caseload. The absence of a country-based pooled fund matters here rather than as background. The available pooled funding did not provide a standing country-level instrument for reallocating resources across the SAM/MAM boundary.

Three limits bound the finding. Deliberate competition for programme space is not evidenced and none is claimed; the pathway supported is constraint. The confidence attached to the assessment is calibrated to the WFP evidence, which is the most complete of the three. And FAO's financing in Niger is documented only at corporate level, so whether its own funding conditions shaped its coordination behaviour cannot be determined; that component is untested. The verdict rests on the UNICEF and WFP evidence, where the constraint demonstrably determined the boundary of possible response and the countervailing case — integration achieved wherever joint funding existed — confirms the mechanism operating in reverse.

funding structure → adaptive capacity confined within each agency's own programme → no cross-agency contingency possible → asymmetric failure when a common shock exposed one agency's supply chain

H3 — The State Capacity Hypothesis

Verdict: Partially supported.

State capacity had a differentiated effect across the window, and Niger's contribution to H3 is to show that the operative variable is institutional authority and its relationship with international actors rather than administrative strength.

Before July 2023, government institutions provided an important basis for coordination. Nutrition coordination was government-led and integrated with the health system at sub-national level, and the agencies worked through national and technical structures. This placed a national institution at the head of one of the two sectors — an arrangement that supplied authority the humanitarian system could not generate for itself.

The change of government of 26 July 2023 altered that relationship. The WFP evaluation identifies the deterioration in dialogue between national authorities and international

humanitarian actors as a constraint on planning and operational alignment, and the altered political environment contributed to border closures, supply disruption and changed operating conditions. The absence of government endorsement affected the formal 2024 planning process.

The asymmetry between the two sectors' coordination arrangements becomes consequential here. Because nutrition coordination was government-led while food-security coordination ran through a humanitarian cluster, a disruption to the standing of national authorities did not affect the two sectors equally. The sector whose coordination ran through the national counterpart was also the sector whose supply chain failed, and both dependencies were disturbed by the same event, though the evidence does not establish that the change in authority caused the supply failure directly.

The state did not cease to function as a coordination actor. Nutrition institutions continued to operate and UNICEF continued engagement with national structures through 2024, and the Cadre Harmonisé continued to be produced. The relevant mechanism is therefore not weak state capacity producing coordination failure, but:

changing state authority and its relationship with international actors → asymmetric effect on sectors coordinated through national rather than humanitarian structures → altered capacity to arbitrate and align planning → altered agency interaction, with sector-level coordination surviving where it was institutionally embedded beyond the national relationship

The effect was strongest after July 2023 and did not eliminate coordination mechanisms. H3 is partially supported.

H4 — The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis

Verdict: Supported.

Crisis pressure was high and recurrent throughout the window. Food insecurity, acute malnutrition, insecurity, displacement and climatic shocks created continuous demand for rapid humanitarian action, and the intensity of these pressures increased the need for coordination while reducing the margin for delay or duplication. The 2023 political crisis intensified this further by affecting access, supply chains, planning and relations with national authorities.

Interaction with the other mechanisms is documented at each point. With funding structure: the chronic and seasonally recurrent character of the crisis meant that constrained, short-horizon resources were continuously committed against immediate need, which is precisely what prevents the accumulation of the reserves and contingency capacity that would have permitted substitution when a supply chain failed. With state capacity: the July 2023 disruption was simultaneously a state-capacity event and an intensification of the crisis, and the two are not separable in this case. With interface structure: the Q4 2023 failure occurred at the precise moment when supply, funding, access and political pressures peaked together, in a system with no mechanism to redistribute across the SAM/MAM division.

Of the three pathways specified in Chapter Two, the evidence supports strategic incoherence rather than operational convergence, and the fourth quarter of 2023 shows it at its sharpest. Neither agency moved into the other's function: UNICEF did not assume the moderate caseload when WFP could not supply it, and WFP did not draw on UNICEF's pipeline. Each instead retreated further into its own programme, and the corrections that followed — air freight for the severe caseload, preventive supplementation within UNICEF's own portfolio — were designed and financed entirely within one agency's boundary. Pressure produced not two agencies doing the same thing but two agencies doing their own things more exclusively, which is divergence in the form the framework specifies. Architectural volatility is not evidenced: the coordination structures themselves were unchanged across the window, and what changed was the standing of the national counterpart on which one of them depended.

recurrent and intensifying crisis pressure → constrained resources continuously committed against immediate need → no contingency capacity accumulated → simultaneous peak of supply, funding, access and political constraint → the unbridged interface converts a common shock into an asymmetric failure

Crisis intensity does not independently explain the coordination outcomes, and the hypothesis does not claim it should. Assessment systems continued under severe pressure, joint programming remained possible, and evaluation and learning mechanisms continued. The most severe implementation problems arose where crisis pressure interacted with funding limitations, supply disruption and institutional change, which is amplification with documented interaction.

Case causal synthesis

Niger does not support a model in which one mechanism independently explains coordination outcomes. H1, partially supported, supplied the structural vulnerability: a clinical continuum delivered through two agencies with no assigned mechanism and no joint contingency arrangement. H2, supported, determined the boundary within which any solution could be found, by confining each agency's resources and adaptive capacity to its own programme. H3, partially supported, governed the capacity of national institutions to coordinate and arbitrate, with the July 2023 change affecting the government-led nutrition sector more directly than the cluster-coordinated food-security sector. H4, supported, prevented the accumulation of contingency capacity and brought the constraints into simultaneous operation.

Two components remain untested and are not absorbed into the account. Whether FAO's food-security and livelihoods programming was integrated with the nutrition response or ran as a parallel track cannot be determined on the available record, and FAO's financing in Niger is documented only at corporate level. The synthesis therefore describes the UNICEF–WFP relationship, which is where the failure occurred and where the evidence is complete.

unbridged wasting continuum + funding confined within agency boundaries + disrupted institutional authority falling asymmetrically on the nutrition sector + recurrent crisis preventing contingency accumulation → a common supply shock produces asymmetric programmatic failure, with 156,756 MAM children untreated while SAM treatment continued

6.6 Country-level conclusion.

Niger is the one case in which an unallocated interface produced a demonstrable coordination failure, falling on moderately malnourished children when a common shock hit two separate pipelines. The evidence provisionally suggests that the weakness is architectural, while its conversion into failure was conditional on funding constraint, political disruption and supply shock coinciding.

Chronic food insecurity, driven by conflict and insecurity, recurrent drought, disrupted agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, high food prices and displacement, coexisted with a decade of crisis-level wasting. The causes of that wasting extended to disease, inadequate

diets and limited access to health, water and sanitation. The change of government in July 2023, followed by sanctions and border closures, disrupted supply routes and altered the relationship between national authorities and international actors.

The agencies' responses mapped onto these drivers. FAO worked on agricultural production, livelihoods, resilience and early warning through the Cadre Harmonisé. WFP combined food and cash assistance with resilience, school feeding, social protection, logistics and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition through specialised nutritious foods. UNICEF led treatment of severe acute malnutrition, nutrition surveillance and community-based nutrition, and supported government-led nutrition institutions. The national roadmap under the Global Action Plan treated the wasting continuum as a single target and committed to securing supplies for it, but allocated responsibility to no agency. In practice the two halves were treated through separate UNICEF and WFP pipelines, for children presenting at the same facilities. Across the four phases, the coordination outcome runs from no problem in analysis to the study's clearest consequential failure in implementation.

CHAPTER SEVEN. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to explain why coordination between UNICEF, WFP and FAO so often falls short in food and nutrition crises, even though the three agencies have complementary mandates and operate within an elaborate coordination architecture. It asked one main question: how do UNICEF, WFP and FAO coordinate responsibilities and interfaces in food and nutrition crises, and under what conditions does coordination break down? It also asked a core sub-question: are coordination failures systemic properties of the three-agency architecture, or context-specific outcomes shaped by the political and operational conditions of each crisis?

To answer these questions, the thesis developed a framework on three levels. At the macro level, it described a governance system without hierarchy, made up of autonomous organisations whose division of labour allocates responsibilities without allocating the relationships between them. From this it derived the central concept of the unallocated interface: a point where two clearly defined mandates meet, and where no body is responsible for the relationship across it.

At the meso level, it identified the mechanisms that decide whether such an interface is managed. These are the form of coordination bodies, the difference between obligatory and discretionary participation, the role of financing instruments, and an evaluation system organised by agency.

At the micro level, it translated this framework into four hypotheses concerning mandate and interface allocation, funding structure, state capacity and crisis intensity.

The research design tested these propositions in three cases chosen for maximum variation. Ukraine is a capable state facing a sudden-onset crisis with abundant and flexible funding. Yemen is a protracted conflict with fragmented authority and constrained, earmarked funding. Niger is a weaker but functioning state facing chronic crisis, with a sharp change of government in July 2023. Each case was traced through the same four phases of response, measured against its own formal baseline, classified using the same five coordination verdicts, and assessed against the same four hypotheses. Because no contextual condition is shared across the three cases, a problem that appears in all of them is unlikely to be explained by context and more likely to belong to the architecture itself. A problem that appears only under certain conditions points to context.

7.1 The three crises: drivers and responses

In Ukraine, the full-scale invasion cut household access to food through displacement, lost income, damaged infrastructure and disrupted markets, while national food supply held up. In rural areas, higher production costs, contaminated land and damaged assets forced many households to reduce or abandon farming. Child nutrition suffered mainly through poorer diets and disrupted feeding practices, including low breastfeeding and heavy reliance on infant formula, especially among displaced families. Acute wasting remained low.

In Yemen, protracted conflict, economic collapse, currency depreciation, high food prices and the breakdown of public health, water and sanitation services produced severe food insecurity and rising acute malnutrition in the same populations. Fragmented territorial authority and severe access restrictions made every stage of the response harder.

In Niger, conflict, recurrent drought, disrupted livelihoods, high prices and displacement sustained chronic food insecurity. Disease, inadequate diets and weak health, water and sanitation services kept wasting at crisis levels for a decade. The change of government in 2023, followed by sanctions and border closures, added a political shock to these long-standing pressures.

In each case the agencies responded according to their mandates, and the division of labour was clear everywhere. FAO worked upstream, protecting agricultural production and rural livelihoods and contributing to early warning and food-security analysis. WFP worked on immediate food access through food, cash and vouchers, and in Yemen and Niger it also treated moderate acute malnutrition with specialised nutritious foods. UNICEF worked on child nutrition: treatment of severe acute malnutrition where wasting was widespread, and infant feeding and access to services where it was not. Each agency's response was substantial and, within its own sector, generally competent. What varied across the cases, and what this thesis set out to explain, was how well the relationships between these responses were managed.

7.2 Comparing coordination outcomes across the four phases

Table 7.1 sets out the coordination outcome in each phase of the three responses. The verdicts follow the thesis's five categories:

- **No coordination problem established:** the evidence shows that coordination worked.
- **Coordination gap:** no arrangement existed at an interface where one was needed.
- **Translation failure:** a formal commitment was not put into practice.
- **Coordination deficit:** an intended arrangement worked persistently and materially badly.
- **Coordination failure:** a coordination weakness is linked through an established causal chain to a documented harmful outcome.

Table 7.1 – Coordination outcomes by phase

Phase	Ukraine	Yemen	Niger
Needs assessment	Coordination gap	No coordination problem	No coordination problem
Response planning	Coordination gap	Coordination deficit	Translation failure
Implementation	Coordination deficit	Translation failure (amounting to a deficit)	Coordination deficit, with a coordination failure at the SAM/MAM interface
Evaluation and learning	Coordination deficit	Coordination deficit	Coordination deficit

Needs assessment. The first phase provides the clearest comparison available in the design, because it is the only phase in which some cases had an assigned, protocol-governed mechanism at the interface and one case did not. In Yemen the IPC brought FAO's food-security monitoring, WFP's market and vulnerability data and UNICEF's nutrition and mortality data into a single classification of severity. That classification continued for six years through funding collapse, truce and worsening access. In Niger the Cadre Harmonisé and the acute-malnutrition classification continued to produce a shared evidence base through the change of government. In both cases, participation was governed by protocol rather than left to each agency's judgement, and the outputs belonged to the process rather than to any single agency. Ukraine had no IPC analysis. Its food-security evidence was built rapidly and was widely respected, but the nutrition requirement entered the appeal on an estimate, and nothing required the two to be compared or reconciled. It is the only case with a gap at this phase. The result matches the framework's expectation that obligatory mechanisms hold where discretionary ones do not. It also matters for the rest of the analysis: because the agencies demonstrably

could and did work together at the analytical level in Yemen and Niger, later weaknesses cannot be explained by incapacity or unwillingness to cooperate.

Response planning. In all three cases, coordination weakened as the response moved from analysis into planning. Planning was organised by sector, each agency planned to its own caseload, and no body had authority to take decisions across the boundary between food security and nutrition. The verdicts differ because the formal commitments differed. In Ukraine no cross-sector planning arrangement had been created, so the weakness is a gap. In Yemen successive plans committed ever more explicitly to integration while the capacity to act on those commitments shrank, and the intended arrangement worked persistently badly, which is a deficit. In Niger the national roadmap committed to securing supplies for the whole wasting continuum, but this commitment never entered any plan as a joint contingency arrangement, which is a translation failure. Joint planning did occur where it was specifically set up and funded, most clearly in Diffa.

Implementation. This phase shows what happens when something crosses an unassigned interface. In Ukraine, the nutrition cluster, the only structure holding the nutrition side of the interface, was closed in October 2022 on reasoning drawn from national food availability rather than child nutritional need. The one joint FAO–WFP programme fell short of its own objectives. In Yemen, WFP's pause in general food distributions in December 2023 was answered by a mitigation plan within the food-security cluster on one side and a unilateral revision of UNICEF's nutrition appeal on the other, with no joint review between the two (UNICEF, 2024b). Even within the wasting continuum, UNICEF and WFP were technically aligned but ran separate supply chains and incentive systems. In Niger, border closures cut supplies to both UNICEF and WFP in late 2023. UNICEF's therapeutic stock had already arrived, so severely malnourished children continued to be treated. WFP's stock had not, and 156,756 moderately malnourished children in the same centres went without treatment. This is the only coordination failure established in the thesis, and it meets all three required conditions: a formal expectation, an antecedent coordination weakness, and a documented harmful outcome causally linked to that weakness. Because the shock was common to both agencies and the outcome differed between them, the difference can be traced to the arrangement between them rather than to the shock itself. In Ukraine and Yemen, by contrast, no harmful outcome can be firmly attributed to the coordination weakness, and failure is therefore not claimed.

Evaluation and learning. This phase returned a coordination deficit in every case, and it carries particular weight, because a weakness that survives identification and attempted correction is a sign of a structural cause rather than poor conduct. In Ukraine three evaluations, one per agency, identified coordination problems within their own frames. None examined the link between food security and nutrition, and the closure of the nutrition cluster was reviewed and endorsed. In Yemen the weakness was recognised in plans, in WFP's evaluation and in pooled-fund allocations for integrated programmes, but the sectoral architecture did not change. In Niger, UNICEF's response to the supply crisis, air freight and preventive supplementation, secured its own caseload competently, while the interface between the severe and moderate caseloads entered the next year unchanged. The Ukraine window was short, and the absence of learning there is interpreted with care. The pattern is nonetheless the same across all three cases: the system could see that coordination was weak, but it had no place from which to see or repair the relationships between agencies.

Taken together, the phases show a consistent shape. Coordination is strongest in shared analysis where a standing mechanism exists, weaker in planning, weakest in implementation when something crosses an unassigned boundary, and uncorrected in learning. The severity differs across the cases, rising from gaps and deficits in Ukraine, to persistent deficits in Yemen, to a consequential failure in Niger, but the location of the weakness is the same in all three.

7.3 The shape of coordination: four descriptive dimensions

The dependent variable of the thesis is coordination outcome, described along four dimensions: role delineation, duplication avoidance, joint programming coherence and strategic alignment. Table 7.2 summarises each case along these dimensions. The purpose is to make visible the pattern in which formal delineation is strong while operational coherence is weak, which is the divergence between formal and operational governance that the thesis examines.

Table 7.2 – Coordination outcome along four descriptive dimensions

Dimension	Ukraine	Yemen	Niger
Role delineation	Strong: clear and uncontested roles	Strong: clear and uncontested roles	Strong: clear SAM/MAM division in practice
Duplication avoidance	Largely avoided: cash values aligned across agencies	Partial: separate supply chains and incentive systems for one continuum	Partial: separate supply chains and procurement for the same facilities
Joint programming coherence	Weak: one joint programme, which underperformed; none across food and nutrition	Weak: joint work limited to small, separately funded projects	Weak outside specifically funded joint work, such as Diffa
Strategic alignment	Strong within food security, weak across food and nutrition	Weak: stated integration rose while practice stayed sectoral	Weak: each agency planned and corrected within its own programme

The table shows the same pattern in all three cases. Roles were clearly divided and no agency contested another's responsibilities. Duplication in the sense of two agencies competing for the same beneficiaries was not documented anywhere. What appeared instead, in Yemen and Niger, was separate operational infrastructure serving a single clinical continuum. Joint programming and strategic alignment were weak in every case, except where a specific arrangement was created and funded. Clear mandates therefore produced clean delineation without producing coherence.

7.4 Comparing the hypotheses

Table 7.3 brings together the hypothesis verdicts, including the variant of H1 and the pathway of H4 supported in each case.

Table 7.3 – Hypothesis verdicts across cases

Hypothesis	Ukraine	Yemen	Niger	Cross-case reading
Mandate and Interface Allocation (H1)	Supported (unallocated interface)	Partially supported (unallocated interface)	Partially supported (unallocated interface)	The ambiguity variant is not supported in any case; the unallocated-interface variant is supported in all three
Funding Structure (H2)	Not supported	Supported (rigidity)	Supported (rigidity)	Conditional: rigidity mattered where it confined adaptation; competition was not observed anywhere
State Capacity (H3)	Supported	Supported	Partially supported	Conditional: state authority shaped coordination in every case, in different directions
Crisis Intensity (H4)	Supported (architectural volatility)	Supported (strategic incoherence)	Supported (strategic incoherence)	Recurrent amplifier, through different pathways; operational convergence not established in any case

The Mandate and Interface Allocation Hypothesis (H1). The framework set two accounts of the MAM boundary and of the wider division of labour against each other.

The first, drawn from the regime complexity literature, expects overlapping or ambiguous mandates to produce contestation: disputes over responsibility, competing caseload claims and parallel programmes pursuing the same beneficiaries. The second, the unallocated-interface account, expects silence: competent parallel operation, interrupted by difficulty when something crosses a boundary that no one holds.

The first account is not supported in any of the three cases. No agency contested another's role, no caseload was fought over, and no competitive programming is documented, even at the MAM boundary where both UNICEF and WFP hold legitimate claims. Because this account fails under every configuration of state authority, crisis type and funding examined here, its disconfirmation is stronger than a failure in a single setting would be. It is reported here as a finding in its own right. The absence of recorded disputes at the MAM boundary is also consistent with the framework's expectation that, where one agency leads the nutrition venue and the other holds part of the caseload within it, the boundary produces silence rather than argument.

The second account is supported in all three cases, and each case supports it in a different way. Ukraine offers the clearest test, because one interface lost its coordinating structure while other conditions stayed the same, and coordination at that interface stopped. Where structures remained, the agencies collaborated. Yemen shows the same logic across interfaces: the agencies worked together where the IPC assigned the relationship and separately everywhere else. Niger shows the consequence when an unassigned interface meets a shock. Niger does not offer a within-case comparison across interfaces, which is why its verdict, like Yemen's, is partially supported. Yemen's verdict also reflects the fact that other supported mechanisms operate alongside the unallocated interface there.

The three properties that the framework attributed to the unallocated interface can now be checked against all three cases.

- **Mandate clarity does not remedy it.** In all three cases mandates were clear, and the relationships between them were still unmanaged.
- **Resources do not remedy it.** The weakness persisted in Ukraine under abundant and flexible funding, and in Yemen in the well-funded year of 2019 as in the worst years.

- **Actors organised around the allocation do not see it.** Every case returned a deficit in evaluation, and in Ukraine the weakness survived a full cycle of evaluation by all three agencies.

The Funding Structure Hypothesis (H2). The hypothesis distinguished a rigidity mechanism, in which earmarked resources confine each agency's adaptation to its own programme, from a competition alternative, in which agencies protect or expand their programme space against one another. Competition is not evidenced in any case and none is claimed. Rigidity explains coordination outcomes in Yemen and Niger. In Yemen, WFP's pause was a dated decision taken on stated funding grounds, and no instrument allowed a shortfall in food assistance to be compensated through expanded nutrition prevention. In Niger, UNICEF's solution to the supply crisis could only cover its own caseload, because no instrument existed through which it could have covered the other half of the continuum. In both cases the mechanism is confirmed in the reverse direction as well: every documented instance of cross-agency integration depended on a dedicated financing instrument. In Ukraine, abundant and flexible money helped agencies move faster within their mandates without creating links between them, and FAO, working under tight and late funding, still cooperated. H2 is therefore not supported there.

The comparison confirms the framework's claim that financing instruments act as assignment devices. The one joint programme in Ukraine was financed by the pooled fund rather than by either agency. In Yemen, integrated action appeared in multi-agency projects and in pooled-fund allocations directed at the food–nutrition interface. In Niger, integration appeared wherever joint funding existed. Flexible money accelerated each agency within its own space, while only an instrument constituted at the interface reached the interface. Across the cases, what mattered was how money was structured rather than how much arrived. Funding did not create the unallocated interface, but it set the limits within which any solution could be found.

The State Capacity Hypothesis (H3). National authority shaped coordination in every case, and the direction of its effect depended on the kind of authority involved. In Ukraine a capable state enabled delivery through national systems. It also supplied an argument for mobilising less international coordination, which slowed the activation of clusters, and a land-release regulation that became the binding constraint on the one joint

programme. In Yemen fragmented authority left no one able to settle priorities between agencies across territories, and humanitarian structures, which can convene but cannot allocate, could not fill that role. In Niger the framework's prediction of an asymmetric effect was tested directly. The change of government weighed more heavily on nutrition, which was coordinated through national structures, than on food security, which ran through a humanitarian cluster, although the evidence does not establish that the change of authority itself caused the supply failure. In all three cases, the state affected coordination within sectors and the constraints placed upon them. In none did it supply an owner for the relationship between sectors.

The Crisis Intensity Hypothesis (H4). Crisis pressure amplified existing weaknesses in all three cases, and in none did it cause them on its own. Operational convergence, in which agencies move into one another's functions under pressure, was not established in any case; the only documented movement across the boundary, UNICEF's 2024 inclusion of high-risk moderately wasted children in its Yemen appeal, was limited and unilateral. In Yemen and Niger pressure produced strategic incoherence. Each agency retreated further into its own programme, and corrections were designed and financed within one agency's boundary. In Ukraine pressure produced architectural volatility: a nutrition cluster was activated by reflex and without evidence, then closed, taking the interface mechanism with it. This third pathway was derived from the Ukraine case and is not independently corroborated within this study. Across the cases, crisis intensity determined how quickly and how harmfully the underlying weakness became visible.

FAO and the upstream interface. The framework treated FAO's position differently from that of its two partners, asking whether its food-security, livelihoods and resilience work was integrated with the nutrition response or ran as a parallel track. Across the cases, FAO's strongest link to nutrition ran through shared analysis in the IPC and the Cadre Harmonisé, where its early-warning role worked as intended. In programming, its connection to nutrition appeared only in discrete joint projects in Yemen. In Ukraine its joint work was with WFP on the food-security side, and in Niger the record does not allow the question to be answered, so it remains untested. The evidence therefore points towards disconnection more often than integration, consistent with the framework's expectation, although it does not settle the question in every case.

7.5 Answering the main research question

How do UNICEF, WFP and FAO coordinate responsibilities and interfaces in food and nutrition crises, and under what conditions does coordination break down?

The question has a descriptive and an explanatory dimension, and the comparison answers both.

Descriptively, the three agencies coordinate well within sectors and at the analytical level, and poorly at the operational boundaries between them. Their mandates are clear and their division of labour is accepted. They share evidence through standing classification systems, cooperate inside clusters, and build joint programmes when someone designs and pays for them. What the architecture does not do is assign responsibility for the relationships between their mandates. The relationships left unassigned are the link between household food assistance and child nutrition, the transition between moderate and severe wasting, and the connection between upstream livelihoods and downstream treatment. These are managed only where a specific mechanism is created for them. Where participation in such a mechanism is required by protocol, as in the IPC and the Cadre Harmonisé, coordination is durable and survives severe shocks. Where it depends on each agency deciding that joint work is worth the effort, coordination is fragile, and when it does not happen nothing records the omission.

Explanatorily, coordination breaks down when something changes at one of these unassigned interfaces. This can be a withdrawal of food assistance, the closure of a coordinating body, or a shock that falls unevenly on two supply chains. The agencies continue to act competently within their mandates, but no one is positioned to respond to the change across the boundary. Three conditions decide how serious the breakdown becomes. The first is rigid, earmarked funding, which prevents agencies from covering each other's gaps. The second is weak, fragmented or shifting state authority, which removes anyone able to settle priorities between agencies, or which binds humanitarian programming in ways the agencies cannot adjust. The third is high crisis pressure, which leaves no time or reserves to repair problems. Where these conditions are mild, as in Ukraine, the result is a gap or deficit. Where they are sustained, as in Yemen, the deficit becomes persistent. Where they peak together, as in Niger in late 2023, the result is a coordination failure with direct consequences for children.

7.6 Systemic or context-specific coordination?

The comparative design was built to separate mechanisms that recur across different configurations from mechanisms that appear only under particular conditions. The framework expected a division between the two: macro-level conditions present everywhere, and meso-level mechanisms varying from case to case. The evidence confirms this expectation. Table 7.4 summarises the result.

Table 7.4 – Systemic and context-specific

Mechanism	Present in	Reading
Unallocated interfaces between clear mandates	All three cases	Systemic
Durable coordination where participation is obligatory (IPC, Cadre Harmonisé)	Both cases where such a mechanism existed	Systemic
Evaluation organised by agency, leaving interfaces unexamined	All three cases	Systemic
Integration only where a dedicated instrument finances it	All three cases	Systemic
Funding rigidity confining adaptation	Yemen, Niger	Context-specific
Effect of state authority	All three cases, in different directions	Context-specific in form
Crisis intensity as amplifier	All three cases, through different pathways	Recurrent in presence, context-specific in pathway
Consequential coordination failure	Niger	Context-specific

The evidence therefore supports a two-part answer. The underlying weakness is systemic. The unallocated interface appeared in all three cases despite very different states, crises and funding conditions, and it appeared in the same places: at the operational boundaries between food security and nutrition, and in an evaluation system organised by agency. It persisted in Ukraine under the conditions most favourable to its resolution, and in Yemen it survived both the best-funded and the worst-funded years. The Global Action Plan on Child Wasting did not change this. Yemen and Niger both had costed roadmaps that set shared targets for the wasting continuum, but neither roadmap assigned the relationship between the agencies delivering it, and Niger's failure occurred after its roadmap was adopted. The strength of the analytical mechanisms, and the dependence of integration on dedicated financing, are systemic in the same sense.

The consequences of the weakness are context-specific. Whether an unallocated interface produces a gap, a persistent deficit or a harmful failure depends on the funding structure, the state's authority and the intensity of the crisis in each setting. These conditions do not create the weakness, but they decide whether it stays hidden or becomes visible and

costly. Coordination failure, in the strict sense used in this thesis, is therefore best understood as a systemic vulnerability activated by context.

7.7 Contributions

The main theoretical contribution is the concept of the unallocated interface and the condition it names, interstitial non-allocation. The coordination literature has mostly explained coordination problems through overlapping mandates and contested authority, as the regime complexity account does. The three cases show a second condition that exists under the same absence of hierarchy: clear mandates coexisting with relationships between them that no one is responsible for. The two conditions produce opposite evidence, contestation in one case and silence in the other, and they call for opposite remedies, since clarifying mandates resolves the first and leaves the second untouched. The cases consistently show the second. The thesis also adds to the meso level of analysis in three ways. It shows that coordination mechanisms with obligatory participation are far more resilient than discretionary ones. It shows that financing instruments can assign an interface as well as fund it. And it shows that an evaluation system organised by agency cannot, as constituted, see weaknesses that lie between agencies. Finally, it adds architectural volatility to the pathways through which crisis intensity affects coordination. The methodological contribution lies in the design. It records, for every interface, whether any body held responsibility for the relationship across it, and it fixes this in the baseline before observing practice. It classifies coordination outcomes by evidentiary threshold, so that coordination failure is reserved for cases where a harmful outcome is causally established, and imperfect coordination is not labelled failure by default. The asymmetry test used in Niger, which compares how a common shock affected differently arranged parts of the same response, offers a way to attribute outcomes to coordination arrangements rather than to external events.

The empirical contribution is a systematic, phase-by-phase comparison of three major responses, which documents where coordination worked as well as where it fell short. It shows that the agencies' shared analytical work was durable under severe pressure, and it identifies the specific boundaries at which coordination repeatedly weakened.

7.8 Implications for policy and practice

If the underlying weakness is the absence of an owner for the relationships between mandates, then the main remedy is to assign those relationships, and to do so before a crisis exposes them. Clarifying mandates further, or adding resources through existing channels, would leave the interfaces where they are. Several practical implications follow from the cases.

- **Give the wasting continuum a joint backup.** A joint contingency arrangement, such as shared stock, a substitution protocol or a body able to authorise transfers between UNICEF and WFP pipelines, would address the weakness exposed in Niger.
- **Link major food-assistance changes to nutrition review.** A standing trigger requiring a joint review of nutrition programming whenever food assistance is significantly cut or withdrawn would address the gap seen in Yemen.
- **Base decisions on nutrition coordination on nutrition evidence.** Decisions to keep or close nutrition coordination should rest on evidence about children's nutrition and feeding conditions, not on national food availability, as the Ukrainian experience shows.
- **Commission joint evaluations of the interfaces.** Evaluations of the relationships between agencies, commissioned jointly and scoped to the interfaces themselves, would allow weaknesses located between agencies to come into view.
- **Use pooled and joint funding deliberately for interface work.** Integration appeared wherever such money existed, and financing instruments are among the few tools able to assign an interface in a system without hierarchy.
- **Extend the obligatory model beyond analysis.** The durability of the IPC and the Cadre Harmonisé suggests that elements of their model, namely protocol, shared ownership of outputs and standing that does not depend on a single national relationship, could be applied to operational interfaces.

7.9 Limitations

The findings carry limits that follow from the design. They rest on three cases and on documentary evidence. The claim is one of analytical rather than statistical generalisation: the mechanisms explain the outcomes observed in these cases and are likely to operate

where similar conditions exist, but they cannot be assumed to apply to all food and nutrition crises. All three crises are high-visibility responses with rich documentation, and lower-visibility crises may behave differently or leave weaker records.

The framework itself imposes an important limit. An unallocated interface is, by its nature, invisible in ordinary operation and generates evidence only when something crosses it. The design is therefore better at finding unmanaged interfaces where a shock or withdrawal occurred than where none did, and the findings are more likely to understate than to overstate how common the condition is.

Several further limits apply to specific parts of the evidence.

- The Ukraine window is shorter than the others, so its evaluation and learning phase is less developed.
- In Yemen the same evaluators appear in several evaluations, so agreement between those sources is not fully independent.
- FAO's perspective and its country-level financing are less fully documented than those of its partners, which leaves some FAO components untested.
- The partner organisations through which most services are delivered were treated as evidence rather than examined as actors in their own right.
- Architectural volatility is derived from a single case and awaits confirmation elsewhere.

7.10 Directions for future research

The findings open several lines of inquiry. The unallocated-interface mechanism could be tested in more cases, particularly lower-visibility crises and refugee settings where UNHCR shares responsibility for nutrition and the configuration of the wasting continuum differs. The partner layer deserves direct study, since many interfaces are managed or left unmanaged inside the organisations that hold contracts from more than one agency at the same facility. The integration of FAO's upstream work with acute nutrition response needs better data, especially on whether the households FAO supports are the same households whose children UNICEF and WFP treat, as the Global Action Plan intends. Research could also follow whether new arrangements under the Global Action Plan, or reforms of pooled funding, begin to assign the relationships that the current architecture leaves open. The most direct test is the UNICEF–WFP "Joint Action

to Stop Wasting", a 2024–2026 transition from separate to unified wasting programming in crisis-affected countries (UNICEF and WFP, 2024). It is the first system-level attempt to assign the SAM/MAM interface, and whether it does so in practice lies beyond this study's window. Finally, the architectural volatility pathway should be tested in other sudden-onset crises, to establish whether reflexive activation and later withdrawal of coordination structures is a recurring pattern.

7.11 Final conclusion

UNICEF, WFP and FAO share a well-designed division of labour, and within that design each agency responds competently to the part of the crisis it owns. The weakness lies in the spaces between them, which the architecture leaves without an owner. Across three very different crises, those spaces were managed only where a mechanism was built for them, and elsewhere they stayed unmanaged until pressure exposed them, with the most serious consequences falling on children at the boundary between moderate and severe malnutrition. The central lesson of this thesis is that clear mandates are necessary but not sufficient. Effective coordination in food and nutrition crises also depends on assigning responsibility for the relationships between mandates, and on doing so before a crisis makes the cost of leaving them unassigned visible.

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