

Rapid Support Team (RST) Policy

For the ACT Alliance

Revised 05 January 2012

The ACT RST policy was originally approved by ACT International governance in August 2008. It replaced the "Coordination Assessment Team" (CAT) section of the "Rapid Response Policy: Rapid Response Fund and CATs" (April 2003). The 2012 revision represents an update of the 2008 document to take into account the change of name to ACT Alliance and to better consider policy related issues outlined in the RST Resource Manual. No substantive changes were made.

1. Introduction

The ACT Alliance Rapid Support Team (RST) was established in 2008. It replaced the “Coordination Assessment Team”, or CAT. The new name reflects more accurately the principal purpose of the ACT RST function, in emphasizing “rapid support” to ACT members in the emergency-affected country. “Coordination” and “assessment” are among the components of rapid support, along with other specific tasks which are covered in this policy. This policy replaces the CAT section of the “Rapid Response Policy: Rapid Response Fund and CATs” (April 2003).

2. Purpose

The purpose of the ACT Alliance Rapid Support Team (RST) shall be to support and assist members of the alliance, along with the ACT secretariat, in implementing a rapid, timely, gender-sensitive and effective emergency response in the initial weeks following an emergency.

The RST is one of the rapid response mechanisms available to members, and shall be coordinated and administered by the ACT secretariat.

ACT RSTs are intended to be for short-term duration to deal with the immediate emergency response, from one week up to three months maximum. In exceptional cases and especially in complex emergencies and mega disasters, if technical expertise is required it can be extended for longer period.

It is expected that an RST deployment will enable ACT members in the emergency-affected country to gain new strengths and improved capacities as a result of its own efforts and with the support provided by an RST.

3. Criteria and parameters for use

- i. The ACT RST shall not be operational, but will rather be deployed as a support to the ACT Alliance members implementing the emergency response. The RST serves as an extension of the ACT secretariat. RSTs must not displace local member initiative, competence or capacity in the emergency response and ownership of the response.
- ii. In principle, ACT RSTs for the most part shall be authorised following a request made by the member(s)/forum in the country affected by the emergency.
- iii. The ACT Alliance secretariat through a decision made by the general secretary and /or deputy general secretary may also initiate the idea of, and take a decision on an ACT RST through direct contact (and in close consultation) with the member(s) – e.g., if an ACT member has limited capacity, for large-scale emergencies, and/or in cases where it is felt that augmented professional expertise from the alliance may be required.
- iv. If an ACT forum exists in the country, the RST request should be endorsed and sent by the forum collectively. If a forum does not exist, the request should be endorsed by all members engaged in the emergency response.
- v. The RST request shall be made as soon as:
 - a. the members recognise that their present capacity requires augmentation in specific areas to deal effectively with the emergency; and

- b. Members agree that an RST can provide that expertise through rapid deployment.
- vi. Ideally an RST should be requested on day 1 or 2 following a rapid onset emergency and an indication can already be made in the ACT alert that will be sent to the ACT secretariat. In cases of slow onset or complex humanitarian emergencies, an RST should be requested as soon as the members recognize the need for RST expertise to help them more effectively plan and conduct the emergency response. The RST request, if accepted, will be authorised by the ACT secretariat on the day the request is received for rapid onset emergencies, or as soon as possible thereafter.

4. Roles and responsibilities of RST roster members

The ACT secretariat shall develop standard Terms of Reference (ToR) for each RST roster category; and update them to be relevant to a specific roster category. Specific ToRs and Key Result Areas (KRAs) for each deployment will be developed in consultation with the requesting members. The specific tasks of an RST mission will depend on the character of the emergency, and the needs relating to the response of the ACT members.

The final terms of reference and actions of the RST shall emphasise the following:

- Ownership of the response by the requesting members and building on local knowledge.
- Compliance with ACT Alliance policies and guidelines. Compliance with and promotion of humanitarian principles.
- Promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, in recognizing the different needs, capacities and contributions of women, men, girls and boys.
- Promotion of common approaches among members to information-exchange, coordination and implementation, with essential role played by the ACT forum.
- Participatory approaches with affected women and men, girls and boys in the affected populations.
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Team building with ACT members.
- Catalyst and facilitator role in supporting work of ACT members/forum
- Accountability to members and to affected women and men in the population.
- Do no harm approach.

The specific role(s) of RST roster members in an emergency shall be informed by the realities of the humanitarian response and the needs of the requesting members; inter alia to include:

- i. **Emergency assessment:** Assist ACT members in their rapid and detailed emergency assessments, leading to the preparation of operational plans and budgets by the members (comprising the emergency response, exit strategies, and transition to recovery and development). Encourage joint assessment, including establishment of common criteria for selection of affected populations and for intervention.
- ii. **Information dissemination:** Assist in providing updated information on the emergency situation as rapidly as possible. This will equally support rapid donor mobilisation of resources.
- iii. **ACT appeal:** Assist ACT members in preparing an ACT appeal funding proposal.
- iv. **Capacity:** Assess with ACT members their overall capacity to respond to the specific emergency, and propose strategies to fill gaps and strengthen the response as applicable. In addition, assess with members their specific capacity to carry out a gender assessment and to mainstream gender thoroughly in the emergency response.

- v. **Internal coordination:** Assess with ACT members extent of coordination in the country (among members in the country, members which may be arriving in the country, and within the ACT forum if established), including sectoral and geographical division of roles and responsibilities. As applicable, facilitate and support improved, sustainable ACT coordination mechanisms.
- vi. **External coordination:** Promote coordination between ACT members and other national and international NGOs, the United Nations and national and local authorities. Strengthen any coordination capacity gaps.
- vii. **Donor liaison:** Assist ACT members in liaising with field-based donors (such as ECHO, USAID, DfID and other funding agencies and interested governmental delegations) on possible funding support.
- viii. **Operational implementation:** Assist members in effective joint emergency implementation ensuring that the needs of vulnerable and marginalised people are adequately addressed. Encourage efficient use of all ACT resources and promote joint procurement where possible.
- ix. **Security:** Review with ACT members their security plans, and suggest common security procedures linked to UN and inter-agency in-country security plans.
- x. **Communications:** Augment, as appropriate, the local communication capacity of ACT members by providing liaison assistance with national and international media. Support facilitation of prompt information flow related to public awareness and fund raising for the emergency.
- xi. **Emergency-related visibility:** Develop with ACT members initiatives to increase the visibility of ACT's work in-country and abroad.
- xii. **Internal systems:** Assist ACT members in improving communications, financial systems, programme monitoring and reporting, including establishment of common frameworks and tools in accordance with ACT policies and guidelines.
- xiii. **Specialized technical expertise:** As appropriate, provide technical expertise to members implementing the emergency operation.

5. Skills development for RST members

To further develop and upgrade skills, RST members shall attend a mandatory training organised by the secretariat, ideally once every two years. The overall objective shall be to enhance the participants' understanding of ACT emergency response mechanisms as well as their ability to undertake support functions in ACT emergency response operations by contributing to internal and external coordination, according to ACT policies and guidelines for humanitarian interventions.

The secretariat shall ensure that lessons learnt including reports from RST deployments are made available to RST members.

A regularly updated RST manual shall be kept by the secretariat and made accessible to all roster members and ACT members. Among other methods the RST manual will be made available through the ACT Alliance website, and printed matter etc. The RST manual shall outline standard operating procedures and guidelines applicable to the RST roster.

6. Authorisation and deployment

The following are key steps for authorisation and deployment of an ACT RST:

Days 1-2:

- Immediately following the emergency, the ACT member(s) shall submit an alert to the ACT secretariat as per the ACT Alliance policy for alerts. If already known at the time the alert is sent to the secretariat, the need for an RST shall be indicated in the alert.
- If augmented expertise is required such as would be provided by an RST, the member(s) in the emergency-affected country should make a request to the ACT secretariat. The request for the RST should be sent by e-mail together with a filled in RST request form to the ACT Alliance regional programme officer responsible for the country in which the emergency has happened.

Days 1-3:

- When a request is received by the ACT secretariat it will be reviewed by the regional programme officer responsible for the country/region and the RST focal person at the secretariat. Where the RST request is for a specialised category such as communications or finance, the review of the request will include staff from those respective units of the secretariat.
 - Once an RST request has been approved the organisation administering the roster shall be informed immediately who shall immediately check availability with roster members and communicate to the secretariat. When selection is finalised confirmation with selected roster members is done.
 - For every deployment, the secretariat shall ensure that proper contracts have been signed and procedures are followed as outlined in the ACT RST manual.¹
 - The composition of an RST shall be tailored to meet the specific needs of the emergency situation. In principle, the team composition will always be gender and regionally balanced with at least one team member ideally coming from an ACT member organisation in the region. At least one team member should know how to conduct gender analysis and gender-sensitive emergency programming.

Days 3-30 (or less):

- Administrative preparations should be addressed as a matter of urgency (including visa, transport, and security arrangements) and the RST mission deployed as soon as possible after the initial request is received.
- In the course of the mission the ToRs for the RST may be modified with agreement on the part of the ACT members in the emergency-affected country, the RST team, and the ACT secretariat, following mutual agreement by all parties.
- A pre-departure briefing for all RST roster members should be organised by the ACT secretariat which will include the requesting member and forum representatives. A copy of a standard pre-departure briefing is accessible through the RST manual. Depending on the nature of the emergency and cost considerations, the general secretary and/or deputy general secretary will make a decision of whether the person to be deployed should pass through the ACT secretariat for a thorough briefing or not.

¹ <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines/act-response-mechanisms/requesting-rapid-support-team-assistance/RSTManual-30June09.pdf>

- The ACT secretariat shall support the requesting members to write clear terms of reference for any request made; and will facilitate that for every RST mission there will be clear terms of reference.

Day 37 (or less):

- Within one week of the completion of the RST mission, the person to be deployed shall submit his/her final report to the ACT secretariat. A debriefing shall follow including all the necessary procedures to be completed as spelt out in the RST manual.
- Upon completion of a mission, debriefing with all RST persons will be arranged to ensure organisational learning from the experiences with RST missions. A standard agenda for an RST debriefing will be used (as contained in the ACT RST manual)
- At the end of ACT RST deployment, the line manager of each ACT RST person shall complete an appraisal and clearance form to be submitted to the ACT secretariat.

7. RST roster management and administration

The overall management responsibility for the ACT RST roster and its implementation lies with the ACT secretariat. A secretariat staff will be nominated as a focal person for the RST. Due to capacity constraints, the ACT secretariat will outsource the administration of the RST roster to an experienced ACT member, via a call for proposals to all ACT members. In doing so, it enters into an agreement – a “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for administration and training of RST roster members” - with an ACT member who has expertise and technical capacity in administering an emergency roster. The MoU outlines the differentiated roles and responsibilities of both parties.

The ACT secretariat RST focal person, in cooperation with ACT management, shall ensure compliance with ACT RST procedures and processes to ensure that all proper documentation and contracts are signed after recruitment, before and during ACT RST deployment. The RST manual which provides greater detail of RST recruitment and deployment terms and conditions will be revised on a regular basis.

Please note that the ACT RST manual provides detailed guidance on each steps of the RST process from alert through to RST evaluation. It also provides the templates for the MoU, RST member contracts, etc.

8. Recruitment and composition of RST

Recruitment of ACT RST roster members shall be done through an alliance-wide letter from the deputy/general secretary calling for nominations for the various RST categories. All nominations must be made by an ACT member organisation. As a general rule, persons nominated to the ACT RST roster should be employed by ACT member organisations. Persons who are retired from, or related to but not in direct employment by, an ACT member organisation may also be recommended to the roster. The same guidelines for nomination and recruitment apply for such nominees.

The requirements for ACT member organisations nominations are as follows:

- a) Ability to release an RST member from his/her tasks in the organisation within a 24 – 72 hours notice; and
- b) Ability to second the RST member to the emergency response operation for a minimum period of two weeks to a maximum of three months.

All decisions on new recruitment to the roster will be made by the deputy/general secretary following a recommendation from the secretariat focal person based on an assessment of current needs.

The ACT RST roster shall comprise of people that represent the diversity within the alliance, in terms of geographic representation, language, and gender, etc. Categories for the roster shall be informed by the needs of the alliance.

The following requirement shall apply for all candidates to the ACT RST:

- a) Extensive experience from the ACT Alliance in emergency assessment and emergency response including knowledge of SPHERE, Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, IASC gender guidelines, Do No Harm, etc.
- b) Excellent knowledge of ACT policies, guidelines and procedures in humanitarian emergency response.
- c) Good communication skills and high cultural sensitivity
- d) Excellent command of the English language (written as well as spoken) is a minimum requirement; expertise in other official languages is an advantage.²
- e) A valid health certificate within the last two years.
- f) Flexibility and ability to respond to a request to respond to an emergency within 24 -72 hours notice.
- g) Availability for missions of minimum of two week up to maximum of three months duration.
- h) Availability to attend the compulsory ACT RST training/induction course every two years.

9. Confirmation of RST membership

The ACT RST roster membership shall only be valid on confirmation by the ACT secretariat through a signed letter from the ACT general secretary.

Upon receipt of the confirmation letter the candidate and the nominating organisation must sign and submit the following documents:

- i. Signature of the agreement on release and deployment of ACT RST persons between the ACT secretariat and the nominating member.
- ii. Signature of the framework agreement between the ACT secretariat and the ACT RST person and the ACT Alliance Code of Conduct for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption and abuse of power.

10. Responsibilities of nominating organisation

During deployment, as a general rule, the RST member's nominating organisation is responsible for the RST member's costs related to salary, national and social insurance and employment related taxes as relevant to their country.

In exceptional cases, where a nominating member cannot meet the salary obligations of their RST person, reimbursement must be prior-agreed with the secretariat. In such cases salary and salary-related costs (direct costs) paid by the nominating ACT member during deployment of an individual ACT RST person may

² English is the working language of the ACT secretariat and all appeals and reports must be submitted in English. In exceptional cases other language skills may be given priority depending on the capacity gap on the ground.

only be reimbursed to the organization based on documented agreement between the ACT secretariat and the organisation, and according to the guidelines for reimbursement of costs specified in the RST manual. In such cases, all costs directly related to the deployment of ACT RST persons shall be reimbursed at the end of the mission and these shall be covered by the appeal. When developing and issuing appeals, the ACT secretariat shall ensure requesting members include a budget line for such deployments.

11. Allowances

A daily sustenance allowance, approved by the ACT general secretary as contained in the ACT RST manual shall be paid for the time-period of the mission. The amount will be adjusted for major changes in the exchange rate at the discretion of the ACT general secretary. The sustenance allowance shall cover the cost of food and drinks and other local incidental costs as outlined in the RST manual. Details on administering the allowance shall be given in the ACT RST manual.

12. Travel insurance cover

All RST personnel will be covered by travel insurance. The secretariat focal person will inform the roster contracting organisation prior to all RST deployments. The roster contracting organisation will procure the insurance and will ensure that insurance is activated for each RST member deployed. Specific details of the insurance cover shall be outlined in the RST Resource Manual.

13. RST financing

The ACT RST is funded through the ACT Rapid Response Fund mechanism. The secretariat should ensure that funding for RSTs is included in the appeal for the applicable emergency to which the RST is deployed. The secretariat is responsible for maintaining a budget to cover: funding advances for the RST; RST costs which may not be fully covered by an appeal; equipment for an RST (e.g., satellite telephone, computer), and training-related costs. Funding should be solicited through an Appeal, along with funding for the Rapid Response Fund.