


Inter-Office Memorandum No. 077/2012
Field Office Memorandum No. 078/2012

To/à: All Representatives, Chiefs of Mission and Heads of Offices in the Field
All Directors of Bureaux and Divisions
All Chiefs of Sections and Heads of Units/Services at Headquarters

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Ref./références: ADM-01-01, EXT 02-03

Date/date: 16 August 2012

Title/titre: The IASC's Transformative Agenda and Implications for UNHCR

The IASC's Transformative Agenda and Implications for UNHCR

This IOM-FOM sets out key information on an important inter-agency initiative, the IASC's 'Transformative Agenda', which will affect the way UNHCR engages in complex emergencies¹ and major natural disasters, and also have an impact generally in on-going IDP operations where UNHCR leads clusters. The IOM-FOM summarises how UNHCR is implementing the Transformative Agenda, what Representatives and colleagues in the field need to be aware of and what they should take action on (last section). Key documents should be read and understood by the staff members involved in inter-agency coordination and collaboration.

Key messages for UNHCR Representatives and Senior Managers:

- The aim of the Transformative Agenda is to enhance leadership, accountability and coordination in complex, system-wide large-scale emergencies (so-called Level 3). It is the outcome of a review of humanitarian reform led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and a commitment by agencies to change and improve leadership, coordination and delivery in the collective response to emergencies. It has the commitment of the High Commissioner and other heads of agency in the IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee).
- The Transformative Agenda introduces new responsibilities for UNHCR with regard to deploying staff to complex large-scale emergencies (so-called Level 3) and how we exercise our function as a cluster lead agency in the Humanitarian Country Team and in relation to the Humanitarian Coordinator, who has additional decision-making powers for up to 3 months at the outset of such an emergency.

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¹ A complex emergency is defined by the IASC (Dec. 1994) as: "a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable break-down of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country program."

- Common approaches to coordinated assessment, planning and monitoring of performance in complex emergencies will require a significant strengthening of our interaction and coordination with all humanitarian actors on the ground.
- Representatives should all be familiar with the basic information on the Transformative Agenda in order to communicate and discuss these issues with other agency staff, NGOs; as well as donor representatives who have all taken a very strong interest to monitor that UNHCR and other UN agencies take serious steps to implement the Transformative Agenda within their operations.
- The introduction of the Transformative Agenda does not in any way change UNHCR's mandated responsibility for coordinating a multi-sectoral response to refugee needs, and where the cluster approach does not apply.
- However, UNHCR will need to ensure that it can demonstrate performance and leadership in coordinated processes at par with those introduced by the IASC, and a smooth interface must be found between refugee coordination mechanisms and the broader humanitarian response coordination led by the Humanitarian Coordinator.

What is the Transformative Agenda?

The 'Transformative Agenda' is a high-level commitment by agencies to change and improve the collective response to emergencies. It consists of a definition and procedures for a IASC system-wide 'Level 3' emergency, and a set of agreed actions to strengthen **leadership, coordination and mutual accountability** from the onset of any major crisis. It was adopted by the Principals of the IASC Standing Committee² at their annual meeting in Geneva on 13 December 2011 and the key components were agreed in April 2012. Implementation modalities and agreement on aspects relevant for other major emergencies are being developed at the working level of the IASC and are nearing completion.

The 'Transformative Agenda' is the outcome of an inter-agency review of humanitarian response, led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The review was triggered by lessons learned from the international response to the massive natural disasters in Haiti and Pakistan in 2010, and builds on the 2005 humanitarian reform which established the cluster approach and strengthened the Humanitarian Coordinator system.

The main aim is to ensure an enhanced and streamlined response to major emergencies, to be defined as system-wide Level 3 emergencies (L3). Criteria for L3 definition have been agreed, and include scale, urgency, complexity, national capacity, and reputational risk. Note that system-wide declaration of an L3

² The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving humanitarian UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross movement. The IASC was established in June 1992 in response to UN GA Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance. General Assembly Resolution 48/57 affirmed its role as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. The heads of agency meet at the Principals' level, while the IASC Working Group meets at Directors' level. Several Sub-Working Groups and Task Forces exist on various themes and more technical aspects of humanitarian policy and response. Participants include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, FAO, IOM, UNDP, OCHA, and NGO consortia (ICVA, InterAction, SCHR). UNHCR has seconded a senior staff member to head the IASC Secretariat, demonstrating its commitment to the IASC approach.

emergency does not preclude UNHCR or other agencies declaring and mobilizing for L3 or L2 emergencies at the individual agency level.

Attention in the IASC has now turned to strengthening joint mechanisms and approaches for better **accountability to affected populations**, and to inter-agency initiatives for **preparedness**.

The process is closely monitored by member states, particularly donor countries, whose representatives have high expectations of improved effectiveness and greater accountability in humanitarian response.

What are the key outcomes of the Transformative Agenda?

The IASC Principals – the Heads of all the main agencies (including NGO networks involved in Humanitarian action - agreed to a set of actions for L3 emergencies including:

- The activation procedures for a system-wide L3 emergency;
- A mechanism to deploy senior humanitarian leadership selected from a specially set up L3 Senior Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator Roster;
- Agreement to empower the HC with greater decision-making powers in the initial period (3 months) of an L3 emergency, while consensus in the HCT remains the preferred approach;
- Rapid review and strengthening of leadership capacities at various levels for both agency-specific and inter-agency roles;
- Rapid deployment of leaders and coordinators to ensure effective coordination of delivery (the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism) including sufficient cluster coordination capacity to fulfill the essential cluster tasks and functions;
- The development, by the HCT under the HC's leadership, of a high level strategic statement or plan at the outset of an L3 emergency, clarifying the collective results that the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identifying how clusters and organisations will contribute to them. The objectives established will inform the respective accountabilities of each agency, in relation to beneficiaries, partners, government and donors;
- Revised and updated guidance on the Cluster Approach to ensure more strategic establishment, management and deactivation of clusters and streamline the processes involved, in all categories of emergency where the cluster approach is being applied.

There are currently only two papers formally endorsed at the Principals level (on system-wide activation of an L3 emergency, and on the empowered leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator). A number of other operational guidance documents are at a more or less advanced stage of development and reflect overall agreement on key elements of the Transformative Agenda. These include strategic planning and monitoring, and revised guidance on the cluster approach. Key documents are outlined in the annex to this IOM-FOM and can be found on:

https://intranet.unhcr.org/intranet/unhcr/en/home/support_services/humanitarian_partnerships0/humanitarian_reform/iasc-transformative-agenda.html.

How will the Transformative Agenda be implemented by the key humanitarian actors (UN agencies, IFRC, NGOs)?

The Transformative Agenda can be considered as new impetus for humanitarian actors to work better together with a stronger commitment to accountability for collective results. While it focuses primarily on L3 humanitarian emergencies, there are on-going discussions in the IASC to identify those elements which bring most value to other emergency situations.

In the meantime, OCHA has already selected several countries where it will focus on improving its own coordination and information management role, and on strengthening partnerships with NGOs. These initiatives are taken under the auspices of the Transformative Agenda.

The IASC Principals are seeking a coherent approach to field implementation and, following a learning mission to South Sudan in early 2012, agreed to select some ongoing complex emergency operations (not corresponding to L3 criteria) to validate and strengthen relevant aspects of the Transformative Agenda for non-L3 emergency response. A mission to Chad is planned for September and at least one other location before end 2012 (tbc).

Operational agencies such as WFP and UNICEF (like UNHCR) have reviewed their own emergency capacities and procedures and are adjusting them where appropriate in order to be more prepared for L3 emergency response.

How will UNHCR implement the Transformative Agenda?

As a key operational agency and member of the HCT, as well as cluster lead agency in 3 key sectors /areas, UNHCR will implement the outcomes of the Transformative Agenda in L3 emergencies and where appropriate and agreed with other IASC agencies, in other emergency situations.

- 1) In IDP and complex emergencies where a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed and a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)³ established, the High Commissioner has committed UNHCR to full engagement at the Representative level in the HCT to play a meaningful role in the planning, priority-setting and coordination of collective results and to be part of a mutual accountability framework.
- 2) In a system-wide L3 emergency, the High Commissioner has committed to ensuring that UNHCR's leadership capacity is adequate to the task, both in discharging cluster lead responsibilities and in the overall management of UNHCR's operation as a key player in the humanitarian response. (see 6 below).
- 3) UNHCR has nominated colleagues for the new senior (D2 level) Humanitarian Coordinator roster for L3 emergencies.
- 4) UNHCR is working closely with OCHA and key partners in the IASC to ensure that the strategic systems elements (assessment, planning, monitoring) are practical and as far as possible compatible with existing agency and inter-agency tools and approaches. The centrally important feature is the strategic plan / statement, delineating the collective results to be achieved and clarifying accountabilities for those results. Inter-agency engagement is also important as the intention is to derive and apply some of these elements for other emergency situations. Once final, UNHCR teams in the field will be expected to participate in such inter-agency work.
- 5) UNHCR has actively shaped and will implement the new Cluster Coordination Reference module.

³ A Humanitarian Country Team differs from the UN Country Team in its Terms of Reference (humanitarian response) and in its membership (membership of UN humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross Movement and NGOs as equal partners). NGOs usually agree on 2-3 NGO heads to represent them. TOR of HCTs can be found at : <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-common-default&sb=77>

- 6) UNHCR has established a Senior Corporate Emergency Roster (SCER), comprising senior staff to strengthen the leadership of UNHCR operations in major emergencies. UNHCR has strengthened and consolidated its emergency leadership training (Senior Emergency Leadership Programme-SELP) and coordination training (Coordination and Leadership Learning Programme). Together, these initiatives will help UNHCR meet its commitments in having rapidly deployable, experienced and trained people for both IDP and refugee emergencies.
- 7) Work is ongoing to identify and prepare more senior cluster coordinators for L3 situations, and to ensure that cluster coordinators are supported by the requisite capacities for coordination, needs assessment, strategy formulation, planning, information management, performance assessment, monitoring, etc.
- 8) In parallel to the Transformative Agenda discussions, UNHCR has reviewed its own emergency response capacity, preparedness and recent performance, including its response to refugee emergencies. In April 2012, the High Commissioner issued **IOM/034-FOM 035/2012 "Guidance Notes on Strengthening UNHCR's Emergency Policy and Procedures"** to all UNHCR Staff at Headquarters and in the Field. These guidance papers go some way toward aligning UNHCR's policies and systems with inter-agency approaches.⁴

The papers cover: (i) emergency response activation and internal coordination; (ii) inter-agency partnerships and coordination in refugee emergencies; (iii) information management in emergencies; (iv) staffing for emergencies and transition to non-emergencies; (v) the refugee emergency appeals process; and (vi) resource allocation in emergencies.

The *Guidance Note on inter-agency partnerships in refugee emergencies* (no. ii) describes approaches and tools learnt and implemented at field level. While the cluster approach does not apply and the Transformative Agenda does not address refugee emergencies, UNHCR is committed to building a stronger and more effective interface between refugee coordination and the coordination of the broader humanitarian response. This ensures UNHCR delivers on its respective accountabilities for both refugees and IDPs. The inter-agency partnership paper provides guidance on achieving such an interface.

What next for UNHCR and the Transformative Agenda?

UNHCR considers that the operationalization of the Transformative Agenda will be successful and bring concrete results primarily through **strengthening field-level collaboration and strategic partnerships with operational partners** such as UNICEF, WFP and major NGO partners. DER, DESS, DPSM and DIP will continue to work closely together in identifying with partners, particularly other cluster lead agencies, how closely we can align our assessment, planning and monitoring approaches, our fund-raising and advocacy, and our approaches to cluster leadership and management.

⁴ They can be found at:

https://intranet.unhcr.org/intranet/unhcr/en/home/support_services/humanitarian_partnerships0/humanitarian_reform/iasc-transformative-agenda.html

In all major IDP and complex emergencies, Representatives will need to:

- Engage fully in the HCT as cluster lead agency and contribute to key planning, prioritization and coordination processes;
- Ensure good cluster coordination and adequate support to clusters from UNHCR (protection expertise, information management, assessment and planning capacity).

And in mixed situations where a refugee response is a component of a wider humanitarian response in any major emergency, Representatives should ensure clear UNHCR leadership of that refugee response and in so doing:

- Ensure excellent collaboration, consultation and information-sharing at senior management and working levels with key partners in the refugee response;
- Engage key partners systematically in contingency planning, assessment, analysis, monitoring and strategic planning and review of the refugee response;
- Brief the HCT on refugee issues, regularly consult with the Humanitarian Coordinator on the directions and implications of the refugee response for the broader humanitarian response;
- Ensure efficient coordination mechanisms are in place for refugee emergency components and communicate them effectively to partners, including the HCT;
- Ensure that relevant colleagues in UNHCR liaise with and provide information on refugees to OCHA and engage with relevant clusters addressing the needs of non-refugee populations in the same regions.

Concerned units and services at HQs will continue to monitor inter-agency processes in various spheres including cluster leadership capacities. Information-sharing with and feedback from the field will be key to this endeavour.

Periodic updates will be provided to inform you of any significant developments impacting on operations.

For further information, questions or to provide field feedback on the Transformative Agenda, please contact the Inter-Agency Unit in DER (Furley, Herrera, Divecha).

ANNEX: Reference documents

The most important documents can be found on the intranet:

https://intranet.unhcr.org/intranet/unhcr/en/home/support_services/humanitarian_partnerships0/humanitarian_reform/iasc-transformative-agenda.html

Some papers are still being finalized. They can be found in draft and will be updated as soon as final and approved by the IASC. They include:

- 1) **The “Transformative Agenda” Chapeau and Compendium of Agreed Actions** (grouping the 55 action points of the IASC Principals’ meeting of 13 December 2011).

The two papers formally endorsed by the IASC Principals in April 2012:

- 2) **Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures.** (guidance on the procedures to activate a system-wide L3 emergency as well as the mechanism and tools to ensure an efficient and effective humanitarian response, including an inter-agency evaluation of that response after 3 months).
- 3) **The Concept Paper on Empowered Leadership** (describes how during the initial 3-month period following the declaration of a Level 3 emergency, the Humanitarian Coordinator will have more authority over the planning, prioritization, resource allocation and advocacy).

A third paper (current draft posted) to be finalized as part of this endorsed set of ‘protocols’:

- 4) **Concept paper on Strategic Systems / Humanitarian Programme Cycle.** (outlines the key components of the system’s approach to assessment, strategic planning, monitoring and reporting in L3 humanitarian emergencies). Whilst there is overall agreement on the orientation of this document, a special inter-agency task team has been set up to provide additional guidance for this overall approach, including where and how it will be implemented beyond L3 emergencies.

A fourth element, (current draft posted) agreed to be relevant to L3 emergencies and beyond, is:

- 5) **The Cluster Coordination Reference Module.** This updates the Guidance Note on the Cluster Approach produced in 2006. It speaks to sub-national coordination, more strategic establishment and deactivation of clusters, cluster management, shared leadership, participation and inter-cluster coordination as well as performance assessment and monitoring. The document is being finalized now and is expected to be widely disseminated to all field operations (L3 and others) by the ERC in September 2012. Most of the guidance reconfirms and further details current practice.

You will also find on the intranet

- 6) **a set of Key Messages and a power point on the Transformative Agenda** developed by OCHA and shared among all IASC members to ensure a common understanding of this initiative and its outcomes.

And lastly, various briefs and presentations made by UNHCR colleagues on the Transformative Agenda are also posted on this site and may be useful to you.