IASC – Inter Agency Standing Committee

Background Briefing Note

The IASC

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was established in June 1992 in response to UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. General Assembly Resolution 48/57 affirmed its role as <u>the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance.</u>

Under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the IASC develops humanitarian policies, agrees on a clear division of responsibility for the various aspects of humanitarian assistance, identifies and addresses gaps in response, and advocates for effective application of humanitarian principles.

IASC Objectives

<u>The overall objective</u> of the IASC is to improve delivery of humanitarian assistance, including the protection of the rights of affected people.

<u>Primary objectives</u> in complex and major emergencies are:

- develop and agree on system-wide humanitarian policies;
- allocate responsibilities amongst agencies in humanitarian programmes;
- develop and agree on a common ethical framework for all humanitarian activities;
- advocate common humanitarian principles to parties outside the IASC;
- advocate for the full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law);
- identify and address areas where gaps in mandates or lack of operational capacity exist; and
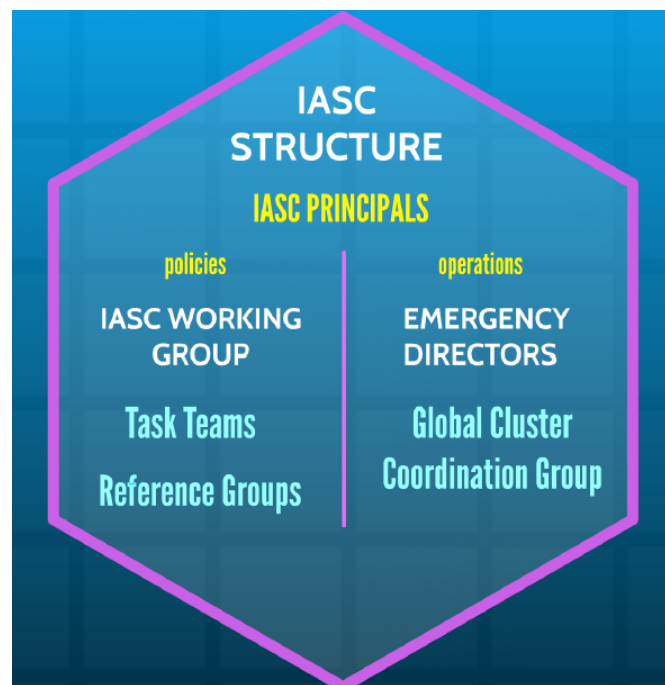
- resolve disputes or disagreements about and amongst humanitarian agencies on system-wide humanitarian issues.

IASC Membership:

The strength and added value of the IASC lies in its broad membership, bringing together all key humanitarian actors. The members of the IASC are the heads or their designated representatives of the UN operational agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, FAO, WHO, UN-HABITAT, OCHA). In addition, there is a standing invitation to IOM, ICRC , IFRC1, OHCHR, UNFPA, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs and the World Bank. The NGO consortia ICVA, InterAction and SCHR are also invited on a permanent basis to attend. The IASC is chaired by the ERC.

IASC's structure

Coordination in the IASC takes place at different levels

The IASC Principals are the heads of all IASC member agencies or their representatives. They meet twice a year in conferences chaired by the Emergency

Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos. For urgent matters, the IASC Principals can schedule ad hoc meetings. The Principals are responsible for making strategic and policy decisions which have system-wide implications and endorse major operational decisions, particularly with respect to implementation of the Transformative Agenda (TA). In addition, they engage in:

- arbitration where no consensus can be reached at the Working Group or Emergency Directors levels;
- advocate common humanitarian principles, collectively or individually, on behalf of the IASC;
- approve the general work programme of the IASC, the WG, and the EDG;
- bring issues to the attention of the Secretary-General and the Security Council, through the ERC; and
- designate Humanitarian Coordinators and selecting coordination arrangements

The IASC Working Group is mainly occupied with policy. It composed of the Directors of the Emergency Programmes of the IASC agencies or their equivalent counterparts. The IASC WG will meet in ad hoc meetings as necessary and once a year for an extended meeting to review the work of the Task Teams and the Reference Groups (subsidiary bodies), to take stock of humanitarian policy issues, and to agree on an annual work plan. Meetings alternate between Rome, Geneva and New York for two and half days, hosted by IASC agencies on a rotational basis. The Working Group is chaired by the Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator. The Working Group is supported by the IASC Secretariat and:

- develops policies and guidance in line with strategic IASC decisions;
- makes proposals to the IASC on strategic issues;
- establishes and oversees the work of the Task Teams;
- establishes and monitors the Reference Groups;
- collaborates with the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) in identifying and elaborating policy matters with direct bearing on humanitarian operations.

IASC Subsidiary Bodies assist the IASC Principals or the IASC Working Group by working on specific policy questions and other tasksThe guidance, tools and handbooks originating from these groups are known as "IASC products". The Subsidiary Bodies regularly consult with staff working in humanitarian situations to ensure their experiences are reflected in IASC guidance. Subsidiary bodies are either Task Teams or Reference groups. Task teams are time-bound and task-oriented and established by the Working Group to work towards the expected outcomes of a thematic priority. Each Task Team is co-chaired by two IASC organizations, ideally one UN and one non-UN; and each priority has a WG level Sponsor. Their tasks can be the development of standards, common tools and guidelines, piloting inter-agency initiatives in the field, development or organization of trainings on new policies, conducting field or academic studies, or providing technical inputs or sector specific guidance in emergencies. Reference Groups are voluntary communities of practice affiliated to, but not directly overseen by, the IASC. They are composed of technical experts from the IASC organizations and build a forum for exchange of knowledge in topics that are cross-cutting issues or remain relevant for the IASC, although not a current priority. Reference Groups are free to organize their structure and leadership. They can bring topics to the Working Group through their sponsor or Working Group members.

The Emergency Directors Group (EDG) is mainly concerned with operational decisions. It advises the IASC on operational issues of strategic concern and prepares options and recommendations for the IASC on operational issues. In addition, the EDG:
- mobilizes agency and Global Cluster resources to address operational challenges and gaps, in support of Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs);
- considers future high-risk scenarios and determining appropriate early actions in support of HCs and HCTs;
- supports the Principals in the activation and initial implementation of a system-wide Level 3 emergency response as defined in the TA Protocols;

- ensures appropriate information sharing with IASC WG so as to address policy gaps and inform policy formulation;
- monitors and provides support, including through capacity building and guidance, to the implementation of the TA.

The Global Cluster Coordinator's Group (GCCG) task is to contribute to coordination-related decision-making in support of country-level operations. The GCCG designates one of its members who, along with the OCHA Convener of the Group, represents the GCCG at the EDG. These representatives will ensure that the views of the GCCG are accurately reflected in EDG discussions. The GCCG is composed of Global Cluster Coordinators of the 11 IASC recognized Global Clusters The GCCG will ensure that multidisciplinary and cross-cutting issues which are not within the remit of one specific cluster are addressed and that synergies and efficiencies are identified across clusters. Its purpose is to support the strengthening of country-level cluster and inter-cluster coordination with the overall aim of improving the quality of humanitarian response. To achieve this, the GCCG:

(i)   Coordinates the provision of joint field support to cluster and inter-cluster coordination, tailored to the specific country situation;

(ii)   Collaborates on capacity building and other joint initiatives where cooperation between all or a group of clusters at the global level will contribute to a more efficient use of resources and a better response at country level;

(iii)   Encourages clusters to participate in and/or inform global level decision-making and raise issues requiring resolution relating to cluster and inter-cluster coordination with relevant bodies as needed;

(iv)   Upon the request of field colleagues, engages in joint advocacy on issues which require amplification at the global level;

(v)   Contributes to the development and dissemination of guidance and tools for country-level clusters as required;

(vi)   Shares information and learning on the implementation of the cluster approach with each other and with relevant actors. This will also include

reviewing relevant reviews and evaluations for applicable recommendations and following up on them.

The IASC Secretariat with offices in Geneva and New York, is responsible for providing technical support and servicing the meetings of the IASC and its Working Group as well as monitoring the implementation of the decisions of the IASC. The Secretariat also supports the Chairs of the IASC bodies in highlighting and fostering connectivity between the IASC, the Working Group, the Emergency Directors Group and the designated Task Teams.

Transformative Agenda (TA)

In light of the growing recognition of the weaknesses in the multilateral humanitarian response, the IASC Principals decided to review the approach to humanitarian response and make adjustments, building on the lessons learned in 2010 and 2011 (crisis in Haiti and Pakistan). Based on an analysis of current challenges to leadership and coordination, the IASC Principals agreed in December 2011 to a set of actions that collectively represent a substantive improvement to the current humanitarian response model. Following the agreement of the TA, the Principals developed the 'TA Protocols' which set the parameters for improved collective action in humanitarian emergencies.

Priorities for 2014-2015:
- Accountability to Affected Populations, including Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA)
- Humanitarian Financing
- Preparedness and Resilience
- Revitalizing Principled Humanitarian Action
- Protection in Humanitarian Crises

The IASC and EARLY RECOVERY:

The IASC established the Global Cluster on Early Recovery (GCER) – *formerly known as Global Cluster on Early Recovery (CWGER)* - in 2005 with the aim of enhancing the global capacity for developing relief and recovery-related interventions, enhancing the impact of development interventions, and integrating risk reduction measures at the very early stages of emergency response and beyond.

The GCER is chaired by UNDP and comprised of 34 global partners from the humanitarian and development communities, including representatives of UN Agencies, Red Cross Movement, and NGOs.

The IASC WG re-affirmed in 2008 and 2009 the importance of the GCER and of all programmatic cluster leads, at both global and country levels, to strengthen the integration.

In November 2013, the IASC Principals have reiterated the importance of integrating early recovery into the overall humanitarian response <u>as the foundation for building resilience in a post-crisis context</u>, and endorsed recommendations for strengthening early recovery at global and country levels.

Overview of IASC Task Teams and Reference Groups

This note summarises the existing Task Teams and Reference Groups reporting to the IASC Working Group. The Task Teams are aligned with the IASC priorities for 2014-15

Below are short summary snapshots (or stated key objectives where available) for each entity. More details on each group can be found in the annex, where summary notes have been consolidated, as prepared by the groups themselves.

1. Global Protection Cluster (GPC) Task Team to Implement IASC Protection Priority Tasks

The IASC will work to ensure the centrality of protection in humanitarian action through the formulation and adoption of system-wide policies and other measures that strengthen the humanitarian community's ability to bring about protection outcomes in practice, both within and beyond the UN.

KEY OBJECTIVES
The selection of protection in humanitarian crises as a priority will help the IASC to promote:

- A clear vision of protection in humanitarian policy and practice.
- An approach in humanitarian crises by UN, NGO and other partners that ensures human rights protection and equitable services and assistance for all persons affected by crises.
- Strategic and operational interaction on protection between humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders.
- Enhanced collective advocacy on protection, including by IASC Principals.

WG Sponsor: Daniel Endres, UNHCR
GPC Coordinator: Louise Aubin, UNHCR

2. IASC Task Team on Principled Humanitarian Action

An enhanced humanitarian response to populations affected by conflict and disaster through strengthened adherence of IASC organisations to the humanitarian principles, including capitalising on opportunities presented by the growing number of new actors.

TASKS FOR 2014-15

Through support for research, policy development and advocacy, the IASC shall seek to:

- Enhance civil-military relations and/or coordination (e.g. use of armed escorts);
- Ensure that UN integration, comprehensive approaches and stabilization strategies (e.g. effective implementation of the UN Integrated Assessment and Planning Policy) account for humanitarian concerns and preserve humanitarian operations;
- Mitigate the impact of counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action.
- Strengthen risk analysis and risk management (e.g. follow up to "Stay and Deliver").

WG Sponsor: Brian Tisdall, ICRC Task Force
Co-Chairs: Ingrid Macdonald, Norwegian Refugee Council and Greg Puley, OCHA

3. Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience

IASC preparedness will support a more effective IASC response. In addition, IASC organizations will demonstrate that the full range of humanitarian actions, including preparedness, can contribute to building the resilience of communities and nations at regional, national, and local levels.

TASKS FOR 2014-15

- Identify gaps, develop and disseminate guidance/tools on preparedness and other entry points in the humanitarian programme cycle, including those that promote a holistic approach to resilience building. This includes risk management instruments that provide early warning to enable early action and tools that trigger and/or support advocacy for response capability and funding for preparedness, in particular early action related to early warning.

- Finalise guidance on the Emergency Response Preparedness approach for the IASC and support and monitor its implementation.

- Support and monitor the implementation of the IASC Common Framework on Preparedness at country level.

- Under the overarching common resilience goal and in specific situations or areas, link humanitarian and development action to provide examples that demonstrate how such linkages can be designed, contribute to increased resilience and document the approaches and lessons learned.

- Prepare an engagement strategy for IASC organizations to influence the post-2015 agenda (inter alia Hyogo Framework for Action 2, Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change Adaptation) and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, particularly in terms of IASC preparedness and the contribution of humanitarian action to resilience

- Develop a strategy for IASC organizations to engage with IASC and non-IASC development actors, donors, and governments (programmatic, funding, capacity support) to achieve comprehensive (multi-sector), coordinated (multi-actor) support for preparedness and resilience in priority contexts with a longer term perspective. The strategy can include strengthening internal linkages within dual-mandate agencies.

WG Sponsors: Sikander Khan, UNICEF and Dominique Burgeon, FAO
Co-Chairs: Jahal de Meritens, UNDP and Anthony Craig, WFP

4. IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team

The IASC's common review of existing funding mechanisms, as well as its engagement with traditional and emerging donors on policy change and innovation, will lead to greater efficiencies, in line with the aims of the Transformative Agenda.

Review the potential of the current funding architecture to respond to the evolving nature of humanitarian action in an effort to improve our ability to provide aid to those who most need it.

- Support coherence among multiple initiatives on humanitarian funding and strengthen financing mechanisms and related tools so that they are accessible to those able to use them effectively and rapidly in support of broader resource mobilization efforts
- Explore models to maximize the current funding base and to secure additional, flexible and predictable funding streams for humanitarian organizations, including by identifying new partnerships

WG Sponsor: Nan Buzard, ICVA
Co-Chairs: Marzia Montemurro, ICVA, and Lisa Doughten, OCHA

5. IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Including Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Create a system-wide "culture of accountability": institutionalisation of AAP, including PSEA, in function and resourcing within each humanitarian organization alongside system level cohesion, coordination, and learning.

TASKS FOR 2014-15

- Pilot inter-agency community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCMs) in Ethiopia, Haiti, and DRC, which are specifically tailored to respond to SEA

and that build coherence with broader AAP focussed complaints and feedback mechanisms and strategies, with a longer term aim of eventual institutionalization of inter-agency CBCMs in all humanitarian response settings. (Funding dependent).

- Implement the AAP Operational Framework that has been adopted by the WG as a Transformative Agenda Protocol and support Humanitarian Country Teams to develop inter-agency models institutionalising AAP, including PSEA, and enhance integration across the sectors. Include links to relevant Task Teams and Clusters and operationalise the AAP Framework through the TA rollout.

- Work to ensure that AAP, including PSEA, is incorporated into organizational and inter-agency policies, recruitment policies3, and performance appraisals.

- Engage with donors to develop their role in advancing the AAP agenda further, including the strengthening of requirements for funding recipients to demonstrate AAP, including PSEA.

- Develop a broader communication strategy to ensure that all humanitarian service providers are aware of their roles and responsibilities with regard to the implementation of AAP, including PSEA4, and establish a sector-wide knowledge management resource to build and complement good practices on AAP and PSEA across the sector.

WG Sponsor: Patricia McIlreavy, InterAction
Co-Chairs: Preeta Law, UNHCR; and John Abuya, ActionAid

Reference Groups

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Reference Group on Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action

Main objectives for its work in 2014:

1. LEADERSHIP: provide guidance and support, wherever feasible, to all bodies and structures of the IASC to be able to incorporate gender equality into relevant aspects of their work
2. ACCOUNTABILITY TO GENDER EQUALITY: support and champion the IASC's commitment to work in an inter-agency fashion towards the goal of gender equality in all aspects of humanitarian action
3. COORDINATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: Ensure the humanitarian community is consistently provided with timely and practical information, tools and resources to meet its commitments to gender-equality programming in humanitarian action

WG Sponsor: Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy ERC, OCHA
Co-Chairs: Siobhan Foran, IFRC; Patricia Colbert; WFP; Elizabeth Cafferty, WRC; Blerta Aliko, UN Women

IASC Reference Group on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas

To improve the effectiveness of the international community's responses to natural and man-made humanitarian crises in urban areas.

Builds upon six objectives for improving humanitarian response in urban areas:

- Strengthen partnerships among urban stakeholders for more effective humanitarian response,
- Strengthen technical surge capacity with urban skills,
- Develop or adapt humanitarian tools and approaches for urban areas,
- Protection of vulnerable urban population against gender-based exploitation and violence,
- Restore livelihoods and economic opportunities during initial phase for expedited early recovery in urban areas,
- and, Improve preparedness in urban areas to reduce vulnerability and save lives.

Chair: George Deikun, UN Habitat

IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and psychosocial support in emergency settings

Support and advocate for the implementation of the Guidelines. The Reference Group consists of more than 30 members, and fosters a unique collaboration between NGOs, UN and International Agencies and academics, promoting best practices in MHPSS.

The aims of the Reference Group are:

1. To facilitate integration of the core principles of the Guidelines into all sectors of emergency response;
2. To foster collaboration amongst agencies and diverse stakeholders (such as governments and communities) for MHPSS in emergencies;

3. To support interagency coordination and activities for MHPSS at global, regional and national levels;

4. To develop relevant tools linked to the Guidelines and share these with relevant actors in the field;

5. To encourage individual agencies to institutionalise the Guidelines;

6. To promote and support ongoing capacity development to enable effective use of the Guidelines and related tools;

7. To share experiences of Guidelines implementation among MHPSS actors;

8. To interface with the UN Cluster System to include MHPSS in policies, tools, capacity building and planning processes;

9. To facilitate language translations, printing and dissemination and of the Guidelines.