

BRIEFING PAPER

1. This paper outlines UNHCR's involvement over the past two years in developing the Transformative Agenda and measures taken by the Office to ensure that its contribution to the overall humanitarian response effort is effective.

I. Background on the Transformative Agenda

2. The extract below from the Inter-agency Standing Committee's (IASC) *Chapeau and Compendium of Actions*¹, describes the core elements of the Transformative Agenda, as conceived:

*"In December 2011, following a comprehensive inter-agency review of the approach to humanitarian response and the lessons learned from the major emergencies in Haiti and Pakistan, the IASC Principals, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), agreed on a set of actions to address acknowledged challenges in leadership and coordination, as well as to enhance accountability for the achievement of collective results. These actions, which would constitute the **Transformative Agenda (TA)**, included:*

- *Establishing a **mechanism to deploy strong, experienced senior humanitarian leadership** to guide the humanitarian response from the outset of a major crisis;*
- *The **strengthening of leadership capacities and rapid deployment of humanitarian leaders** at various levels, to ensure the coordination architecture functions well;*
- ***Improved strategic planning** at the country level that clarifies the collective results the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identifies how clusters and organizations will contribute to them;*

¹ See the IASC website for all related documentation:
<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87>

- *Enhanced accountability of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for the achievement of collective results and of the humanitarian community towards the affected people; and*
- *Streamlined coordination mechanisms adapted to operational requirements and contexts to better facilitate delivery.*

At the same time, key stakeholders, i.e. UN Agencies and other IASC member organizations, reaffirmed their commitment to work in partnership to implement the TA and, through this, to strengthen their capacity individually and jointly to respond more effectively in humanitarian emergencies.”

II. UNHCR’s involvement in the development of the Transformative Agenda

3. The High Commissioner has, from the outset, played a key role in the development of the Transformative Agenda, and has helped shape its direction through active participation in IASC Principals’ discussions. He has committed the Office, at all levels, to improved leadership and coordination of humanitarian response, and has engaged senior management in re-orienting relevant policy, capacity and practice. Within UNHCR, a Steering Group was established at the Director level, chaired by the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations), to ensure that UNHCR’s response mechanisms were gradually adjusted to the commitments made under the Transformative Agenda.

4. Following the adoption of the Transformative Agenda by the IASC Principals at the end of 2011, efforts have focused mainly on developing and putting in place normative guidance for implementation at the inter-agency level. To this end, UNHCR was engaged in an intensive inter-agency process at the Director level. The Office participated in two level-3 emergency simulation exercises led by the IASC Principals, and two IASC field-validation missions to South Sudan and Chad. The normative phase culminated in the endorsement by the IASC Principals, in December 2012, of the “Transformative Agenda Protocols,” composed of five reference documents that serve as guidance for collective action.² Currently, UNHCR is also taking an active role, as a member of the IASC Transformative Agenda Implementation Steering Group, in developing an inter-agency communication and dissemination strategy for the Transformative Agenda, as well as a detailed work plan for its roll-out in 2013.

² (i) Empowered Leadership; (ii) Humanitarian System-wide Emergency Activation; definition and procedures; (iii) Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: What “empowered leadership” looks like in practice; (iv) Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level; and (v) Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: The Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

III. UNHCR's implementation of the Transformative Agenda

5. Over the past year, UNHCR disseminated to all staff instructions and guidelines on internal and inter-agency policies, highlighting the importance of inter-agency coordination and partnership. A first communication in April 2012 on strengthening UNHCR's emergency policy and procedures included specific guidance on inter-agency engagement and partnerships. This was followed by a message from the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) in August 2012, on the "IASC's Transformative Agenda and implications for UNHCR." In January of this year, all UNHCR staff were provided a copy of a letter from the ERC and Principals addressed to Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams, disseminating the Transformative Agenda Protocols.

6. Simultaneously, UNHCR launched its own institutional process aimed at strengthening, adapting and aligning its emergency response systems with those under development by the IASC. The Office's participation in the development of the Transformative Agenda informed and underpinned these efforts. UNHCR has worked to integrate the principles and spirit of the Transformative Agenda into training, simulations, retreats, strategic meetings and briefings. The High Commissioner's upcoming meeting with all of his representatives from around the world (to take place in Geneva on 19-20 February 2013), will devote a half-day session to inter-agency engagement and partnership in the new humanitarian working environment.

A. Strategic partnerships with key operational partners

7. UNHCR believes that strong partnerships are vital to ensuring an improved humanitarian response and to successfully operationalizing the Transformative Agenda. The High Commissioner has launched a number of initiatives to achieve closer and more predictable collaboration with major operational partners, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and UN agencies. The quality of UNHCR's partnership with NGOs has been of particular focus and was reviewed at the strategic level through the "High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue with NGOs," which also involved the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). At the culminating meeting of this Structured Dialogue in December 2012, a number of recommendations were jointly agreed, aimed at strengthening operational collaboration in the field through stronger mutual respect and trust, and a culture of transparency and shared responsibility.

B. Refugee coordination and the Transformative Agenda

8. UNHCR's leadership role in responding to refugee emergencies is recognized in the Transformative Agenda Protocols as follows: "... *in emergencies which involve refugees, the UNHCR Representative has the mandate to prepare for, lead and coordinate the refugee response.*" At the same time, the High Commissioner has applied the spirit of the Transformative Agenda to UNHCR's

refugee leadership and accountability for coordination, and is committed to improving the Office's performance and better meeting the expectations of partners. Furthermore, with the roll-out of the Transformative Agenda to the field and the now extensively-applied cluster approach, the need has grown for an effective interface between the coordination of a refugee situation, under UNHCR's mandate and accountability, and the coordination of the broader humanitarian response led by the Humanitarian Coordinator.

9. The Syria and Mali operations provided successful examples of an improved coordinated approach, whereby the establishment of a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator was complemented by the appointment of a Regional Refugee Coordinator, establishing direct senior counterparts for both coordination mechanisms. At the country level, efforts have been made in several emergencies (e.g. South Sudan) to establish an effective interface between the refugee response and cluster-based coordination.

IV. Enhancing emergency response

10. Institutional change related to emergency management in UNHCR started with the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply. However, the process reached all divisions and bureaux within the organization. Below is a description of the changes that have been introduced.

A. Internal capacity related to the Transformative Agenda

11. UNHCR has continued to build up its capacity to successfully engage, when called upon, in level-3 emergencies. The Office has participated in simulation exercises in the context of the inter-agency rapid response mechanism (IARRM) for this purpose.

12. UNHCR has consolidated and strengthened training to enhance the leadership and coordination skills of its staff. In 2011, UNHCR established a Senior Corporate Emergency Roster (SCER) of personnel at the P-5 to D-2 level to strengthen leadership in emergencies. The SCER enables UNHCR to meet its commitment under the Transformative Agenda to deploy experienced and skilled senior managers to level-3 emergencies. It also serves as a resource for the Office's internal response to any emergency.

13. The Office bolstered its internal rosters and strengthened its cooperation with emergency standby partners³. Additionally, UNHCR has recently issued internal guidance on "Emergency Response Activation and Internal Coordination

³ UNHCR has 16 standby partners: CANADEM, CDC, DFID, DRC, DSB, emergnecy.lu, IHP, Irish Aid, MSB, NRC, RedR, Save the Children Norway, SDC/SHA, THW Germany, Veolia Environment Foundation, and the White Helmets Commission.

Procedures,” as well as “Staffing for Emergencies and for the Transition to the Non-emergency Phase.”

14. As part of UNHCR’s commitments under the Transformative Agenda, the High Commissioner nominated three senior managers with extensive emergency experience to be members of the roster of capable level-3 Humanitarian Coordinators. One of UNHCR’s candidates currently serves as Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria situation.

B. Cluster leadership and the Transformative Agenda

15. The Transformative Agenda resulted in a more strategic approach to cluster leadership, and confirmed six core functions of the clusters: Supporting Service Delivery; Informing Strategic Decision-Making of the Humanitarian Coordinator/Humanitarian Country Team for the Humanitarian Response; Planning and Strategy Development; Advocacy; Monitoring and Reporting; and Contingency Planning/Preparedness.

16. UNHCR has continued to work on cluster coordination and capacity as Global Cluster Lead Agency for the three clusters, namely: Protection, Shelter (co-led with IFRC), and Camp Coordination and Management (co-led with the International Organization for Migration (IOM)). To further strengthen performance and accountability, UNHCR has enhanced partnership approaches within the clusters, improved communication and information management, and developed tools and guidance to support cluster leadership in the field. UNHCR has also consolidated and enhanced internal and external training for staff working in inter-agency operations where the cluster approach is applied.

V. Conclusion

17. UNHCR will continue to ensure implementation of the Transformative Agenda policies, procedures and tools. In order to deliver on its commitments under the Transformative Agenda, the Office will continue improving its internal systems and mechanisms. UNHCR recognizes the importance of effective and well-supported coordination, and will continue to strengthen the capacity of those clusters under its responsibility. It further recognizes that partnerships - both with UN agencies and NGOs - are vital to an effectively-coordinated humanitarian response. Efforts to further strengthen these relationships will remain a priority in the roll-out and institutionalization of the Transformative Agenda.
