

DISCUSSIONS AND OUTCOMES OF THE IASC MEETINGS IN NEW YORK
ON HUMANITARIAN REFORM INITIATIVES

1. This note provides an update to the note issued on 9 September on UNHCR's role in IASC humanitarian reforms and in the strengthening of the inter-agency collaborative response to internally displaced persons. It lays out the main elements of discussion and agreement at the meeting of the IASC Principals on 12 September, indicating the future inter-agency arrangements under consideration and the general direction of the commitments that UNHCR is likely to face.

2. During the discussions, the non-UN participants expressed the need to clarify the relationship between the UN system and the NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, whose autonomy needs to be respected within the common effort. Nevertheless, on matters of substance, there was good progress in harmonizing the perspectives of UN and non-UN participants. In particular, the Principals found common ground on what the 'cluster' system should achieve and on key issues such as the responsibilities of 'cluster leads' (now the agreed terminology, replacing references to 'lead agency' or 'sector lead'). The IASC Principals agreed to devote the next two months to jointly refining the elements of the new cluster approach so that all IASC members and standing invitees would be satisfied with their respective roles in the approach, and would have time to adjust these in consultation with their governing bodies. The issue of 'gaps' in leadership for protection, camp coordination and shelter in situations of natural disaster will also need to be addressed.

3. Subject to the above, the IASC Principals agreed:

- that the main aim of this initiative was to improve the predictability, timeliness and effectiveness of response to humanitarian crises, strengthening existing collaborative approaches with a system of enhanced accountability. The response would be improved for all affected populations, including IDPs, in sectors where critical gaps have been identified, and in both complex emergencies and natural disasters;
- to establish clusters for these areas: this includes clusters that are primarily concerned with service provision (e.g. telecommunications and logistics), with provision of relief and assistance to beneficiaries (eg nutrition, water and sanitation, camp coordination/management, emergency shelter and health) and those that cover a broad range of cross cutting issues (such as protection and early recovery). Other areas important to effective humanitarian action have been identified. WFP leads for food aid but cluster arrangements may be needed for education (which UNICEF would be willing to lead). Similarly, the initiative is not aimed at refugee situations, where UNHCR has a specific mandate.

- on who should lead each of the clusters where systemic and critical gaps have been identified:

Nutrition:	UNICEF
Water and Sanitation:	UNICEF
Health:	WHO
Camp Coordination and Management	UNHCR (For conflict-generated IDPs)
Emergency Shelter:	UNHCR (ditto)
Protection:	UNHCR (ditto)
Logistics:	WFP
Telecoms:	OCHA for overall Process Owner; UNICEF for common data services; and WFP for common security telecommunications services
Early Recovery:	UNDP

No lead agency was proposed for camp coordination, protection and emergency shelter for persons affected by natural disasters. Further consideration is being given to camp coordination and emergency shelter in these settings by IOM and IFRC. The protection cluster would also consider the needs of civilians in complex situations who are not displaced, within the context of the discussion on the broader dimensions of protection. The High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed her readiness to play a significant role in this regard.

4. It was proposed that the cluster lead would be accountable for ensuring preparedness (including essential support for local and national risk assessment, vulnerability reduction and preparedness) as well as adequate and predictable response. It would be responsible for: (a) taking forward capacity assessments and developing capacity within the cluster; (b) securing and following up on commitments to contribute to these functions; and (c) sustaining mechanisms through which the cluster as a whole can deliver on its overall commitments, and the contribution of individual entities within it. It would work with relevant actors and agencies with expertise and capacities in that area.

5. Functions at global level include up-to-date assessments of the overall needs for human, financial and institutional capacity in the cluster area, and in linkages with other cluster areas - including preparedness measures and long term planning, standards and best practices, advocacy and resource mobilization; reviews of currently available capacities and means for their utilization; taking action to ensure that vitally needed capacities and mechanisms (including rosters for surge capacity) are put in place (through training and system development) at local, national, regional and international levels as appropriate, with the use of existing resources where possible.

6. At the field level, the clusters would provide support to the Humanitarian Coordinators who are able to call upon cluster leads for support as required. The cluster lead would not carry out all of the activities itself, but would be responsible for ensuring that these activities are carried out and would act as the provider of last resort. The Cluster Lead would take all necessary actions to ensure fulfilment of commonly accepted standards for timely, adequate and

effective humanitarian action that achieves the required impact in relation to the specific cluster area. This should be done in ways that ensure the complementarities of the various stakeholders' actions, strengthening the involvement of national and local institutions, and making the best use of available resources. The cluster lead would be responsible for: (a) predictable action within the cluster for analysis of needs, addressing priorities and identifying gaps in the cluster area; (b) securing and following up on commitments from the cluster to contribute to responding to needs and filling the gaps; and (c) sustaining mechanisms through which the cluster as a whole, and individual participants, can both assess its performance and deliver effectively.

7. It was further underlined that the cluster lead should ensure that needs assessments and responses were based on participatory and community-based approaches which integrate cross-cutting issues (such as human rights; gender, age and diversity; and HIV/AIDS), ensuring synergies and effective links with other clusters, risk reduction, monitoring and adjustment of the response, and acting as the 'provider of last resort'.

8. Participants within each cluster are encouraged to work collectively - building the operational capacity for the functions agreed within the cluster concerned. Participants working within each cluster area would have obligations to each other relating to the fulfilment of their commitments. In addition, the cluster leads would also have mutual obligations, and be accountable to humanitarian coordinators (at country level), and globally to the ERC - in his or her capacity as chair of the IASC.

9. All IASC participants were concerned about the potential for 'bureaucratization' and expressed great caution. While dedicated staff will be necessary to lead capacity-building and preparedness measures within the clusters, the concept of a 'secretariat' was put aside for the moment. The process must add value for beneficiaries of humanitarian action, underpinning an improved, collective, response to new crises and improving response in current major emergencies. It is not intended to undermine existing arrangements where these are effective. Both the process - and its benefits - will be reviewed after two years.

Implementation

10. It is envisaged that IASC members will now prepare to implement this approach during 2006, preparing on the one hand for two or three major new emergencies (with up to 500,000 beneficiaries each) and on the other, in a small number of ongoing emergencies. Two or three of the IDD's priority countries will be jointly selected in the coming weeks, in consultation with the respective Country Teams. All necessary actions to ensure delivery through this cluster approach should be in place, using a phased approach, within the next two years.

11. While the need to make the most effective use of existing resources within all organizations is essential, clusters leads recognized the need for varying levels of additional human and financial resources to fulfil their clusters' obligations. The focus of these efforts will be on delivery at the field level and on ensuring global preparedness. The involvement of organizations active in field settings is critical for the further development of these arrangements. The decision to apply cluster lead arrangements should enable more effective participation of all actors, while respecting their individual mandates and programme priorities.

12. Clusters leads will undertake the following priority actions, between September and December 2005:

- decide how the cluster will substantially improve the humanitarian response within the sector for new emergencies;
- complete assessment of capacities and gaps in the sector;
- carry out specific capacity mapping and response planning in consultation with the Humanitarian Coordinators to improve response in a selected number of existing emergencies;
- improve non-UN actor involvement in the process, building on regional/national capacities;
- ensure integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender, age and diversity; HIV/AIDS; human rights;
- undertake coordinated response planning and preparedness measures, build links between clusters and and prevent duplication with other structures;
- prioritize actionable recommendations for 2006 implementation;
- develop recommendations on outstanding cluster specific issues, such as the broader protection framework;
- develop a plan for a phased introduction;
- prepare cluster-specific resource requirements.

IASC members are asked to give active support to the leads in the above tasks.

13. To ensure that this initiative adds value, all stakeholders must be involved in its implementation. Critical among these are the Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators. The IASC's advocacy and outreach strategy, grouped around the key role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, will engage member States constructively and be supported by measurable progress in the field. Recognizing the different governance structures of IASC members and the differing implications of this initiative for those organizations, participants agreed to engage in mutually supportive efforts to convey the common message, under the ERC's coordination.