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IASC REFERENCE MODULE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
**THE HUMANITARIAN
PROGRAMME CYCLE**

VERSION 2.0

IASC
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

This document was prepared by the Humanitarian Programme Cycle Steering Group of the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)**. It is primarily for managers of organizations that prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises. It provides an overview of what needs to be done, when and by whom, to enable managers to allocate staff and tasks, sequence decisions and planning, and identify priorities. It does not describe how to do each action. For this, managers should refer to the technical guidance and templates available on:

hpc.humanitarianresponse.info

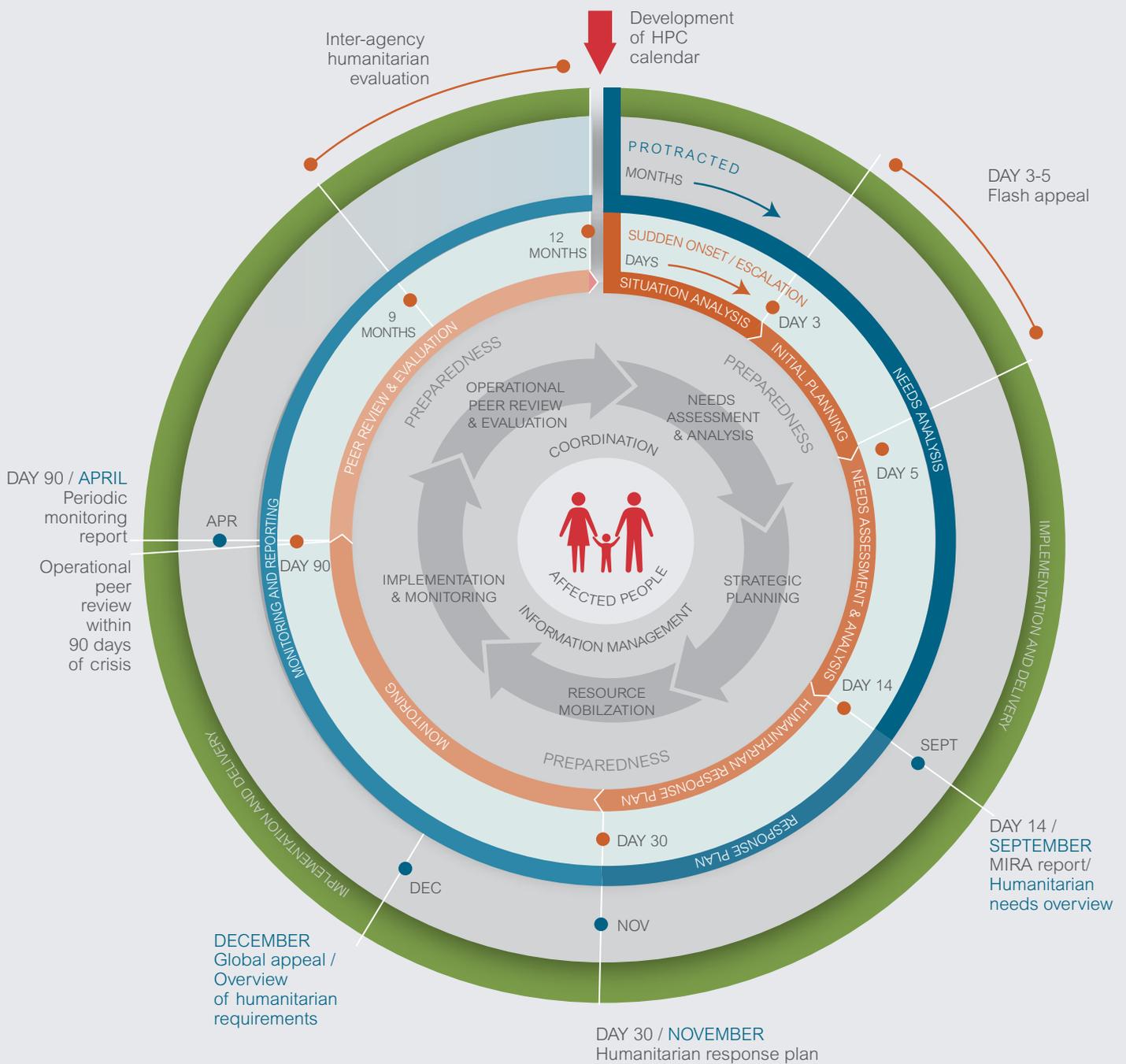
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This Reference Module will be revised periodically to take account of feedback from practitioners and further developments in guidance and tools.

This Reference Module is one of eight protocols developed to support implementation of the IASC Transformative Agenda. A summary of the protocols may be found in the annex.

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This graphic visualizes the key elements of the humanitarian programme cycle in the central core. The next two rings represent the indicative steps in **sudden onset crises** or **sudden escalations in an existing crisis**, and in the annual planning cycle of **protracted crises** respectively. The **outer ring** depicts the operationalization of these elements through implementation and delivery. The humanitarian programme cycle provides a framework for the delivery of aid to meet the needs of affected people quickly, effectively and in a principled manner. This framework applies to all humanitarian crises but the process, timeline, tools and documents can be used flexibly.

A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals committed to the ultimate objective of accountability to affected people by ensuring that the humanitarian response delivers assistance to those in need as the result of effective and timely decision-making and planning. In December 2011, IASC Principals agreed to a set of actions that collectively represent a substantive improvement to the humanitarian response model. These include:

- 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 that the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identifies how clusters and organizations will contribute to them;
- Enhanced accountability of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for the achievement of collective results; and
- Streamlined coordination mechanisms adapted to operational requirements and contexts to better facilitate delivery.

While States have the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on their territory, international

new way of working, building on what the humanitarian system has learned. This IASC Reference Module defines the roles and responsibilities of international humanitarian actors and the way that they interact with each other, with national and local authorities, with civil society, and with people affected by crises.

The humanitarian programme cycle consists of a set of inter-linked tools to assist the Humanitarian Coordinator² and Humanitarian Country Team to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection through better preparing, prioritizing, steering and monitoring the collective response through informed decision-making. This requires each organization to change its practices, but also its mind-set and institutional culture to focus on the collective response and not simply on the individual organization's corporate priorities, mandate or fundraising concerns. Each individual organization's piece of the response must fit together and contribute to the overall expected results. The focus is on collectively-owned and evidence-based plans to ensure increased HCT accountability for results. The HPC should influence programming and resource allocations of all actors – including United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and governments. Organizations are required to act with the collective in mind, to collaborate together, share information and hold each other accountable for working toward better decisions and improved outcomes at the field level.

*Note on refugee and 'mixed situation' operations: The **Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice** clarifies leadership and coordination arrangements in the situation where a complex humanitarian emergency or natural disaster is taking place, a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed, and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. The note sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the UNHCR Representative and the HC, and the practical interaction of IASC coordination and UNHCR's refugee coordination arrangements, to ensure that coordination is streamlined, complementary and mutually reinforcing.³*

There is no “one size fits all” approach to the application of the humanitarian programme cycle. Tools should be applied flexibly and in a ‘light touch’ manner to ensure evidence-based, prioritized responses and periodic reporting on results in support of the delivery of humanitarian protection and assistance.

cooperation to address emergency situations and strengthen the response capacity of affected countries is of great importance given that the magnitude and duration of many emergencies may be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries.

The humanitarian programme cycle (HPC)¹ is about a

¹ The humanitarian programme cycle concept is inclusive of elements of the former consolidated appeal process (CAP).

² This term refers to individuals performing humanitarian coordination leadership functions be they Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), Resident Coordinators/ Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs), Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinators/ Humanitarian Coordinators (DSRSG/ RC/HCs), or Resident Coordinators (RCs).

³ See the Joint Note at: <http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/joint-unhcr-ocha-note-mixed-situations-coordination-practice>

A SINGLE STRATEGIC PROCESS

The **humanitarian programme cycle** consists of six sequential elements and two key 'enablers', which are ongoing at all times in support of the successful implementation of the response:

Six key elements

1. **Emergency Response Preparedness**
2. **Needs Assessment and Analysis**
3. **Strategic Response Planning**
4. Implementation and **Monitoring**
5. **Resource Mobilization**
6. **Operational Peer Review and Evaluation**

Two 'enablers'

1. **Coordination**; and
2. Information Management.

These elements and enablers combine into a single, seamless strategic process that runs through the cycle of inter-agency coordination and response, with one step logically building on the previous and leading to the next.

The humanitarian programme cycle allows humanitarian actors to jointly define the overall shape of the response, position their role in relation to other organizations, and understand what needs to be done at a given moment in line with agreed objectives in order to ensure a more coherent, effective and accountable response.

The humanitarian programme cycle highlights the need to:

- Prepare as much as possible before a humanitarian crisis strikes. Preparedness includes both minimum and advanced preparedness actions, such as joint risk analysis, contingency planning, prepositioning, or the integration of emergency planning in development programming. **See the *Emergency Response Preparedness Guidance for further information.***
- Plan based on joint risk analysis and evidence. Organizations need to collect, analyse and share information in advance of, and during, crises; undertake joint risk analysis and needs assessments, where possible in partnership with national authorities and development actors; take new information into account to adapt and update plans; and ensure that decisions are evidence-based.

- Set objectives early and ensure they drive the response. To do this, those involved need strong and accountable leadership and a solid coordination architecture.
- Empower field-based decision-making, locating it as close as possible to the affected population affected by the crisis. It is vital to work with and listen to people affected by the crisis, local NGOs, national and local authorities, and humanitarian organizations already in the country.
- Monitor humanitarian action and adjust the strategy and programmes in response. This requires periodic monitoring and regular evaluation processes.
- Plan an exit strategy from the outset and ensure clarity regarding how to transition effectively and hand-over to national, local and development partners, as appropriate.

To be meaningful, there needs to be an inter-agency commitment to, and ownership of the, the humanitarian programme cycle, with roles, responsibilities and time-lines clearly defined and circulated. The process and its outcomes must be accessible and useful to humanitarian responders, and cost effective in terms of time, money and energy.

Senior managers in individual organizations are accountable to work collectively together to ensure that the overall response is evidence-based, well planned and executed and that all actors contribute to the collective effort. This includes training and familiarizing staff on the contents of this Reference Module.

WHO IS INVOLVED

The implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle involves all relevant actors in decisions, adopting a cooperative approach to achieving objectives. It supports and complements the capacity of national actors to respond. While institutional and decision-making arrangements vary, especially at the onset of a crisis, the application of the programme cycle should be an inter-agency process which is:

- Led by a Humanitarian Coordinator⁴.
- Managed by a Humanitarian Country Team.⁵
- Supported by an inter-cluster/sector coordination group and clusters⁶.
- Inclusive of a broad range of actors, including at the sub-national levels.
- In support of the national authorities, who have primary responsibility to affected people.
- With the participation of the people affected by the crisis.

Leadership by the HC and HCT is critical in defining the crisis and providing direction to the response. In a sudden-onset crisis where no HC/HCT exists, the Resident Coordinator is expected to lead and coordinate the response of humanitarian actors, including possibly establishing a HCT. In this situation, the ERC, following consultation with the IASC, will take a decision regarding the designation of a Humanitarian Coordinator⁷. If there is a sudden spike in a protracted crisis, structures may already be in place but may not have the capacity to cope with the crisis, especially at the sub-national level. The programme cycle should be applied and supported with these field realities in mind.

4 **IASC Terms of Reference for Humanitarian Coordinators, January 2009.**

5 **IASC Guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams, November 2009.** The HCT is composed of organizations that undertake humanitarian action in-country and that commit to participate in coordination arrangements. These may include UN agencies, the International Organization for Migration, non-governmental organizations, and, subject to their individual mandates, components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

6 The term 'cluster' refers to sectoral coordination that uses the 'cluster approach' introduced after 2005 as part of humanitarian reform. References to 'cluster' in this guidance should be understood to refer to the range of sectoral coordination mechanisms that are in place in humanitarian response operations.

7 **Handbook for RCs and HCs on Emergency Preparedness and Response, 2010**

FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT

This Reference Module provides a standard and adaptable set of tools for use in humanitarian crises globally. While the sequencing and speed of steps to be taken differ between IASC System-Wide Level Three (L3) Emergency Responses⁸ and other responses, the overall objective of ensuring that humanitarian response delivers life-saving assistance to those in need as the result of effective and timely decision-making and planning, as well as the principles of inclusivity, robust cooperation, inter-agency collaboration, effectiveness, field ownership and greater accountability, are the same.

Recognizing that each context and response is different, there is scope for significant local adaptation of this guidance to meet conditions on the ground. The steps, method and timeline for each context can therefore be adapted to: the particulars of the crisis; the capacity of the government and of the humanitarian community; the coordination structures in-country; and the social and political environment. The HC and HCT are encouraged to read this Reference Module, discuss how to adapt it to the context, and prepare a calendar⁹ which outlines what process and tools will be implemented and by when.

Humanitarian actors on the ground are the focus of the humanitarian programme cycle's process and tools.

8 Level 3 emergencies are defined as, "major sudden onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization" as per the IASC paper entitled **Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures** (2012). Five criteria are used by the IASC Principals to determine whether a level 3 response is required, namely scale, urgency, complexity, combined national and international capacity to respond and reputational risk. The declaration of a level 3 emergency triggers the activation of several mechanisms and tools, like the deployment of experts from the inter-agency rapid response mechanism (IARRM) to provide technical and management support or the empowered leadership protocol for HCs. Additional guidance is available on **'Applying the System-wide Emergency Activation ('L3 activation') to Slow-onset and Protracted Humanitarian Crises'**.

9 The timeframe of the calendar is dependent on the crisis/response. For contexts participating in the annual planning cycle, the calendar may be one or more years.

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE ELEMENTS AND ACCOMPANYING TOOLS

The following section of the Reference Module refers to each element of the humanitarian programme cycle and outlines the accompanying tools. These elements apply to all humanitarian crises, but the tools should be applied flexibly. Implementation covers the operationalization of all elements to ensure the delivery of aid to affected people quickly, effectively and in a principled manner.

TOOLS

PREPAREDNESS

What

Preparedness measures taken prior to a crisis assist in making the response more timely, more appropriate to the context and, in some cases, more cost effective. Emergency response preparedness (ERP) involves anticipating emergencies that are likely to occur and putting in place key components of the response in advance. In addition to collective IASC preparedness, each organization has committed to working in a coherent manner to assist in the development of national and local preparedness capacity as per the Common Framework on Preparedness.

When

Continuously.

What needs to be done?

The ERP concept stresses that preparedness is a continuous process which seeks to understand risk and match this to action, working off a predictable base level of multi-hazard preparedness. The approach comprises three elements:

1. Risk analysis and monitoring: Hazards are identified and ranked as low, medium or high risk based on an analysis of several factors, including potential impact and likelihood. This generates a country risk profile. Risk analysis is undertaken, where possible with national authorities, and with development actors, to build national and local preparedness capacity.
2. Minimum preparedness actions: These identify steps which need to be taken ahead of time to ensure that the other elements of the humanitarian programme cycle can be implemented effectively when a crisis occurs. Minimum preparedness actions include risk monitoring, establishing coordination and management arrangements, and preparing for joint assessment, monitoring, information management, and operational capacity.

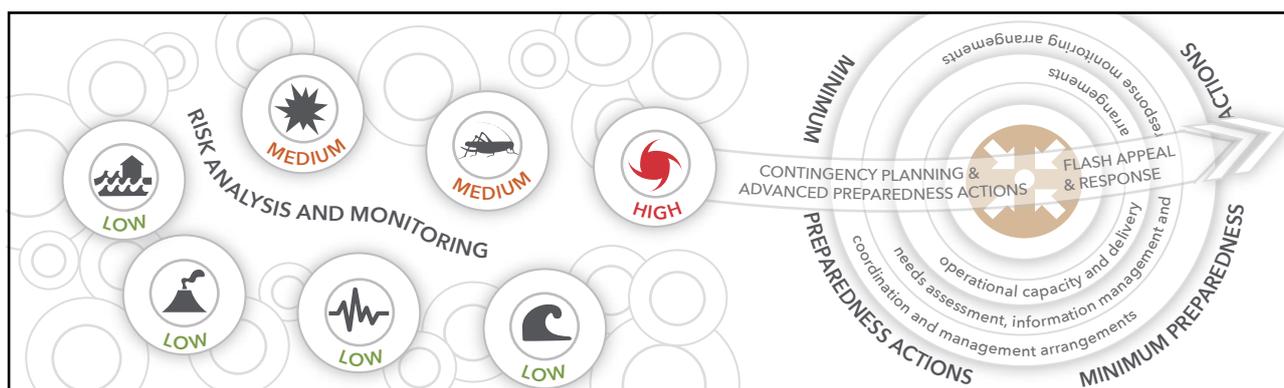
3. Contingency planning and advanced preparedness actions: Formulation of a contingency plan and familiarity with its contents, together with implementation of associated advanced preparedness actions, such as identifying capacities, key logistic requirements and pre-positioning of relief supplies for initial response, brings all relevant actors to an advanced level of readiness for specific scenarios. A contingency plan is developed whenever risk analysis monitoring suggests an emergency may be imminent or in the case of a very specific risk with potentially catastrophic impact. If an emergency occurs, the contingency plan informs the flash appeal; both should follow the same format to ensure that what the HCT prepares for looks a lot like the way it eventually responds.

Who does what?

The HC, working with the HCT and clusters/sectors (or in the absence of humanitarian coordination structures, the Resident Coordinator with the UN Country Team, national authorities and NGOs), is responsible for leading preparedness actions, and ensuring coherence in the HCT (or in-country mechanism) as well as with national structures and plans. Support is available from headquarters and regional offices as required. Clusters/sectors use the country risk profile to identify which clusters are likely to be most relevant and what risks are likely to affect their activities; to put in place minimum preparedness actions; and to assist the HCT to prepare and provide technical support as needed. Organizations strive to align their preparedness training and planning with the interagency and cluster/sector arrangements established under the ERP approach.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ Emergency Response Preparedness Guidance
- ✓ Inter-Agency Emergency Simulation Facilitator Guide
- ✓ IASC Handbook for RCs and HCs on Emergency Preparedness and Response.



NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

Needs assessments provide the evidence base for humanitarian response. At the outset of an emergency, they provide the information needed to define the strategic objectives, and later for operational planning, staffing and resource requirements. To enable inter-agency and inter-sectoral planning, it is important to coordinate assessments so that they are conducted jointly or through a harmonized approach. In a joint assessment process the information and analysis generated is collected using a single approach and shared and available to all humanitarian stakeholders. No organization is considered the owner of the data. Where a harmonized assessment approach is taken, agencies are encouraged to use standardized modules which allow for interoperable data which, along with analysis, is made available to all stakeholders. All organizations have a duty to inform and engage whenever possible with national and local authorities and people affected by the crisis throughout the needs assessment process.

A. Joint Needs Assessment - Multi-Cluster/ Sector Initial Rapid Assessment

What

The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) is a joint needs assessment tool that can be used in sudden onset emergencies, including IASC System-Wide level 3 Emergency Response (L3 Responses). It is a precursor to cluster/sectoral needs assessments and provides information to inform strategic planning. The MIRA is implemented through a phased process of secondary and primary data collection, joint analysis and reporting. The MIRA is an inter-agency process enabling actors to reach, from the outset, a common understanding of the situation and its likely evolution. Based on its findings, humanitarian actors can develop a joint strategic plan, mobilize resources and monitor the situation. A joint needs assessment approach can also be used in protracted crisis, if deemed useful by the HC and HCT.

When

A MIRA should be initiated as soon as possible after a sudden onset crisis. The initial secondary data analysis for the MIRA should be completed within 72 hours to inform the flash appeal (if applicable). A MIRA should be finalized within 14 days to inform the humanitarian response plan. The HC and HCT decide, in close coordination with the inter-cluster coordination group, on the most suitable timeline.

Purpose

- To identify needs as expressed by affected communities.
- To determine key humanitarian issues based on several data sources.
- To provide an analysis of need to underpin the humanitarian response plan.
- To identify gaps in needs assessments which need to be filled.

What needs to be done?

- Analyse pre-crisis and in-crisis secondary data and identify information gaps per cluster
- Agree on a needs assessment data collection tool that addresses the information gaps identified through the secondary data analysis.
- Ensure joint, community-level primary data collection using appropriate sampling approaches and mainstreaming age, gender, diversity considerations and representation of the perceived needs of the affected populations into the methodology.
- Ensure consultation with community representatives involved in the response.
- Jointly analyse the primary and secondary data.
- In consultation with the government, where appropriate, disseminate the analysis to the HC/HCT and sectors/clusters, so that it can inform the humanitarian response plan, cluster/sector planning and the programmes of individual organizations
- Communicate findings to affected people through the most accessible mechanism and identify ways of receiving feedback.

Who does what?

The HC is responsible for initiating and overseeing the MIRA, in close cooperation with the HCT and with the support of clusters/sectors. A team is formed of technical experts, cluster representatives, humanitarian organizations, representatives of the affected community, and the national authorities to prepare and analyse the findings of the MIRA. OCHA ordinarily oversees coordination of the MIRA process; this includes information management support, as needed.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises
- ✓ Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Guidance

B. Joint Needs Analysis - Humanitarian Needs Overview

What

A **humanitarian needs overview** consolidates and analyses information on the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people. It is based on existing information (secondary data) derived from multi-cluster and sectoral assessments, monitoring data, survey results, and contextual judgment of humanitarian actors and of local sources such as national authorities, community bodies and representatives from affected communities. It also outlines the humanitarian risk profile of the country. It is reviewed at regular intervals.

When

The development of a humanitarian needs overview is the first step in the implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle in a protracted crisis and is done ahead of strategic response planning. Its application (or revision) in a new slow onset crisis or escalating protracted crisis should be determined by the HC and HCT based on operational requirements. It may also be used in the later stages of a sudden onset crisis, if deemed useful by the HC/HCT.

Purpose

- To identify immediate emergency needs and key humanitarian issues based on multiple data sources.
- To provide an analysis of severity and ranking of need to underpin the humanitarian response plan.
- To consolidate and analyse information in order to plan and identify gaps in needs assessments for better programming.

What needs to be done?

- Set up an analysis plan by identifying indicators for measuring humanitarian needs and agree on param-

eters for collecting, analysing and sharing information (including systematic dialogue with affected people to seek their perspective on needs and priorities, and how these are being met).

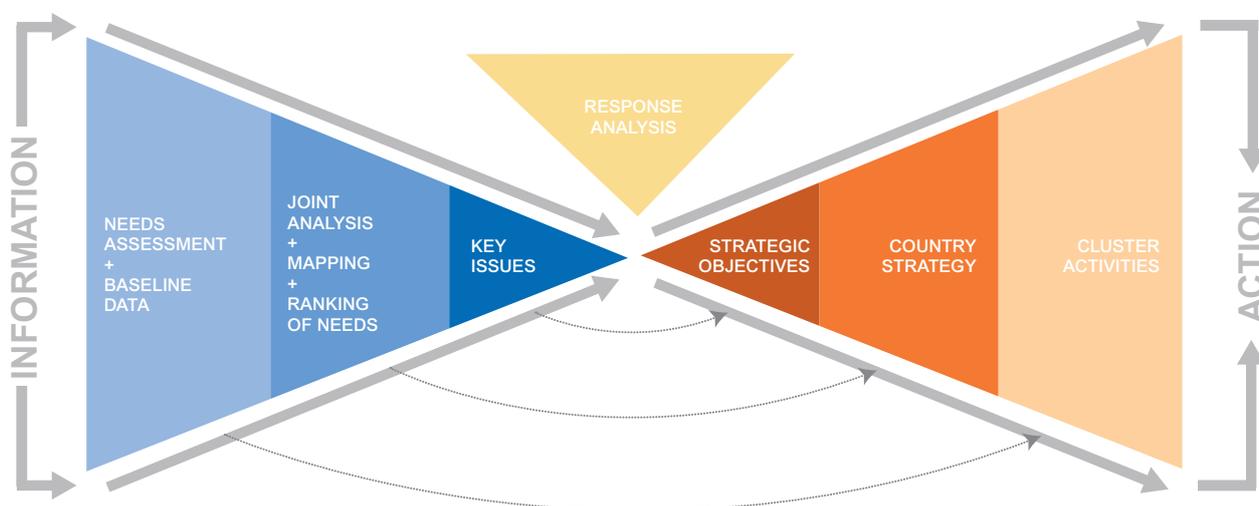
- Consolidate data and identify information gaps.
- Undertake a joint, inter-sectoral analysis and validate and triangulate findings with national counterparts and affected people.
- Disseminate the outcomes of the humanitarian needs overview and use the findings to inform the humanitarian response plan.
- Communicate the findings to people affected by the crisis through the most accessible mechanism and identify ways of receiving feedback.

Who does what?

Humanitarian needs overviews are initiated by the HC and HCT or national authorities, and coordinated by OCHA. Clusters, humanitarian organizations, technical experts and community representatives participate in the data collection and analysis process. Information management officers play an integral role, including ensuring an up-to-date assessment registry. Every organization involved in the response applies the findings to their programming.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ **Humanitarian Needs Overview Guidance and Template**
- ✓ **Humanitarian Needs Comparison Tool Guidance (under finalisation)**
- ✓ **Humanitarian Indicators Registry**
- ✓ **IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises.**



STRATEGIC RESPONSE PLANNING

What

Humanitarian response planning helps the humanitarian community respond more effectively to the needs of people affected by a crisis – to focus activities and resources, to ensure that organizations are working toward the same goals, and to assess and adjust the humanitarian community’s response to a changing environment. The process is “strategic” because it involves being clear about the overall objectives, being aware of the resources and capacity, and incorporating both into being responsive to a dynamic environment. The decisions made in response planning shape and guide the collective response. Response planning involves setting strategic objectives developing an approach to achieve those objectives, and making sure roles and responsibilities are clear. As it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, response planning requires prioritization of possible actions. Much of the “strategy” lies in making the tough decisions about what is critical to do and how to do it.

A. Flash appeal (sudden-onset OR significant and unforeseen escalation in protracted crises)

A flash appeal includes a concise, top-line analysis of the scope and severity of the humanitarian crisis and sets out priority actions and preliminary requirements for the response. Ideally, it is based on a contingency plan and draws on baseline information gathered during the preparedness phase. Initial planning as reflected in the flash appeal should set the direction of the development/revision of a humanitarian response plan, to be completed within 30 days. The HC and HCT should determine the duration of the activities included in the flash appeal in order to estimate the financial requirements; the flash appeal resource requirements will be absorbed into the humanitarian response plan requirements when developed.

When

A flash appeal is issued three to five days after a sudden-onset emergency and if/when the HC and HCT determine a need in protracted or slow onset crises facing a significant and unforeseen ‘spike’ in needs or a change in the context, with the emphasis being on timeliness. The development of the flash appeal is streamlined, quick and light in order to set out an initial planning framework, response priorities and resource requirements in the early days of a crisis.

Purpose

- To provide an initial joint analysis of the situation.
- To build broad support for the direction of the response.

- To briefly outline priority actions and initial funding requirements (based on estimations).
- To highlight the plan for the scale-up of the response.
- To ensure that contextual, institutional and programmatic risks to the achievement of the collective response priorities are identified.

What needs to be done?

- Consolidate and jointly review data on the situation and response (including gaps and capacity) to develop a shared analysis, or use the initial MIRA secondary data analysis (if applied).
- Hold a HCT meeting to decide on the scope of the response, the strategic objectives (drafted in cross-sectoral language), the scale-up plan (including the coordination architecture), and the initial resource requirements.
- Determine priority activities, per strategic objective, and funding requirements based on preliminary costing.
- Ensure that risks and mitigation actions are identified by each cluster/sector.
- Draft the document and circulate it to the HC and HCT for validation. It is essential to keep it brief (5-10 pages) and to avoid consolidating information into long, narrative documents.
- Consult government, development actors, civil society actors, and consult affected people as a priority, taking into account access and security.
- Finalize the plan and disseminate it broadly among humanitarian responders to ensure its use in guiding programming, project planning and resourcing.

Who does what?

The HC provides leadership for the planning process and together with the HCT sets the direction and priorities of the response. Organizations and clusters/sectors contribute to the development of the flash appeal. Information management officers provide support throughout, including keeping a reasonably up-to-date ‘who, what, where (when)’ (3 or 4Ws) database to better identify coverage, gaps and overlap. OCHA compiles data, prepares a draft, and facilitates the document’s finalization.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ [Flash Appeal Guidance and Template](#).

B. Humanitarian response plan

A **humanitarian response plan** communicates the strategy to respond to the assessed needs, and serves as the basis for implementing and monitoring the collective response. It consists of two parts: a country strategy and cluster/sector response plans. The humanitarian response plan should support country-based decision-makers, inform programming at national and sub-national levels and within clusters/sectors. It also should consider issues of sustainability and indicate what conditions must be met and how to effectively phase out or transition into development activities.

When

In the case of a sudden onset crisis or a rapid escalation in a protracted crisis where a flash appeal is issued, a humanitarian response plan is normally completed/ revised within 30 days of the issuance of the flash appeal and builds on the initial planning undertaken. In protracted crises, whether using an annual or multi-year planning process, most HCTs develop their humanitarian response plans on a yearly basis. These are developed in the last quarter of the year for the following year, and usually cover a calendar year: January-December. However, the planning timeframe is flexible and can start at any point in the year. The HC and HCT must decide the duration of the plan in advance as this will directly affect the process as well as the strategy.

Purpose

- To set the direction and strategic objectives of the humanitarian response.
- To indicate each cluster/sector's contribution toward meeting the strategic objectives.
- To provide strategic objectives, indicators and targets for monitoring progress.
- To ensure the contextual, institutional and programmatic risks to the achievement of the strategic objectives are identified.
- To link to the existing development plan (if applicable) and indicate how the response will provide a path into recovery and build resilience.
- To mobilize resources for the humanitarian response

What needs to be done?

- Review the humanitarian needs overview (or the MIRA report, if applicable) and identify capacities, assets and operational constraints in order to determine how to address needs in a given context. This 'response analysis' will inform the boundaries of the humanitarian response plan.
- Convene a meeting or workshop of humanitarian stakeholders to review the 'response analysis' and

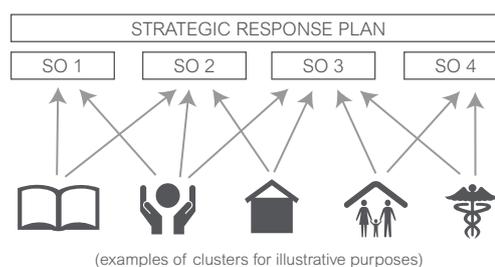
then develop a top-line country strategy which outlines the boundaries, sets priorities within those boundaries and assumptions. Agree on strategic objectives and indicators

- Hold cluster/sector meetings to determine cluster/sector objectives and key activities – in line with the strategic objectives – and then (if applicable) prepare projects according to an agreed process, criteria and a division of labour. Ensure that risks and mitigation actions to the achievements of objectives are identified.
- Draft/compile the humanitarian response plan and circulate it to the HC and HCT for validation.
- Consult government, development actors, civil society and affected people throughout.
- Disseminate the plan broadly to ensure its use in each organization's programming and fundraising.
- Use the strategic objectives and indicators to develop a response monitoring framework and as the basis of reporting on results in the periodic monitoring report.

Who does what?

The HC provides leadership to the planning process and, together with the HCT, sets the priorities and strategy and ensures that the cluster response plans comply with that strategy. Organizations and clusters/sectors participate in the process and contribute to the development of the plan. Information management officers collect and manage data and keep a reasonably up-to-date 'who, what, where (when)' (3 or 4Ws) database to better identify coverage, gaps and overlap. OCHA supports the planning process by consolidating data, agreeing planning figures, preparing a draft plan, and facilitating the plan's finalization. If present, an inter-cluster coordination group supports these efforts. Humanitarian responders at the subnational level should be engaged throughout.

A multi-sectoral approach to response planning is critical. Relevant clusters develop multi-sectoral strategies in achievement of the strategic objectives (SO) and coordinate to operationalize and monitor results. This is essential for a "joined-up" response.



GUIDANCE

- ✓ [Humanitarian Response Plan Guidance and Template.](#)

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE MONITORING

What

Humanitarian **response monitoring** is necessary to: help HCs and HCTs examine whether sufficient progress is being made in reaching strategic and cluster objectives; provide an evidence base for taking decisions about the future direction of the response; and support resource mobilization. It is a continuous process that records the aid delivered to people in need, measures results against the objectives set out in the humanitarian response plan, and examines what was delivered versus the resources allocated. The aim is to establish whether aid is actually delivered to affected people as intended and to analyse how and why any gaps, if any, have occurred. The final stage in humanitarian response monitoring is reporting. The analysis answers the questions: “has the humanitarian community done what it committed to doing in the response plan, and, if not why, and what should be done to address those shortcomings”.

When

Response monitoring is continuous. The frequency of data collection and reporting is determined by the HC and HCT based on needs and capacities. For sudden onset and/or protracted crises with a sudden and unexpected escalation in the crisis, it is recommended that a first periodic monitoring report be prepared 60 days after the response plan; reporting periodicity thereafter is determined by the calendar set by the HC and HCT.

Purpose

The purpose of response monitoring is two-fold:

- To provide humanitarian actors with the evidence they need to take decisions and adapt short and long-term strategies; and
- To ensure that organizations involved in the response remain accountable to affected people, national authorities, donors and the general public.

What needs to be done?

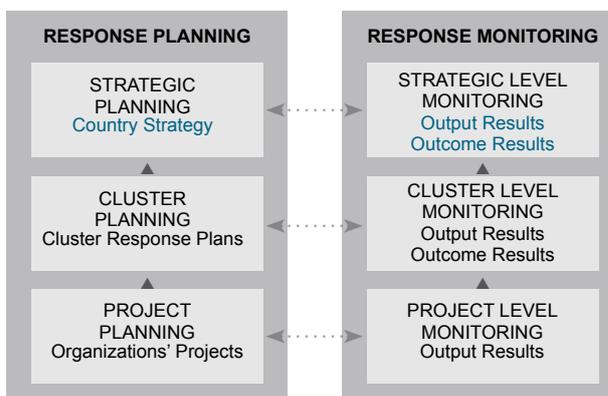
Response monitoring is performed in three stages: preparation, monitoring and reporting.

- Preparation: During the strategic planning process, the clusters and inter-cluster coordination group agree monitoring plans. The HCT establishes and endorses an overall **response monitoring framework**, which defines what will be monitored; how and when; who is responsible for monitoring and analysis; how and when monitoring information will be recorded and reported; what key actions will be taken; and, what resources are necessary for successfully monitoring the humanitarian response.

- Monitoring: Apply the response monitoring framework continuously, throughout the implementation of the humanitarian response plan.
- Reporting: Use the data collected on the collective response in the periodic monitoring report, which includes an analysis of monitoring findings and a set of recommendations for corrective action, if applicable.

Who does what?

The HC ensures, with the HCT, that a response monitoring framework is developed and applied, and that monitoring findings feed into their collective decision-making. Clusters and the inter-cluster coordi-



nation prepare the response monitoring framework and aggregate data and compare actual results to targets set for cluster and strategic objectives based on that framework. The clusters and OCHA, on behalf of the inter-cluster coordination group, make monitoring information available through different channels: reports, websites, and so forth. Humanitarian actors undertake monitoring exercises and report against indicators as agreed in the response monitoring framework. OCHA provides support as needed.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ [Humanitarian Indicators Registry](#)
- ✓ [Humanitarian Response Monitoring Guidance](#)
- ✓ [Periodic Monitoring Report Guidance and Template](#)

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

What

Resource mobilization is about fundraising for the humanitarian response, as outlined in the flash appeal and/or humanitarian response plans. It is also about using **pooled funding mechanisms**¹⁰ (if present) strategically to fund in line with the priorities set in the humanitarian response plans. The credibility and accuracy of assessed needs, the strategy and response priorities, and the perceived reasonableness of funding requirements as well as the perception of the 'collectiveness' of engagement under the programme cycle, have an impact on donor decision-making.

When

Resource mobilization activities can take place at any point in the humanitarian programme cycle. However, the top humanitarian donors tend to make their main decisions during the last quarter of the calendar year for disbursement early in the next calendar year and within 72 hours for sudden onset emergencies.

Purpose

- To ensure the flash appeal and/or humanitarian response plans, are well-funded, that funds are allocated to priority activities and to raise the visibility/profile of a crisis.
- To maintain an on-going dialogue with donors on the evolution of needs, results achieved and funding received.

What needs to be done?¹¹

The HC and HCT may wish to develop overarching resource mobilization strategy. Some suggested activities/products include:

- Joint briefings for donors at the global and country levels and for Member States in New York and Geneva on needs, strategy and funding requirements
- Country-specific fundraising brochures/pamphlets, infographics, or other documents, which tell a compelling story focused on people in need and the impact of funding/underfunding.

- Donor pledging conferences in-country or in donor capitals.
- Regular, up-to-date reporting on pledges and contributions to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service, which supports the tracking of funding requirements and contributions, to inform country-level funding analysis (monthly, quarterly or at mid-year) and articulate the human impact of under-funding.
- Applications to the Central Emergency Response Fund (grant or loan elements) or the development of allocation policy papers for the strategic use of country-based pooled funds.
- Guide to giving (and if relevant a business brief) as well as tailored messaging to support the response.
- Coordinated lobbying of parliaments for increased humanitarian and preparedness funding or the use of development funds to support chronic crises.

Who does what?

Resource mobilization activities at the field level are led by the HC, coordinated by OCHA and supported by the HCT, inter-cluster coordination group and clusters/sectors. The national authorities should be consulted and included in the process as appropriate.¹² At the project/programme level, organizations fundraise individually and are expected to propose activities to donors that are consistent with the strategic objectives and cluster response plans/activities set in the response plan. Clusters play an important role in facilitating funding allocations from pooled funds to cluster partners; they may wish to approach donors for resources to fulfil their cluster response plan. All organizations are expected to regularly inform the Financial Tracking Service (**fts@un.org**) of any new funding, including internal allocations or the use of private funds. At the request of the HC, OCHA Headquarters can support field-based resource mobilization activities or initiate coordinated system-wide advocacy and fundraising. Donors have an important role to play in using flash appeals and humanitarian response plans to inform funding decisions.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ **Resource Mobilization Template.**

¹⁰ **Country-Based Pooled Funds** are multi-donor humanitarian financing instruments established by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). They are managed by OCHA at the country-level under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Donor contributions to each CBPF are un-earmarked and allocated by the HC through an in-country consultative process.

¹¹ This does not include headquarters activities like the production of an **overview of global humanitarian action**, which summarizes humanitarian needs and funding requirements to guide and inform donor decision-making at the global level.

¹² IASC policy states that government bodies in an affected country may be included as partners in UN or NGO projects but cannot appeal directly for funds.

OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW

What

An **operational peer review** is an internal, inter-agency peer support tool, which helps determine whether adjustments (or “course correctors”) need to be made to the collective humanitarian response. It is a light, brief, collaborative and forward-looking process undertaken by peers. It is not a real-time evaluation.

When

For L3 Responses, operational peer reviews are to be conducted within the first 90 days of the L3 Response activation. For other responses, an operational peer review may be triggered by a request from the HC/HCT, the IASC Emergency Directors Group or the IASC Principals.

Purpose

- To support the enhancement of the collective response, as necessary, and to identify good practice or learning to share with other operations, including with regard to: leadership arrangements; key obstacles affecting operational; coordination mechanisms; accountability to affected people; and implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle.
- To review the adequacy of support to the HC, HCT and clusters from headquarters, the IASC Emergency Directors Group and IASC Principals.

What needs to be done?

- Initiate an operational peer review of a particular context.
- Select an inter-agency team of senior peers to carry it out.
- Prepare terms of reference and a mission programme in consultation with the HC/HCT.
- Collect and review secondary data
- Conduct interviews and hold meetings with key informants prior to the mission, as appropriate.
- Carry out a mission over 7-10 days which utilizes various techniques, including self-assessment exercises, field/site visits, key informant interviews, and a workshop of the HCT.
- Prepare an analytical report and recommendations, based on the observations in-country and the secondary data analysis. The report also captures global learning and good practice

- Submit the final report to the HC/HCT and the IASC Emergency Directors within two-three weeks following the end of mission.
- Ensure implementation of the course correctors, including a first status update from the HC/HCT within 30 days from submission of the report. This should be tracked by OCHA at the country and headquarters level.

Who does what?

An operational peer review is initiated automatically by the activation of a L3 response. The Emergency Directors select a group of experienced, senior operations managers or external ‘peers’ of the HC/HCT to carry out the operational peer review. The team prepares for the in-country mission; engages in site visits, key informant interviews, HCT workshop and self-assessment exercises in country; prepares a set of recommendations per the areas of focus included in the terms of reference; and steers the drafting of the report and the “course correctors”. OCHA supports the substantive and logistical preparations, including setting up a mission programme, drafting terms of reference, reviewing secondary data, finalizing the self-assessment questionnaires to be used in country, and drafting/editing the report. The HC and HCT are engaged in the process throughout, informing the observations/findings of the review team and monitoring and reporting back on the implementation of the recommendations.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ [Operational Peer Review Guidance](#)

INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION

What

An **inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (IAHE)** is an independent assessment of results of the collective humanitarian response by IASC partners to a specific crisis. IAHEs evaluate the extent to which planned collective results have been achieved and how humanitarian reform efforts have contributed to that achievement. IAHEs are not in-depth evaluations of any one sector or of the performance of a specific agency, and, as such, cannot replace any other form of agency-specific humanitarian evaluation, joint or otherwise, which may be undertaken or required.

When

IAHEs may be triggered after activation of an L3 Response and final reports are expected 12-15 months after the L3 Response activation. In other large-scale emergencies affecting multiple sectors, an IAHE may be requested by the HC/HCT and should be conducted within 9 to 12 months of the onset/escalation of the crisis. A discretionary IAHE could also be conducted in other cases at the specific request of an HC/HCT or other primary stakeholders, such as in the case of prolonged chronic emergencies.

Purpose

- To contribute to accountability and strategic learning for the humanitarian system, and seek to promote human dignity and the empowerment of affected people.
- To promote accountability to affected people through the provision of feedback on the results of the response to affected communities.

What needs to be done?

Specific terms of reference are established for each IAHE which detail the entire process. IAHEs are con-

ducted by teams of independent evaluation experts¹³. They assess collective results that have been achieved during an agreed time period and focus on: the quality of aid delivered; the degree to which affected people have been protected; and progress towards both the response's objectives and targets set by the HC and HCT.

Who does what?

On behalf of the IASC, IAHEs are initiated by the ERC, as advised by the EDG. OCHA chairs the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group, which oversees the evaluation process, and the ad-hoc Management Group, which manages and coordinates the entire evaluation process, including ensuring quality control for the evaluation outputs and follow-up. The IASC Principals are responsible for ensuring that systemic recommendations from IAHEs are addressed. The IAHE in-country advisory group represents country-level stakeholders engaged in the emergency response; it plays a key role in advising the evaluation team and supporting the evaluation through the planning, implementation and follow-up stages. The HC and HCT engage with the evaluation team to help scope the evaluation to ensure that specific policy and operational questions are addressed and they provide sustained inputs to the evaluation throughout the process, from inception to dissemination. The HC is responsible for ensuring that operational-level recommendations are addressed in a formal management response plan and that their implementation is monitored over a 12-month period, with an update provided three months from the date of issuance of the report.

GUIDANCE

- ✓ IAHE Guidelines

¹³ See IAHE guidelines: IAHEs are undertaken by independent evaluators who have not been involved with the design and implementation of the intervention being evaluated in any way.

INTER-AGENCY ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS TRIGGERED BY L3 DECLARATION

	Operational Peer Review	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
Purpose	An operational peer review is an internal, inter-agency management tool that identifies areas for improvement early in a response. It does not measure the results or impact of a response.	An inter-agency humanitarian evaluation is an inter-agency independent assessment of whether collective results achieved in responding to an emergency meet the objectives stated in the humanitarian response plan and the needs of affected people.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended to take place within the first 90 days from the L3 declaration. • Overall duration: 6-8 weeks (10 days in country). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be conducted within 9-12 months from the L3 declaration, subject to operational feasibility and utility. • Overall duration: 10-12 months (4 weeks in country).
Roles and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated by HC/HCT, EDG or IASC Principals. • Managed by EDG with OCHA's support. • Undertaken by senior UN agency and NGO representatives or 'peers' of the HC/HCT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated by ERC, advised by EDG • Managed by the Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group, chaired by OCHA. • Undertaken by a team of independent evaluation experts.

ESSENTIAL ENABLERS

Coordination

Effective **coordination** underpins all elements of the humanitarian programme cycle. It serves to identify and meet priority needs, address gaps and reduce duplication in humanitarian response. It ensures that each aspect of the programme cycle is applied as part of a joint effort that uses available resources and capacities. Specifically, the HCT provides a forum for strategic discussion and decision-making by the country directors of humanitarian organizations. This includes setting the direction of the humanitarian response and development of the overall humanitarian strategy, under the leadership of the HC. The inter-cluster coordination group brings cluster/sector coordinators and representatives of cross-cutting issues together at the national and sub-national levels to coordinate operations and the implementation of the programme cycle. Clusters coordinate action among humanitarian partners within their sectoral area of responsibility. Collaboration, two-way flow of communication, timely meeting documentation, and clear roles and responsibilities among the various coordination structures are essential to support the implementation of the cycle

Please see the **IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level** for more information.

Information Management

Humanitarian information management is the systematic process of collecting, collating, storing, processing, verifying, and analyzing data and information, and disseminating it to humanitarian stakeholders. Information management underpins each element of the programme cycle and helps connect them by carrying information from one to another. In order for the programme cycle to function properly, data must be shared and collected in a timely manner to inform decision-making and analysis. Sufficient information management capacity and the use of common tools – such as the **humanitarianresponse.info** website, **Common Operational Datasets**, **Fundamental Operational Datasets**, a reasonably complete and up-to-date ‘who does what where’ database (3Ws), list of contacts and assessment registry – are critical elements to the successful implementation of the programme cycle. Please see the **IASC Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Clus-**

ter/Sector leads and OCHA in Information Management for more information on the responsibilities of OCHA and the clusters, including the role of an information management working group

QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability to Affected People

Humanitarian actors are expected to listen to, involve and communicate with affected populations throughout the humanitarian programme cycle. They need to establish a direct, responsible and respectful relationship with aid recipients. This includes enabling affected people’s participation and feedback into planning, implementation and monitoring, including through the establishment of complaints mechanisms. Where their needs cannot be met or planned for, these constraints and regular programmatic updates should be shared with them. Good communication between aid workers and the affected communities leads to meaningful dialogue and the identification of evidence-based needs and concerns, thereby improving the quality of the strategic process and the actions linked to it. For more information, please see the **IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations** and the **Accountability to Affected Populations Operational Framework**.

Affected people are at the centre of the humanitarian programme cycle and they should be effectively consulted at each step.

Minimum Standards

Each step of the humanitarian programme cycle must be implemented in a manner that adheres to and promotes well-established humanitarian principles, standards, and codes of conduct. The application of the Sphere Project’s core humanitarian minimum standards and companion standards can significantly contribute to the quality of humanitarian work and the accountability of those that undertake it, particularly to affected people. Organizations are required to draw on and apply these global standards, which have been developed through a broad consultative and consensus-based manner and which take a rights-based approach.

ALIGNING INFORMATION PRODUCTS WITH THE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE

The humanitarian programme cycle should help to rationalize and align information products in order to help reduce the workload of responders in-country. Whenever possible, inputs provided by organizations or clusters to processes and documents of the cycle should be reused or repackaged in public information products. As an example, the Humanitarian Dashboard should be based on the information contained in the periodic monitoring report.

Protection

Protection of people affected and at risk should inform the humanitarian programme cycle and operational activities. In practical terms, this means identifying who is at risk, how and why at the outset of a crisis and then taking into account the specific vulnerabilities that underlie these risks. It includes ensuring protection oriented analysis and priority-setting; a rights-based and participatory approach to collective action; and the incorporation of 'Rights up Front' to reinforce the need to respond early to human rights violations. For more information, please see the **IASC Statement on the Centrality of Protection**.

Cross-Cutting Issues and Gender Equality

Humanitarian organizations need to acknowledge the differences with respect to sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, and other social markers of exclusion and should use sex and age disaggregated data to inform the response. Design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian programmes must take into account the implications on women and men as well as other dimensions of diversity that can lead to exclusion. For more information, please see **Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs, Equal Opportunities (IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action)**.

Environment

Considering the environment is a fundamental requirement of effective humanitarian action. Environmental issues are underlying and contributing factors to humanitarian crises and humanitarian action can impact negatively on the environment, impacting affected people. The reduction of the environmental footprint of the response provides for a smoother shift into sustainable recovery and contributes to strengthening the resilience of affected communities.¹⁴

Exit and Early Recovery

Early recovery is a vital element of any effective humanitarian response. Planning for it should start when the crisis begins. Early recovery is an approach that addresses recovery needs that arise during the humanitarian phase using humanitarian mechanisms that align with development principles. It enables people to use the benefits of humanitarian action to seize development opportunities, strengthens resilience, and establishes a sustainable process of recovery from a crisis. For humanitarian organizations, early recovery can provide a path to durable solutions and an exit strategy. For both reasons, programmes that promote sustainable long-term solutions, including greater system and community resilience, should be integrated into the humanitarian programme cycle and explicitly referenced in humanitarian strategies and approaches.

KEY THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- ✓ Translate or produce programme cycle documents in the local language.
- ✓ Ensure that the documents use multiple logos or the IASC logo but never only the UN or OCHA logo.
- ✓ Post the documents on the country page of humanitarianresponse.info.
- ✓ Keep it short; key decision-makers will rarely have time to read or be influenced by long, unreadable documents.

14 For more information, please see <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/clusters/early-recovery/document/key-things-er-actors-need-know-about-environment> and <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/topics/environment>.

INDICATIVE TIMELINES AND TRIGGERS: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS SUMMARIZED

The timeline for implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle will be adapted to each individual context. The duration of the timeline will depend on the nature of the crisis – e.g. sudden onset or protracted – and the optimal planning period for the response (e.g. single year or multi-year).

To help guide HCs and HCTs in the development of a calendar for the implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle in their context, indicative timelines for possible scenarios are provided below, outlining expectations on a day-by-day basis. HCTs should adapt the indicative timeline for the most relevant scenario, taking into account their specific circumstances and seasonal hazards¹⁵

While implementation of the cycle should be flexible and adaptable to different country situations, it must at a minimum ensure evidence-based, prioritized plans and periodic reporting on results.

¹⁵ Seasonal hazards are hazards which have a regular cycle, such as floods, cyclones, and drought. See Emergency Response Preparedness Guidance.

CRISIS

1 SUDDEN ONSET CRISIS/ESCALATION OF CRISIS

In sudden onset crises, decisions need to be taken based on limited or incomplete information. There is an urgent need to quickly provide overall direction to the response to allow for the mobilization of action and resources. In such a situation, the application of the humanitarian programme cycle should begin immediately and be flexibly applied. The humanitarian response may be declared a Level 3 Response by the IASC.

Particularly where there is a sharp escalation in a protracted crisis situation, a considerable amount of work may have already been done to identify vulnerable populations, assess and monitor their needs, and define and cost elements of the response. It is important to also take stock of what is in place to avoid duplication or overlap and ensure that there is only one joint planning framework in place at any given time.

To ensure well-coordinated action in the fast-moving environment of a sudden-onset crisis or sharp escalation of an existing crisis, it is recommended that the HC, in consultation with the HCT, take the following steps:

Pre-crisis: Emergency response preparedness actions are undertaken making it possible to respond faster, more appropriately and efficiently, and to take decisions on the basis of more reliable information. Once thresholds identified through risk analysis are met, a contingency plan is prepared or updated, setting out the initial response strategy and operational plan, which can be seamlessly transformed into a flash appeal when the crisis occurs.

Day 1 after the onset/sharp escalation: The HC convenes a HCT meeting to discuss the scale and magnitude of the crisis. The outcomes of the meeting are (a) an analysis of the situation and capacity (including coordination gaps and leadership proposals); (b) an immediate statement of strategic priorities to feed into headquarters-level press and advocacy; and (c) timeline of next steps. The process of gathering, consolidating and analyzing information on needs is expected to start immediately.

By days 3-5: Based on an initial analysis of needs, a flash appeal is developed, setting out the immediate priorities and funding requirements of the response. If an up-to-date contingency plan exists, this should be used as the basis of the flash appeal.

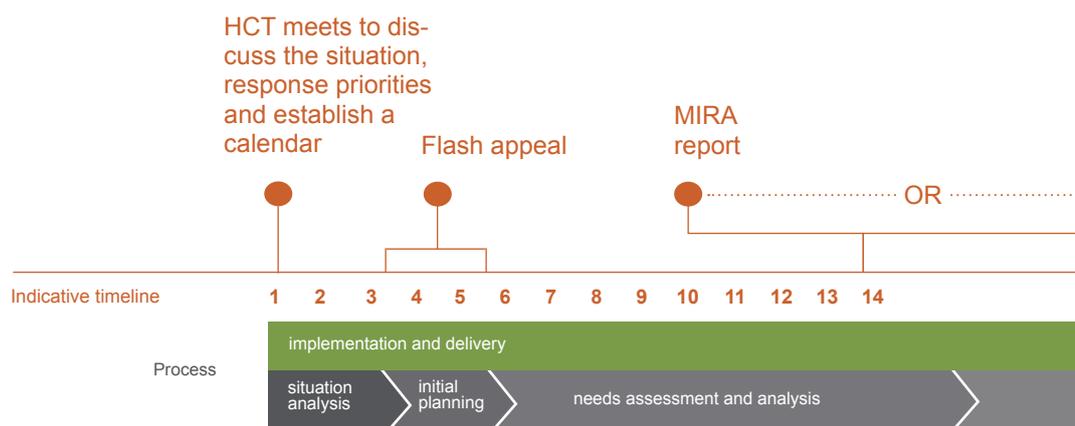
By day 14: A Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment is carried out and a report is issued; the findings underpin the response planning process and/or, when applicable, existing joint needs analyses are updated.

TRIGGER:

Onset of crisis



Sharp escalation of crisis



30 days after the flash appeal: Based on updated joint needs analysis, a Humanitarian Response Plan is developed, or updated, establishing a framework for humanitarian action and for monitoring results. If a humanitarian response plan already exists, it may not be necessary to develop a new one. Instead, the plan can be updated to take into account the changes in context and shift in response approach, as appropriate.

60 days after the humanitarian response plan: A periodic monitoring report is issued which records inputs and outputs and measures progress towards the strategic and cluster objectives of the humanitarian response plan. The report may also indicate a need to prepare / update a humanitarian needs overview or revise the humanitarian response plan. The frequency of reporting is determined by the HC and HCT.

By day 90 (for L3 Responses): A mandatory operational peer review is conducted by an inter-agency group of peers to recommend any adjustments to the management and coordination of the response.

Between months 9 to 12 (for L3 Responses): Where justified to the ERC, an inter-agency humanitarian evaluation may be conducted by an independent team of experts to assess collective results achieved against the humanitarian response plan.

Note: The HC/HCT may consider transitioning to an annual/multi-year planning cycle (see scenario 2) once the crisis moves from the emergency phase and if it requires a sustained response.



2 ANNUAL OR MULTI -YEAR PLANNING IN PROTRACTED CRISES

HCs and HCTs in protracted crises, often in conflict and post-conflict situations, generally engage in an annual needs analysis and response planning process from September to November of each year. However, the planning timeframe is flexible and can start at any point in the year and run for any length of time based on operational requirements. In contexts where needs and planned responses change little from year to year, or multi-year programming like resilience-building actions is underway, a multi-year Humanitarian Response Plan could be considered to enable an outcome-orientated approach that accounts for incremental results, ensuring the response effectively strengthens resilience.

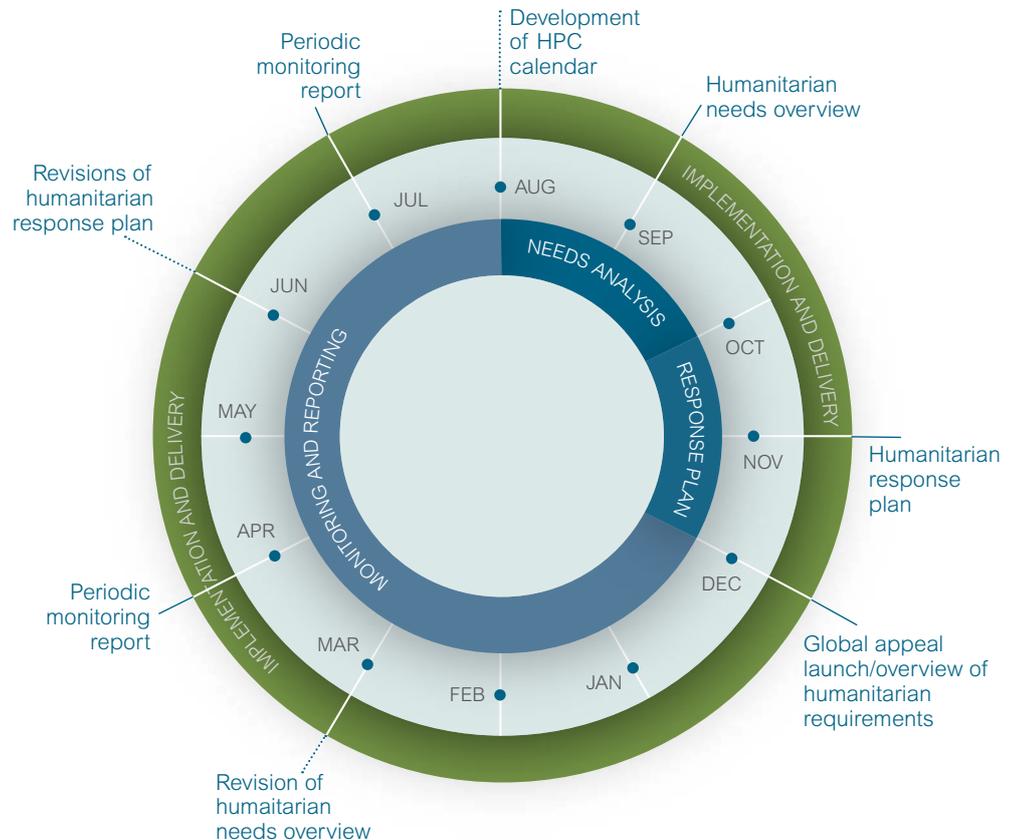
Due to the ongoing nature of protracted crises, the programme cycle timeline is extended to allow for broad consultation at both the national and subnational levels. The number of tools is limited to a smaller set given that information should be available on the crisis and the assessed needs.

The HC and HCT should ensure that a contextually-adapted programme cycle approach is developed, taking into account the following recommended steps ensuring that the process remains 'light touch' so as to facilitate, and not detract from, the delivery of assistance and protection.

Emergency response preparedness actions are undertaken on an ongoing basis, making it possible to respond faster, more appropriately and efficiently, and to take decisions on the basis of reliable information.

Step 1: The HC convenes a HCT meeting and a programme cycle calendar is agreed.

Step 2: A humanitarian needs overview is developed through an inter-agency/cluster process which collaboratively analyses existing needs data and other information and reaches a shared understanding of needs, priority issues and the likely evolution of the situation. This analysis underpins the humanitarian response plan.



Step 3: A humanitarian response plan is prepared which defines the joint response strategy including strategic objectives and indicators, and includes cluster/sector response plans with objectives, activities and funding requirements. The Humanitarian Response Plan serves as the basis for response monitoring.

Step 4: A periodic monitoring report is issued which records inputs and outputs and measures progress towards the strategic and cluster objectives of the humanitarian response plan. The report may also indicate a need to collect fresh assessment data and undertake analysis through a humanitarian needs overview process or to revise the humanitarian response plan. The frequency of periodic monitoring reporting is determined by the HC and HCT.

Optional: The HC and HCT may wish to repackage information presented in the humanitarian needs overview and humanitarian response plan into public information products for advocacy and fundraising.

Note: If there is a (significant and unforeseen) spike in needs or a change in the context, the HC and HCT may decide to revise the humanitarian response plan or develop a flash appeal to outline the new needs and associated funding requirements for the spike or new part of the crisis. In this case, the flash appeal serves as a precursor to the revision of a Humanitarian Response Plan.

**ANNEX: SUMMARY OF IASC TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA
PROTOCOLS**

PROTOCOL

SUMMARY OF IASC TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA PROTOCOLS

In light of the growing recognition of the weaknesses in multilateral humanitarian response, the IASC Principals reviewed and made adjustments to the approach, building on the lessons learned in 2010 and 2011, particularly related to the Haiti and Pakistan responses. The IASC Principals agreed in December 2011 to a set of actions that collectively represent a substantive improvement to the current humanitarian response model. These actions are referred to as the Transformative Agenda. This Reference Module is one of eight protocols developed to support implementation of the **IASC Transformative Agenda**, and agreed by the IASC Principals:

1. **Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: Definition and Procedures**
2. **Concept Paper on 'Empowered Leadership'**
3. **Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: What 'Empowered Leadership' Looks Like in Practice**
4. **Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism**
5. **Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level**
6. *Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*
7. **Accountability to Affected Populations Operational Framework**
8. **Common Framework for Preparedness**

Humanitarian System-wide Emergency Activation: Definition and Procedures (April 2012)

A humanitarian system-wide emergency activation, known as a Level 3 (L3) emergency response, is an exceptional measure to an exceptional large-scale humanitarian crisis requiring mobilization of the entire humanitarian system to ensure an effective response. The IASC L3 mechanism is about the need to rapidly ramp up the response effort so that it is fit-for-purpose, i.e. has the appropriate leadership, and coordination mechanism to deliver assistance and facilitate protection as the scale, complexity and urgency of a crisis develops. It is intended as a short-term injection of additional capacity. It does not determine the severity of the crisis itself or relate to any political circumstances. As per this protocol, the IASC Principals are required to meet within 48 hours after the onset of the crisis to decide on L3 activation on the basis of recommendations and analysis provided by the IASC Emergency Directors on five criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk. The IASC Principals also agree on the most appropriate leadership model, the duration of L3 measures, and common advocacy priorities. L3 activation automatically triggers mechanisms and tools for strengthened capacity, leadership and coordination for an initial period of three months. These include: the establishment of an HCT (if not present); deployment of a Senior/Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator within 72 hours; Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) deployments; implementation of the L3 timeline of the humanitarian programme cycle; an immediate CERF allocation of US\$10-20 million; and activation of the 'empowered leadership' model. 7 to 10 days follow-

ing the decision to activate, the Principals review the arrangements put in place and make any adjustments. The duration of applicability of L3 activation should be defined by the IASC Principals in their initial meeting, but in principle should not exceed three months. During this period IASC member organizations should put in place the required capacities, i.e. the longer-term funding staffing and leadership arrangement, to transition from an L3 Response. An exit strategy is recommended to be developed within three weeks of the L3 activation. At the end of the three-month period, the Principals decide whether to deactivate or extend the L3 response. This protocol is complemented by a Q&A paper *What Does the IASC Humanitarian System-wide Level 3 Emergency Response Means in Practice* (May 2015).

Concept Paper on 'Empowered Leadership' (revised March 2014)

During the L3 activation period, the HC is vested with enhanced authority to be able to take decisions on behalf of the HCT when there is no consensus. This 'empowered leadership' model specifies that the HC has quick access to all key information on the crisis, and is expected to support the accountability of all partners for the overall response, including for results and performance and to affected populations. An HC with empowered leadership will take timely decisions in setting priorities and planning, leading overall cluster coordination, leading advocacy and relationships with national authorities and with donor and other partners, ensuring adequate information and monitoring of the response, leading humanitarian funding strategies, and aiming for strengthened accountability.

Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: What 'Empowered Leadership' Looks Like in Practice (November 2012)

This protocol further expands on the Concept Paper on 'Empowered Leadership' by outlining the deliverables and timeframes as well as the authority of an empowered HC in a L3 emergency. It also reiterates that the HC is empowered to make timely decisions with respect to setting overall priorities; allocating resources; monitoring performance and managing underperformance. It underscores that throughout the initial three-month activation period, the HC will be empowered to take decisions on behalf of the HCT when there is no consensus; act as the primary focal point for the operation with senior government officials; receive from agencies public statements/press releases before release; ensure common messaging; and raise HCT member and cluster lead performance issues with headquarters of the relevant organisations. An 'empowered' HC briefs the ERC more frequently.

Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (revised December 2013)

The IASC Agencies committed to have on standby for immediate deployment the necessary staff with the appropriate seniority, experience and skills to meet their commitment to an inter-agency Level 3 Response. The Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism is a composite of agency emergency response capacities, rather than a stand-alone integrated team. It includes coordination roles, but is not limited to these. The IARRM ensures that key functions for an L3 emergency response are filled, including cluster coordinators; additional OCHA capacity to support the HC/HCT with overall coordination; technical experts to support joint needs assessment, information management, and strategic planning; NGO leadership; and security expertise. IARRM deployments are designed to augment and support existing capacity at field level rather than replace it. Activation of the IARRM does not imply activation of all or any of the clusters; rather this capacity can be used to advise the HCT on existing coordination capacity in that sector and whether there is a need for cluster activation. IARRM deployees work under their individual organizations and, under the direction of the HC, to advise and support the HCT in steering the collective response. Deployments are reviewed by the IASC Principals after 7-10 days and then regularly by the HC/HCT, until the end of the three month period when the IARRM may be deactivated, unless decided otherwise by the IASC Principals.

Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level (revised June 2015, not yet endorsed by the IASC Working Group)

The Cluster Coordination Reference Module outlines the basic elements of cluster coordination, serving as a reference guide for practitioners. It outlines key concepts, looking at eleven critical areas: cluster and sector

coordination; cluster activation; cluster transition and deactivation; cluster functions; cluster management arrangements; subnational coordination; inter-cluster coordination; role of clusters in preparedness; the minimum commitments for cluster participation; sharing leadership; and monitoring cluster coordination, including the cluster coordination performance monitoring tool. It encourages coordination arrangements tailored to the context and based on existing capacity. The module emphasizes that the activation of clusters must be strategic, less automatic and time-limited. The HC and HCT must devise the most appropriate 'coordination solutions' taking into account the context and in support of national coordination efforts. In terms of guidance on L3 emergencies, the module notes that there must be sufficient capacity among operational humanitarian organizations to rapidly deploy (within 72 hours of the onset of a crisis) the immediate components necessary to address the inter-agency coordination functions required. Within three weeks of an L3 declaration, a review of the cluster coordination architecture is undertaken to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Common Framework for Preparedness (October 2013)

The Common Framework for Preparedness requires all actors, whether focused on humanitarian assistance or development, to develop national and local capacities for preparedness. It represents a commitment by the IASC, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the UN Development Group to make the development of preparedness capacity at country level more systematic and coherent. The Framework recommends seven concrete steps for coordination preparedness action at country level: regularly convene all partners concerned; assess gaps in capacity against a multi-hazard risk profile; clarify roles and responsibilities for preparedness; support nationally-led joint planning; integrate and adapt plans and programmes; coordinate implementation; and monitor results. National and local governments have the lead role for emergency preparedness. Under this leadership, international actors must ensure joint planning and coordination to support preparedness capacity development, drawing on combined humanitarian and development expertise. Preparedness capacity development initiatives should be context-specific and take a comprehensive approach, which encompasses multi-hazard risk assessment, multi-stakeholder engagement, and activities at multiple levels and in multiple sectors. They should also apply a human rights based approach, including through consultation with affected people and in line with relevant laws and policies.

Accountability to Affected Populations: The Operational Framework (revised November 2013)

The Operational Framework outlines how individual organizations and coordination mechanisms can improve accountability to affected people in their humanitarian programming at field level. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the IASC Accountability Commitment Analysis Tool, the HAP 2010 Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the Minimum Operating Standards for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, as well as locally developed and tailored tools. The Framework calls for humanitarian organisations to engage with affected communities in a more systematic way. At every stage of the programme cycle, mechanisms should be in place to communicate with beneficiaries and enable their participation and feedback. Means to mainstream and verify accountability should be established, such as including accountability in job descriptions, training and partnership agreements. Affected populations are not a homogenous group, and their differences should be taken into account when communicating with and consulting communities. The framework also refers to the IASC commitments to accountability to affected populations, namely leadership/governance; transparency; feedback and complaints; participation; and design, monitoring and evaluation.



