INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA REFERENCE DOCUMENT

2. Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures

This series of reference documents has been produced by the IASC Working Group and serves as guidance on implementing the Transformative Agenda in Level 3 emergencies

13 April 2012

I   Definition

The IASC Principals have agreed that major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization (so-called 'Level 3/L3' emergencies) are to be subject to a *Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation (henceforth referred to as 'L3 activation')*, to ensure a more effective response to the humanitarian needs of affected populations. This exceptional measure will only be applied for exceptional circumstances where the gravity justifies mobilization beyond normally expected levels, while recognising the complementarity of humanitarian systems.

The procedure activates mechanisms and tools to ensure that the system delivers effectively and can monitor its performance. It sets up adequate capacity and tools for enhanced leadership and coordination of the humanitarian system. It also engages IASC member organizations to ensure that they put in place the right systems and mobilize resources to contribute to the response as per their mandate areas.

The activation period will vary but should not exceed 3 months initially. The priority will be to revert as soon as possible to the regular methods of work of the humanitarian system, under a strong national leadership. Ideally, during this period, the system would put in place the required capacities and response would get well underway, such that the activation should not have to be extended. The procedure mandates that an exit strategy be defined to that effect, and outlines steps for deactivation.

Initially, this procedure would apply to sudden-onset situations only. At a later stage, with established practice and experience, it could be adapted / extended to slow-onset emergencies. Through other mechanisms, the humanitarian system and its development partners are also investing in preparedness, early warning and early action to limit the number of emergency situations in which such activation would be required.

The designation of an L3 emergency, in consultation with the IASC Principals, will be issued by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), on the basis of an analysis of 5 criteria: <u>scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk</u>. The criteria are defined in Annex A, and a proposal on responsibilities for analysis and recommendation, as well as steps for decision-making, is outlined in this paper.

II   Main Steps in the Procedure

2.1   Assessing the situation

As soon as possible but no longer than within 18 hours of the event, to the extent feasible, the ERC will receive an initial assessment of the situation including early data on affected persons. This assessment will be compiled by OCHA, based to the extent possible on the preliminary output of the first phase of the Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA),[1] providing an analysis of the context based on the 5 criteria and drawing from the following sources:

- A review of secondary sources (media, web-based situational data, etc.);

- An initial report from the Humanitarian Country Team where applicable. Where the HC function is not yet activated, an initial report from the UN Country Team (UNCT) via the Resident Coordinator (RC). In the interest of speed this input can be given orally;

- Both of the above should consider humanitarian needs, as well as the general economic, political and security context, the capacities of national authorities and communities to respond, population displacements, any access constraints, and, to the extent possible, will take into account the views of affected populations;

- As appropriate, OCHA will undertake direct consultations with the National Disaster Management Agency and/or other national sources;

- Consultations with IASC partners to obtain their assessment of the situation at headquarters level, including whether IASC member organizations are recommending activation of their respective corporate emergency procedures (for NGOs, this may be done through a pre-established role of the consortia); and

- A review of pre-existing contingency plans, where available.[2]

It should be noted that during the period of assessment and decision-making at headquarters level regarding L3 activation, the humanitarian response at country level is already underway. This analysis should not in any way cause delays to the provision of humanitarian assistance according to needs, as rapidly as possible.

III   Consultation and decision-making

1. Following, or in tandem with, the receipt of the initial situation assessment, the ERC will attempt to contact national authorities at the highest possible level to explore their views about the possible L3 activation.

2. The Inter-Agency Emergency Directors' network will be activated and will meet to discuss the context, response, capacity, expected gap analysis, lessons learnt from past emergencies, advocacy priorities, using a structured decision-making approach supported by OCHA, and leading to a set of shared recommendations to propose to the IASC Principals.

3. Within hours of receiving the Emergency Directors' proposals, and no later than 48 hours after the onset of the crisis, the ERC will convene the IASC Principals to jointly review the

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[1]   Noting that the Preliminary Scenario Definition (PSD) must in any case be completed within 72 hours of the crisis onset.

[2]   Where relevant, the overall analysis should take into account lessons learned and experiences from previous emergency response operations, as well as any changes in the context since these

initial assessment.[3] The ERC will also present to the Principals the recommendations from the Emergency Directors on a 'no objections' basis. The Principals will discuss whether the initial assessment warrants L3 activation. It is noted that in this context, every effort will be made to reach consensus but the ERC will have the final decision.

At this meeting, the Principals will also discuss:

(a) the most appropriate leadership model (see details in section VI below), using a checklist developed by OCHA to facilitate decision-making and deployment, and drawing from the pre-established pool of resources (ie. the L3 Humanitarian Coordinators' Pool);

(b) the composition of the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) to be deployed (based on the guidance developed and an analysis of existing capacity at country level);

(c) the period during which the measures triggered by the L3 activation should be in place (up to 3 months) and assigned responsibility for defining and implementing an exit strategy;[4]

(d) the common advocacy priorities for the humanitarian system and common messages that will be at the core of the ERC's communication strategy with regards to the emergency situation; and

(e) other context-specific arrangements, as applicable.

4. The ERC will inform the UN Secretary-General (SG) and the lead UN Department (Department of Peace-Keeping Operations or Department of Political Affairs as applicable),[5] as well as the chair of the UN Development Group (UNDG) that the L3 activation decision is under consideration.

IV   Activation

The ERC will make a final decision on the L3 activation based on the recommendations of the IASC Principals. While consensus should be the norm, it is not a requirement. This decision will be taken as soon as possible after the event itself, and no later than within 48 hours of the event, and should include the duration of the activation.

The ERC will announce the activation via e-mail to all IASC Principals. He/she will also issue a note to the attention of the SG, and a note to the HCT via the HC (or UNCT via the RC, if the HC/HCT is not yet in place).[6]

The ERC will also contact the national authorities at the highest level to explain the decision and its implications.[7] The exact way to go about this will depend on context and should be discussed among the IASC Principals when they meet to discuss the proposed activation.

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[3]   Any of the IASC Principals may also request to the ERC that such a meeting be convened.

[4]   During the meeting, a date will be set within 7-10 days for the Principals to meet again and review the application of the procedure.

[5]   If there is a PKO or SPM in the country in question, responsibility for informing the SRSG that this is under consideration would rest both on the HC and/or RC/DSRSG as applicable, as well as with the Lead Department at Headquarters.

[6]   To ease communications in this regard, standard templates for such notes explaining the implications of L3 activation for the various stakeholders will be developed in advance.

All messages should state: geographic coverage, duration, leadership and coordination arrangements. Whilst the activation will undoubtedly become a known fact, communication around it should focus on the prioritized response and strengthened coordination mechanisms, as opposed to the activation of the mechanism itself. The exact messaging will depend on context and should be discussed among the IASC Principals when they meet to discuss the proposed activation. The ERC will ensure to systematically update the IASC Principals on all ongoing advocacy initiatives relating to the L3 activation and response.

V   Deactivation

The duration of applicability of the L3 activation in a given context should be defined by the Principals during their initial meeting to discuss and agree on application, but in principle should not exceed 3 months initially. Based on the defined duration of application, an exit strategy will be drawn up in the 3 weeks following activation.

This exit strategy should include at minimum:

   i)   A statement of how the chosen leadership model will affect arrangements at the end of the period (e.g. will the specific leadership arrangement remain in effect, come to an end and be replaced by something else) and how the transition would be managed.

   ii)   A strategy to gradually mobilize and deploy the required capacity to take over core coordination functions from the IARRM (at least those function that will be required past the initial period of application).

   iii)   A common view of the manner in which reporting lines, roles and responsibilities will be defined at the end of the period of application.

The Principals will meet at the end of the 3-month period to review the situation and formally deactivate the L3 response.

VI   The implications of the Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency procedure

The L3 activation commits IASC members to the procedures as laid out below; it does not, however, prejudge or affect the ability of IASC member organizations to decide on activation of their respective major emergency mechanisms and procedures, nor the manner in which those would be applied.

The activation commits IASC member organizations to ensure that they put in place the right systems and mobilize resources to contribute to the response as per their mandate areas, Cluster Lead Agency responsibilities, and commitments made in the strategic statement (see below).

In addition, it automatically triggers the following:

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[7]   To ease communications in this regard, a standard note explaining the implications of activation for the national emergency response structures and other national considerations should be prepared in advance.

- Establishment of the HCT, with the current RC re-hatted as HC a.i. pending decision on the most appropriate leadership model[8];

- Deployment of a Senior/Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator within 72 hours of the onset of the crisis for up to 3 months, to lead the overall humanitarian response. Based on the IASC Principals' decision (see section III above) this could be one of a variety of options: a. senior to the RC/HC, b. deputy to the RC/HC, c. parallel to the RC in-country (as a separate HC)[9]. Other alternatives which could be considered include the deployment of a Special Envoy or the nomination of a Head of Agency *in situ* to serve as deputy HC *ad interim*, pending the identification and deployment of a Senior/Emergency HC or Deputy from the L3 HC roster.

- Deployment of the IARRM core team[10], on a 'no regrets' basis[11], and possibly other context-specific capacities as required, upon decision by the IASC Principals;

- Immediate implementation of a MIRA, particularly the Preliminary Scenario Definition;

- Elaboration of a strategic statement within 5 days of the crisis onset by the HC/HCT, according to the agreed IASC template, which will lay out priorities and a common strategic approach, and will serve as a basis for performance monitoring. This will also guide the Flash Appeal (to be developed within 7-10 days) and individual cluster response plans;

- Immediate initial CERF allocation of between US$10-20 million, to be issued by the ERC within 72 hours of the crisis onset, on a "no regrets" basis, to be allocated by the HC in support of priorities identified in the strategic statement; and

- Activation of the "empowered leadership" model.[12]

VII Other measures

- 7-10 days after the decision to activate, IASC principals will meet to review the effective functioning of the coordination and leadership arrangements and check that they are fit for purpose[13]. They will also meet at any time as required during the activation period to resolve any coordination, strategic and operational issues.

- The L3 activation automatically triggers a Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) of the response, to be conducted according to revised Terms of Reference within the initial 3-month period, and used to inform the Principals' meeting at the end of the 3-month activation period.

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[8] And notwithstanding any alternative leadership arrangements which may be agreed in the interim (see below).

[9] All costs related to the initial 3-month deployment of the Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator will be borne by OCHA. This will include the salary costs (and related entitlements), travel costs to/from the location of the assignment as well as other support costs related to the deployment.

[10] For details see IASC concept paper on IARRM.

[11] Meaning that agencies commit to deploying senior and experienced staff to fulfil the agreed core coordination functions immediately, without waiting for more precise details on exact needs and response plans, and decide at a later date to withdraw surplus staff as relevant.

[12] For details see IASC concept paper on empowered leadership.

[13] If it has not already been confirmed electronically following the usual procedures, the Principals will also use this meeting to formalize decisions about cluster arrangements, based on the proposals outlined to the ERC by the HC and HCT.

- IASC Principals will meet at the end of the 3-month activation period to review the activation and recommend the way forward (deactivation or continuation).

ANNEX A – Definition of the 5 criteria

- Scale (either size of affected areas, number of affected/potentially affected, number of countries affected);

- Urgency (importance of population displacement, intensity of armed conflict, crude mortality rates)

- Complexity (multi-layered emergency, multiple affected countries, presence of a multitude of actors, lack of humanitarian access, high security risks to staff, etc.);

- Capacity (low national response capacity, weak/fragile state, needs outweigh the capacity of CO and RO to respond). (Note that HIGH National or international Capacity may offset / balance the other criteria)

- Reputational Risk (media and public attention and visibility, expectations on the humanitarian system by donors, the public, national stakeholders and partners)