

IASC EMERGENCY DIRECTORS GROUP

# 2016

## SUMMARY REPORT

**IASC**  
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

The IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) supports humanitarian operations globally by advising the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the IASC Principals on operational issues of strategic concern, and by mobilizing member organizations' resources and capacity to address key challenges and gaps, in support of Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams.

Established in 2013 to enhance to engagement of the IASC around operational issues and support roll-out of the Transformative Agenda, the EDG has the following key objectives (endorsed by the IASC Principals in March 2013):

1. Consider and advise on operational issues of immediate concern, including all operational issues placed on the agenda of the IASC Principals
2. Consider future high-risk scenarios and determine appropriate early actions
3. Assure the roll-out and operationalization of the Transformative Agenda at the country level
4. Undertake the regular monitoring and review of emergency operations

### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

M'Poko IDP Site, Bangui,  
which EDG members  
visited in December 2016

Credit: UNDP/A. Ba



The EDG's key strengths include its responsiveness, field-orientation and collective approach. It is composed of senior directors from across the international humanitarian system, with an equal balance between UN and non-UN membership, and provides a critical link between the IASC Principals and field-level leadership. The EDG's operational focus complements the policy orientation of the IASC Working Group. The EDG also oversees the work of the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT).

# 2016

## IN NUMBERS

23

EDG MEMBERS

9 NGO  
2 Red Cross/  
Red Crescent  
12 UN

5

EDG missions

(CAR, Haiti, Nigeria,  
Amman/Gaziantep,  
Yemen)

EDG engagement with  
donors on 3 country  
or regional operations

(El Niño/Southern Africa,  
Ethiopia, Nigeria)

Advice and recommendations  
provided for IASC Principals  
discussions on 4 operations

(Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen)

Horizon Scanning discussions  
covering early warning risks  
and early action priorities in

9

country or regional operations

6

STAIT missions

(Chad, Ethiopia, Iraq,  
Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan)

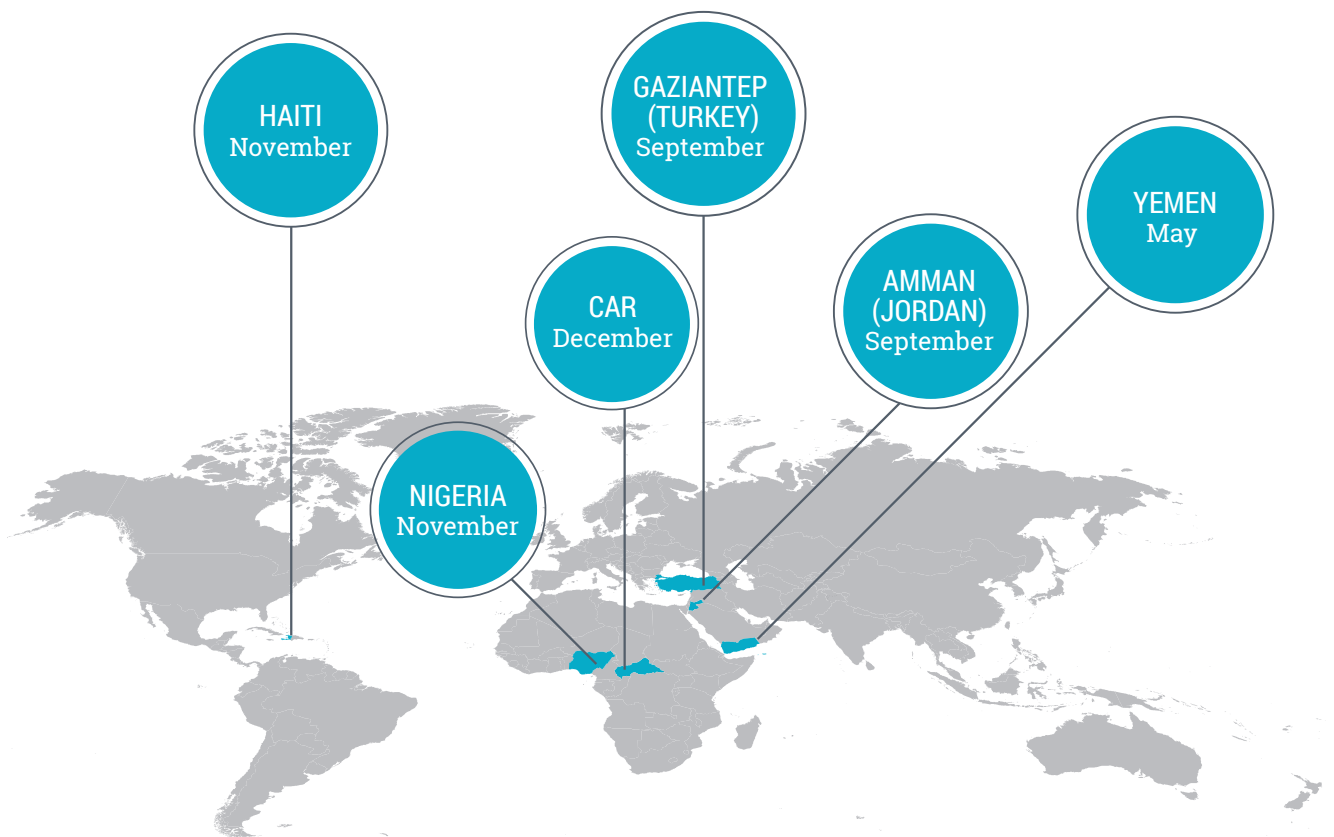
21

operations covered through  
various EDG engagements  
(missions, teleconferences,  
annual review, etc.)

# 2016

## FIELD MISSIONS

Joint field missions are a key part of the EDG's work, allowing for members to meet affected people, see first-hand the operational challenges being faced by partners on the ground and determine immediate priorities for support from the headquarters level. Field missions also provide opportunities for collective advocacy with host governments, armed groups and other actors, in support of the efforts of HCs and HCTs. Missions by the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) are in many cases undertaken as part of the follow up to EDG missions, typically involving more time on the ground.



**In 2016, EDG members undertook five joint missions:**

A three-person EDG team travelled to **Yemen** in May to assess support requirements just under one year on from activation of a system-wide L3 surge for that operation, and as course corrections continued under the framework of the Operational Peer Review carried out in December 2015. The team visited Sana'a and Amran Governorate, meeting with affected people, the Government of Yemen and de facto authorities, humanitarian partners and other stakeholders. The operating context remained exceptionally complex and challenging, and while progress had been made under the L3 activation, significant additional support was needed to ensure that response capacity reached the necessary level, particularly across sub-national hubs. The team's findings informed the IASC Principals' decision in August to extend the L3 activation for Yemen for an additional six months.

In September, EDG representatives travelled to **Gaziantep** and **Amman** to engage with humanitarian partners on headquarters support for the "Whole of Syria" approach, designed to ensure strategic coherence across the components of the highly complex Syria response operation. The visit came days after a cessation of hostilities agreement had raised hopes of critical cross-border aid convoys reaching eastern Aleppo, as

an independent review of the Whole of Syria approach was concluding, and as a new HC for Syria was about to be deployed. The mission also came at a time of growing frustration among humanitarian NGOs working in Syria, linked to the inability of the UN and broader international community to halt the deepening suffering of the Syrian people, as well as concerns around inclusiveness in humanitarian decision-



**YEMEN**

Destruction in Bayt Mayad Neighborhood, Sana'a. The EDG visited Sana'a in May 2016.

Credit: OCHA/C. Gans

making under the Whole of Syria banner, and operating modalities inside Syria. The EDG team, which included NGO and UN representation, assured partners in the two hubs of the IASC's commitment to coming together around implementation of the Whole of Syria review recommendations, and to ensuring transparency, communication and inclusivity.

In November, an EDG team travelled to **Haiti**, one month after Hurricane Matthew had torn through the south-west of the country. Humanitarian partners were dealing with a challenging operational context, with an increasingly assertive approach from the authorities and an unpredictable security environment, as well as growing risks of politicisation of aid linked to upcoming elections. The Hurricane had also struck as the humanitarian footprint in Haiti was being reduced, in the expectation of a shift towards greater emphasis on recovery and development

## Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT)

The STAIT was created by and reports to the EDG. It provides unique peer support to Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) through Operational Peer Reviews and field missions, as well as by sharing learning and effective practices between field leaders. STAIT missions address issues such as leadership around the centrality of protection, gender-based violence and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and ensuring effective and appropriate coordination structures and mechanisms are in place. Missions generally involve participation from UN agencies and NGOs as well as the STAIT itself, and this inter-agency approach is an important element of the added value the STAIT brings to field leaders.

In 2016, the STAIT travelled to Chad, Pakistan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia, developing action plans jointly with HCTs for each of these operations, as well as carrying out a learning mission to Iraq. The STAIT regularly reports back to the EDG and other headquarters mechanisms, ensuring that the necessary follow-up support is provided.

The STAIT also facilitated nine webinars in 2016 to a combined audience of close to 3,000 people, on topics including senior leadership and coordination structures, humanitarian financing, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), security and access in humanitarian crises, and the role of local actors in humanitarian response.



investments, leaving humanitarian capacity increasingly stretched. Emergency Directors visited Grand'Anse and Sud Departments, observing the destruction caused to homes and agricultural land, as well as appalling conditions in overcrowded relocation sites. They met with government partners who were keen to lead response and recovery, but who lacked the resources to do so. Despite the challenges, the team also noted effective response outcomes linked to pre-positioning and other preparedness investments. The mission coincided with the deployment of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) for the Hurricane response. The Hurricane was also the first major natural disaster since the adoption of the Grand Bargain at the World Humanitarian Summit, providing important lessons for donors and humanitarian organisations on challenges around translating the commitments agreed to in Istanbul into operational reality on the ground.



#### HAITI

Hurricane Matthew caused widespread destruction in the south of Haiti. EDG members visited affected areas in October 2016.

Credit: MINUSTAH/I. Rugwiza

## THEMATIC FOCUS

### Addressing gender-based violence and ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and strengthening protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) demand effective leadership and a collective, coordinated approach across the humanitarian system. During the Annual Operational Review in January, EDG members agreed to prioritise these areas during missions to CAR and Nigeria, aiming to gain a better understanding of operational and institutional challenges in these areas, as well as good practices, including through direct interaction with affected people. Particular areas of focus were the operationalization of revised IASC GBV Guidelines and the Real Time Accountability Partnership (RTAP) around Gender in Emergencies. EDG recommendations for enhanced field support were fed into existing global-level mechanisms including the GBV Area of Responsibility.

Later the same month, a group of 11 EDG representatives visited **Nigeria**, travelling to Abuja and Borno state in the north-east of the country. The observed an extremely worrying humanitarian situation, with deepening food insecurity overlapping with deeply-rooted protection challenges. Humanitarian organisations were scaling up in a highly challenging operating environment, with affected people and aid workers directly threatened by attacks, ongoing military operations, and a continuing inability to access large numbers of people in desperate need of assistance and protection. The EDG team was at the same time encouraged by the openness of federal and state authorities to working with international humanitarian partners, and by the innovative programming underway in deep-field locations despite scarce resources. The mission included a thematic focus on efforts to address gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, with



#### NIGERIA

Displaced women in northeast Nigeria have been cut off from their livelihoods and farms. The EDG visited Nigeria in November/December 2016.

Credit: OCHA/O. Fagan

dedicated discussions with partners on the ground on challenges in these areas.

In December, five EDG representatives visited the **Central African Republic (CAR)**. The mission was undertaken jointly with members of the Regional UN Development Group for West and Central Africa, providing an opportunity to reflect on opportunities to more effectively link humanitarian, development and peacekeeping engagement in a country in which aid organizations continued to substitute for core government services,

more than 18 months after deactivation of a system-wide L3 Response. In addition to the “New Way of Working,” the mission involved focused discussions around the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and the role of humanitarian organizations in addressing gender-based violence.



# L3

## RESPONSES

The IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation, often referred to as “Level 3/L3 Response,” was one of the key innovations of the Transformative Agenda launched in 2011. Declaration of an L3 Response triggers a concerted mobilization of capacity (leadership, staffing and funding) to enable accelerated and scaled-up delivery of assistance and protection to people in need, ideally for a time limited period, with the response transitioning out of L3 status once the required capacities are in place. The EDG plays a key role in advising the IASC Principals and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on new L3 activations and extending those already in place, as well as providing enhanced support to field leadership as part of the system-wide surge effort.

In 2016, system-wide L3 Responses remained in place for three of the world’s largest and most complex aid operations, in **Iraq, Syria** and **Yemen**. In May, the IASC Principals agreed to deactivate the L3 Response for South Sudan, in view of progress made against transitional targets set by the HCT, and to adopt a package of “accompanying measures” requested to ensure that the

operation remained aligned with the requirements on the ground post-deactivation.

The Emergency Directors Group also developed “**Level 3 Activation Procedures for Infectious Disease Events**,” adapting the existing L3 Response Protocol to meet the specific requirements of an infectious outbreak scenario. This work was undertaken at the request of

the IASC Principals, building on the lessons learned from the international response to the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak and the recommendations of the High-Level panel on the Global Response to Health Crises regarding the leveraging of proven IASC mechanisms and tools during future infectious disease events.



## Deactivation of the system-wide L3 Response for South Sudan

The L3 was designed to provide a short-term injection of additional capacity and high-level engagement, following a sudden and significant deterioration in an underlying humanitarian situation, with the intention of rapidly aligning leadership, systems, coordination arrangements and human and financial resources with the changed context. The L3 mechanism is not intended to serve as a designation of the severity of a crisis, nor does deactivation of an L3 mean that a crisis has been resolved. However, L3 Responses have remained in place for Syria, Iraq and Yemen since, January 2013, August 2014, and July 2015 respectively, and significant concerns persist about possible negative repercussions of L3 deactivation for these operations.

The deactivation of the South Sudan L3 in May 2016 to some extent bucked this trend. An L3 response was established for South Sudan in February 2014 and extended a total

of four times. In August 2015, however, the HCT developed an L3 transition plan including country-level operational targets. In early 2016, the HCT then presented an updated analysis of the situation and status of the operation, indicating that the L3 had largely achieved its intended purpose and that key targets in the transition plan had been met. On this basis, the HCT recommended deactivation of the L3, while also setting out a set of “accompanying measures” required from the level of the IASC Principals to ensure that deactivation was not understood externally as a downgrading or deprioritisation of South Sudan,

and that the strength of the operation was sustained.

Despite a significant subsequent deterioration in the humanitarian situation in South Sudan, the capacities and systems put in place under the L3 proved resilient post-deactivation, allowing humanitarians to stay and deliver. South Sudan remained high on the global agenda and the South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan was amongst the best covered in 2016. Elements of the South Sudan approach have the potential to contribute to thinking around next steps on currently active L3s in 2017.



### SOUTH SUDAN

**A young boy waves to a helicopter that has just delivered aid in Pibor County. Challenging logistics require humanitarians to find creative ways to reach people in need.**

Credit: UNHCR/M. Ferrante

# Horizon scanning

Translating early warning into concerted, effective early action

Consideration of future high-risk scenarios and determining appropriate early action is one of the four key objectives of the EDG. It does this through semi-annual horizon-scanning meetings, during which it considers an internal IASC Early Warning, Early Action and Readiness (EWEAR) Report, which highlights contexts in which a significant deterioration in the humanitarian situation is anticipated over the coming six-month period. The report also includes analysis of humanitarian response preparedness for each operation covered.

In 2016, the EDG convened horizon scanning meetings in June and November. In June, members considered emerging risks in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Libya,

as well as the impact of El Niño/La Niña in Southern Africa. Participants also noted concerns around the deteriorating situation in South Sudan, and in the Lake Chad Basin. In November, Emergency Directors noted continuing high risks in the DRC, the Lake Chad Basin, South Sudan, the Syria region and Yemen, discussing options for

follow-up at the collective and organization-specific levels. Improvements in the EDG's horizon scanning function will continue to be pursued in 2017, in particular in relation to ensuring that early warning translates into concerted and effective early action.

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In DRC, political instability risks further complicating one of the world's most protracted humanitarian crises.

Credit: OCHA/N. Berger



## Accountable humanitarian leadership in the field

Supporting humanitarian leadership in the field is central to the work of the EDG. Members participate in an annual review of Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), in support of the Emergency Relief Coordinator's oversight of HC performance, as well as advising on new HC designations and DHC deployments. The annual HC review process is complemented by various forms of engagement and support over the course of the year, including through teleconferences and missions, as well as the work of the STAIT. A range of training and development activities for HCs have also been rolled out.

During the January 2016 HC Review, Emergency Directors discussed the performance of 30 HCs, assigning jointly agreed grades in relation to leadership around preparedness, response and advocacy. Average grades for the 2015 cycle represented an improvement on the previous year for HCs at the D1, D2 and ASG levels. This continued a trend of improved HC performance, year on year, linked to sustained investments in the accountability framework around HCs and in the support provided to them throughout the year.

Over the second half of 2016, the EDG paid particular attention to the importance

of the HCT function in terms of operational performance and effectiveness. It has become increasingly clear – including from STAIT and EDG missions – that HCs cannot deliver on their considerable responsibilities alone. Yet while significant investments have been made in the HC performance, less progress has been made around HCTs. Notably, while a standard global terms of reference (ToR) for HCs is in place, the work of HCTs is currently framed only by a guidance note. The EDG has therefore moved ahead with a draft ToR for HCTs, which is due to be rolled out in the field in the first quarter of 2017.



# 2016

## KEY ACTIVITIES

### JANUARY

- Annual Operational Review (15 priority operations covered)
- EDG-Donor meeting on the IASC Transformative Agenda, protracted crises, Grand Bargain
- Annual Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) Performance Review (30 HCs covered)

### FEBRUARY

- EDG consultation on South Sudan L3
- STAIT mission to Chad

### MARCH

- EDG-Donor meeting on Ethiopia and Nigeria
- EDG and IASC Principals consultations on Iraq, Syria, Yemen L3s

### APRIL

- EDG teleconference with HC for Yemen
- STAIT mission to Pakistan

### JUNE

- Semi-annual EDG horizon scanning meeting
- June EDG-Donor meeting on operationalizing the Grand Bargain, Southern Africa drought

### MAY

- EDG and IASC Principals consultations on deactivation of South Sudan L3
- EDG mission to Yemen
- EDG teleconference on South Sudan and post-L3 support

### JULY

- EDG teleconference with HC for South Sudan

### AUGUST

- EDG and Principals consultations on Iraq, Syria, Yemen L3s
- EDG-Donor call on Nigeria
- STAIT learning mission to Iraq

### SEPTEMBER

- EDG mission to Gaziantep, Amman, Beirut
- EDG in-person meeting on support to field leadership and HCT accountability

### OCTOBER

- EDG teleconference with HC for Haiti
- STAIT mission to South Sudan
- STAIT-UNDSS meeting on security risk management in humanitarian response

### NOVEMBER

- EDG mission to Haiti
- STAIT mission to Somalia
- Semi-annual EDG horizon scanning meeting
- EDG mission to Nigeria

### DECEMBER

- EDG mission to CAR
- STAIT mission to Ethiopia
- Adoption by IASC Principals of IASC activation procedures for infectious disease events