

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA REFERENCE DOCUMENT

## 1. Concept Paper on ‘Empowered Leadership’

*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

This paper clarifies what is meant by the concept of ‘empowered leadership’ during the initial 3-month period following the declaration of a Level 3 (L3) emergency.<sup>1</sup>

### I What empowered leadership means

Empowered effective leadership is needed at all levels, to ensure that:

- as a first priority lives are saved, and people get the assistance and the protection they need; and
- as a second priority the effects of the crisis on human development are to be contained.

This paper is focused on empowered leadership by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)<sup>2</sup> but the HC can only be effective as a leader, especially in an L3 emergency, if the other leaders within the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) are also empowered to meet their responsibilities, and if actors within the humanitarian architecture abide by their already defined commitments, roles and responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

While the existing tools an HC has may be adequate for many situations, especially if used by a skilled HC working together with an effective HCT and strong national partners, for L3 emergencies, the tools available to an HC must be strengthened to permit:

1. The HC to *take decisions* on behalf of the HCT in circumstances where there is no consensus, and where a delay in making a decision could have a serious effect on the welfare of people for whom the humanitarian operation exists.
2. The HC to have *quick access to all key information* on the nature of the crisis, the needs, and the response, in order to lead the HCT in the development of a common analysis of the situation and priority needs, as well as to better coordinate the use of that information for advocacy and for a better response.

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<sup>1</sup> A ‘Level 3’ is a major sudden-onset humanitarian crisis triggered by natural disaster or conflict which requires system-wide mobilization and response, as determined collectively by the IASC Principals under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of empowered leadership applies to anyone responsible for HC functions during the initial 3-month period of an L3 response, whether it is an existing Resident Coordinator who has been assigned HC responsibilities, or to a new HC deployed to lead the humanitarian response (on a longer-term basis), or to a Senior/Emergency HC deployed from the L3 HC roster for a temporary period. Note that in a UN mission context, the ERC will confirm with the UN Secretary-General the relationship between the ‘empowered’ HC and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).

<sup>3</sup> One of the priority responsibilities of the HC is the convening of the HCT in the immediate aftermath of a crisis onset. Where a HCT does not already exist, the HC is responsible for the immediate establishment of a representative HCT as per agreed procedures and guidance.

3. The HC *to better support the accountability* of all partners for the overall response, including for results, performance and to affected populations, together with the HCT, including through the HC-ERC compact.

## II What is needed for the HC to be empowered and effective:

For the HC to be an empowered and effective leader, he/she needs the following *set of tools, some of which are new, and some of which are modifications to existing tools*:

1. In setting priorities and planning an HC with empowered leadership would:
  - a) Lead the preparation of the strategic statement to be produced within 5 days of the crisis, together with the HCT, and take responsibility for delivering on the initial strategy. Liaise with the Government to ensure they are involved to the extent possible in the development of the plan.
  - b) Approve cluster strategies and objectives in line with the agreed strategic priorities, with input from the HCT.
  - c) Approve impact indicators for the clusters' plans, based on the strategic plan, and cluster strategies.
  - d) Based on the strategic statement, needs assessments, and HCT recommendations, and where possible after a rapid consultation with national authorities, approve which projects are to be funded by the initial 'L3' allocation of funds from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and subsequently approve the projects to be included in the Flash Appeal.
  - e) Be accountable to the ERC for the above (and through new mechanisms being developed, to the HCT)
2. In leading cluster coordination an HC with empowered leadership would:
  - a) Linked to the priorities determined in the strategic statement, and in consultation with the HCT, recommend to the ERC within 72 hours of the crisis, which existing coordination mechanisms will need to be strengthened and which clusters established.<sup>4</sup> The ERC transmits the proposal to IASC Principals and Global Cluster Lead and Co-Lead Agencies for approval within 24 hours, before endorsing the HC's recommendations.
  - b) Advise Cluster Lead Agencies on cluster performance issues, with the Cluster Lead Agency taking the necessary action.<sup>5</sup> If there are issues with the performance of the Cluster Lead Agency in fulfilling its functions as per the agreed ToRs, the HC will advise the ERC on the situation, who will then take action with the Global Cluster Lead Agency.
  - c) Where necessary, constitute a smaller group of agencies, ideally those with cluster lead or co-lead responsibilities within the HCT, for more regular

<sup>4</sup> The activation of clusters should only be recommended when there is an identified gap in the enabling environment warranting their activation and when justified around an identified need. Support of pre-existing, or the development of new, national mechanisms for sectoral coordination should be the priority.

<sup>5</sup> Noting that the RC/HC has selected Cluster Lead Agencies in consultation with the HCT based on the agencies' coordination and response capacity as well as the location and extent of its operational presence and/or ability to increase this, and that it has clearly-defined responsibilities as per the agreed ToRs.

consultations. If no NGO representatives are included in this group in a cluster lead or co-lead function, then at least two, and preferably more, will be included.

3. In leading advocacy and relationships with national authorities and with donor and other partners an HC with empowered leadership would:

- a) Coordinate and lead the elaboration and implementation of a common strategy to secure access to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This strategy may entail direct action and advocacy by the HC on behalf of the HCT, or it may involve other agencies if he/she can identify other actors better placed to do such advocacy.
- b) Act as the primary focal point for the operation as a whole<sup>6</sup> in dealing with senior government officials such as a President, a Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and the National Disaster Management Authority, and in leading the HCT in donor coordination meetings. HCT members would join the HC in such meetings according to the topic, while maintaining and building on their own relationships with government and civil society partners and donors.<sup>7</sup>

4. In ensuring adequate information and monitoring of the response an HC with empowered leadership would:

- (a) Agree with HCT members at an early stage in the response the mechanisms and frequency with which information on agency and cluster activities should be made available to the HC (and/or OCHA). Ensure that OCHA and cluster staff engaged in information management collaborate effectively in order to process and analyse the large volume of information generated in an L3 emergency, to systematically ensure that the HC can engage in informed decision-making.
- (b) Ensure that this information is assembled daily by OCHA, in its support function to the HC, in a brief for members of the HCT.
- (c) Confirm with agencies that they would share with the HC public statements/press releases they make in support of their work, for his/her information (not clearance), shortly ahead of their release. This would apply to information provided either by an agency as Cluster Lead or by an agency in its own capacities.
- (d) Agree with all operational humanitarian partners the mechanisms through which they should make available to the HC and the relevant Cluster Lead Agency, information useful for the purposes of monitoring the response, such as needs assessment results, progress towards agreed indicators in the strategic statement, and information on the use of humanitarian funds.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Noting that in emergencies which involve refugees, the UNHCR representative has the mandate to prepare for, lead and coordinate the refugee response

<sup>7</sup> This would not prevent Heads of Agency meeting with senior Government officials, but ideally should be done in consultation, and preferably together with, the HC.

<sup>8</sup> In line with the agreed monitoring framework developed in consultation with the HCT for the overall response

5. In leading humanitarian funding strategies an HC with empowered leadership would:

- a) Lead the process of developing the Flash Appeal within 7-10 days of the event.
- b) Determine CERF funding priorities based on the strategic statement, including approving projects to be funded by the immediate L3 CERF allocation of \$10-20 million.

6. In aiming for strengthened accountability an HC with empowered leadership would:

- a) Hold Cluster Lead Agencies accountable for ensuring the key tasks outlined above are implemented to ensure the overall response is effective and timely; and in particular hold them accountable for regularly reporting on progress and achievements made towards cluster objectives and their commitments as per the strategic statement.
- b) Hold OCHA accountable for its support to the HC function, and ensure the direct reporting line between the OCHA Head of Office and the HC is strengthened, with OCHA systematically sharing all relevant communications with HQ with the HC.
- c) Report on functions and responsibilities for the duration of the ‘empowered leadership’ period. In addition, through procedures being developed, the HC’s performance would be regularly monitored.

In all the above cases, where decisions have to be made during the ‘empowered leadership’ period, it is preferable that decisions are made by consensus within the HCT. However, the HC would be the final arbiter when no consensus can be reached.