

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
PRINCIPALS MEETING**

9 December 2004

9.30 – 13.00 hrs

Room I, Palais des Nations, Geneva

**Lessons learned from the Darfur Crisis: Preliminary observations from the
Darfur Real Time Evaluation of Humanitarian Response**

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The objectives of the evaluation and current status

The first aim of this evaluation is to allow the UN and other responders to the crisis to benefit from external, independent guidance to help improve the operational response in real-time. The second is to identify broader lessons learned in Darfur for future humanitarian action there and elsewhere. The evaluation has so far focused primarily on: 1) observing, in a short visit to Sudan in September 2004, the on-going operation to gain an appreciation of the challenges faced by, as well as the achievements of, the agencies on the ground; 2) identifying key issues and gaps that need attention; and 3) determining, in consultation with the UN Country Team (UNCT), reasonable expectations for improvements in the response, against which progress could be measured in subsequent stages of the evaluation. Headquarters and capital level interviews in October 2004 helped strengthen working hypotheses on the key issues, in preparation for the next field visit, now scheduled for January 2005, in which the team will spend more time in the Darfurs gathering primary information from both beneficiaries and responders in order to deepen its insight. This will inform the final lesson learning phase of the evaluation. The real-time aspect of the evaluation continues to offer the opportunity for timely corrections, and thus the team has and will continue to provide working papers for the UNCT at the conclusion of each visit. UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been constrained by many external factors in responding to the crisis, which will be elaborated on in the final evaluation. This background document for the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) meeting on 9 December 2004 will focus on internal constraints and systemic issues of critical concern.

Factors affecting deployment and response

1. The evaluation continues to wrestle with issues surrounding the timeliness of the intervention. For instance, preliminary analysis of internal early warning information provided by the agencies indicates that some were aware of the crisis as early as the first half of 2003, while by the end of that year Darfur was undeniably at the center of attention. Yet it was only well into 2004 that a comprehensive response was underway. It is thus reasonable to conclude that poor early warning cannot be solely blamed for the slow and inadequate response and that other elements, including political ones, came into play. The evaluation team will thus have to continue to unravel the many other factors that have inhibited the response.

2. According to recent guidance on the collaborative approach, “the ERC, in consultation with the IASC, is responsible for ensuring that satisfactory mechanisms have been established at the field level for the effective delivery and coordination of assistance and protection in situations of internal displacement”.¹ Practically, this responsibility must be shared among the operational agencies. In many sectors, the collaborative approach has proved effective but in other critical areas – including protection, camp management and some forms of assistance – it has been problematic.
3. There appear to be various reasons for this, including concerns over the applicability of individual agency mandates, inadequate funding and capacity, and the selectivity exhibited by both UN agencies and NGOs in choosing activities that they were willing and/or able to undertake.
4. The role of the IASC in addressing weaknesses and gaps in humanitarian intervention deserves review. Urgent attention should be given to developing a default mechanism for determining which agencies should fill critical gaps that the UNCT has been unable to address. Donor support would be required in each case.

Planning

5. With the 2005 Workplan, the UNCT has attempted a more thoroughly integrated, strategic approach. Most promising is the envisioned quarterly cycle, which suggests that a periodic strategic planning process de-linked from appeals (but feeding into them) will become routine rather than an exception, as it should.
6. Earlier experience and recent planning efforts highlight the need for agency headquarters and regional offices to more actively support and ensure that the UNCT is prepared for all eventualities, including an increasingly negative scenario in Darfur and flare ups elsewhere in Sudan. In doing so, there remains a need to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in advance. It is hoped that the contingency planning exercise to be undertaken in January 2005 will take these issues into account.
7. A sound understanding of the socio-political context is a prerequisite to effective assistance and protection. While some agencies are impressively informed, this is not uniformly so for a variety of internal and external reasons, including the lack of appropriately trained and experienced officers, and limited access. Further, given the wealth of knowledge and experience that existed in Sudan, and the Darfurs in particular, there appears to be limited historical memory of previous approaches and interventions, which might have been built upon in the various recent planning efforts. It is hoped that the opening of UNAMIS sub-offices with civil affairs capacities will further assist and support in this regard.
8. There is an outstanding need for a better understanding of the differential impact of the armed conflict and current situation on women and men, girls and boys. There also appears to be a need for greater capacity at the field and Khartoum levels for translating a gendered analysis into assistance and protection. Lessons learned from other crises and the provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 need to be applied. Gender concerns have centered on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). While this issue is key, is not the only issue; women’s role as actors in protection, assistance and planning needs to be supported.

¹ *Implementing the Collaborative Response to Situations of Internal Displacement: Guidance for UN Humanitarian and/or Resident Coordinators and Country Teams*, IASC, September 2004, p 7

Capacity

9. Many agencies have attributed the delayed and inadequate response to the Darfur crisis to difficulties in fielding appropriately senior and seasoned humanitarian emergency managers as well as staff with technical skills, either through internal surge mechanisms or direct recruitment – highlighting an apparent systemic weakness in capacity. Systemically, surge capacity is increasingly being used to fill regular staffing gaps, which is perceived to be due in part to a shrinking pool of experienced emergency response personnel. In part, this is because managers have generally been unwilling to divert or transfer existing staff with the requisite experience, even if they are on surge rosters.
10. As a result, a good number of surge and donor stand-by arrangement personnel are still on the ground. Relying on them indefinitely compounds the problem globally and is unsustainable. It thus needs to be urgently addressed.
11. Many staff are new to their agencies and have received little training. This is understandable for the initial phase of the emergency, but must now be addressed.
12. Common services, including most notably the common pipeline for non-food items, have been beneficial for UN agencies and NGOs alike. Efforts should be made to build on this model through 2005 in order to establish a broader common logistics and operational support infrastructure.

Protection

13. It is positive that this crisis has been recognised as a protection crisis at all levels. This reflects an important shift from other recent crises.
14. The UNCT was slow to develop a protection strategy, not presenting one until well into the crisis in November 2004. This is reflective mainly of a lack of a common conceptual understanding of the actions required, as well as specialised and trained personnel to lead.
15. This strategy derived from a number of agency specific protection interventions throughout the Darfur and a loosely coordinated response across the system. It divides protection concerns into five broad categories and provides lists of relevant activities for each, which is vital, but the document still requires a clear exposition of priority activities, roles and responsibilities, and specific guidance and tools on how to immediately tackle difficult protection concerns. An implementation matrix is being prepared that will likely fill some or many of these gaps. Nevertheless, the team believes that the supporting ‘strategy’ should be further developed. Objectives, assumptions and risks also need to be clearly stated and the strategy needs to be more clearly grounded in international law.
16. The protection offered by presence is necessarily limited by the security environment, a culture of impunity and the lack of a military force and credible justice system. Unarmed civilian workers cannot intervene physically, and speaking out carries its own risks. Leadership founded on protection expertise is thus sorely needed.
17. The efforts of the UN to address involuntary and forced returns of internally displaced people (IDPs) on a case-by-case and ad hoc basis has met with inconsistent success. While the recent efforts made and mechanisms devised to resettle IDPs have been appropriate, they are yet to be fully tested. This area will continue to require constant monitoring.
18. Efforts to address SGBV have been weak and immediate concrete attention to reducing the incidence of SGBV is required.

Camp management

19. The critical importance of strengthening camp management to improve environmental health outcomes and address a range of protection issues has long been recognised but has so far resulted in only a handful of camps having a recognised lead. This still needs to be urgently addressed.
20. Further, there continues to be a lack of technical expertise and capacity in this area. Thus, it would seem that there remains an urgent need for the UN, in particular the operational agencies, to backstop current efforts in this area. Without this, camp management will continue to be a central weakness of the response.
21. For example, the lack of effective, comprehensive and uniform approaches to camp management has meant that IDPs themselves are not being effectively engaged. As a result, valuable local capacities to better manage facilities and resources; facilitate protection; and improve environmental health outcomes are not being fully exploited. Doing more in this area will also enhance the confidence of IDPs in themselves, each other and the humanitarian community.

The way forward

22. First and foremost is the need to recognize the value of this real-time evaluation in helping the responders on the ground and other key stakeholders to better understand the particular environment of Darfur; to get an early diagnosis of the problems and obstacles to an effective response; and to make timely corrections as appropriate. Further, to recognize the priority that this places on the IASC to fully support and address field concerns with the urgency and attention they deserve. To this end, the evaluation team submits that the following steps and actions are amongst the most important for the IASC:
23. Protection and camp management have presented considerable challenges in Darfur and have tested the collaborative approach to IDPs. Valuable lessons will emerge from this experience. The immediate task for the IASC is to support the UNCT by helping determine how the existing protection and camp management strategies can be strengthened and effectively implemented. Most importantly this comes down to agencies making commitments to fill the gaps and agree concomitant roles and responsibilities. The UN needs to impose accountability on itself across all sectors and provide the 'backbone' in terms of leadership and expertise.
24. In the medium term more formal arrangements are required including: a) building up technical expertise in protection and camp management and establishing a formal 'home' for this in one or more of the UN agencies (or at least designating this on a crisis-by-crisis basis by agreement of the UNCT); and b) establishing a default mechanism for determining which agencies should fill critical gaps that the UNCT has been unable to address.
25. A quarterly strategic planning process de-linked from appeals (but feeding into them) should be made the standard. Such a planning process should be truly strategic and be informed by: a) more in-depth socio-political, gender and human rights analysis; and b) review exercises that critically evaluate progress in achieving higher level agency-wide objectives in key areas (e.g. SGBV) while assessing potential changes in overall assumptions and risks.