IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings

<u>TERMS OF REFERENCE</u>

Date established: December 2007

End of mandate: Ongoing

Background

Following the completion and launch of the IASC Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings in 2007, the IASC Working Group agreed to the formation of an IASC MHPSS Reference Group that is primarily focused on the dissemination and mainstreaming of the IASC Guidelines. The MHPSS Reference Group now consists of over 30 organisations drawn from United Nations and Intergovernmental organisations, Nongovernmental organisations and Red Cross and Red Crescent agencies.

Purpose

The overarching goal of the MHPSS Reference Group is to focus on the dissemination and mainstreaming of the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency settings, with the objective of improving mental health and psychosocial support interventions following emergencies.

Specifically, the aims of the MHPSS Reference Group are as follows:
1. To facilitate the integration of the core principles of the Guidelines into all sectors of emergency response;
2. To foster collaboration amongst agencies and diverse stakeholders (such as governments and communities);
3. To support interagency coordination for MHPSS in emergencies at global, regional and national levels;
4. To support interagency activities for MHPSS in emergencies at global, regional and national levels;
5. To develop relevant tools linked to the guidelines and share these with countries;
6. To encourage individual agencies to institutionalise the guidelines;
7. To promote and support ongoing capacity building to enable effective use of the guidelines;
8. To share experiences of implementation among countries;
9. To interface with the UN Cluster System and IASC subsidiary bodies to include MHPSS into policies, tools, capacity building and budgets;
10. To facilitate printing, dissemination and language translations of the guidelines;

The MHPSS Reference Group, through the co-chairs and identified focal points, strategize, advocate and support the mainstreaming of MHPSS into the cluster approach at the global level. Priority clusters are:
- Health
- Protection, including Gender Based Violence and Child Protection
- Education
- Nutrition
- Camp Management and Camp Coordination

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Structure

In order to provide structure to the Reference Group, all active agencies should be part of at least one Working Group. These Working Groups will be responsible for carrying out specific activities, both in preparation and during actual emergencies. Following the identification of needs, specific "thematic projects" will be identified, for example working on assessment or on monitoring and evaluation.

Members of the Working Group will include the Focal Points that have committed to field implementation in each country. Focal points will be responsible for:

- Establishing a steering committee/ working group per country that includes the focal agency and least 2 other organizations
- Establishing clear descriptions of responsibility for each organization
- Developing a multipronged strategy which includes a range of activities
- Developing a timeframe with minimum commitment of agencies for a period of 6 months
- Taking time to involve all major actors in MHPSS in the country or region in some way
- Identifying human and financial resources at the start of the process
- Communicating with the Working Group for information on previous experiences
- Reporting back to the broader Reference Group at the annual face-to-face meeting.

Focal Points will also be responsible for:
- Disseminating the full version or field version of the guidelines to cluster members.
- Attending (when possible) key cluster meetings and making potential linkages, to include reviewing cluster meeting minutes and communications delivered through the cluster mechanism, and disseminating information to the MHPSS RG.
- Including MHPSS in the work plan of the relevant cluster.
- Conducting an orientation seminar for cluster members at global or field level.
- Advocating for funding where necessary for joint activities.
- Organizing conference calls.
- Reporting progress at the face-to-face meeting.

Chair

The group is chaired by two co-chairs, and the purpose of the co-chairs is to coordinate and facilitate the objectives of the Reference Group.

The Co-Chairs of the MHPSS Reference Group are proposed by the members of the Reference Group for a period of at least one year (preferably two years), after which the chairmanship will rotate to another. The IASC Working Group (Secretariat) will endorse the proposed co-chairs. Where possible it is best to have a representative of a UN agency or International organisation (e.g., IOM, IFRC) as well as an NGO, with the representatives coming preferably from a mixture of the health and social services sectors. Ideally, one co-chair will be based in Geneva to attend relevant Global Cluster and other coordination meetings. Each Co-Chair is responsible for supporting certain aspects of the annual work plan.

The co chairs also function as the secretariat of the group and coordinate the substantive implementation of the work plan. With information provided by representatives to the MHPSS Reference Group, they draft the annual work plan (for discussion and agreement by the membership), a progress update, and annual report to the IASC Working Group; convene regular

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meetings/provide venue arrangements; draft and distribute the agenda and minutes; monitor progress of the implementation of the work plan and action points from MHPSS Reference Group, IASC Working Group, and IASC Principals meetings; maintain an email distribution list of participants and keep participants lists for each meeting; prepare materials for distribution to the group; facilitate the flow of communication; and update the MHPSS Reference Group's webpage on the IASC website, One Response and www.mhpss.net.

Participation
Participation in the MHPSS Reference Group is open to interested humanitarian organizations, bringing together NGOs, UN, and other international organizations together on an equal footing. Participating cluster lead agencies represent both their agency and their respective cluster. Non IASC member experts and donors may be invited as observers to provide technical input or to discuss certain relevant issues, when needed. Operational NGOs are encouraged to participate actively.

Secretariat
N/A

Meeting Schedule and Agenda
It is essential to maintain regular communication between Reference Group members, and between the Reference Group Members and their organizations. There will be one face-to- face meeting of the full Reference group per year, which all members are expected to attend.   The agenda for this meeting is set by the co chairs in collaboration with the members, based on stated needs, requests, and issues which have arisen during the year, as well as current initiatives and best practice in the field of MHPSS. In addition, the Co-chairs will commit to regular teleconferences to monitor the implementation of the annual work plan, and other ad hoc teleconferences as required. Teleconferences are usually held around new emergencies and the development of tools. The co-chairs will produce one mail out per month, which will be sent to all members of the reference group.

Members will receive regular monthly email communications requesting inputs that may be related to the work plan or the activities of the Reference Group itself. Reference Group members are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities that may arise to meet face-to-face or to support the overall work of the Reference Group (e.g. if travelling to a country for your agency, you would be encouraged to link in with the working group or cluster in that country). They are then expected to communicate the work of the group within their respective agencies and where possible through existing networks such as www.mhpss.net which is the main platform for sharing information and coordination among members. All IASC Reference Group products will be published on the IASC website.

Funding
The MHPSS Reference Group is supported by a variety of member organisations from year to year. During 2011, the groups' activities and co chair positions have been supported by World Vision Australia, The IFRC Psychosocial Resource Centre, UNICEF and ACT Alliance/ Church of Sweden. It is envisaged that member organisations will continue to support the work of the group through both financial and in kind support.

Workplan

The MHPSS Reference Group prepares an annual workplan based on the standard template, prepared by the IASC Secretariat, which includes specific objectives, prioritized activities, indicators, and deadlines. Focal points are identified for each activity listed in the workplan, and are accountable for ensuring the implementation of the specific tasks and for progress reporting on a regular basis. Workplans should be submitted to the IASC Secretariat by the deadline for the IASC Working Group to review, subject to their agreement and endorsement before the end of the ongoing workplan year.

Reporting and Public Information

(Reporting arrangements are still being clarified so this section may change.) The MHPSS Reference Group provides an annual report to the IASC Working Group, reporting progress against the objectives of the workplan. This annual report should be prepared in accordance with the standard template and is due by the deadline (usually mid January), in order for the IASC Working Group to take stock of progress and performance of the group. Each subsidiary body is also required to submit a brief progress update (2-3 paragraphs) to the IASC Secretariat by the deadline (usually mid October) for consolidation and presentation to the Working Group before its November meeting.

The MHPSS Reference Group maintains a webpage on the IASC website and the One Response website, and will post regularly all relevant meeting notes, background papers and other documents on that site.

Members are also encouraged to share information and relevant documents on www.mhpss.net, which is the main platform for sharing information and coordination among reference group members.

IASC Products

The MHPSS Reference Group will ensure that any IASC products developed by the group are in line with the IASC guidelines on product development available from the IASC Secretariat. In addition, the Reference Group will monitor and share information with regards to updates of, or the need for updates of extant products, as well as the development of any new relevant documents by member organisations or others.

Criteria for inclusion of products and activities within the RG work plan

The criteria for inclusion of agencies/ organization's activities/ products or tools in the work plan are outlined below. The criteria do not apply to policy-advocacy initiatives.

Endorsement for IASC Reference Group products and activities within the work plan

An IASC Reference Group product (i.e., a product with the IASC logo) involves participation and endorsement by reference group members as a group. One member of the reference group can lead the process. The process for this is clear and standard across all IASC bodies.

In addition to IASC Reference Group products, specific agency or inter-agency products may also find a place in the workplan (a) to have a coordinated approach to product development (e.g. to avoid duplication of products) and (b) to potentially increase the quality and utility of an agency's work. Such products will not be published with the IASC reference group logo.

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Inclusion of members' activities and products within the work plan, must meet the following criteria

- Products must be produced by a member organization of the reference group, and the proposal to include the product in the workplan should be endorsed by a minimum of two members of the reference group.
- All members of the reference group must be invited to participate in the work, acknowledging that member organisations may have bilateral partnerships. Participation can be in the form of peer review, financial support or another form, and is not obligatory.
- Where possible, members of the reference group should be consulted in the early planning stages to maximize participation and involvement.
- The document must be circulated to all reference group members at least once for comment during the writing/ production process, in a time frame which allows comments to be incorporated before finalization.

Relationship to the Working Group

The MHPSS Reference Group prepares background papers and recommendations on salient topics and broader policy/operational issues in support of effective field-based action at the request of the IASC Working Group or Principals. The MHPSS Reference Group can propose agenda items for the IASC Working Group via the IASC Secretariat as part of the agenda setting process.

The IASC Working Group will review the performance and relevance of the MHPSS Reference Group periodically. At that time, the mandate and the continuation of the MHPSS Reference Group will be assessed. The IASC Secretariat supports the IASC Working Group in monitoring the performance of IASC subsidiary bodies.