INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
63RD WORKING GROUP MEETING

Informal Consultative Group on Capacity Building of Emergency Response at Regional, National and Local Level: Update

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I   Background

One of the lessons from the December 2004 Tsunami is that most relief is local and that local capacity and preparedness are key to the delivery of effective relief. In preparing for future disasters, it is critical that there be:

> ➢ an accurate assessment of the local capacity to handle disasters, and

> ➢ collaboration among the various stakeholders in creating a plan to respond to disasters.

Local governments, NGOs, the business community and the local community in areas vulnerable to disasters each have different perspectives and priorities with regard to disaster mitigation and relief. Systematically evaluating and integrating these is likely to create a more nuanced and appropriate plan.[1]

The World Disasters Report 2004[2]recognised that most lives are saved by friends and neighbours, and that disaster affected people have a capacity of to pull together and not give up when a disaster strikes. Local and regional response clearly provides a major and significant part of the overall crisis response, particularly in natural disaster situations. As has been demonstrated in Bangladesh, Cuba, Mozambique, the Philippines and elsewhere local and national disaster preparedness pays. Last years floods in Nepal and Bangladesh confirmed again the value of community based disaster preparedness.

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[1]   Fritz Institute: Lessons from the Tsunami : Top Line Findings. Fritz Institute, San Francisco, September 2005.
[2]   IFRC: **World Disasters Report 2004: Focus on Community Resilience.** Geneva, IFRC, October 2004.

The Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) team recognised in their report that their review did not represent the full humanitarian global response capacity particularly since local and regional capacities in recipient countries or regions had not been reviewed. Although the HRR identified three "pillars" in the international response system – the UN system, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs, an alternative analysis might define three levels of response sequenced and prioritised in the following way:

➢ local response by the affected communities in some cases including volunteers from the national Red Cross/Red Crescent society, CBOs and local NGOs;

➢ national response by national governments, regularly including national military forces, fire departments, etc and frequently supported by national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies and national NGOs; and

➢ international response supported by the UN system (including IOM), external governments, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs and on occasions by external military forces.

The IASC WG agreed, at the Ad hoc Meeting on 12 August, on the need for further discussions on local and national capacities. It has however already begun to address the need for strengthening local, national and regional planning and preparedness through the following:

➢ *The IASC WG Task Force on Natural Disasters (TFND)* which was disbanded in June 2005 with its specific tasks completed. The TFND initiated the establishment of a set of "minimum standards" of disaster response preparedness (DRP) measures for the UNCT to use for monitoring its capacities in this regard and proposed the promotion of the concept of IASC In-Country Teams. The Synthesis Report prepared by the TF on Natural Disasters concluded:

▪ That it is not possible to cover all aspects of natural disasters and that there is a need to focus on key areas.

▪ That the Self-assessment tool needs to be promoted.

➢ *The Early Warning and Contingency Planning SWG* is a subsidiary body of the IASC WG and deals with preparedness and early warning, the work of the group is centered on preparedness in the broadest terms. While initial efforts were focused on preparedness of the IASC system, over the past year some agencies have become increasingly engaged in capacity building efforts with partners. It was recognized that there might be some overlap with aspects of preparedness.

➢ *The Hyogo Framework for Action,* a follow-up process to the Kobe Conference, has focused more on mitigation activities but will also help to address the need for strengthening local, national and regional planning and preparedness. It is also focussed on natural disasters.

During the IASC WG Retreat in September the IASC agreed that **an *informal consultative group*** of all concerned IASC members that would be led by the IFRC would prepare a paper to identify measures needed to strengthen local, national and regional capacities for humanitarian response. This paper would be presented to the 63rd IASC Working Group meeting in November 2005.and would include an action plan for the IASC, clusters, and other relevant forums. That group met once in early October and again in early November, 2005.

II   Capacity Building for Disaster Response

From the perspective of this paper capacity building focuses on the abilities required to organise and sustain disaster preparedness and response measures in the context of local, national and regional actors. From a development perspective a number of important lessons and trends are emerging from more than a decade of efforts to give substance to capacity building in practice. From this at least four trends are shaping today's understanding of capacity.

➢ There is a clear move away from focusing on individual organisations to look at capacity in networks and larger systems (such as sectors, whole-of-government approaches, societal transformation). Capacity often only comes about through interplay among the capabilities of individuals, organisations, networks and larger institutions or systems.

➢ Greater recognition is now being given to the 'soft' and less tangible aspects of capacity building. Case studies of successful capacity building have highlighted the importance of factors such as leadership, values, incentives and motivation, legitimacy, power relations and organisational culture.

➢ It is generally accepted that capacity building must be a dynamic process that is context and situation specific. It requires continuous strategic planning, interaction, negotiation and action-learning. Capacity building can not be pre-designed and 'implemented', but requires 'strategic incrementalism'.

➢ There is growing recognition that the changes required for capacity building can not be simply rolled out from the top; rather, it should be seen as a process of '*decentralised social learning*'.[3]

Building capacities for disaster prevention, preparation, response and recovery requires the building of skills to assess vulnerabilities, reinforcing expertise in relevant technical, social and scientific institutions, and establishing partnerships of mutual learning that extend from communities and districts to central authorities. The will to invest in this kind of capacity building is widespread. Governments, international agencies, and private groups embrace the concepts, and expertise is widely available but much more

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[3] Jan Ubels, Thomas Theisohn, Volker Hauck and Tony Land: **From local empowerment to aid harmonisation**. Capacity.Org (http://www.capacity.org/), September 2005.

needs to be done. IASC Agencies can make significant contributions in sharing knowledge and resources and helping to build on existing capacities toward more effective regional, national and locally directed action.

Much has already been done to build capacity at the local, national and regional level by a range of organisations and agencies. Examples include UNDP and OCHA supported work with SADC in Southern Africa, the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative of the Stability Pact for South East Europe (involving UNDP, OCHA, IFRC, NATO and national disaster management organisations), SOPAC's programme in the Pacific to link the strengthening of local and national capacity, etc.

In its role as a global UN system programme for disaster-related learning, the UN Disaster Management Training Programme (UN DMTP) has launched the Rethinking Capacity Development for Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative. DMTP's primary project partners include UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and the UN System Staff College (UNSSC). It is anticipated that the initiative will run through most of the decade, 2005-2015 with the aim of Identifying what works and is needed for "how to" develop capacity for disaster risk reduction and convert that into common practice. A htree day conference to launch this initiative will take place in February 2006.

III   The Informal Consultative Group

The Informal Consultative Group was initially established with a limited period of time, in effect some four weeks, to complete its task and present a paper to the IASC Working Group meeting on 21 and 22 November. This the group has not been able to do. Instead it has determined that a timeframe for the Informal Consultative Group should be extended to one year, subject to IASC WG ratification in November.

Two approaches for capacity building were considered by the Group:

➢ Capacity building as series of specific actions and programmes (e.g. training), and

➢ Capacity building as a method in implementing disaster management related activities that will strengthen the local and national capacities (e.g. participation of affected communities in international disaster response, etc.)

The informal Consultative Group will therefore undertake the following tasks:

➢ **Clarify and review group objectives** and clearly identify activities to be undertaken over the course of the following twelve months with clearly defined outcomes.

Other tasks are expected to include:

➢ **Map capacity and identification of key partners**: The starting point for strengthening capacity needs to be based on identification of what has been done and of available and deployable resources. The Group will need to identify high

risk countries and/or regions and consider capacity building from a local and upwards perspective. Identification of gaps and weaknesses will need to be a key part of the mapping process.

> **Establish an improved basis for support for capacity strengthening**: Based on what is seen as most appropriate for local, national and regional capacity building.

> **Review of IASC actions**: Building on the IASC Task Force on Natural Disasters and the Early Warning and Contingency Planning SWG, identify and propose ways in which the IASC WG can better address natural disasters and support the strengthening of capacity at local, national and regional levels.

> **Monitoring**: Ensure appropriate monitoring mechanisms in place to review impact and progress against implementation plans

Findings of the Group will be presented in a Paper to the IASC WG in September 2006.

IV Recommendation to IASC WG Meeting 21-22 November 2005:

1. That the timeframe for the IASC WG Informal Consultative Group established in September 2005 be extended to 12 months to enable it to prepare a paper which would include an action plan for the IASC, for clusters, and other relevant fora to identify measures needed to strengthen local, national and regional capacities for humanitarian response. The Informal Consultative Group should present a document along these lines to be reviewed and ratified at the September 2006 IASC WG Meeting;

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