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**IASC Task Force on Natural Disasters:**
*Guidelines for the Use of the Self Assessment Tool*

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Introduction

Disaster loss is on the rise with unprecedented consequences for lives, livelihoods and hard-won development gains.   The number of people affected grows annually. In the last two decades, more than 1.5 million people have been killed by natural disasters.

The recent Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2004 hurricane season in the Caribbean clearly demonstrated that in terms of cause and consequence, disasters are a global problem rather than an issue limited to hazard-prone areas.  Factors such as climate change and economic globalization mean that actions in one region can impact on risks in another.  This, compounded by growing vulnerability as a result of unplanned urbanization, under-development and competition for scarce resources, points to a future where natural disasters will increasingly threaten the world's growing population

The Indian Ocean disaster was in many ways unprecedented.  It combined two phenomena, the outreach and force of which hit several countries and extensive coastal lines.  Some of these countries were not considered amongst the most vulnerable to earthquakes in UNDP's recently published global report "Reducing Disaster Risk – A Challenge for Development" and its innovative Disaster Risk and Relative Vulnerability Indexes, although tsunamis are not explicitly included in this research.  This is a clear indication of the dynamic nature of vulnerability and of the need to continue advocating for disaster preparedness as part of the IASC in-country teams' agendas, even in countries where vulnerability has not been a traditional cause for concern.

In recognition of the growing impact of disasters, both large-scale as well as those that do not make the headlines but that have a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of developing countries, the IASC partners have compiled a tool for in-country partners world-wide to assess their level of preparedness, identify priority areas to address with regular or specific programmes and/or to establish a Disaster Management Team (or a similar IASC-partnership wide body).

The purpose of the tool is to encourage IASC in-country teams[1] to embark in a process to gradually increase their capacities to respond to the challenge of providing host governments with prompt, effective and concerted country-level support in disaster preparedness and response. This includes an inward view of response preparedness capacities of IASC partners, as well as those of the host government, in order to ascertain priorities and establish preparedness and response mechanisms and systems according to the national legislation, institutional framework and practices.

The Self-Assessment Tool

The self assessment tool is a very simple chart that runs users through standard areas of preparedness, provides a checklist to assess the level of preparedness according to minimum international standards, and a list of selected tools and resources to support the assessment and the simultaneous identification of key concerns and priority areas.

The chart elements are an *indicative* and by no means exhaustive. There may be other areas, questions and resources that were not included at the initial formulation stage. The intention is to review the tool periodically to include more elements derived from the use and experience at the country level.

Areas of Preparedness

Ten areas of preparedness were identified at the formulation stage as critical elements of a good response preparedness plan:

1.  Inventory of national capacities, which will allow the IASC in-country team to determine the legal and institutional framework, national strengths and weaknesses. This is a suggested first step towards identifying priority concerns that may be addressed with on-going, regular or specific programmes from IASC partners.
2.  IASC in-country team awareness. A necessary step towards ensuring the commitment of all partners to embark in a process of enhanced preparedness for the host government, but also to the collective effort of IASC in-country team as a vehicle for more efficient response preparedness support.
3.  Hazard identification, monitoring and warning. The types of response preparedness efforts to be undertaken in each country will differ according to the disaster/hazard profile of the country. In many cases, hazard maps and other tools are available in the country and can be obtained from the national authorities. The tool suggests several web sites where information can be procured.
4.  Vulnerability assessment. This will lead to the determination of "*what and who is at risk*" especially regarding the types of disasters that affect a

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[1] The IASC is formed by the following agencies, providing broad representation of today's composite humanitarian world: FAO, ICRC, ICVA, IFRC, InterAction, IOM, OCHA, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights of IDPs, OHCHR, SCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, and the World Bank.

particular country, and to a much more accurate targeting of the affected population in the event of a disaster.

5. <u>Contingency Planning</u>. The IASC has made considerable advances in the formulation of guidelines for in-country contingency planning. The guidelines are available on the web and the contingency planning process is suggested as a very good start to speed-up the organisation and training of IASC in-country team partners.

6. <u>IASC in-country capacity inventory: human, financial and material resources,</u> mirroring step 1, looking at the capacities of the IASC members. This exercise must include the national level (i.e. the resources available in the country at any given moment) and the headquarters level of all IASC partners (surge capacity, emergency resources, technical support for key areas, etc.). Ideally the in-country capacity inventory must be part of the contingency and preparedness planning process.

7. <u>Logistics/IT/Communication</u>. The more accurately this part of the assessment is done, the more efficient response operations will be, both national and international. Many IASC in-country teams now have operational units that may be of great assistance in defining the country's logistics, IT and communications profile.

8. <u>Partnerships.</u> Advanced identification of those key partners and stakeholders who will be part of a response operation. These may include donors with a special interest in the particular country, NGOs and the private sector. The IASC in-country team may wish to explore possibilities of MOUs or stand-by arrangements to increase efficiency in the event of a disaster.

9. <u>Coordination Arrangements.</u> Prior knowledge and agreement on roles and responsibilities that IASC in-country team and regular partners are willing/capable of assuming in the event of an emergency.

10. <u>Human Resources and training requirements</u>. This includes the national and regional surge capacity mechanisms, the out-posted regional advisors from the various IASC partners and rosters of experienced personnel in-country and at the sub-regional or regional levels.

<u>Questions-checklist</u>

The self-assessment tool provides a checklist of issues and questions, based on common international standards for disaster preparedness and response. The list is indicative and may be complemented with IASC in-country partners' experiences and the particular circumstances of the host country.

<u>Selected Resources</u>

A number of tools and resources were identified during the formulation of the Self-Assessment tool. Some of these resources provide more complete and integrated checklists and questions, as well as references to publications produced by IASC partners that may be of help for in-country teams to develop a preparedness and response plan.

Undertaking the Self Assessment

The decision to embark on the self-assessment exercise lies within the IASC in-country team, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator as appropriate, who will normally provide the institutional framework to conduct the exercise.

Following this decision, a first step is to decide on the roles and responsibilities that each partner is willing/capable to assume (see step 9) and develop a Plan of Action.

As the self-assessment progresses, priority or uncovered issues are likely to emerge which may result in a different sequencing of the assessment than that proposed in the tool.  It must be borne in mind, however, that the sequence and number is indicative and in no way does it represent the order of priority of the issues included.

IASC in-country partners may request technical support from their respective headquarters for key areas of the self-assessment for which in-country capacities are not deemed sufficient.  They may also wish to consider using the framework of ongoing disaster-related projects and programmes to address key areas either in the research or in the implementation of specific programmes identified as priorities during the exercise.

Regional and sub-regional out-posted advisors of the IASC partners may provide significant support to the process and may be called upon using the partners' regular channels of communication.

It is strongly suggested, however, that the self assessment is conducted in a collective and constructive manner, with the participation of all IASC in-country partners, national authorities and other stakeholders, in order to ensure ownership and continuation of the process in the longer-term.

Monitoring and Updating

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), mandated with the coordination of humanitarian response, policy development and humanitarian advocacy, and host of the IASC Secretariat, will act as the custodian of the Self Assessment tool.

Through its regional desks and out-posted Disaster Response Advisor, OCHA will ensure that yearly updates, reflecting the experience in the use and application of the tool, are reflected in this instrument, which is designed as a living document.

IASC in-Country Teams may address queries on the tool, its application and on support requirements to the OCHA network which will facilitate communication with the IASC partners at headquarters levels.