

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP

61 st MEETING

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IOM (Geneva)

**Internally Displaced Persons:
*Strengthening UN Agency Accountability in Crises of Internal Displacement-
Background Paper***

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The collaborative response is the agreed approach of the international community in addressing situations of internal displacement. This approach has the backing of the IASC membership, and it is clear that in the immediate future there will be no one 'lead agency' for IDPs, nor a new UN entity for IDPs.

Nearly six years on from the formal adoption of this inter-agency approach and a year since OCHA's Internal Displacement Division (IDD) began providing systematic support to country teams in eight countries on implementing the approach, a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of this choice on the speed and success of the response to IDP crises.

IDPs are distinguished as a category because of their specific vulnerabilities as well as the need for lasting solutions to their displacement. In the absence of an operational agency formally mandated to address these vulnerabilities, a major weakness of recent responses to IDP crises has been the absence of operational accountability and leadership in key sectors of IDP-specific vulnerability: camp management; emergency shelter; return; reintegration and recovery; as well as in the cross-cutting area of protection.

Underpinning the effective functioning of the collaborative response is the need for clear coordination, management and accountability systems. While the over-arching coordination and leadership role for IDPs of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) – as the Secretary-General's focal point on IDPs – and his field-level counterparts, the Humanitarian Coordinators (HC), is vital, in practice their impact is minimised by the lack of operational accountability among UN agencies for addressing IDP needs in these areas. This has greatly impeded the planning and implementation of speedy and effective humanitarian responses to new emergencies, as evident in the first months of the Iraq and Darfur operations. The absence of an agreed division of labour among key agencies in a number of protracted IDP crises has also hampered ongoing humanitarian operations, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Uganda, as well as Darfur.

While the September 2004 IASC Guidance to RC/HCs and Country Team on responding to IDP crises provides a decision-making framework and parameters for agencies' potential involvement, it is clear that on the ground, a 'pick and choose' approach by operational partners has led to significant gaps, inter-agency competition, short-term commitments, and a lack of standard-setting, monitoring and accountability.

The difficulties experienced by both the ERC and HCs in assigning responsibilities where agencies are reluctant to step up to the plate is linked to a lack of accountability at the

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institutional level for particular aspects of the IDP response. (In addition, while HCs – with OCHA field support – are theoretically accountable to the ERC for the overall coordination of the IDP response at the country level, there are no benchmarks, performance appraisals, or induction programmes for HCs on this particular issue.)

In his 2005 report, *In larger freedom*, the Secretary-General stated his intention to ‘strengthen further the inter-agency response to the needs of internally displaced persons, under the global leadership of my ERC, and at the country level through the humanitarian coordinator system.’ The General Assembly has also emphasised (in A/RES/58/177 of 2004) ‘the need to strengthen further inter-agency arrangements and the capacities of the United Nations agencies and other relevant actors to meet the immense humanitarian challenges of internal displacement, and underlines in this regard the importance of an effective, accountable and predictable collaborative approach.’

There has been some recent progress in supporting HCs to give some more structure to the inter-agency response in a small number of prioritized IDP crises. Ultimately, however, rather than maintaining an *ad hoc* approach, long-term improvement requires changes at the institutional level.

Proposal:

The ERC and Heads of the relevant UN agencies, programmes and funds need to agree on designating operational accountability for the various sectors and cross-cutting areas in IDP crises. UN agencies designated as operationally accountable for specific sectors would have responsibility in all major IDP crises for ensuring – under the overall leadership and direction of the Humanitarian Coordinator and in line with the IASC Guidance – that the relevant needs are met in an effective and timely manner, and in line with agreed standards. They would be answerable to the HC and ultimately the ERC when such needs are not met. They would also work to ensure that national authorities meet their own responsibilities in providing for the protection and assistance needs of IDPs.

Such an arrangement would not mean that the designated agency undertakes or implements all sector-related activities for IDPs; it would be responsible for ensuring that such activities are planned for and undertaken by partners with the appropriate capacity; for advising the HC and Country Team on planning, gaps and concerns; and for advocating with authorities, donors and other partners on these issues.

The main responsibilities of the designated UN agency in each specific sector would be: (a) planning and strategy development, (b) standard-setting, (c) implementation monitoring, and (d) advocacy. The HC would continue to bear overall responsibility, under the ERC’s leadership, for the effective functioning of the overall collaborative response to IDP protection and assistance needs, in line with the IASC Guidance.

Should another agency on the ground have significant expertise and capacity, the HC could exceptionally propose the agency takes over primary responsibility for a specific area in the crisis.

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The IASC-WG is asked to endorse the following points:

1. The national authorities bear primary responsibility for protection and assistance to IDPs.
2. The HC is responsible to the ERC for the strategic coordination of protection and assistance to IDPs (in line with IASC Guidance), and for ensuring unimpeded access.
3. In each of the sectors or cross-cutting areas, a UN agency should be designated as operationally accountable. As such, the agency would be primarily responsible in all major IDP crises to the HC/ERC for ensuring effective (a) planning and strategy development, (b) standard-setting, (c) implementation monitoring, and (d) advocacy. (N.B. Other key partners (UN and non-UN) may be implementing the majority of programmes in each sector or may have specific mandates covering part of the sector.)
4. In a specific crisis, should another agency on the ground have significant expertise and capacity, the HC could exceptionally designate that agency to take over primary responsibility for the specific area in that crisis.
5. The IASC WG requests the IDD to develop more detailed outline on designating sector-specific UN operational accountability in major IDP crises.

Proposed Actions by the IASC WG members:

- Review and endorse the above-mentioned points.

Prepared by: OCHA/Internal Displacement Division (IDD)