INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
4 June 1996, Washington, D.C.

FOLLOW-UP TO ECOSOC RESOLUTION 1995/56
Interim Reports from Working Groups

Background

1.   Inter-Agency discussions on achieving a coordinated follow-up to the ECOSOC Resolution 1995/56 led to the proposal of establishing an Inter-Agency Task Force. This proposal was endorsed at the meeting of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on 30 October 1995. Full meetings of the Task Force began on December 1995 as well as informal sessions of members of the major operational agencies of the UN system beginning January 1996.

2.   The Task Force had considered the indicative list of issues included in the ECOSOC Resolution and decided that while generic policy and strategic issues should be debated in the Task Force forum, the task of resolving gaps and inconsistencies at the operational level should be delegated to a series of informal consultations to be convened by DHA. The proposals emanating from these consultations will be submitted to the IASC/IASC-WG as appropriate, for decision.

3.   It was also agreed that the agencies will keep the Task Force informed of the progress of their consultations with their respective executive bodies.

4.   DHA's role so far is to ensure a coordinated follow-up to the resolutions and to provide a series of formal and informal briefing to member states.

Status of Inter-Agency Consultations

5.   The inter-agency consultations geared by the ECOSOC Task Force are addressing the following systemic issues: Resource Mobilization, Strengthening Capacity and Local Coping Mechanisms, Evaluataion and Accountability, Coordination, Human Resources Development and Internally Displaced Persons. The interim reports for each of these consultations below:

Resource Mobilization

6.   The main conclusions reached and progress so far by the Working Group on Resource Mobilization may be summarized as follows:

7.   A guiding principle for the process of inter-agency consultations on resource mobilization issues is the independence of each organizations dialogue and relationship with its own governing body. The Working Groups attention should be focused on the gaps, limitations and imbalances which may exist in the Consolidated Appeal process (CAP) and other mechanisms for ensuring that adequate human, material and financial resources are in place to allow for an efficient and effective response to humanitarian crises.

8.   Resource mobilization is the prerogative and responsibility of each individual organization. The CAP has been a major element in coordinating and facilitating the international communities response to complex and major emergencies. The review of CAP-related issues should be with the objective of ensuring that it enhances individual agency initiatives within an inter-agency framework of collaboration, integration and prioritization.

9.   As there was general agreement on the basic elements of the draft Terms of Reference, DHA incorporated comments made in the first meeting into a revised TOR which has now been distributed to the agencies.

10.   A workplan has been developed by DHA with priority being placed on (1) priority areas identified by the IASC and (2) those issues which would seem to be most directly related to ensuring clarity, consistency and coordination in the preparation of the 1997 appeals.

11.   It is clear that the work of this group must be guided by the seven priority areas agreed upon by the IASC at its meeting on 19 April. The seven areas to be addressed are Prioritization, Flash Appeals, Synchronization of Appeals, Relationship of the CAP to other Resource Mobilization Mechanisms, the Involvement of NGOs, in the CAP Process, Regional vs. Single-Country Approaches and Ways to Enhance Advocacy and Develop Public Information Strategies. It should be noted that another conclusion of the IASC was that the Bretton Woods Institutions should be invited to participate in this working group.

Local Capacity

12.   Given the obvious importance of strengthening the resilience of communities to withstand the effects of crises and in pursuance of ECOSOC resolution 1995/56 an inter-agency working group has been established. The agenda and programme of the working group has yet to be defined. However, based on preliminary consultations it is understood that, as an initial step, the working group will review the concepts, operational definitions and current practices of agencies in relation to the different aspects of programme delivery. Once a comprehensive picture is obtained, the extent to which different approaches add up to an overall coherent strategy will be studied.   Once this has been completed, the most appropriate means of assessing the impact of humanitarian action on local capacity and coping mechanisms will be determined.

Evaluation and Accountability

13.   This Working Group first met on 20 March 1996. It agreed that a first priority would be to study and make recommendations on a system for the monitoring of humanitarian programmes, in particular the monitoring of the overall UN programme in emergency situations, building on existing monitoring activities already carried out by operational agencies and their implementing partners. It was agreed that DHA would, with the services of a consultant, study one or more large-scale humanitarian programmes in order to make recommendations on the design of a practical system for such monitoring. The recommendations arising out of this study, would be presented to the Working Group and then, to the IASC for its consideration and approval.

14.   It is understood that, whereas each operational agency involved in humanitarian programmes has a responsibility for monitoring and evaluating its own activities, there is at present no systematic attempt to monitor the interface between these activities and the overall direction of the programme. Nor is there a common understanding and acceptance of the global objectives of the programme as a whole. The consequence is that coherent coordination of the programme is rendered more difficult, and accountability is made less easy to achieve. In addition, the identification of constraints to the programme as a whole is inevitably an *ad hoc* process and does not necessarily reflect common perceptions shared by those involved in the programme. The removal or modification of such constraints is inevitably in these circumstances a process weakened by the absence of accurate assessments and baseline data.

15.   The objective of this process is thus to identify a simple and practical system for monitoring those aspects of a multi-agency humanitarian programme which may be considered relevant to its overall coordination and direction. Subsequently, work will be initiated on the development of joint evaluation methodologies and procedures.

Coordination

16.   The inter-agency working group on coordination will review the current situation regarding options for field coordination. Past coordinations measures, as fundamental as they are, have tended to address the quality of the people called to work on coordination functions, rather than the quality of the coordination systems and mechanisms themselves. In order to enhance coordination mechanisms, the working group will examine a number of distinct examples of existing field coordination mechanisms, and identify what lessons can be learned for improved practice in different emergency settings. From these lessons it is anticipated that principles and criteria which should be the underlying objective of the exercise of coordination will become clear -- principles, such as impartiality, neutrality, transparency and accountability, and criteria such as responsiveness, program integrity, adaptability and flexibility. In turn, these standards will constitute a more rational basis for the establishment of coordination mechanisms appropriate for each unique situation.

17.   The working group will address a number of issues. The definition of the scope and form of coordination mechanisms appropriate in demobilization, reintegration and mine action programmes will be an important undertaking. The working group will address the problem of identification of the multiple actors (UN, bilaterals, multi-laterals, donors, NGO, government authorities, beneficiaries, etc) and multiple levels (international, regional, national, local) engaged in humanitarian assistance response; the identification of appropriate coordination mechanisms for this complex interaction will be the following step. Also important will be the definition of appropriate coordination mechanisms during and between different phases of complex emergency situations. In addition, the working group will continue the ongoing refinement of previously established coordination tools and decision-making processes and procedures at Headquarters, regional and in-country level.

Staff Development Issues

18.   The Working Group on Human Resources Development and Staff Security has met twice - on 11 and 29 April 1996. Agreement was reached that staff security should be handled within the ACC appropriate fora. The Working Group will look at staff security only in relation to training. It was also agreed that the title "Human Resources Development" should be changed to "Staff Development" in the humanitarian context to avoid overlap with other fora - namely, CCAQ Per and its sub-committee on training; the UN Staff

College being launched by the Secretary-General with the International Training Centre of the ILO at Turin; and the "Complex Emergencies Training Initiative" facilitated by DHA.

19.   It was mentioned that there may be non-training issues such as rosters of qualified UN personnel for humanitarian affairs, interchangeability of staff among agencies and how to build and preserve institutional memory especially in the context of staff rotation, that would be relevant to the Working Group. Agencies felt that these could be handled in the CETI fora or any other appropriate fora. In case non-training issues are identified in the broad context of staff development, proposals not exceeding three issues by agency should be discussed at the next meeting.

Internally Displaced Persons

20.   IDPs are a major challenge to the coordination of the UN humanitarian community both because of the increasing number of people affected by internal displacement and because of the lack of any mandated overall responsibility in assistance and protection to them.

21.   The Inter-Agency Task Force on IDPs has been asked to cover the IDP issue as a follow-up to the ECOSOC resolution following a brainstorming session of the ECOSOC Task Force. Its workplan, according to the issues listed in the ECOSOC resolution and particularly to the selection of topics made by the DHA in its background document for the ECOSOC Task Force, is expected to deal with the problem of gaps and imbalances in three subject areas: agencies' capacity; coordination at headquarters and field level; information issues.

22.   The first session of the Task Force on IDPs on the follow-up to the ECOSOC Resolution was held on 23 April. At least four additional discussions are planned in the context of the regular meetings of the Task Force on IDPs in June, August, September and October 1996.

23.   At the moment Agencies are providing the Secretariat of the Task Force on IDPs with all relevant and updated documents covering the above-mentioned issues and including IDPs-related matters, based on: a) response to the ECOSOC resolution 1995/56, b) dialogue with respective governing boards, or c) official position papers.

General

24. Given the difficulties both in time and expense of agency representatives attending meetings of this broad mechanism, Chairperson of the Working Group will make effort to minimize the number of formal meetings in using all other means of consultation.