IASC PRINCIPALS AD HOC MEETING

IRAQ, SOUTH SUDAN AND SYRIA

26 August 2015

**Final Summary and Action Points**

**Summary of Discussions:**

The IASC met to review the System-Wide Level 3 Emergency (L3) Response Activations for Iraq, South Sudan and Syria. The Chair thanked the Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) for hosting him during his recent visit to each country and stressed the seriousness of these situations, as well as the massive gap between needs and funding. All three Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) presented arguments for the extension of the L3 designation in their country of responsibility. Each presentation was followed by a discussion between Principals. There was consensus to extend in Iraq and differing views on whether to extend in Syria and South Sudan. While, the majority of participants were in favour of extending the L3 in these specific instances, several participants raised concerns on the use of the L3 mechanism in protracted emergencies in general. Following is a summary of key points and decisions with respect to the L3 response for each country, as well as a more general overview and point for action regarding a broader review of the L3 mechanism.

**Syria**

*On the impact of the L3 activation, the following was noted:*

* A lot has been accomplished through the “Whole of Syria” approach with L3 support. Empowered leadership is facilitating critical decision making. High quality personnel have been deployed to manage the operations. Coordination mechanisms have been streamlined with clusters in all main hubs co-led by UN and NGOs. There is a joint operational plan, a protection strategy, and a needs identification system about to be adopted.
* The response continues to rely on surge capacity despite the long duration of the L3 activation. There is a need for staff rotation and it is unclear if the system has enough capacity to replace staff currently serving in Syria.

*On the possible deactivation or extension of the L3, the following points were raised:*

* The sheer scale and cost of the crisis, both in human lives lost and in financial requirements for the response, are unprecedented and the dynamics on the ground are rapidly changing with exponential escalation of needs. The impact of the crisis goes beyond the Middle East and is becoming global (large refugee movement heading to Europe). These exceptional circumstances call for continuation of L3 measures.
* The extension should be used to implement the Operational Peer Review (OPR) recommendations and to expand partnerships with local NGOs to improve access and protection.
* The reputational risk of deactivation with local actors and government is very high. The Government of Syria was against the activation at the beginning.
* The L3 status is perceived as a designation of priority, and not a surge capacity mechanism. There is a risk that donors and the public will view the deactivation as a signal that the IASC does not consider Syria as a priority any longer. It could adversely affect funding and lessen the pressure to find a political solution.
* An L3 transition plan and benchmarks should be developed taking into account long term capacities and support required for this protracted crisis, including for resource mobilization with appropriate messaging.

The following counter-points were made:

* Since the situation is protracted and in light of the fact that no additional surge capacity is available at present, the same issues will be present during the next review and none of the current problems will be solved through an extension of the L3 status. In Syria the original objectives of the L3 mechanism cannot be achieved.
* The “Whole of Syria” approach and the need for reactiveness and flexibility will continue whether or not there is an L3 extension.
* Specific recommendations have been made to the Principals on Syria through the OPR, which have yet to be discussed and acted upon. The L3 extension discussion detracts from issues related to improved delivery that Principals need to focus on.
* The L3 has become a branding tool divorced from operational reality.
* A new terminology is needed to highlight protracted crises as the L3 surge mechanisms appear inadequate.

***Action Points:***

*The IASC Principals agreed to:*

1. Extend the L3 designation for Syria for six months and request the HCT to implement the OPR recommendations and develop an L3 transition plan and benchmarks within the next three months. (Action by: HCT by the end of November 2015).
2. Hold a substantive discussion on ensuring a more effective operational response including through implementing the recommendations of the Syria OPR with the Principals in December 2015. (Action by: ERC and InterAction by end of 2015).
3. Develop clear communication around the objectives of the L3 status and operational needs. (Action by: HC by end of November 2015.)

**South Sudan**

* The Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) highlighted the dire overall humanitarian situation, as well as its complex and protracted nature.
* The HCT requested an extension of the L3 to make progress in meeting benchmarks. It was noted that the situation is quite straightforward as the HCT was interrupted in meeting its benchmarks due to the previous HC being “PNGed”.
* A point was made by one participant that there was no relation between an extension and improving the response and so an extension should not be made (see arguments listed previously).

***Action Points:***

*The IASC Principals agreed to:*

1. Extend the L3 designation for South Sudan for an additional three months and request the HCT to implement the L3 transition plan and benchmarks. (Action by: HCT by end of November 2015).

**Iraq**

*The HC highlighted that:*

* The worsening situation with the number of people in need set to reach ten million by the end of 2015, with an increased number of people expected to be displaced in the coming months. They noted that the response in Iraq is desperately short of funding.
* Any reforms made in the last few months were possible because of the L3 mechanism.
* Strengthening presence in Baghdad is a key element of the HCT plan to implement the findings of the OPR.
* The L3 transition plan and benchmarks which were promised during the previous review have yet to be developed.

*Meeting participants noted that:*

* Iraq has not benefited from the full resources and support that an L3 designation should bring due to the system being overstretched.

***Action Points:***

*The IASC Principals agreed to:*

1. Extend the Iraq L3 Response for 6 months, and request the HCT to review the recommendations of the OPR, submit their L3 transition plan and benchmarks for Iraq by the end of November before the December 2015 IASC Principals meeting. (Action by: HCT by end of November 2015).

**L3 Mechanism**

Beyond the discussion on the three specific country situations, an issue on the overall strategic direction behind the L3 mechanism was raised, in particular with respect to its functionality in achieving the objectives set out in the present context. This included the L3 mechanism’s functionality in scaling up system-wide response in protracted crises situations, as well as addressing challenges in how L3 responses are communicated with and perceived by external actors, especially donors, and the public. Participants observed that partners use the L3 designation to prioritize and deprioritize their funding and/or engagement.

***Action Points:***

*The IASC Principals agreed to:*

1. Have a strategic discussion on the overall approach to protracted crises and L3 mechanism before the end of 2015 and in particular around classification, declassification, communication, extension, response capacity, and engagement with partners on key crises, in particular local NGOs. (Action by: ERC by the end of 2015)
2. Have strategic discussions on key crises focused on substance with less focus on process. (Action by: ERC)

**Yemen**

The ERC noted that the L3 response for Yemen activated for six months on 1 July 2015 is due for review in September and, given its gravity and the fast-changing nature of the crisis, that he would propose a modality for this shortly.

*IASC Secretariat, 8 September 2015*