

OCHA Response to MAR Update 2013

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): Response to the UK's Multilateral Aid Review (MAR) Update 2013

OCHA has a unique mandate within the global humanitarian system, and plays a pivotal role in strengthening the effectiveness of humanitarian response. In leading the implementation of critical reforms within the system, OCHA is central to the drive towards making humanitarian action more accountable and efficient. However, it is important to note that OCHA functions primarily as a catalyst and facilitator, and that many of the services OCHA provides only realise their full potential if all humanitarian partners actively commit to working towards system-wide objectives, and take responsibility for collective results. In this respect, while OCHA is accountable for the achievements of its objectives, the complexity of its role within the system means that certain elements remain beyond its control.

OCHA has been proactive in laying the groundwork for a more robust and accountable humanitarian system. As with any system-wide endeavour, it takes time for initiatives developed and agreed by humanitarian partners at the global level to have a tangible impact on the actual response in the field. The MAR Update has captured the beginnings of this process, and OCHA is prioritising its activities to ensure that concrete improvements occur at field level, to the benefit of people in need.

OCHA is focussing its resources on strengthening some of the key constituent elements of an effective humanitarian response, including in the areas of leadership, inter-cluster coordination, and information management. OCHA is also leading the development of more strategic and prioritized CAPs, informed by robust needs assessments, to support informed decision-making, more rigorous monitoring of humanitarian response, and improved resource allocation and value for money. Underpinning these critical functions in support of the humanitarian system, OCHA continues to work towards strengthening its own field presence, aiming to 'get the right people to the right place at the right time'. Outlined below are some key developments under each MAR reform component since the MAR Update was completed in 2012, in addition to an overview of future plans.

MAR Reform Component 1 (contribution to results)

Humanitarian Leadership

OCHA continues to make progress in strengthening leadership across the humanitarian system, through (a) broadening the pool of potential candidates for humanitarian leadership positions; (b) ensuring that Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) Pool members and other qualified candidates are selected for Resident Coordinator/HC posts; (c) providing HCs with more tailored learning opportunities; and (d) strengthening HC performance management.

The HC Pool now includes 65 members from 22 agencies. OCHA places continued emphasis on increasing gender and geographical balance within the HC Pool, and is working with regional humanitarian networks and NGOs to achieve this, including through a talent scout, who has identified over 100 potential candidates through outreach and referrals.

OCHA has increased learning and leadership development opportunities for RCs and HCs. During 2012 and 2013, some 130 RCs and RC/HCs have benefited from regional workshops on humanitarian advocacy. A private sector partner provided specific training on leadership, including a three-day HC Leadership Summit in October 2012, and a one-day session on managing change in May 2013. As a result, HCs have become more adept at providing direction, influencing and persuading stakeholders, and leading country teams. In addition to its induction program for newly appointed HCs and RC/HCs, OCHA has

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strengthened individualised leadership development support, including the HC mentoring programme, with six HCs currently engaged in mentoring relationships and two further planned. OCHA is also collaborating with Save the Children's Humanitarian and Leadership Academy on executive leadership coaching, with coaches identified to provide pro bono support, and a pilot project to begin in July 2013.

In December 2012, OCHA instituted an annual review of HC performance by Emergency Directors, based on the HC performance compacts with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, paving the way for more accountable and effective leadership. To better support HCs, OCHA holds monthly calls to facilitate discussion of operational challenges and real-time follow-up on requests for support or guidance. An informal survey conducted by donors in 16 countries in June 2013 indicated that the efforts to strengthen HCs are 'seen as bearing fruit' in the field, with donors regarding new appointments positively and recognising that, where concerns on leadership have been noted, action is taken to address these. HCs, donors, and partners have emphasized the need to increase the focus on the role played by Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) in supporting leadership. Three HCTs (Yemen, South Sudan, and Pakistan) have benefited from a new team effectiveness strengthening programme designed and facilitated by OCHA, and there are plans to replicate this programme in other field locations, tailor-made in response to each contextual need.

Information Management

OCHA has made tremendous progress in organizing itself to deliver tangible improvements to information systems in support of field operations with partners and for the humanitarian community. A comprehensive Information Strategy, aligned with OCHA's Strategic Management Plan, will be finalised by October 2013, and seeks to transform OCHA into a recognised leader in humanitarian information services and solutions. Key elements include an increased focus on field operational needs, improved governance, a 'one-stop-shop' for information services and field tools, and increased innovation.

OCHA continues to strengthen the management of information around the humanitarian programme cycle to provide a predictable set of products and a timeline for their delivery. OCHA will also draw on best practice to increase the use of inter-disciplinary teams in the field that bring together skills such as data-gathering, reporting, communication, analysis, mapping, info-graphics, regional knowledge and local languages. OCHA also plans to bolster its remote support to Country Offices through stronger regional and global capacity and by leveraging global partnerships such as the Digital Humanitarian Network. By moving to a more predictable and integrated approach to information, OCHA will create a cadre of staff trained and familiar with these standard operating procedures and available to deploy to or remotely support new emergencies. The net result will be a capacity to deploy an expert information management service to emergencies of varying scales, without the need to maintain a large, dedicated capacity at the global level.

OCHA has initiated a data and analysis project to make humanitarian data available for analysis through a data platform. OCHA has also recently completed research with the Economist Intelligence Unit to define OCHA's analytical requirements, such as the overall number of people affected, in need, and targeted for assistance. A multi-year humanitarian analysis training programme is also being considered. Collectively, these activities aim to provide Country Offices with a reliable suite of information tools, products, services, support and expertise to maximize the impact of their work, and provide partners and clients working in humanitarian operations worldwide with significantly improved access to humanitarian information and data for better operational decision-making.

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The new portal - www.HumanitarianResponse.info (HR.info) – is now live in 13 countries, with other sites launching regularly. The site is undergoing constant development to respond to user requests, add functionality, and integrate common information tools. HR.info currently houses pages for global clusters and cross-cutting issues, contacts, calendar, assessment registry, document repository, Common Operational Datasets (CODs) and galleries for maps and media. The Humanitarian Kiosk - an iOS application that synchronises key humanitarian documents to iPhones and iPads - has also been launched as a companion to HR.info and is live in 16 countries.

The CODs registry now contains 83% of CODs for 42 identified high-risk countries. OCHA also plans to develop a new generation of tools for managing core information in emergencies, which will lead to significant improvements in functionality and efficiency by removing bottlenecks around basic data-entry and transactional work. Simplifying 'the basics' will release skilled staff to focus on more substantive issues, such as working with evidence to support decision-making.

Inter-Cluster Coordination

OCHA remains firmly committed to strengthening and reinforcing inter-cluster coordination at both national and sub-national levels in the field, and significant progress is being made in this regard. An informal survey conducted by donors in June 2013 indicated that inter-cluster coordination was rated as 'good' to 'very good' in 75% of the 16 countries reviewed. As OCHA takes a stronger and more proactive role in inter-cluster coordination, it is simultaneously working with partners and affected governments to streamline and simplify coordination structures, to make them more effective, efficient, and results-oriented. Overall, the emphasis will continue to be on ensuring that global level inter-cluster coordination on operational and policy issues results in more practical support to cluster and inter-cluster coordination in the field.

Coordination performance monitoring has now been introduced in oPt, South Sudan, and Mali, and is being implemented by individual clusters in countries such as Afghanistan. The performance of inter-cluster coordination will be monitored through this framework, which will be rolled out to other countries throughout 2013. For inter-cluster coordination to be effective, individual clusters must be supported to improve their own performance and engagement with the system. OCHA will continue to encourage IASC partners to commit to providing strong, high quality cluster leads, with adequate resources and capacity to perform their coordination function. OCHA will also advocate for more consistent cluster funding based on performance monitoring of clusters and minimum cluster capacity requirements.

OCHA's capacity to support inter-cluster coordination is being reinforced through improved technical guidance and skills training for OCHA field staff. The revised inter-cluster coordination section of the IASC Coordination Reference Module will be disseminated to the field in July 2013. Guidance on inter-cluster coordination is being incorporated into existing OCHA trainings (such as FIRST) and cluster coordinator trainings, while learning workshops on inter-cluster coordination are planned in 3 focus countries and at regional/global level. A cadre of OCHA inter-cluster coordinators will be established in the 6 priority countries identified for targeted OCHA support on the humanitarian programme cycle (DRC, Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, and Yemen), resulting in strengthened links and shared learning among OCHA staff responsible for inter-cluster coordination. OCHA is developing a training package on inter-cluster coordination targeting both inter-cluster coordinators and cluster coordinators, and including a mixture of soft skills and technical knowledge. OCHA will also strengthen the inter-cluster coordination component of the inter-agency roster for Level 2 and 3 emergencies (Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism/IARRM).

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MAR Reform Component 2 (strategic and performance management)

Since the adoption of its first Strategic Framework in 2010, OCHA has been continuously moving towards a more coherent 'whole-of-organization' approach to planning that connects strategy, implementation, monitoring and reporting across the organization and under the direct oversight of senior management. OCHA's new Strategic Framework (2014-2017) will provide an even sharper focus for the organization's vision and strategic objectives over the next four years, and will introduce a broad set of initiatives aimed at improving performance and efficiency. To this end, OCHA's Strategic Plan will be accompanied by a related Management Plan designed to ensure that the necessary culture, structure and systems are in place for OCHA to function as effectively as possible, and to ensure the accountable stewardship of the organization's resources. OCHA is committed to enhancing its ability to assess and report on its value and impact, and will put in place an improved Results Framework that will enable OCHA and its partners to keep track of global and field-level performance in a more measurable, transparent and accountable way.

In tandem with these significant developments in strategic performance and organisational management, OCHA has made very good progress towards achieving greater consistency in field capacity, through strengthened human resourcing. Despite the challenges of working within the UN Secretariat recruitment system, OCHA has greatly improved the speed and efficiency of its field recruitment, to expedite timely deployments, reduce gaps, and improve staff quality, particularly for critical field leadership positions. A dedicated field recruitment team has been established, which is responsible for building a strong roster of qualified candidates while at the same time undertaking targeted recruitments to fill positions requiring specific language skills, expertise or willingness to serve in hardship and non-family duty stations. OCHA combines external advertising for new candidates with lateral re-assignment of OCHA staff to fill vacancies as quickly as possible with the most appropriate candidates. The use of rosters has expedited placements in the field as well as the internal mobility of currently serving staff, and OCHA's non-family duty station vacancy rate has been reduced to 5.28%, a historic low. OCHA has enhanced its management of mobility, rotating Heads of Office upon completion of their assignments and has also improved internal coordination to improve the transition between surge assignments and longer-term staffing.

'Getting the right people to the right place at the right time' in an emergency context requires good planning and an innovative use of various staffing mechanisms, particularly for senior leadership positions. The Senior Surge bracket of OCHA's Emergency Response Roster (ERR) now has an expanded membership of 42, including individuals qualified to lead in a 'Level 3' response for all managerial and technical disciplines. Meanwhile, the 6-monthly rotations of the regular ERR continue, with a membership of 35 individuals across all key disciplines. OCHA has recruited 2 senior Roaming Emergency Surge Officers, both of whom are currently engaged in the Syria response, and the recruitment of a Roaming Operational Stability Officer will soon be completed. Standard Operating Procedures for surge management in OCHA have been included in the revised Policy Instruction on Emergency Management, and will henceforth be used as a guiding tool, leading to operational stability in new or escalating emergencies, and improved succession and continuity in OCHA staffing.

MAR Reform Component 3 (financial resource management)

OCHA has made significant progress in the development of more strategic and prioritized CAPs, informed by robust needs assessments. All CAPs are underpinned by assessments and each CAP document presents a list of assessments used to support strategic planning, usually at the sectoral level. In most complex emergencies, the aim is to

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achieve a coordinated approach to assessments rather than conduct a joint assessment. Coordinated assessments are planned and carried out in partnership by humanitarian actors, an assessment plan is drafted, assessment results are shared, and the results are jointly analyzed to lead to a common understanding of priority needs. Joint assessments (such as the Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment - MIRA) are recommended to inform strategic planning in a sudden-onset emergency. The MIRA is also being used in complex emergencies to gather information in previously inaccessible areas or when there is a change in the overall humanitarian situation. In these contexts, the results of the MIRA inform the overall coordinated assessment approach underpinning the CAP.

Almost all CAP countries undertook activities to strengthen coordinated assessments in 2012, and more than 70 OCHA field staff were trained in the MIRA and coordinated assessments, in addition to the training of UNDAC members and agency/cluster partners. There has been significant progress at field level, including the addition of a humanitarian dashboard in the CAP (Afghanistan, Burkino Faso, CAR, Chad, DRC, Mali, Yemen), the assignment of dedicated capacity to work on strengthening assessments (Afghanistan, oPt, Yemen), work on secondary data analysis (Afghanistan, CAR), the implementation of a survey of surveys (Kenya, Chad, Mali), the use of a needs prioritization approach (Afghanistan), the establishment of assessment working groups (Mali, Yemen), and the development of joint assessment tools (Kenya, Mali, oPt, Somalia, and South Sudan).

To further strengthen the coordinated assessment approach, OCHA is leading the development and implementation of the Humanitarian Needs Overview - a stand-alone needs analysis document that presents priority needs agreed upon through an inter-agency workshop. The template includes prioritization tools that can be used to support needs analysis. This is being rolled-out in 2013 to underpin the 2014 CAPs, and is already being produced on a quarterly basis in Syria. OCHA is also leading a project with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and the International Rescue Committee to roll-out a mobile data collection tool - the Kobo Coordinated Assessment Tool. This will streamline and automate data collection, thereby facilitating data collection, analysis and reporting. OCHA is also producing an indicator registry to be made available on the Humanitarian Response website, including key cluster indicators as well as core humanitarian indicators.

Robust indicator sets were added to almost all CAPs by 2012, and particularly to 2013 CAPs. All CAPs now have strategic objectives, matched with strategic indicators and targets (though the specificity and pertinence of strategic objectives and indicators are still irregular across CAPs); and most cluster response plans state clear collective output targets and demonstrate the link between these and the strategic objectives. Four of the 17 CAPs for 2013 now have rigorous prioritization (rating less than half of the proposed actions as top-priority): Central African Republic, the Philippines, South Sudan and Mali.

The 2013 CAPs saw the near-universal use of the On-line Planning / Projects System (OPS), which has some 5,000 registered users from hundreds of organizations in 20 field operations. Its purpose is to make more efficient operational plans among the humanitarian actors, by being a platform for aggregation, peer review, and mutual adjustment of each other's implementation plans and consequent fundraising targets. The widespread use of the system's 'enhanced geographical fields' allowed cluster coordinators to spot and eliminate duplications among implementing organizations in the planning stages. OPS also has a new feature which adds the appeal's strategic and cluster objectives to the database, to allow users to link projects to them (and by implication to filter out draft projects that don't link to common objectives). There is also good potential, with more technical development (now being explored), for clusters to use OPS as an implementation monitoring tool and thus improve the timeliness and transparency of data on implementation. Better use of the OPS geographical planning and peer review features will also support a rationalisation of CAPs, and reduce the scope for inflating projects within CAPs.

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While IASC monitoring and evaluation systems for collective humanitarian action have been under development for the past 18 months, the CAP system has stepped into the breach and become the vehicle for reporting on strategic and cluster objectives, vis-à-vis the targets which HCTs and clusters set themselves in the CAP. Most of the 2013 CAP mid-year reviews contain clear reporting on progress towards strategic and cluster objectives.

In one of the most fundamental changes to date, OCHA has led the IASC to agree on a profound re-configuration of the CAP alongside the other humanitarian programme cycle elements, such that HCTs will now develop and publish needs analyses, strategic plans, cluster response plans, and monitoring reports sequentially, with greater quality control for each, rather than incorporated into the CAP process and document. This will help to make the scope of assessed needs clear, and to ensure that strategic plans, operational plans, and related funding requests are commensurate.

It its oversight and management of Country-based Pooled Funds (Emergency Response Funds/ERFs and Common Humanitarian Funds/CHFs), OCHA is moving towards a risk-based approach, in response to the recommendations of the Board of Auditors following the audit of the 2010-2011 biennium. This includes the development of:

- A risk management methodology to assess the capacity of implementing partners and determine different levels of risk and risk mitigation mechanisms;
- A policy to apply measures and sanctions in cases where implementing partners fail to comply with financial reporting requirements or reimburse unspent funds to OCHA;
- A grant management tool/system, focusing initially on a basic web-based tool as a transitional solution while OCHA develops a robust, longer-term grant management system;
- A monitoring and reporting framework for ERFs to streamline field monitoring of ERF projects by OCHA at country level (proposed target of at least 70%), while following up on implementation of CHF monitoring and reporting framework launched in 2012;
- The review of ERF Global Guidelines and development of CHF Global Guidelines, which will further support the management of Country-based Pooled Funds through the continuous improvement of, and compliance with, new and existing policies.

OCHA has accepted all the recommendations outlined in the recent Global ERF Evaluation, and is finalizing a Management Response Plan to implement the agreed action.