Global Protection Cluster

31 MAY 2018, 09.00-11.00: THEMATIC SESSION – Humanitarian Program Cycle

IMPROVEMENT OF THE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE

BRIEFING NOTE

On 26 and 27 April 2018, OCHA convened a Workshop in Geneva with UN agencies, global clusters and NGOs to identify actions to improve the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC). The Workshop was a culmination of previous consultations to review the main achievements and constraints to the current process and outputs of the HPC, such as its timeline in the field and the relevance and quality of the Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP). **This Note summarises the objective of improving the HPC and the main components of this efforts**, as agreed upon by the Workshop participants.

BACKGROUND

The humanitarian programme cycle was established in 2013 as a successor of the Consolidated Appeal Process. The current cycle revolves around the production of a yearly Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) which informs a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in countries affected by crises. It also includes a mid-term Periodic Monitoring Report (PMR). Since 2015, several rounds of reviews with partners involved in the HPC have identified recurrent challenges that have proven difficult to address despite workshops and lessons learned exercises at field and global levels. The main issues include:

- A perceived heaviness due to misaligned timing and competition with operational priorities, unclarity of purpose (e.g. strategic versus operational versus fund-raising focus), and insufficient capacities to collect and analyse information and to participate in collective analysis and planning;
- Delays in the production of the various outputs, leading to poor linkages between the HNO and the HRP and associated challenges of consolidating needs and funding requirements at global level;
- Weak inter-sectoral analysis of needs and of responses, contributing to a heavy sectoral focus;
- Unsatisfactory process and criteria for prioritizing responses;
- Inconsistent approaches to multi-year planning;
- Lack of continuous monitoring of the situation, needs and response preventing flexible adjustments throughout the year.

In parallel, developments at the global level are calling for closer collaboration between humanitarian and development actors on analysis and planning, and commitments have been made by humanitarian actors and donors to improve the funding efficiency and effectiveness as part of the 'Grand Bargain'. The time is therefore ripe to take substantive action to overcome the persisting challenges and integrate these new dimensions.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE

Between December 2017 and April 2018, several rounds of consultations were held at global level with UN agencies, global clusters and international NGOs to review the main issues affecting the implementation and results of the HPC and identify potential solutions. The 26-27 April Workshop provided the opportunity to consolidate these outputs into a common set of inter-related priority actions. The attached diagram offers a visual representation of the key components and their inter-relations. While a sequence of separate actions is necessary, the components form a comprehensive set that has to be considered as a whole and not as independent pieces.

The primary objective of improving the HPC is to enhance the achievements of desired positive humanitarian outcomes at field level. A precise definition of what humanitarian outcomes entail in different crisis situations must be produced but they are understood as a set of life and livelihood conditions that reflect the overall goal of humanitarian action to save lives, alleviate suffering, reduce risks to affected people, protect livelihoods and ensure the dignity of crisis-affected people. Desired humanitarian outcomes are generally inter-sectoral in nature, but they can also be sectoral depending on the nature of the crisis and needs. Humanitarian outcomes include protection outcomes as defined in the IASC Protection Policy.

It follows from this objective that **Humanitarian Response Plans must be articulated around humanitarian outcomes** to enable local and international stakeholders to define and integrate their plans and actions around their achievement.

As crises, needs and responses evolve throughout the year, HRPs must also be a "living" and agile document that is updated as and when necessary. Identified 'high-level' humanitarian outcomes and operational plans (inter-sectoral and sectoral) may not change but specific programmes may need to be adjusted more frequently, whether in coverage, target or content. This should be achieved through the **establishment of a collective monitoring and accountability framework** (coherent with the existing HPC Reference Module). The framework should build upon already existing monitoring frameworks by the various humanitarian actors and incorporate feedback on the response from affected people through common service community engagement mechanisms. It should support a joint analysis of potential changes and their implication for the response and funding.

For this to happen, **inter-sectoral mechanisms to analyse needs and response options must be established or strengthened in the field**. Ongoing work on joint inter-sectoral needs analysis and the Grand Bargain on Needs Assessment should be leveraged to provide guidance and help change attitudes towards more data sharing, transparency and collaboration. Protection analysis which involves the continuous analysis of risks people face, of threats, vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people, must be part of joint inter-sectoral analysis. A similar effort must take place to achieve inter-sectoral response analysis, including direct links with needs analysis.

Costing of the response and funding requirements will continue to be produced on the basis of the HRP. It is essential for fund-raising at both country and global levels. However, **fundraising**

and advocacy should draw from the HRP[1] rather than be mixed up with its coordination purpose. This will allow the HRP to evolve throughout the year as required by changes in the situation, needs and response in a light and nimble manner to meet operational (and not fund-raising) requirements. The country fund-raising and advocacy documents will feed into the Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) launched towards the end of each year at global level. Updates of country HRPs will inform corresponding adjustments of funding requirements which are also communicated through GHO updates.

Staff capacities and resources must be dedicated to inter-sectoral needs and response analyses, prioritise and formulate humanitarian outcomes, and regularly monitor and adapt to changes. **More coherent capacity strengthening efforts and knowledge management** among the various stakeholders on the various elements of the HPC is necessary, this includes strengthening the capacity of those involved in coordination to integrate and mainstream protection. These efforts must be adapted to field realities and aim at filling gaps while building on existing capacities of both local and international actors. Funding resources to conduct analyses and monitoring must also be identified and secured, including exploring options with pooled funds.

In sum, more robust inter-sectoral needs and response analyses underpinning the formulation of humanitarian outcomes, and more regularly updated situation, needs and response achievements are expected to improve the relevance and quality of the response, and hence the achievement of the desired outcomes. Fund-raising and advocacy efforts will be supported by more credible plans and more regular reviews of changes in the situation and needs and of response results and gaps. Better equipped and resourced international and local actors will be better positioned to deliver against these various expectations.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Several issues represent risks or opportunities for the improvements which are sought after. **The way they will be treated is critical as it will determine whether they turn into enabling or constraining factors**. These include (not exhaustive):

- Ongoing UN Development System and empowered Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator leadership, which may affect how the HPC is treated vis a vis other planning mechanisms, including the linkages with development actors;
- Balancing agility and context-adaptation necessary for operational added-value at field level with minimum harmonization across country contexts to provide a set of core data and information at global level;
- Ensuring proactive and continuous engagement of local actors;
- Building upon (and not re-inventing) frameworks that already foster the desired focus on inter-sectoral analysis and people-centered humanitarian outcomes, e.g. protection;

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[1] Although this looks like adding another document to the existing HRP for fundraising and advocacy purposes, it will essentially represent an extraction of the fundraising and advocacy elements of the HRP and be mainly the responsibility of OCHA to prepare to be included in the Global Humanitarian Overview, thus alleviating the burden from partners.

- Providing incentives to shift attitudes and practices towards more genuine collaboration across agencies and accountability, including through donors;
- Ensuring that the HPC improvement components are driven by efficiency and effectiveness objectives so as to decrease rather than increase the burden on the various partners;
- Coordinating with other initiatives tackling some of the identified priorities, e.g. around analysis, capacity strengthening, involvement of local actors, collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, and financing.