



Prospects for Integrating a Programme-Based Approach in CAPs and Common Humanitarian Funds

A SCOPING STUDY

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Integrating a Programme Approach in CAPs and CHF's

Table of Contents

Acronyms	3
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Objectives and methodology of the study	6
1.2 Caveats	6
1.3 The current context and constellation of interests framing the debate.....	7
2. Defining the ‘programme-based approach’ in the humanitarian context.....	10
2.1 A diversity of definitions	10
2.2 Towards a consensus definition based on goals for effective humanitarian response.....	13
2.2.1 Proposed definitions	14
2.2.2 Other terms for clarification.....	14
3. The current modalities: How could a programme-based approach add value?	15
3.1 Coordinated strategic planning and prioritization	16
3.2 Fundraising	18
3.3 Accountability: Reporting and M&E	19
3.4 Conclusions: What are the problems with the common humanitarian financing mechanisms that a programme-based approach could potentially address?	21
4. Options for introducing a programme-based approach	22
5. Recommendations	27
6. Annexes.....	29
Interviews	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bibliography	31
Study Terms of Reference.....	33

Acronyms

CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CAR	Central African Republic
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHAP	Common Humanitarian Action Plan
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
ERC	Emergency Response Coordinator
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative
HAP	Humanitarian Action Plan (DRC)
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NFIs	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
OPS	Online Project System
PBA	Programme-Based Approach
PCA	Project Cooperation Agreement
RC	Resident Coordinator
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

The undeniable improvements in coordination achieved by the humanitarian reform process have entailed significant adaptations by individual humanitarian actors. These adaptations have come at some real cost, and the efforts to address the costs and consequences of coordination have at times seemed to pit the organizational interests of individual agencies against the larger needs of the system. This study, externally commissioned by UNHCR on behalf of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Group, is an attempt to reconcile the opposing viewpoints within a framework that is aimed foremost at strengthening the strategic cohesiveness of humanitarian response for affected populations, while reducing inefficiencies and unnecessary transaction costs. It is a modest and preliminary stab at a formidable coordination challenge, and is intended to serve as the inception stage of a more in-depth analysis and piloting exercise at field level.

The purpose of the study was to determine whether two of the main vehicles for coordination in fundraising for humanitarian response - the Consolidated Appeal Process and the Common Humanitarian Funds - could potentially be improved by the introduction of a 'programme-based approach'. Previous research regarding the transaction costs of these mechanisms (Salamons, Van Lith, & Vartan, 2009) had concluded that their basic organising principle of projects within sectors (so-called 'projectisation') created costly difficulties for some of the UN humanitarian agencies that traditionally modeled their work and raised funds on the basis of larger programmes, often involving multiple sectors. The agencies have objected to the time consuming task of disaggregating their programmes into discrete project proposals to fit them within the projectised frameworks, and the piecemeal funding and additional reporting tasks this involves for staff. In addition to alleviating the administrative burden for these actors of fundraising and reporting on numerous, artificially disaggregated projects, it was argued that a programme-based approach would improve overall strategic planning for longer-term results for beneficiaries. The question critical then becomes how could such an approach coexist with the cluster system, upon which the financing instruments are based, and which is responsible for considerable advances in sectoral coordination and leadership.

The first task of this study was to propose a common understanding of what causes a 'programme-based approach' in the humanitarian context. Different humanitarian actors define the term in various ways according to their own mandates or missions, and in accordance with their internal management systems. For the purposes of humanitarian coordination and the particular objectives of this study, the most useful way of distinguishing 'programmes' from 'projects' is on the basis of the level of results they seek to achieve. Projects aim to produce the direct **outputs** of activities (such as X number of shelters constructed, wells dug, children vaccinated, etc.); whereas a programme is typically larger and wider ranging, involving multiple different types of outputs that are synergistically linked to contribute to **outcomes**. Outcome-level change entails broader and longer term results for the population being served (such as increased access to health care or clean water, for instance). Outcome goals can be focused within a single sector or involve multiple sectors for the benefit of a particular beneficiary group (such as IDPs, demobilized soldiers, or children).

A programme can therefore be defined as ‘a grouping of activities and partners linked within a cohesive strategy to achieve specific, measurable humanitarian outcomes for a sector or a defined beneficiary population’ and a programme based approach as ‘A means of strategic planning, resource mobilization and reporting based on programmes as the basic unit of organisation’.

On the basis of these proposed definitions, the research examined the existing systems of the CAP and the Common Humanitarian Funds to identify any specific issues with strategic planning, fundraising, or accountability for performance that a programme-based approach could potentially help address. The issues identified included coordinated planning that lacks an overall cohesive strategy due to a focus on output level results; multiple formats, criteria, and indicators for proposal submissions and reporting; and the inability to accommodate multisectoral objectives and programming. Other challenges for individual agencies that are not amenable to a programme-based approach solution, however, include changes in donor preferences and behavior independent of humanitarian coordination such as the loss of some bilateral grantmaking at the country level, and some donors no longer accepting global annual reports as the sole source of reporting.

The report outlines two possible options for moving forward on the question of the programme-based approach. Option 1 would incorporate and facilitate agency level programme-based approaches within the current modalities. It would mean that in addition to the usual projects within sectors, CAPs/CHAPs could also include programmes, geared toward outcome-level objectives. Transaction costs and workloads would be reduced for fundraising and reporting, and for those organizations capable of working to outcomes could achieve benefits in both effectiveness and efficiency. However, the system-level deficiencies in strategic planning and accountability would remain. Option 2 envisions a more ambitious shift to a system-wide programme-based approach for all CAP countries, reframing all the CAPs/CHAPs for chronic emergencies on a programme-basis with outcome-level targets, and would integrate separate projects as components of these programmes. This option could potentially provide the overall strategic planning and performance assessment capacity the system currently lacks, and moving from a project to a programme basis could strengthen unified action and the coordination mindset of actors in the field. On the negative side, it would involve considerable start-up costs, and the smaller and more project-oriented NGOs would lose visibility and direct access to donors in the CAP. Additionally, the system would no longer be able to track funding amounts by sector. It also runs the risk of that both information and accountability could be lost if monitoring systems are not in place to adequately report against outcomes.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations that include launching a pilot study process in two or more field settings in 2012 to examine the feasibility, practical implications, and potential benefits of both options. In addition, the report notes that regardless of which, if any, option is pursued, current inefficiencies and transaction costs could be significantly reduced if agencies and donors alike took steps to harmonize their internal processes with those of the coordinated system.

1. Introduction

Since 2006 the changes brought about by the humanitarian reform process have fostered substantial improvements in the international humanitarian system, while at the same time posing considerable challenges to its constituent organisations. As the new financing and coordination mechanisms evolve, and the operational humanitarian organisations adapt, a continuing process of review and evaluation has led to joint initiatives seeking to improve and fine-tune the instruments. This scoping study represents one such initiative.

1.1. Objectives and methodology of the study

The subject of this study derived from a 2009 report examining the transaction costs entailed in the common humanitarian financing mechanisms, or ‘pooled funds’ established three years prior - the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) at country level. Among other findings, the transaction costs study put forward that ‘pooled humanitarian funds would benefit from an option for programme-based, cross-sectoral allocations’, and went further to suggest that the CAP itself could be usefully ‘redesigned to function at the programme level as well.’ (Salamons, Van Lith, & Vartan, 2009, p. 6)

On behalf of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Group’s Task Team on Integrating Programme Approach, UNHCR commissioned this scoping study from an external consultant to examine whether and how a programme-based approach could ‘help and promote more coherent and holistic allocations across clusters, resulting improved inter-cluster approaches and coordination, and may also enable organisations to obtain more balanced funding towards the various components of multi-sector programmes.’ (IASC HFG, 10 February 2011)

Conducted as a short-term (six-week), desk-based research project, the scoping study involved key informant interviews with 36 individuals representing UN agencies and offices, NGOs, and donor governments (interview list attached as Annex 1); a review of relevant documentation, including IASC and internal agency policies, guidance, and reports, as well as related prior reviews and evaluations (Annex 2: Bibliography); and a financial review of humanitarian aid flows using FTS data.

Paraphrasing the study’s Terms of Reference (attached as Annex 3) the study report sets out to answer four main questions:

What is a ‘programme-based approach’ in the humanitarian context?

What are the problems or shortcomings within the existing modalities that a programme-based approach would seek to address, and would they be amenable to such a solution?

What are some possible ways that the current financing instruments could incorporate programme-based approaches that would meet common objectives? What would be pros and cons of making this shift?

How should the Task Team move forward with piloting programme-based approaches, if recommended?

To answer these questions the report examines the issues and challenges of existing modalities in terms of: a) strategic planning and prioritization, b) efficient mobilization of funding, and c) reporting and accountability, and ways they could potentially be improved. It concludes with recommendations for the Task Team consider in deciding on the way forward on programme-based approaches in CAPs and CHFs.

1.2. Caveats

Because of the short-term and desk-based nature of the study, there is a risk that the findings will skew toward a headquarters and

UN-centric perspective. Interview subjects were drawn first from the members of the Task Team (all but one of whom represented UN entities), with additional informants from the field and from NGOs and donor governments brought in to the extent possible during the study timeframe, leaving non-UN and field based actors underrepresented, and their perspectives less well reflected. This is a distinct weakness of the study which will need to be addressed in any follow-up field-based exercise.

The subject of the programme approach initially fell within the remit of the Task Team on Making the Pooled Funds More Efficient, but HFG members decided to give it a separate Task Team for study due to its complexity. It is unavoidable that this study will overlap in some areas with the work of the Task Team on Making the Pooled Funds More Efficient, particularly in Section 3, which looks at the perceived problems with pooled funds that a programme-based approach might be used to address. However, it attempts to limit the amount of detail on fund structures and processes and remain focused on big picture questions regarding programme-based approaches.

During the course of this study, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC principals began plans for a high-level task team exercise to make recommendations addressing issues of cluster leadership and accountability for performance. Because the subject matter overlaps, it is possible that the recommendations of the high-level task team will supersede the results of this study.

Lastly, the intricacies of the various mechanisms and in-country processes reviewed in the study, as well as the wide-ranging internal financial and programming processes of the humanitarian agencies, necessarily limit what can be realistically achieved by a short-term study. Rather than providing a detailed blueprint for a new system or process, therefore, it will instead serve as a scoping study for a larger study or pilot exercise with field-based applied research. It also seeks to lay the groundwork for such an exercise by defining the common terms and points of consensus on which to

base future action, outlining the critical questions, and presenting broad options.

1.3. The current context and constellation of interest framing the debate

The argument for introducing a programme-based approach to the common humanitarian financing mechanisms is rooted in a few different motivations, and the discussion encapsulates the various tensions in the current system. As already mentioned, there is the issue of transaction costs. Some organisations, particularly the larger and multi-mandated agencies, have traditionally operated on the basis of larger-scale programmes, and find that the pooled funds require them to disaggregate these programmes into discrete projects as the basis for fundraising and later reporting against - a labor-intensive, burdensome, and in their view 'artificial' exercise.

If the transaction costs issue represents the 'self-interested' motivation, another rationale is found in promoting good practice. Using a programme-based approach would improve strategic planning and cohesion efforts, and accountability for performance would be focused on higher-level outcomes as opposed to low-level outputs and processes that don't provide the full picture of how the system as a whole is doing.

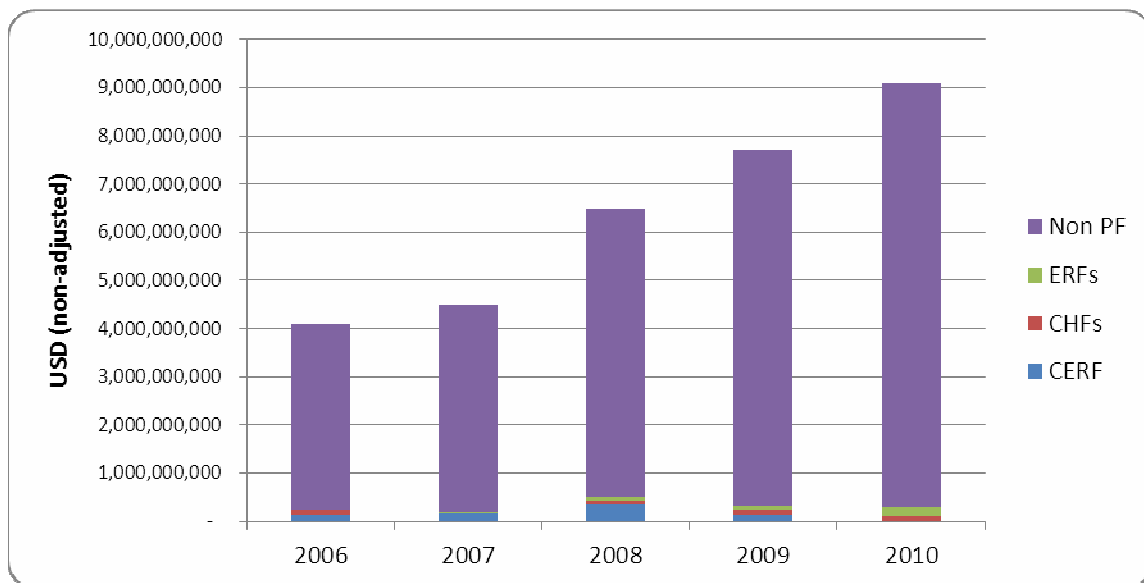
There are also more general financial concerns of humanitarian organisations that have been around since the inception of the new humanitarian financing mechanisms, but which have intensified in the past two years with strains in the global economy and responses by donor governments. These responses have included consolidation of funding channels and increased demand, by some, for a greater degree of evidence-based accountability to be demonstrated by their grantees.

Although some humanitarian agencies and NGOs continue to worry that the existence of pooled funds will result in declining resources for bilateral grant-making by donor

governments, a review of humanitarian financial flows since 2006 shows these fears have not materialised. Overall government contributions for international humanitarian assistance continue to rise, by an annual average increase of 23%, since 2006. The overall amounts going to pooled funds, moreover, have not continued to rise along with overall humanitarian funding, but seem

to have leveled off after a peak in 2008. Rather, it is bilateral funding that is rising fastest, particularly in 2009 and 2010. While there may be particular donors who choose to channel more of their contributions through the pooled mechanisms, a diversity of funding sources has been maintained in the system at large, and no agency so far can point to a net loss of humanitarian funding.

Figure 1: Humanitarian aid flows, 2006-2010



Source: FTS

The global recession has naturally affected aid donorship by governments, with some of them reducing their foreign aid budgets or planning to, and some have narrowing their scope of partners and funding channels. Some large agencies and NGOs report feeling squeezed in core resources, as some active mid-level donors have already cut foreign aid budgets. This does not stem from anything to do with humanitarian reform and nor does it primarily affect humanitarian funding as much as development funding. At the same time, the average amounts in CAP requests to donors have been rising. The overall numbers of CAPs and Flash Appeals prepared per year

since 2000 have risen only slightly, while the average amounts requested have gone up much more. The average ask per CAP has risen by over 20%, in part due to larger project budgets, including one agency that recently significantly increased its assessed budget needs in humanitarian response due to a new method of internal budgeting and programme design. Markedly higher amounts have also been requested in recent years for humanitarian coordination and logistics, safety and security, and early recovery activities. The possibility of decreased funding against humanitarian response needs remains a worrying, but not yet realised, scenario.

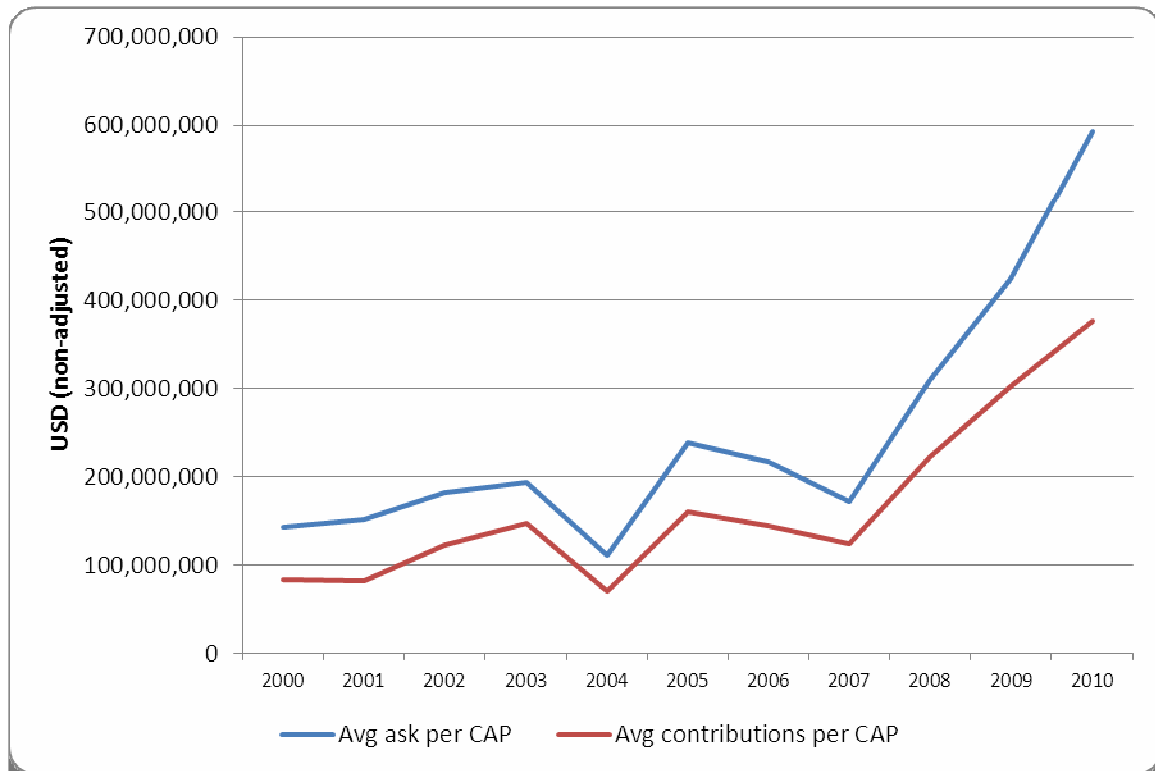


Figure 2: Average total requests funding for CAPs 2000-2010

Source: FTS

Increased pressure among some donors for partners to show ‘value for money’ (which they need to justify their budgets to their own legislatures during a period of fiscal austerity) has added to the tension, as has recent examples of donors becoming more coordinated amongst themselves to jointly applying pressure on grantees. Donors are not always clear and consistent about their expectations, however, and can at times send conflicting signals even from within the same donor agency. It is unlikely that those who have moved to more rigorous information requirements will reverse course, however. OECD DAC perceives that the emphasis on “value for money” is here to stay,’ among

many donors, in addition to the trends of ‘narrowing and deepening’ their partnership base. (Scott, March 23, 2011)

Another tension complicating the discussion is between the system’s goals for consolidating and building on the gains made in coordination through humanitarian reform, and agencies’ goals of preserving flexibility and autonomy in their programming and fundraising and minimizing redundancies and inefficiencies. Many system participants have a sense of a zero-sum game in this regard, which makes proposing any major change very difficult. This of course is not new, but is rather the perennial dilemma of coordination,

and one which needs to be frankly acknowledged as the backdrop for this discussion. In general, the interests of donors, UN agencies and IOs/NGOs converge in some areas but compete in others. The ‘common goods’ of increased funding, timelier disbursements, and less duplication brought about by common appeals and funding tools are offset by the administrative burdens and transaction costs at the level of individual organisational interest. At the system level the benefits of coordination on humanitarian

response are at times seemed to be in conflict with agency level performance (the classic example being if an agency needs to spend more time servicing coordination mechanisms than actually performing aid work. If the humanitarian actors hope to take the programme approach forward, they will need to openly recognize and agree upon which of these levels is being discussed, and at which one the programme-based model would be aimed.

2. Defining the “programme-based approach” in the humanitarian context

The first task of this study, as the Task Team conceived it, was to propose a definition of ‘programme’ and the ‘programme-based approach’ in humanitarian action that most actors could agree upon. Currently the humanitarian system has no commonly accepted definitions of these terms, such as exists in the development sphere. Rather, different humanitarian providers and donors maintain their own internal definitions or understandings of the terms relative to their internal structures and modes of work. The only constant among them is that programmes are understood to be larger than projects, and may encompass them. A consensus definition of the terms is a necessary starting point in this exercise, not just for definitional clarity but also to form agreement on the presumed benefits (or drawbacks) such an approach. In other words it must be defined collectively in terms of what it seeks to accomplish for overall enterprise.

Initially we must settle on the actual wording: The discussion has seen the terms ‘programme approach’, ‘programme-oriented approach’, ‘programme-based funding’, and other permutations variously used. For internal consistency, the paper will use ‘programme-based approach.’

2.1. A diversity of definitions

The development model of a programme-based approach (PBA)

By the simplest dictionary definition an aid programme is ‘a plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal’. Development assistance actors first found it necessary to explicitly differentiate a ‘programme’ from a ‘project’ in the early 1990s. Funding discrete development projects had resulted in incoherence and duplication, and did not allow for a central leadership role of the host government. The OECD DAC definition of programme-based approaches consists of ‘(i) leadership by the host country or organisation; (ii) a single comprehensive programme and budget framework; (iii) a formalised process for donor co-ordination and harmonisation of donor procedures for reporting, budgeting, financial management and procurement; and (iv) efforts to increase the use of local systems for programme design and implementation, financial management, monitoring and evaluation.” “PBAs involve more flexible assistance provided through country systems to support an agreed programme of activities... They include general and sector budget support, sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) and similar programmes at a cross-sectoral, sub-sectoral or regional level. A range of funding modalities, including projects, are possible within PBAs.” (OECD DAC, 2003, p. 37). This idea of ‘scaling up’ for more effective development strategy in line with host country systems and leadership was

reaffirmed in the Paris Declaration. (OECD DAC, 2006)

The OECD DAC definition focused on the funding side of the equation. Looking at it from the vantage point of strategic planning, UNDP framed the development programme-based approach as follows: “The programme approach is a process that helps governments to formulate national priority development objectives and to realize these objectives through corresponding national programmes formulated and implemented in a coherent, coordinated and participatory manner to ensure sustainability. Such integrated national programmes are normally multisectoral and have a variety of funding partners. The principle that such a programme should be multisectoral is based on the view that it is preferable to tackle only one development problem or objective but address it in all its dimensions.’ (Andic, Cook, Cossée, & McCommon, 1998)

Any humanitarian model for a programme-based approach must necessarily differ from the development model in some important aspects. The central focus on supporting the capacity of government will not be feasible or appropriate in all humanitarian responses, for instance in conflict environments where it is important to have a neutral and impartial aid presence, and where capacity is lacking for an effective government-led response to a crisis. Humanitarian programming also typically takes place within a much shorter time frame than development programming.

Sector-based programming

A programme within the water and sanitation sector, for instance, could include multiple projects and activities (e.g. drilling boreholes, building latrines, providing hygiene education, repairing water pumps etc.) in service to some broader objectives for the sector as a whole (e.g. percentage of population with access to clean water, decrease in waterborne disease prevalence). WHO's health programming more or less fits this definition. WHO's approach, based on long term health programming in cooperation with

governments, is to identify clear objectives in the sector and design a package of work in programmatic terms to achieve those objectives. Projects may refer to specified activities within a defined geographical area that fall under an overall programme.

The terms are generally well understood by large, multi-mandated actors like WHO in the health sector; or UNICEF in nutrition, what is less clear is how to apply this approach to humanitarian emergency contexts. WFP also organizes its work in large programmes, typically one or two per country. What tend to be missing, these actors acknowledge, are the inter-sectoral linkages: how food security links to water, for instance, or the interdependence of health and nutrition.

Thematic or broad goal-based programming
Similar to the above, but not necessarily focused within one sector, would be thematic or goal-based programming that may encompass different activities in different sectors. An example of this would be UNICEF's new organisational ‘Vision,’ a results-based programming model that is geared toward achieving specific outcomes rather than outputs and activities: for example, achieving greater numbers of children enrolled in school as opposed to building X number of schools. Within its country programmes, UNICEF is identifying programme component results, and seeks to have donors contribute toward these outcomes rather than a stack of projects. It is not yet completely clear if and how the rollout of this new model, which is mainly conceived in regard to UNICEF's development work, will affect the organisation's commitments in humanitarian response and its prominent cluster leadership role. UNHCR has also taken steps over the past two years to move to an outcome-based model for type of programming, described below.

Population-based programming

When an organisation's assistance work is focused on a particular population group or groups, their programme could be defined as including any projects and activities, and

multiple sectors, which address the specific needs of that defined beneficiary population. The prime example here is UNHCR's programmes for refugees, returnees, stateless, and IDPs (indeed UNHCR is mandated as a programme itself within the United Nations system). Other population-based programming could be around a group such as women, children, excluded minorities, the handicapped, etc. Such programmes may not necessarily be confined to a single country, but may need to span national borders as their populations do. In addition, protection tends to be a major area of activity within a population-based programme, and there are certain less tangible aspects to protection programming, for instance daily advocacy vis-à-vis governments, that are particularly difficult to 'projectise' as separate components of work.

Geographically-based programming

Some organisations will define their programmes based on a geographic region, often a country. Many of the larger organisations, typically those that work in development as well as humanitarian assistance, who seek to work toward a higher level of strategic objectives have adopted 'country programmes' for their presence in particular countries. NRC, for example, has a country programme for each country of operation which entails a three-year strategy across five core activity areas. Because such country programmes tend to be funded by multiple donors, the organisation will raise money on the basis of smaller, disaggregated projects, while maintaining its overall strategic approach. Oxfam also has country level programmes that each separate activity is integrated within, and in addition to outcomes has begun to look at working toward higher-level impact objectives.

Programme as a unit of management/fundraising

The most general way to define a programme - pertaining to all the above categories - is as a management or fundraising unit, as opposed to defining it by the type of activities or beneficiaries it involves. This is more of a

simple, sized-based understanding of programmes - that they are bundles of projects and activities managed by a single organisation, which will raise funds against it (ideally retaining the flexibility to allocate amongst the various components as it sees fit). This same definition - a unit of management or fundraising - can also be applied to a project, and here is where some confusion may lie.

The 2011CAP Guidelines define programme as 'a coherent and linked set of projects and activities by one organisation in (usually) one country. (IASC CAP SWG, 2011, p. 34) In other words, programme refers the organisation's own country strategy and vision, whatever that may entail. The Guidelines go on to define a project is 'a package of activities under one management unit in one organisation.... It is, or can be, a unit of analysis for the organisation's internal management (financial operational), a medium of exchange of operational information with other organisations, and an external relations device (a fund-raising proposal)' (Ibid.)

The Guidelines here are essentially allowing for a specific definition of programme approach to be used within the CAP, substituting a broadened definition of 'project' - the basic unit of the CAP. In this way an organisation could bundle activities into as large as needed, multi-geographic 'project' and submit it for funding. However, this type of programme-based approach could only be used within a single sector. The CAPs, like the Common Humanitarian Funds, are organized along sector lines and linked to be cluster coordination system, where cluster lead agencies provide leadership over the selection and prioritization of activities. It does not work for an agency that organizes its work and fundraises around a programme that incorporates more than one sector, because there is currently no similar locus of responsibility at the intercluster level. (Although the CAP has made allowances for UNHCR's refugee programmes in this regard,

entering its wide-ranging activities as a single funding block in the CAP called ‘multisector’.)

A few UN agencies and a large number of NGOs work on the basis of projects, and do not have an explicit definition or business model of the programme approach, although some have indicated that they are working towards it. Many of these actors primarily plan and report on the level of outputs rather than outcomes. Finally, most donors also do not have a written definition of the programme-based approach as it relates to humanitarian assistance, although some do for development work. When asked for their general understanding of the terms, responses from donors interviewed ranged across the above definitions.

2.2. Towards a consensus definition based on goals for effective humanitarian response

It is evident that before exploring possible ways forward, the humanitarian actors must clearly define for system what is meant by a programme based approach in the context of coordinated humanitarian action. Not only does the definition need to be distinct from development assistance, it must also differentiate itself from individual, agency-specific definitions of programming. Given that we are talking about system-wide coordinated financing (and reporting) mechanisms, the definition needs to relate to those multilateral structures. It cannot be centered around any one agency's particular modality, because these are so varied. (This is not to say each agency and NGO cannot pursue its own vision of programmes and manage its own internal systems accordingly, but the difficulty then arises when these are in conflict with the system.) To arrive at a common definition, the system's members must look outward towards common objectives, as opposed to inward at their own definition of programme. In other words the definition must reflect the objectives that the system seeks to achieve by employing it: strategic effectiveness and greater efficiency in humanitarian response. Moreover, it should reflect the ethos of humanitarian

reform that it is not enough that any individual agency performs well – the overall system must perform well. In this way it should strive not to reverse the steps that have been made towards greater cohesion among humanitarian actors over the past several years.

To summarize, a common definition of a programme-based approach to coordinated humanitarian response, must be:

- Distinct from the development definition
- Defined at the system level (differentiated from individual, agency-specific definitions of programming)
- Based on active, shared goals
- Supportive and reinforcing of coordination gains achieved in the humanitarian reform process

By the same token, the wide variation of actors and interests in this discussion dictates that no single solution will please all stakeholders. The ‘business models’ differ significantly across organisations, and are determined in part by their unequal sizes and scales of operations. Donors’ interests and expectations are also widely varied and in flux; determined in the first instance by their domestic political and economic circumstances. A common advocacy position by aid providers vis-à-vis the donors, if it could be achieved, could conceivably help to ‘educate’ donors and manage expectations, but overall the degree of influence over donor policies would be limited. Given the trend among some donors for more detailed and results-based reporting, they would be particularly loath to accept any change which they perceived to amount to a lesser degree of transparency and accountability. Finally, depending on the form of the proposed new approach, it is unrealistic to expect that it will make sense, or be needed, in all humanitarian scenarios and instruments.

Therefore, what a programme-based approach cannot be realistically expected to achieve includes:

- A design that fits seamlessly with all individual agency models
- Decisive influence on donor behavior, interests, or domestically-determined requirements
- Applicability to all humanitarian contexts and instruments (e.g. may not be possible for Flash Appeals)
- Something that results in qualitatively less information on performance and results than currently exists

2.2.1. Proposed definitions

Based on the criteria and considerations above, and aiming for language which is deliberately simple and encompassing, the below definitions are proposed for terms Project, Programme and Programme-Based Approach in the context of coordinated humanitarian action:

Project – A typically short-range endeavor consisting of one or more aid activities designed to produce a specific *output* (or outputs)

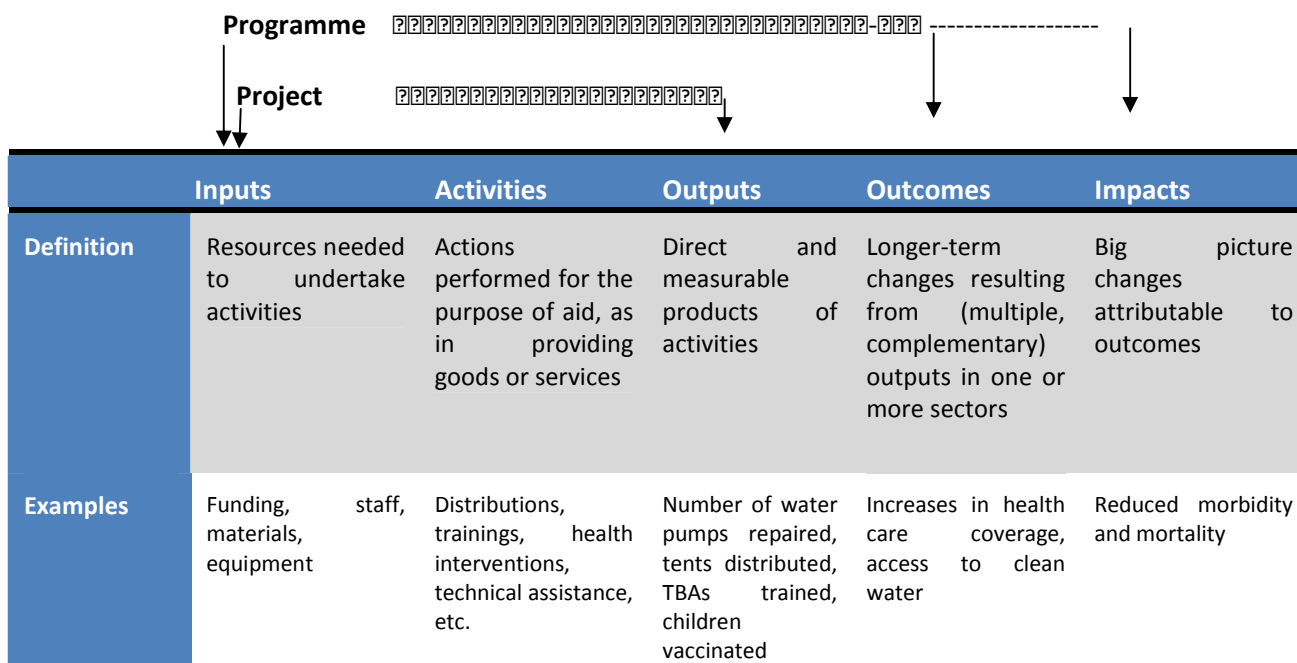
Programme - A grouping of activities and partners linked within a cohesive strategy to achieve specific, measurable humanitarian *outcomes* for a sector or a defined beneficiary population

[Note: in some, but not all, humanitarian contexts, a programme could also be designed to work toward impact-level objectives]

Programme-based approach - A means of strategic planning, resource mobilization and reporting based on programmes as the basic unit of organisation

As depicted in the figure below, a humanitarian programme may or may not encompass one or more projects, and is primarily defined by its working toward outcomes, or in some cases impacts.

Figure 3: Definitions



The above proposed definitions were synthesised for the humanitarian context drawing from the following sources: OECD DAC 2002, Hofmann et al (HPG) 2004; and Innovation Network 2008

2.2.2. Other terms for clarification

If the above definitions are accepted, and a programme-based approach is defined primarily by a strategy to achieve results at the **outcome** level, the key question becomes whether such an approach can be used within the existing financing mechanisms and the cluster system upon which they are organized. Before the following section takes this up, it is worthwhile to seek clarity on other terms frequently heard in the debate, of which actors have differing understandings, namely: predictability, flexibility, earmarking and prioritization.

Predictability -the availability of advance, unearmarked funding allowing for preparedness and planning

Flexibility - the autonomy to decide on priorities and resource allocations independent of the funding source

The confusion with these terms comes not from their basic definitions, which all actors generally share, but rather at what level one is speaking. Predictability and flexibility are principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship that the new humanitarian financing mechanisms were designed to enable. The instruments allow for large volumes of unearmarked funding to be made available in-country for priority, underserved, and unforeseen humanitarian needs. This has created predictability and flexibility for the overall system, with allocations made on the basis of need by the Humanitarian Coordinator in consultation with the country team and/or interagency advisory board. At the same time, agencies perceive that their

own individual funding predictability and programme flexibility have been reduced by the CERF and common funds due to the granular nature of the proposal and allocation processes. Their ability to decide priorities within their own programmes and allocate to activities as they see fit have been reduced. Donor funding to the CERF and common funds are by definition unearmarked, because the HC makes the allocation decisions. For agencies, some say, this amounts to merely a secondary form of earmarking, but looked at from the system-level perspective it is a necessary process of prioritization.

To summarize, the common humanitarian financing tools have been credited for enhancing flexibility and predictability by some, and blamed for reducing flexibility and predictability by others. Both statements are true; with establishment of the common humanitarian financing mechanisms the trade-off has been made in favour of the aggregate, or system-level. By enhancing predictability and flexibility at the level of the overall system, it has arguably detracted from predictability and flexibility at the individual agency level. If these two perspectives cannot be reconciled, a common approach will be exceedingly difficult to forge. At the very least it should be clear within the approach at which level the benefits will accrue.

The next section will examine the current modalities and attempt to identify problems with them, discuss what is possible for a programme-based approach to address, how could it potentially enhance effectiveness of humanitarian response and increase efficiencies in coordination instruments.

3. The current modalities: how could a programme based approach add value?

In order to determine whether a programme-based approach would effectively solve the problems with the current pooled funding mechanisms, it is important to make clear what the specific problems are, and for

whom. This section will review the strengths and weaknesses of the CAP, the CERF, and the CHFs as they relate to the individual actors, the system as a whole, and the overall goals of the enterprise. It looks at these modalities from the vantage points of their three main objectives: prioritization of humanitarian needs and strategic planning (the 'demand side'); raising funds to meet those needs (the 'supply side'); and finally, transparency and

accountability for performance, including reporting and M&E.

The four country-based CHF's differ from each other in their processes, but all of them, along with the CERF, share the same organizing principle, i.e. a compilation of separate projects within clusters. All processes in fact hang on the CAP (or HAP, CHAP, or Work Plan as it is variously called) as the basic framework. Projects included in the CAP can be quite large, but can only pertain to one sector. The basic problem with a projectised approach, as experienced by some UN agencies who are accustomed to working on the basis of programmes, is that it is both 'onerous' and 'artificial' (Salamons, Van Lith, & Vartan, 2009) to breakdown their work by activities to fit into the sector-based organisation of projects used in the CAP. This onerousness and artificiality continue when the agency is required to report on the basis of the project, and is made more difficult when only partial funding has been obtained for the original programme through the mechanism, which is often the case. Moreover, agencies argue, the goals of strategic planning and evaluation are not well served by an incremental approach to aid interventions; instead the system should be geared toward accomplishing larger outcomes.

3.1. Coordinated strategic planning and prioritization

There is little disagreement that a conglomeration of projects does not add up to a cohesive plan. The observation predates the CERF and the CHF's, and is as old as the CAP itself. Numerous evaluations and reports over the past many years have called for CAPs to be made 'more strategic'. Even when there is a solid, shared understanding of the humanitarian needs, the path to meeting them can be obscured by an excess of proposals for disparate activities. In Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, for instance, there were over 400 NGOs working within the health sector alone. In DRC in 2006 over 1000 separate project sheets were submitted for funding. Logic dictates that a true strategic

plan would not be formed by simply aggregating all of the actors and activities. As the transaction costs study noted, "The sectoral and regional analysis in CAPs is often well done and convincing, but it does not provide a rational basis for the choice of projects." (Salamons, Van Lith, & Vartan, 2009)

In theory, clusters should be able to agree on common outcomes and strategies for the sector, but in practice this does not always happen. For one thing, agencies may differ in their methodology and approach to a problem. If WFP's strategies derive from its annual food security assessments, and other actors use different criteria, it is not necessarily a straightforward process to bring them all together. If methods are rooted in global organisational policies, the reconciliation may have to be worked out at headquarters rather than by the clusters in country (a top-down approach that is currently happening in a collaborative effort between WFP and UNICEF on nutrition strategies).

Another oft-mentioned shortcoming of the CAP as a planning tool is that it is a static document, unable to adjust to changing realities apart from one review point at midyear. This particular criticism is based in misunderstanding: a conflation of the document produced with planning cycle itself, which had never precluded continual revision. This may now become clearer to participants with the new Online Project System (OPS), used to track the activities of projects in the CAPs. OPS allows for participants to update and revise their projects at any point in the timeline, however interviews suggest that many people remain unaware of this feature.

Flash Appeals, because of their need to be rapid and focused on short-term critical interventions, usually in the wake of a sudden onset emergency, are generally considered outside the scope of a programme-based approach to strategic planning, and appropriately based on short-term projects only. One interviewee, however, observed

that in countries where there has been a Flash Appeal, a subsequent CAP may become path dependent on the structure that the first appeal laid down.

Overall, donor governments see a continuing trend of improvement in the CAP over the years. Many continue to push for the CAPs to demonstrate a stronger link between the proposed activities and assessed needs on the ground, however. A stronger needs assessment process, they say, would make prioritization clearer and more credible, and donors more confident in contributing. In general, CAPs that are viewed as bloated and not prioritized are not taken seriously by donors, and this is reflected in low funding coverage. One donor interviewee suggested that some agencies are overstating their requirements because they know not to expect full funding, so are trying to maximize their return.

Unlike the CAPS/CHAPs, a primary function of the CERF is not to serve as a coordinated planning tool necessarily, but to fill gaps in humanitarian funding by targeting neglected crises and unforeseen needs. However, requests to the CERF are expected to be cohesive and prioritized. Where there is already a CAP, the CERF request will be based on that plan, and allocations based on priority gap areas. In countries where there is no CAP or Humanitarian Coordinator, it is typically harder to prioritise within a request.

Of all the common humanitarian financing mechanisms, the Common Humanitarian Funds (currently operational in the Central African Republic, DRC, Somalia, and Sudan) have elicited perhaps the greatest amount of consternation regarding projectisation and transaction costs. DRC and Sudan are both huge countries with vast needs, and their funds have entailed complex processes. The structures have been fairly fluid as well, and the DRC CHF in particular has evolved with each subsequent round. The HCs in CHF countries together with country teams have had the latitude to structure and manage the

funds in different ways and experiment with various planning and allocation approaches.

General guidance for the CHF's call for an allocation process wherein HC and the humanitarian country team, having determined strategic objectives for the country in the CAP/CHAP, decide on attendant overall allocation amounts; the clusters identify priorities by cluster and region; and projects are submitted for funding decisions. In both Sudan and DRC the funds re-centralized the final allocation decision-making with the HCs in the capitals after experimenting with regional/provincial level clusters making these decisions. This proved too much of a strain on the provincial cluster coordination system, and resulted in an overly granular allocation plan, which some judge to be attempts to 'equally divide the pie'.

While all the CHF's underlying planning documents include higher-level strategic objectives, by cluster or theme, and some CHF's like DRC leave off making the final project allocations (and naming recipients) until after the plan has been submitted and funded, it remains a project-based rather than a programme-based funding mechanism. Final funding allocations and reports are still made project by project. In addition although they contain 'strategic objectives,' or 'strategic priorities' these are put forward in broad terms, such as 'increased protection of civilians' or 'preserving livelihoods', and expected outcomes are not clearly specified. The newest CHF, in Somalia, has perhaps come closest to approximating a programme-based model (by cluster) with its approach, which starts with the HC and HCT identifying strategic priorities for the country, which are then interpreted by the clusters into cluster plans with clear objectives (no more than three), targets, and indicators. The resulting 2011 CAP gained praise from some donors for being credible and well justified. It does, however, beg the question whether coordination in this case was ironically supported by the access difficulties in Somalia, the greatly reduced activities in 2010 and 2011, and the fact of a 'captive audience'

of agencies based in Nairobi. It also hinged on having strong cluster coordinators, which is not the case across all clusters of all CHF countries.

The cluster system, when correctly applied, has enhanced operational thinking in terms of achieving higher-level results. Since the purpose of the clusters is to unify actors under common objectives for the sector as a whole, the cluster system is justifiably seen by some as a critical building block of a programme-based approach at the sectoral level. More than one interviewee observed that prior to the clusters there were no such broad-based strategic meetings. But what of programmes that cut across sectors? UNHCR, with a mandated focus on a particular beneficiary population, is arguably the least adaptable to the clusterised common funding mechanisms. In addition to working in multiple sectors, it often needs to work across countries to meet the needs of a targeted population. For these reasons its refugee programmes are not required to be broken down for CAPs, but can be entered as a 'multisector' block. For its work with IDPs, however, UNHCR is required to disaggregate activities by sector in order to participate in CHFs and CAPs. The issue is complicated further when the priorities of a population-based multisectoral programme do not match those of a needs-based sectoral planning process. For instance if UNHCR wants to undertake activities for IDPs in camps, but only a small percentage of IDPs are actually housed in camps their priorities could be seen as in conflict with the prioritization of needs for the population as a whole.

3.2. Fundraising

When looked at from the perspective of system-level fundraising, the CHFs and CERF have been effective at raising the overall volume of funding, and have been shown to contribute to a more equitable distribution of funding coverage across sectors. (Stoddard, 2008) In terms of agencies' individual fundraising needs, the CAPs and the CERF are seemingly less of a challenge than the CHFs. Their CAP projects are funded directly by the

donors to their agency, in what is essentially a coordinated bilateral funding process, and as discussed above there is no reason why they cannot submit a 'programme' within a sector simply by presenting it as a large 'project' for the CAP. In the CERF allocation process the administrative procedures are relatively light, and there is less call for them to be both 'judge and party' as cluster leads in the funding decisions. The CHFs, on the other hand, have created much more of a challenge, particularly for agencies which lack fundraising capacities and skill-sets in the field. NGOs have no direct access to the CERF, a fact that has been a bone of contention since its establishment, and the latest five-year evaluation has again recommended against allowing NGO participation, due to the 'excessive administrative costs' this would ostensibly entail. (Cosgrave et al 2011, p.46) For the most part INGOs have participated actively in the CHFs and shown gains in overall in country funding as a result (Stoddard, 2008). Accustomed to the higher level of administrative requirements expected by donors for proposals and reporting, they seemingly have found the requirements of the pooled fund mechanisms less of a challenge than the UN agencies. The CHFs and the cluster system in general have also raised the potential for greater local NGO participation in the coordinated humanitarian system, as well as the potential for direct access to donor funding, but there is not much in the way of hard evidence that this has been realized to date.

Although funding for individual UN agencies (and NGOs generally) in the four CHF countries has increased overall since the establishment of the funds, agencies became alarmed when some of their traditional donors began declining requests for bilateral grants - saying they had already programmed their budget into the CHF. Although it has not been demonstrated by numerical evidence, there is a strong sense among agencies that funding they ordinarily would have received bilaterally from certain large donors has been diverted into the common funds, where the agencies have to work much harder to receive

a smaller share of it, and they can no longer count on donor additionality to their own programmes when they need it. This line of reasoning assumes that without the CHF the donors would still have stepped up their funding levels to these countries after 2006, which is not assured (in fact, some CHF donors have stated that the existence of the multilateral funds enabled them to channel more funding than they would normally be able to manage in bilateral grants.) And it further assumes that greater shares of this funding would be going in large programme grants to UN partners. Whether this assumed net loss of funding to individual agencies is real or perceived, it is not clear how moving to a programme-based approach within the CHF would help redress it. It could potentially reduce the work entailed in fundraising from the CHFs, but short of dismantling the CHFs entirely, agency allocations will still be made within the coordinated system rather than bilaterally by those particular donors.

From the agencies' perspective it would be ideal to receive money against a country level programme and then be able to move it around strategically as needs arise and according to their own priorities. Agencies that operate with large programmes typically need multiple sources of funding to fully resource the programme. And when each donor - say the common fund, ECHO, and the US - each have their own breakdown formula which does not correspond with the others, it becomes more difficult and time-consuming still. The fundraising argument for the programme approach has been made in part as an effort to simplify this situation, at least as regards the common funds, by only requiring agencies to report against an entire programme rather than component activities. However, for multisectoral programmes at least, this has not been possible with the CHFs, which are structured upon a plan where each participant must show what it plans to do with its money at the project level.

3.3. Accountability: reporting and M&E

One of the goals of the coordinated humanitarian financing mechanisms is to

support system-wide accountability in the same way they promote system-wide strategic planning: by being based on a common strategic plan. For example, the DRC HAP lists as one of its 'core functions' to serve as 'a methodological framework for monitoring and evaluating results and impact' (HAP, 2010, p. 35). Leaving aside the important but under-examined issue of 'downward' accountability to beneficiaries, there are two types of accountability involved in the humanitarian financing mechanisms: financial and performance. Financial accountability is simply the ability to prove that funds went to where they were intended to go, while performance accountability relates to the extent to which the provider can be shown to have achieved its humanitarian objectives effectively and efficiently.

Along with needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation have been among the perennial weak points of coordinated humanitarian action both before and after humanitarian reform. In general, although each individual agency maintains its own internal monitoring, evaluation, and reporting structures, when it comes to reporting back to the financing instruments these functions are perceived as a regrettable chore or bureaucratic exercise rather than a tool for improving performance and organisational learning. Traditionally, the accountability of agencies for performance is toward their own headquarters, and their reporting systems are structured accordingly. Added to this is the fact that reporting formats and indicators are different for each individual fund, which slows the learning curve of field staff and increases the overall administrative burden.

Pinning the pooled funding mechanisms to the organizational structure of cluster system has had two effects: First, it has incentivized coordination and brought actors to the table in a way that would not have been possible without the carrot of potential funding. Second, less positively, it has conflated financial accountability with accountability for results. A fund manager might necessarily

need to know where and on what precise outputs the funding disbursements were spent. A strategic donor would be more concerned with final results, with less detail needed for expenditure that went into bringing about the results.

Agencies maintain that the existing reporting requirements, particularly through the CHF and the ERFs are far too heavy (for example, requiring three financial and three narrative reports for a six-month grant) and they should not be required to report on the level of specific outputs which were somewhat artificially broken out for the fund to begin with. OCHA, conversely, maintains that in order to be accountable to the donors, the fund needs to be able to report on what is being spent at output level, both to ensure that recipients did what they said they would, as well as in order to get better big picture of results. Ultimately, as with proposal requirements, this is work that agencies are required to do for certain other of their bilateral donors, such as ECHO, anyway. And it is work that NGOs must do for all their donors, including UN agencies, as a matter of course. NGOs observed that when they receive sub-grants from UN agencies, they are required to report to them in extensive detail on their activities and expenditures, so they don't understand why this information is not able to 'go up the chain'. The answer again most certainly lies in the dual lines of accountability that the agencies have to their headquarters on the one hand and the common funds on the other.

Additionally, there is the question of trust and track record. Whereas many donor governments may be satisfied with UN agencies' global annual reports as its sole report against their direct contributions, the common funds as the intermediary recipients have no such agreement. They arguably need to demonstrate a greater level of accountability to maintain to donor confidence in the mechanism. Some agencies maintain that the fund management has not pushed back or clearly asked the donors what would be the minimum acceptable

requirements, and as a result have 'over delivered' to the point of inefficiency. On the other hand, the trend among a number of key donors, including some of those most active in the common funding mechanisms, are towards more extensive reporting in any case. The UK in particular has recently announced that it will no longer accept UN agencies' global reports as the only reporting, and though it did not detail reporting requirements, a recent letter from donors to the IASC principals suggests that that more rigorous accountability will be expected in future. (Letter to IASC Principals from the governments of Japan, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and the US, 10 April 2011)

As one donor representative put it, what most donors are expecting now is 'clear reporting on outputs, attempts at outcome reporting, and ultimately working towards reporting on the whole country response - although this last one is still very ambitious'. In countries receiving CERF funding the HC's office will consolidate reports from all UN agency grantees and/or attempt to synthesize bigger picture results from the CHF reports, but in general system-wide reporting system against broader objectives and strategies is underdeveloped. Donors interviewed for the study expressed the sense of lacking a single line of accountability informing them of what the humanitarian community as a whole has achieved in a given emergency response. Even at the cluster and agency levels, outcome level reporting is still rare. Even agencies who work to programmes rather than projects tend to focus on outputs in their reports. For one reason, the often very short term nature of humanitarian grants (and this has been pointed out in particular regarding CHF grants) is simply not conducive to achieving results at the level of outcomes. To demonstrate outcome level results also requires that the humanitarian actor demonstrate a causal link between its intervention and the outcome that occurred, which is not always a straightforward process. This problem of attribution bedevils evaluation in general, and in fluid humanitarian emergency situations in

particular, poses real challenges to outcome-level accountability - not to mention impact-level accountability, which many consider to be an unrealistic ambition of humanitarian action expressly because of the attribution problem. Agencies that work in development contexts have an easier time recasting their work in chronic emergency and early recovery contexts to a longer-term perspective - "more like development" - while maintaining humanitarian principles and flexible humanitarian funding.

Among current examples as regards reporting, OCHA considers Somalia to be a good example of a traditional CAP done the right way. The guidelines have always said CAPs should have strategic objectives and indicators, with two-tier monitoring. Currently only a handful of other countries in addition to Somalia are doing this as envisioned. Monitoring guidelines are now standardized across CAP countries as of the 2011 CAP, but there is not yet a standard template for reporting outputs. OCHA is now working to develop project monitoring templates to eventually be incorporated into OPS.

Agency and NGO interviewees for the study did agree, on balance, that outcome level reporting is achievable for the system at the cluster level. If the system can aggregate outputs to a point where they represent a substantial proportion of the assistance provided in any one sector then it can make a causal connection to outcomes. Some expressed doubts, however, that cluster lead agencies would be willing to take on that sort of accountability for the sector, and some suspected that the discussion on reporting was less about raising the level of accountability and more about simply lightening the administrative load. A proposed programme-based approach solution should arguably do both.

Recently, it seems that the IASC has come out in front of the debate, calling for a new performance accountability framework - at

the outcome level - to be established in the field, as outlined below:

'Agreed to establish a performance framework for humanitarian action, with measurable indicators, through which the progressive achievement of collective results can be monitored, reported and audited. The performance framework will provide indicators for the contributions of the HC, HCT, OCHA and the clusters to the overall response including a statement of collective system wide outcomes to be included in the terms of reference of all heads of agencies in the field. Over time, the performance framework will evolve to reflect performance expectations at different phases of an emergency.

Agreed to establish a system of inter-agency monitoring missions, led by OCHA, carried out periodically for all major emergencies, using the performance framework as a basis for assessment, and reporting to the ERC.' ('Key Transformative Actions' from the IASC Principals Meeting 21-22 February, 2011)

3.4. Conclusions: what are the problems with the common humanitarian financing mechanisms that a programme based approach could potentially address?

The challenges to constructing a cohesive strategic plan for achieving humanitarian outcomes using the existing modalities is arguably a problem for the system at-large, while the practical issues related to fundraising and reporting are problems for the individual agencies, to varying degrees. At the agency level, the research for this project yielded the same concerns and critiques as heard in the transaction costs study and other prior reviews of the mechanisms. Generally speaking, for their field offices the issue is time; time spent dealing with the redundancies of the dual, incompatible reporting formats and processes. (Although interviewees generally report that most field staff have become more comfortable with and adept at navigating these processes over time) For agencies' global headquarters the

problem has more to do with fundraising, and how to consistently support their countries of operation.

There are numerous challenges facing humanitarian actors in adapting to the structures of humanitarian reform and changes in donor expectations, and it is important to separate out which of these could potentially be addressed by system-wide action, including the adoption of a programme-based approach, and which cannot.

Problems that could potentially be addressed include the following:

- A focus in the system on the output level which results in less cohesive and less strategic planning and reporting
- Multiple formats, criteria, and indicators for proposal submissions and reporting
- Inability to accommodate multisectoral objectives and programming (with the exception of UNHCR's arrangement under the CAP)

Problems not amenable to a programme-based approach solution include:

- Loss of formerly relied-upon donor additionality at the country level
- Loss of the ability to provide global annual reports as the sole source of reporting

As illustrated in the findings for the study, on the above two points the ship has already sailed, and for reasons more to do with the preferences and changing needs of donors and less with the particulars of the humanitarian financing mechanisms. While some donors continue to be satisfied with the global annual reports of UN agencies for their bilateral grants, more of them, including some who contribute large proportions of the common funds, are increasingly expecting more rigorous results-based accountability.

Study subjects also raised issues that are not actually problems, but misunderstandings, such as:

- CAPS and pooled funds do not allow for large programmes, only projects.
 - o In fact, as long as it is within a single sector, large, multi-partner and multi-activity programmes are welcome.
- The current modalities to not allow for flexibility, is there is only one midterm review point where activities can be adjusted based on changing needs on the ground
 - o In fact, OPS allows for continual change and adjustment of the work plan

An important point to bear in mind is that there is nothing in the current system that necessarily precludes multisectoral allocations. According to OCHA these would be acceptable within the CAP provided that the issue of cluster lead authority/responsibility is addressed and intercluster mechanisms strengthened, and that stakeholders are willing to dispense with the need for detailed reporting of funding by sector.

Finally, it bears reminding that there are other options for individual actors that find themselves severely challenged by the requirements of the coordinated financing mechanisms. The CHF's currently do not threaten to become the sole or even the largest source of funding in the countries where they exist (and they only exist in four), and agencies who find them problematic could usefully focus their fundraising on bilateral donors and core funding. The US government, for instance, which does not contribute through the CHF's, and provides only a token level of support to the CERF, has been increasingly using 'macro grants' for UN agencies. These funding instruments operate on a calendar year and essentially pull together all non-core funding from the US to a UN agency across countries. This reduces workload for the agencies and still allows for programmatic flexibility, as modifications are allowed throughout the cycle.

4. Options for introducing a programme-based approach

Taking the specific, addressable issues identified above as the basis for action, this section proposes two possible options for moving forward on the question of the programme-based approach. Certain other options were ruled out on the basis that they were highly unlikely to receive a consensus of support among the humanitarian actors, or had been explicitly rejected prior to this study. An example is the recommendation from the transaction costs study that proposed a two-tier system of funding for the CHFs - one for UN actors and one for NGOs - with pre-set overall allocation amounts or percentages, which would ostensibly allow for programme based funding and reporting for the UN agencies. There was insufficient support for this recommendation on the grounds that it would potentially 'undermine the process of joint programming and prioritization at the cluster level', and that as a matter of principle, requests 'should be

Option 1: Incorporate and facilitate agency-level programme-based approaches in current modalities

This option would not fundamentally change existing frameworks, but rather strengthen systems to allow for individual actors to work on a programme- basis to the extent that they are capable. It would mean that in addition to projects with output-level objectives within sectors, CAPs/CHAPs could also include programmes - designed either within sectors (as is currently possible) or across sectors, with specific and measurable outcomes as

Pros - This option would not amount to a radical departure from current processes (requiring major rollout, training, and relearning by field personnel already suffering from reform-fatigue), but rather an augmentation. It would allow those demonstrably capable of planning and reporting against outcomes and providing economies of scale to achieve benefits in both

needs based and UN agencies and NGOs should be considered cluster members on equal terms.' (Transaction Costs study Follow-Up Matrix, 2010). Another non-starter was the suggestion that has come up periodically to make funding authorizations for cluster-wide programmes, to be led by cluster lead agencies who would allocate in the manner of an umbrella grant to cluster partners. It is generally agreed that the agencies have neither the administrative mechanics nor the inclination to perform the role of sub-fund managers for their clusters, and it would dramatically reduce the standing of NGOs and other non-cluster leads within the sectors, running counter to the principle of cluster coordination in partnership.

Two possible options for change are outlined below, along with the pros, cons, requirements, and risks that each would entail. This is followed by a recommendation as to which of them should be taken forward for piloting and/or further study in 2012.

objectives. Fundraising and financial reporting would be against the entire programme as a unit, and narrative reporting in the field would focus on outcome level results, while showing evidence that the outputs contributed to the outcomes. Agencies implementing the programmes would maintain their organisational procedures for monitoring inputs, outputs, and low-level expenditures, and be able to make them available for any audit. However, these details would not need to be entered into the common reporting framework, thereby reducing associated transaction costs and workloads.

effectiveness and efficiency, respectively, while simultaneously reducing workloads.

Cons - The deficiencies with overall system-level strategic planning and accountability would remain, and although the system would be inching closer to outcome-level results reporting on an individual agency level, it would be piecemeal.

Requirements - For this option to be successful there would first need to be common understanding of what constitutes a programme, outcome, and acceptable indicators. Agencies wishing to submit programmes will need to explicitly define expected outcomes and the means for achieving them, and identify the indicators they will use to measure results. For cross sectoral programmes the inter-cluster coordination platforms, currently weak, will need to be strengthened to approve programme designs and ensure consistency and harmony with the cluster objectives and the other projects and programmes taking place within them. The HC and Advisory Board would have to promote and implement the approach at country level, clarify the roles responsibilities of clusters (including inter-cluster bodies) in the process, ensure accountability mechanisms are in place, and be prepared to defend the approach to donors. OCHA would need to build a programme layer into OPS and into the CAP Guidelines. The approach could only be applicable to CAPs and CHF and CERF grants where longer term, outcome-oriented

Option 2: Adopt a system-wide programme-based approach for CAP countries

This more ambitious option would reframe all the CAPs/CHAPs for chronic emergencies on a basis of programmes with outcome-level targets, and would integrate separate projects as components of these programmes. Under an overall strategic plan that identifies outcome targets in and across sectors and themes, humanitarian actors would develop programmes that could include multiple partner organisations working within a programme framework. For instance, an NGO with a health center repair project in one area could be contributing to outcomes within an overall programme geared toward health outcomes led by UNICEF or IRC. Fundraising and financial reporting would be in the basis of the programme, and results reporting would be against outcomes - including output-level information to the extent that

programmes can be feasibly designed and implemented; acute sudden onset emergencies and Flash Appeal processes would not be amenable.

Risks - Bifurcating CAPs/CHAPs into both programme- and project-level submissions and reports could in fact make the overall picture of the humanitarian response less clear. In addition, without a unified approach among humanitarian actors to accountability, there is a risk that donors will instead set the agenda for accountability strengthening in a possibly inconsistent and/or overly burdensome way.

provides the evidence for a causal link between activities and outcomes. In broad strokes, the process might look like the following:

- 1) The HC and HCT, based on jointly assessed needs, outline strategic priorities for improved humanitarian outcomes
- 2) Clusters and inter-cluster bodies propose specific outcomes by sector and theme in key areas. [Note: because there is no 'authority' over the inter-cluster bodies, approval for non-sector-based programmes would revert to the HC.]
- 3) Agencies and NGOs capable of running programmes (and managing partners/sub-grantees) will submit programme proposals on behalf of themselves and their partners. Proposals will contain measurable target outcomes and planned outputs and indicators

- 4) Individual donors will fund against the programmes in CAPs, as they now do with projects; likewise in CHF countries the fund allocations can be made for entire programmes
- 5) NGOs and agencies working on a project level basis will submit to the programme leads for incorporation of their activities
- 6) Financial reporting will be done by agency headquarters on a programme level-basis, narrative reporting will be done by the field. Narrative reports will include no more than

one midterm and one final, and will include overall outputs and evidence of how they contributed to the end result at outcome-level

This model derives from the logic that as long as planning is logical and comprehensive, the presentation of funding proposals and reports can be less detailed. This is provided however that, agencies are tracking it with their own systems and would be able to account for it at a detailed level if needed.

Pros - If successfully executed, this option would provide the overall strategic planning and performance assessment capacity the system that is now lacking. Moving from a project to a programme basis could enhance unified action and strengthen the coordination mindset of actors in the field. It would necessarily strengthen clusters, which would remain the backbone of the system even as the inter-cluster mechanisms are further developed. And although humanitarian providers are not able to control donor preferences and requirements, they can be of some influence and help to manage and inform donor expectations by adopting a common framework. Donors seek greater accountability, but they have also long pushed for greater cohesiveness among the humanitarian actors. A system-level instrument supported by all participants will be stronger in the eyes of donors.

Cons - As a more radical departure, this option would necessitate the redesign of multiple systems, would entail re-learning and additional work at the early stages, and would be costly to implement - particularly for OCHA as the coordinating entity for the system. As a result it would be harder to attract buy-in at the outset, particularly for countries where there is no CHF to incentivize coordination. Moreover, many large NGOs would be able to design and manage programmes for funding, but smaller ones that work exclusively on the basis of projects and are subsumed by programmes would lose visibility to donors in the CAP. Finally, with the programme as funding unit, the system would no longer be able to track funding per sector via FTS, at least for multisectoral programmes. As regards this last point, OCHA informants to this study indicated on balance that this might be an acceptable tradeoff provided it was still possible to see who was doing what where under each programme. Due to the large amounts now classified as 'multisectoral' or 'unallocated' already in the system, the sectoral funding numbers were in some sense inaccurate in any case.

Requirements - The context would have to be limited to chronic emergency countries with HC appointments. Additionally, this option would entail many of the same requirements as Option 1: namely, common agreement and general understanding of the definitions of programmes and outcomes; well-defined programme proposals with measurable outcomes and credible indicators; an even more active role played by the HC and, where

applicable, the Advisory Board, strengthened intercluster platforms, and strong cluster coordinators. Programme arrangements must include criteria and standards for good partnership, lest they become a means for larger organizations to simply pass along earmarking, lack of flexibility, and administrative burdens to partners/sub-grantees

Risks - It has not yet been demonstrated that a preponderance of humanitarian actors are able to credibly plan and report the outcome level. The risk here is that some actors who seek programme level funding simply for the reduced workload and that both information and accountability will be lost in the process. The continued shortcomings of the system in needs assessment and evaluation arguably provide a weak foundation for the proposed new structure. Not all donors may have confidence in the new approach, furthermore, and the change might spur some to withdraw from the common funding mechanisms. Lastly, the change will involve a 'power shift' of sorts to the agencies and larger NGOs that can run the programmes, and essentially cut off the direct access to funding now available

to be smaller NGOs working on a project basis. The risk of this is that the resulting partnership arrangements may disadvantage the junior partners (by not providing for reasonable overheads etc.), detract from their flexibility and autonomy in project design, and potentially stifle innovation. These risks would be worth taking if more meaningful results at the outcome level and significant economies of scale could be gained by pursuing the programme-based approach; in other words if the approach was found to improve the humanitarian response for beneficiaries on the ground, irrespective of the costs and benefits of individual aid providers

**Recommended for further study and piloting:
Option 2**

Option 2 is recommended for a further study and possible piloting on a limited basis in 2012. Option 1 may well prove to be more realistic and achievable in the near future, or the cons and risks of Option 2 may be deemed simply too great to warrant going down this path. At this stage, however, the potential long-term benefits of Option 2 warrant exploration. And because Option 1 is a scaled-down version of Option 2, it is possible for both to be examined and tested in a country context. Field testing should assess feasibility in terms of participant and system capacity, and donor support, against the promise of long run gains.

Regardless of which option is chosen, or if stakeholders decide to go with the de facto third option, which is no change to the current modalities at all, there are still actions

that need to be taken to address existing problems. It is not clear, for instance, that most agencies have closely examined their own internal constraints to make the best use of the humanitarian financing mechanisms. One that has was noted as an exception. (Cosgrave, et al., 2011) Inefficiencies that apply to a broad number of users should indeed be addressed by the mechanism, but where a difficulty is specific to one user, it makes more sense to expect the user to adapt to the tool as opposed to the other way around. Inefficiencies and transaction costs will always result unless agency systems can be reconcile/harmonized with the common systems. If the multilateral funds and bilateral donors are being asked to rationalize and unify reporting formats, as among the recommendations here, agency headquarters must be asked to do the same to harmonize their internal systems with those used in the field in the interest of more effectively coordinated humanitarian action.

5. Recommendations

This report recommends that IASC members:

Endorse a common definition of programme and programme approach as relates to humanitarian action, and promote it internally within each organisation. Suggested language, as proposed in Section 2 is as follows:

Project – A typically short-range endeavor consisting of one or more aid activities designed to produce a specific *output* (or outputs).

Programme - A grouping of activities and partners linked within a cohesive strategy to achieve specific, measurable humanitarian *outcomes* for a sector or a defined beneficiary population.

Programme-based approach - A means of strategic planning, resource mobilization and reporting based on programmes as the basic unit of organisation.

Ensure that field personnel understand what is currently possible within the common planning and financing mechanisms in terms of submitting broader programmes, and encourage them to take advantage of existing flexibility to design and undertake such programmes where appropriate, even without broader change the system.

Launch a pilot study process in two or more operational settings in 2012 that takes either Option 1 or Option 2 (recommended) as the basis for applied research. This study should have a large field based component in at least two relevant countries, and a duration of at least 12 months. It could be jointly commissioned and steered by IASC HFG members, and the purpose would be ground-truthing and fleshing out the potential model(s), and, if possible, conducting real-time participant observation on a pilot programme-based approach.

In addition to observing how the new approach affects strategic planning and reporting, the field study should also closely examine the effects on:

- participation, including of local NGOs
- the functioning of the clusters
- host state relations
- donor attitudes and behavior

As a precondition to recommendation 3, it is recommended that OCHA:

Prepare an inventory of changes to current systems and instruments that will be necessary if one of the two options is adopted, e.g. CAP guidelines, CHF guidelines, CERF granting and reporting

guidelines, OPS templates, etc. Provide a rough cost estimate for these actions, as well as the costs of the field study, for potential extra budgetary support from donors.

To support and facilitate coordinated efforts to improve upon current modalities, it is recommended that humanitarian donor governments:

Endorse the common definitions adopted by the IASC membership

Consider ways to align their proposal and reporting frameworks, to the maximum extent possible, with those of the harmonized coordination mechanism's frameworks, once developed

Provide funding support for the pilot, and the eventual start-up costs of the new approach, possibly as a separate programme in itself.

6. Annexes

Interviews

UN agencies and offices

FAO

Sandra Aviles, Senior Liaison Officer, Programme Development & Humanitarian Affairs

IASC Secretariat

Simon Lawry-White, Chief

OCHA

Shelley Cheatham, HAO, CERF/CAP

Andrea DeDomenico, OCHA DRC

Ysabel Fougery, Humanitarian Affairs Officer (CAP), OCHA Geneva

Kiki Gbeho, OCHA Somalia

Michael Jensen, CERF Secretariat

Luke McCallin, Flash Appeal Coordinator, OCHA Geneva

Steve O'Malley, Chief, CERF Secretariat, OCHA NY

Sanjana Quazi, HAO, Funding Coordination Section, OCHA NY

Robert Smith, Chief, CAP Section, OCHA

UNHCR

Francesca Bonelli, Senior Programme Officer, Uganda

Monika Brulhart, Assistant Regional Representative (Programme) DRC

Peter De Clercq, Representative, Sudan

Sajal Gupta, Senior Donor Relations Officer

Ayaki Ito, Deputy Representative, Somalia

Dag Siggurdson, Deputy Head, DRRM

Dona Tarpay, Head, Appeal and Reports

UNICEF

Lisa Doughten, Senior Advisor, Public-Sector Alliances & Resource Mobilization Office (PARMO)

Naline Nippita, Programme Funding Specialist (Humanitarian and Transition)

Jalpa Ratna, Emergency Specialist, Humanitarian Field Support Section

WFP

Denise Brown, Senior Donor Relations Officer

WHO

Daniel Lopez-Acuna, Director RRO/HAC

Cristina Del Pueyo Rodriguez, Technical Officer

Patricia Kormoss, Global Health Cluster Coordinator

NGOs

Aimee Ansari, Humanitarian Policy Representative, Oxfam International

Charles-Antoine Hofmann, Executive Secretary, SCHR

Suzi Faye, Acting Head of Programme Funding, Oxfam GB
Heidi Nordbeck, Institutional Donor Advisor, NRC
Arnhild Spence, Resident Representative, NRC
Tess Williams, Humanitarian Funding Coordinator & UN Humanitarian Donor Lead, Oxfam GB

Donor governments

Canada

Anar Mamdani, Manager, Strategic Analysis and Planning Unit, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate (IHA), Canadian International Development Agency
Vicki Singmin, Senior Programme Analyst, Canadian International Development Agency

Netherlands

Margriet Koeleman, Senior Policy Advisor, Humanitarian Aid Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sweden

Johan Carlson, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Sweden, Geneva

UK

Scott Gardiner, Humanitarian Adviser, DFID

US

Mia Beers USAID/OFDA Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor

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Study Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference (TOR) for study on behalf of:

The IASC HFG, Task Team on Integrating Programme Approach in CAPs and CHFs.

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Introduction: Background/Rationale

During 2010, the IASC Humanitarian Financing Group (HFG) focused on three priority areas – early recovery financing, funding for preparedness, and making humanitarian country-based pool funds more effective (follow-up on the 2009 Transaction Cost Study) and that for each area, a task team had been established to address the issues and propose actions for the Working Group’s consideration. At the end of 2010, HFG summarised the tasks undertaken by each task team and rationale behind them and made specific recommendations to IASC WG as action points.

Task Team on Improving Effectiveness of Pooled Funds (TTPF) concluded that a programme oriented approach to pooled fund allocations and prioritization could potentially help promote more coherent and holistic allocations across clusters and sectors, resulting in improved inter-cluster/sector approaches and coordination, and may also enable organisations to obtain more balanced funding towards the various components of multi-sector programmes.

TTPF also concluded that current coordinated response plans are operationalized by CAP/Flash project sheets, which tend to itemise activities and requirements (“projectization”), with the risk of inviting narrow earmarking by donors. A “programmatic approach” to response could encourage more flexible funding from donors and would help in reporting on outcomes.

The 3rd and final IASC WG meeting of 2010, held in Rome from 10 to 12 November 2010 made the following recommendation:

“HFG to move forward with consultations, particularly with CAP SWG, on integrating programme approaches in CAPs and CHF proposals and provide recommendations by July 2011, with the aim of implementing recommendations in 2012 CAPs.”

A new Task Team on Integrating Programme Approach (TTPA) has been established to review and implement the above recommendation by the IASC WG. This study will inform the work of this TT and will aim to provide recommendations on the best way forward.

Objectives:

The overall goal of this study is to:

(a) Propose a common definition of “programme-based” approach.

(b) Outline pros and cons of existing modalities and how to improve synergies and coherence of CAP and CHF “projects”.

(c) Explore and recommend ways to incorporate programme-based modalities included in consolidated appeals and in CHFs.

(d) Make recommendations on the basis of his/her findings for consideration of the Task Team to finalize its decision on way forward on programme-based approaches in CAPs and CHFs.

Methodology:

- The study will be undertaken in 6 weeks and the nature of this study will be one hundred per cent desk-based (reviewing related documents) with a combination of interview/discussion with stakeholders in OCHA (either in person or over phone), operational agencies and key NGOs colleagues, both at the global level and selected CAP and CHF countries. In doing so, close cooperation with OCHA’s CAP Section, Funding Coordination section in New York, UN agencies and NGOs is required.

- Consultant to examine existing interpretations and practices of different UN agencies and NGOs on programme approach i.e. programme-based implementation and outline these practices viz. CAP and CHFs.

- Consultant to review history of CAP from the beginning to understand gradual progress made so far particularly in context of humanitarian reform.

- To understand recent trends of CAP and CHF, consultant shall review all CAPS/CHF of different countries as well as relevant policy decision taken by CAP SWG, CHF working group and IASC decisions related to CAP and CHFs.

Management arrangements

Consultant’s main point of contact will be Mr. Axel Bisschop, Head of Humanitarian Financing and Field support unit of DRRM, UNHCR in Geneva, as the capacity of chairperson of IASC HFG Task Team on Integrating Programme Approach in CAPs and CHFs.

Deliverables and delivery dates

March 15 – Finalize TOR for this consultancy.

April 01 – Hiring process of Consultant in motion

April 15 – Consultant is on board and starts work

May 15 – Present preliminary progress report to the TT

May 31 – Produced final report (exec Sum) not too big 20-25 pages include recommendation for larger study

Expected outcomes

A comprehensive report outlining pros/cons and impact of introducing programme approach, with the aim to inform HFG's response to the IASC WG's recommendation of *integrating programme approaches in CAPs and CHF proposals*. This Report is also expected to provide a common definition what programme-based approach means to the humanitarian community (UN/NGOs) and make recommendations on programme approach modalities for necessary consideration of HFG TT.

Qualification/specialized knowledge required of this consultancy

This position will require:

- Strong analytical skills as well as excellent proficiency in writing and editing English.
- Experience or specialization in understanding humanitarian reform and writing on humanitarian action/response related issues.
- Clear understanding of existing humanitarian appeal process such as CAP, Flash appeals and functioning of CHFs.
- Eight to ten years progressively responsible work experience at international level in professional writing on humanitarian/development issues.

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