Annex 1 : Questions and Answers

What is Protection and what does it mean for clusters?

The Global Protection Cluster uses the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) definition of protection, which states that protection is " all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee laws)." That means that protection is an objective, a legal responsibility and a multi-sector activity to (1) prevent or stop violations of rights, (2) ensure a remedy to violations – including the delivery of life-saving goods and services and (3) promote respect for rights and the rule of law.

In situations of conflict, civil unrest and natural disaster, people affected by crisis are almost invariably exposed to acute risks of violence (physical, psychological and sexual), rights violations, coercion and exploitation. Individual and community protection capacities, and national protection mechanisms, are frequently disrupted or inadequate to address acute protection risks stemming from new threats. Accordingly, protection must inform humanitarian action and advocacy, including engagement with States, which have the primary responsibility to protect, and other relevant stakeholders, including non-state armed actors that also have obligations to protect in situations of armed conflict in areas that they control. Further, protection outcomes are maximised when humanitarian actors leverage their complementary and yet distinct mandates, roles and responsibilities. **Protection is likewise a collective responsibility that cannot be left solely to 'protection' actors**.

In their 2013 statement, the IASC Principals call on the full range of actors to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action, including the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Humanitarian Country Team, and the clusters.

What is AAP and what does it mean for clusters?

There are many dimensions to accountability, but in summary, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is an active commitment for aid workers and organisations to use the power and resource entrusted to them ethically and responsibly, combined with effective and quality programming that recognizes the community's dignity, capacity and rights to participate in decisions that affect them. Being accountable means taking account of the views of affected people in the design and implementation of aid activities, collecting and acting upon feedback from them, and being held to account for the quality, fairness and effectiveness of their actions.

Individual aid organisations are ultimately responsible to manage resources, engage communities and be accountable to the population they assist. However, clusters are an important space for actors to discuss and promote a consistent and harmonised approach to accountability in operations. Cluster coordinators should play an active role in ensuring accountability is considered in operations. Leadership at the cluster level – one of the key elements of the IASC AAP commitments – to encourage and promote application of good practices around accountability helps ensure that clusters can more consistently and effectively meet affected people's needs, priorities and concerns.

What is the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)?

The CHS is the result of wide consultation with NGOs, the UN, Global Clusters and governments on how to define quality and accountability in humanitarian actions. It sets out nine inter-related commitments to communities and people affected by crisis, stating what they can expect from individuals and organizations delivering humanitarian assistance. The nine commitments are based on recognised good practices in the both the way responses are designed and delivered and on the relationship between aid organisations and affected people.

The CHS harmonises and replaces, the Sphere Core Standards, the former HAP accountability benchmarks, and the People In Aid Code into a single, consolidated framework. For more information, please see: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

What are the IASC five core commitments?

Accountability is one of the three pillars of the Transformative Agenda and the IASC principles, committed to creating a system-wide "culture of accountability" by endorsing these 5 commitments: Leadership/Governance; Transparency; Feedback and Complaints Participation, Design, monitoring and evaluation. The IASC commitments are being revised to reflect important development including the CHS (Core Humanitarian Standard) the Centrality of Protection, the changed humanitarian landscape, PSEA, and the importance of collective approaches meaningfully including local actors.

How does the AAP relate to technical standards used by clusters?

AAP is also about ensuring the quality and consistency of a response. Clusters play a key role in promoting harmonised approaches to ensure there are no gaps in the quality or coverage of a response. In this regard, AAP commitments, and the CHS in particular, were designed to complement and reinforce, not replace, existing technical and programming standards, such as Sphere, Child Protection Minimum Standards and other specific standards and guidelines, used by organisations and clusters. These standards reflect and give practical expression to the human rights of affected populations under international law and the related principles of participation and accountability, essential elements in a rights based approach.

The CHS includes indicators, key actions, and organisational responsibilities to ensure that relevant technical standards are used in programmes. Cluster coordination groups can leverage these commitments to advocate for all aid organisations to use apply existing standards whenever possible or appropriate, as well as document and share successes, challenges and lessons learned in applying technical and quality standards in different crisis contexts, in line with the HPC and clusters responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation.

What is the link between Accountability and Protection?

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group (EDG) Preliminary Guidance Note, Protection and Accountability To Affected Populations In The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (2015) sets out the fundamental link between accountability systems and protection in humanitarian action, and then describes, for each stage of the Humanitarian Program Cycle, the accountability mechanisms that should be established and actions required at country-level (see Section II below).

The "Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action Statement" by the IASC Principals gives primary consideration to the humanitarian community's accountability to affected populations, to identify, understand and support their own protection measures. It highlights the need of the different segments of affected populations to be meaningfully engaged in all decisions and actions that have a direct impact on their well-being and reiterates the importance of protection as a collective responsibility.

Hence, protection demands meaningful engagement with the affected population during all phases of the humanitarian response in a manner that is sensitive to age, gender, and diversity, In practice, this means continuous engagement with the affected populations in a manner that enables their meaningful feedback in order to be able to prevent, mitigate or end actual and potential violations.

What is the link between Accountability and Protection Mainstreaming?

Accountability is not only about improving humanitarian program effectiveness but also about ensuring affected people can exercise their rights. Protection mainstreaming is about ensuring protection-sensitive humanitarian programmes, and thus constitutes a crucial pillar of programme quality. It is the process of incorporating protection principles and promoting meaningful access, safety and dignity in humanitarian aid. The following elements must be taken into account in all humanitarian activities. **1) Prioritize safety &dignity, and avoid causing harm:** Prevent and minimize as much as possible any unintended negative effects of your intervention which can increase people's vulnerability to both physical and psychosocial risks. **2) Meaningful Access:** Arrange for people's access to assistance and services – in proportion to need and without any barriers (e.g. discrimination). Pay special attention to individuals and groups who may be particularly vulnerable or have difficulty accessing assistance and services. **3) Accountability:** Set-up appropriate mechanisms through which affected populations can measure the adequacy of interventions, and address concerns and complaints. **4) Participation and empowerment:** Support the development of self protection capacities and assist people to claim their rights, including – not exclusively – the rights to shelter, food, water and sanitation, health, and education.

What is the link between Accountability and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse?

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of affected community members by anyone associated with the provision of aid constitutes one of the most serious breaches of humanitarian accountability. Exploitation frequently occurs when the essential needs of those most at-risk in communities are not adequately met. Issues of impunity and lack of accountability in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse are derived from existing asymmetries in the balance of power. It is a serious protection concern, and erodes the confidence and trust of affected communities and other stakeholders (host States, donors, media and the public) in all those providing assistance. This is why Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is an essential issue of accountability.

Cluster coordination groups can play a key role to discuss and identify risks and integrate prevention strategies into cluster work plans, and advocate that all cluster members have appropriate mechanisms in place to deal with any issues of exploitation and abuse. They can also ensure that issues are brought to the attention of the appropriate stakeholders for action, such as the Humanitarian Coordinator.