KEY COMPONENTS IN PREPAREDNESS
- CONTINGENCY PLANNING -

*In “Guidance and Indicator Package for Implementing Priority Five of the Hyogo Framework”*

Preparedness planning aims to establish a standing capacity to respond to a range of different situations that may affect a country or region by putting in place a broad set of preparedness measures. This includes for example early warning systems, ongoing risk and vulnerability assessment, capacity building, the creation and maintenance of stand-by capacities and the stockpiling of humanitarian supplies. Undertaking a contingency planning process will be a key component in developing an analysis of what needs to be done in this process, and will help in the designing, testing and implementation of response actions.

In order for a plan to be effective, it is essential that all participating actors are meaningfully involved in its development. A process which is built around participation will lead to increased ownership by all those involved and will contribute to the smooth implementation of plans during times of disaster. This includes participation at the local, national and international levels. Coordinated participation will help to work out problems of who is responsible for what when a disaster occurs. It also allows for effective scaling up during disasters; thereby ensuring the required goods and services get to the most affected and vulnerable populations.

Sound preparedness planning should lead to an improved state of readiness that ultimately leads to safeguarding lives and livelihoods. The process of developing a national preparedness capability should bring together each of the elements described in this document reflecting legislative and institutional arrangements, coordination structures, contingency and response plans as well as information and communication systems. While the process may require significant time and resources, it is essential that all partners have a genuine sense of ownership, as this is a requirement for sustainability. The objective of the planning process is not simply to write a plan but to stimulate ongoing interactions between parties that should result in written, usable agreements. The plan is a product to facilitate improved readiness; it is not the goal of the planning process.

**CONTINGENCY PLANNING**

Contingency planning is a management tool used to analyse the impact of potential hazard events so that adequate and appropriate arrangements are made in advance to respond in a timely, effective and appropriate way to the needs of the affected population(s).

Contingency planning is a tool to anticipate, pre-empt, and solve problems that typically arise during a humanitarian response.

A well-developed and consistently updated contingency plan is an essential element of an overall national preparedness capability.

Contingency plans should be clear, accessible and concise. Sectoral, Ministry or humanitarian agencies plans can be attached as annexes.

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1 This document applies the definitions and key methodology components of the IASC Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance.
The Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance endorsed by the IASC outlines four key steps in the contingency planning process: preparation, analysis, response planning, and implementing preparedness.

A. Preparation

The organisation tasked with disaster management is best placed to lead, or coordinate a national contingency planning process although all key stakeholders should be included. Before developing a contingency plan, an analysis of existing emergency plans and procedures, resource and equipment inventories, training records and reviews of past disaster experiences and lessons learned in research studies and reports should be undertaken.

Staff that has been involved in responding to previous disasters, as well as those who have worked on recovery should be involved in the contingency planning process. Representatives of disaster-impacted populations should be involved in developing and/or reviewing the plan. Ensuring that staff with administrative and logistics functions, as well as from financing bodies, or donors also participate can be important in facilitating effective resource flows during an emergency.

While external experts may provide valuable input as part of the team developing a plan, it is important that the user organisations actually determine its content. Hiring an external consultant to develop a plan is not advised. However, it may be helpful to draw on specialist expertise during the contingency planning process or to have a specialist review draft plans before they are finalised.

B. Analysis

A contingency plan should be based on a sound analysis of risk in a specific context, and will therefore reflect the nature of the hazards or threats, as well as the vulnerabilities and capacities in a particular context.

Scenario planning should try to look at a full range of possible hazard events and then to try to prioritise those most relevant to the risk profile of the area. When developing scenarios it is important to undertake an honest analysis of previous disasters, to assess current levels of risk, and to develop projections of the likely humanitarian implications of a particular hazard/threat within a particular risk context.

There is also a need for a clear understanding and appreciation of who is vulnerable and why, and measures that can be taken to strengthen the resilience of disaster-prone communities including the extent to which indigenous coping mechanisms are sustainable. This, invariably, includes a people-centred approach that is sensitive to gender, culture and other context-specific issues that undermine or empower particular groups and individuals. Information must be collected through the undertaking of a detailed vulnerability mapping exercise to clearly identify areas and communities of high vulnerability.

Although scenarios should be based on the most likely and frequent events, it is important to consider what might happen in an abnormally large event, or how responses would need to be adapted in the case of a possible, but less frequent type of hazard event. It is also useful to discuss what would be the early warning signs and triggers that could be used to monitor the progress of a hazard event and its human impact.
A contingency planning exercise should enable designated organisations to spell out their strategy for how they will meet their obligations for building a preparedness capability. As such, the process should clearly articulate the minimum standards of assistance that organisations will be expected to provide.

Plans should be based on clear and established standards, such as those developed by the Sphere project. Issues of the quantity and quality of services expected to be provided should be discussed prior to the disaster, and should be considered both in the pre-positioning of stocks and in budgeting processes. Effective accountability mechanisms should be put in place that are accessible to local actors and communities.

Contingency plans should also include an analysis of how response organisations themselves would function if their own facilities, staff or systems were immobilised by the hazard event (such as key warehouses being destroyed in an earthquake, or staff not being able to report to work as usual during a flood). This process, known as ‘business continuity planning’ can be essential to making sure that key organisations remain operational in the face of a hazard event.

Each organisation involved in developing the plan will have different capacities and resources to bring to the table. Each has the right to participate in the development of the contingency plan and each has something to contribute. Different skills and resources are required depending on the specific disaster scenario. While some organisations will be specialised in very technical areas (e.g. meteorological forecasting) while others will have equally essential more generally applicable community based knowledge and skills. By using a process whereby various voices are heard early, a dialogue can be initiated and differences worked out before, rather than during, a hazard response.

**C. Response Planning**

Based on agreed upon roles and responsibilities, it is important for participants in the contingency planning process to define response objectives and strategies in more detail. While the institutional arrangements outlined earlier in this document spell out overarching common objectives and strategies for response, the contingency planning process will provide more detail on how they will meet their responsibilities.

In most cases this is done at the ministerial level based on specific sectoral arrangements, and a summary of these can be included in updates to the overall contingency plan. Through the development of these plans, gaps may be identified that should be addressed, or the need for greater joint operations across sectors may be required.

These plans should also include information on dissemination and communication that explains how impacted populations, key stakeholders such as decision-makers and donors will get information and also how the media will be briefed. It should also enable information and local knowledge to feed back into the government system enabling disaster-affected people to express their views, share lessons learned. Findings from community assessments should also be made available to all interested parties (within and outside community) and should feed into disaster and development planning.

**D. Implementing Preparedness: Consolidating the process and follow-up actions**

A plan in and of itself is not enough. The plan needs to be tested and exercised by the people and organisations that will use it. Classroom or actual field simulation exercises, based on specific scenarios, are an effective means to determine how realistic the plan is.
and to assess the capacity of the different actors. Based on the results and lessons learned during such exercises, plans (procedures, responsibilities, etc.) can then be modified accordingly.

Simulation and response exercises can help to identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as what training is required so that all participants are able to meet their identified responsibilities. The use of simulation exercises also serve to maintain the plan ‘fresh’ in the minds of all the actors and to keep knowledge and skills up to date. The same holds true in the testing of the effectiveness of early warning and alert systems. Conducting lessons learned exercises from previous responses is also important.

Simulation exercises can also be a good means of reviewing how well cross-cutting issues are reflected in the plan, and if vulnerable groups will be able to access extra support during a potential hazard response.

Once the planning process has been completed, it is essential that its content be used to directly increase levels of readiness through activities such as upgrading early warning systems, pre-positioning resources within sectors likely to be impacted, or the provision of contingency budgets for associated government departments with central responsibilities for preparedness.

It is also important that sufficient resources are allocated for the review and dissemination of the plan by all of those who are expected to play a role in its implementation. It is vital that all clearly understand the plan and their role and responsibilities.