

ANNEX 7

UNITED NATIONS DISASTER ASSESSMENT AND COORDINATION TEAM (UNDAC)

a) The Concept

The UNDAC System is designed to assist the United Nations in meeting international needs for early and qualified information during the first phase of a sudden-onset disaster and, when necessary, in the coordination of incoming international relief at national level and/or at the site of the emergency. It also aims at strengthening national and regional disaster response capacity.

The UNDAC System consists of two components:

- (i) **Staff:** Experienced emergency managers made available for UNDAC missions by their respective governments or organizations, together with OCHA relief coordination officers. UNDAC Team members are specially trained and equipped for their task;
- (ii) **Procedures:** Predefined methods for the collection and management of information as well as structures for coordination support during the first phase of a sudden-onset disaster;

OCHA has established a proven system to mobilize, deploy and support an UNDAC team, so that it can achieve its objectives in the arduous post-disaster environment.

Added Value

An UNDAC team can be dispatched at very short notice at the occurrence or early warning of a disaster. UNDAC teams are requested by, and work under the authority of the United Nations Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator to reinforce the in-country Disaster Management Team (DMT), and, when requested, the national government of an affected country, through its capacity to conduct cross-sectoral emergency assessment and manage information. When required, UNDAC teams can be reinforced with experts covering more specialized fields of disaster assessment and / or coordination. An UNDAC team is self-sufficient in basic telecommunications, office and personal equipment.

The UNDAC Team

The UNDAC Team was established in 1993 and today consists of 68 national emergency managers from twenty-four countries in Europe, Latin America (since 1995) and the South Pacific (since 1996), together with 35 UN staff members from OCHA and UNDP. In major international emergencies, UNDAC teams are drawn from the entire membership. In disasters of more regional or national concern, they are normally drawn from amongst

members in the affected country / region. Future expansion of the Team is being pursued in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific

UNDAC Missions

The UNDAC Team has conducted 54 emergency missions to date. Its mobilization is triggered by:

Natural Disasters:

- when a disaster has caused serious casualties or destruction and it is unclear whether sufficient resources are available nationally to meet immediate needs;
- when the disaster has caused international concern irrespective of the resources available, or where there are catastrophic consequences to the environment;

Complex Emergencies:

when there is the sudden onset or change in intensity of a complex emergency, which is likely to result in a change in the humanitarian coordination structure in-country, particularly when there are inadequate resources in-situ to support the coordination mechanism.

In each case, the deployment and detailed tasks of an UNDAC team are decided in consultation with the Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator. The Team normally stays in the affected area for the initial response phase of up to three weeks in a natural disaster, and two months in a complex emergency.

b) Lessons learned after Hurricane Mitch

The deployment of UNDAC Teams to Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador in response to Hurricane Mitch was the most extensive UNDAC operation so far. Information gathered in the four countries visited highlighted achievements and constraints in relation with the UNDAC Teams' performance. Therefore, the Inter-Agency Mission, drawing lessons from this exercise, wishes to suggest several ways and means to strengthen the support UNDAC Teams can provide to United Nations Resident Coordinators. Below are comments/suggestions, which the Mission submits for further consideration by OCHA.

Awareness raising of UNDAC capacities

The deployment of UNDAC teams, needs to be field driven. Towards this end, it is essential that UN Resident Coordinators and their staff be made fully aware of the capacities and know-how of UNDAC Teams, as well as of qualifications and skills of the teams' members. This should be ensured by OCHA through briefings to newly appointed UN Resident Coordinators and in the context of regional meetings of UN Resident Coordinators. Information on UNDAC should also form part of other agencies' induction of Representatives and training of Representatives. At the working level, familiarization

missions should take place to and from Headquarters between focal points in the offices of UN Resident Coordinators and OCHA Geneva (be they desk officers or staff of the Field Coordination Support Unit managing UNDAC in OCHA). Missions of this kind from Headquarters should interact with all the members of the UNDMTs.

Competences of the UNDAC Teams

UNDAC teams support UN Resident Coordinators in needs assessment, and the collection, processing and dissemination of information related with the impact and the management of disasters: two among the most critical issues in the aftermath of a disaster, when constraints are the largest and expertise is lacking. Of course, in these circumstances, expectations are inevitably high.

UNDAC teams, in general terms, are “disaster assessment and information specialists” with a clear “portfolio” of competences which is at the disposal of United Nations Resident Coordinators and UNDMTs. They need to emphasize - and provide evidence of - their predefined methods of collection and management of information. Their role in information collection, processing and dissemination, might be in the Capital City (UN or Government Operations Center) and/or in the field, as member of UN field missions; some of the usual tasks (in cooperation with the RC) are:

- a) Support field assessment activities;
- b) compilation of substantive information to be used, deployed and made available in UN (or Government) Operations Centers;
- c) preparation of statistical information on contributions of the international community at the field and central levels;
- d) establishment of basic data banks on international relief assistance provided, to be applied at the outset of emergency situations;
- e) identification of gaps in the provision of assistance;
- f) mobilization of additional resources, including, inter alia, equipment, relief items, human resources, etc.;
- g) preparation and, with the RC’s approval, forwarding to OCHA Geneva of SITREPs and periodic consolidated reports;
- h) as appropriate, monitoring, supervision and, when required, implementation of field emergency projects;
- i) in exceptional cases, monitoring, delivery of OCHA contributions in kind from the OCHA Pisa Warehouse.

The support of UNDAC Teams depends on the specificity of each disaster. UNDAC members are trained on a number of specific and concrete information tools to be used in emergencies. Nevertheless, the Mission suggests that the contents of UNDAC Training Courses be analyzed and reviewed so as to make provision for the above priorities. Similarly, OCHA could pre-identify among UNDAC members those with the widest knowledge and experience in disaster information collection and processing, in each of the three continents where the UNDAC Team members are based.

Role of UNDAC Teams in preparation of Appeals

Several UNDAC members are not members of the United Nations and their knowledge of United Nations agencies' mandates and functioning is not complete. Their role should focus on the collecting and processing of assessments and information, which could serve as a basis for the preparation of the Appeals. As a rule, therefore, UNDAC Teams should not be the key actors in the production and issuance of United Nations Appeals, which pertain to the competence of UN Resident Coordinators and DMTs.

In exceptional circumstances, however, it may occur that UN Resident Coordinators (due to shortage of staff, time pressure, etc.) request UNDAC Teams to be of direct assistance in the preparation of appeals. The Mission therefore recommends that UNDAC members receive training on the appeal process.

Agencies' participation in UNDAC Teams

The Mission believes that the addition in the Teams of agencies' staff with experience in disaster management, notably in disaster-prone countries, can only be an added value to the functioning of UNDAC Teams. While agencies' staff bring in their own qualifications and skills, their presence in the teams should be not as agencies' representatives but on their personal capacity. In this context, independently of the UN agency concerned, the main task of the UNDAC Team in most cases remain focussed on supporting field assessment activities, data processing and information management. OCHA should enter into agreements with agencies with a view to ensuring that agencies' staff receive training in the same manner as other members of the Team and they become available at immediate notice for UNDAC missions.

Regional expansion of UNDAC Teams

Given its disaster-proneness, Latin America possesses a wealth of disaster management experts. Therefore, the efforts of OCHA to expand the composition of the UNDAC Regional Team in Latin America include some of the disaster management experts and colleagues, based in Central America, who were involved in the handling of Hurricane Mitch. Besides, the disaster management experience related to the Hurricane Mitch, highlighted the need to increase the number of Spanish-speaking UNDAC members.

Use of in-country UNDAC teams

The presence of an in-country UNDAC Team of four in Guatemala proved to be an asset in coordinating operations from the very outset of the disaster. The fact that two UNDAC members worked in their regular government functions, provided an added advantage. Experience shows, however, that an in-country UNDAC team may not become available if the scale of the disaster is such that it requires the participation of UNDAC members in national bodies involved in the management of disaster related operations.