

# Guidelines for Flash Appeals

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CAP SUB-WORKING GROUP  
OCTOBER 2006**

**SUMMARY:** Flash appeals present an early strategic response plan and specific projects within 5-7 days of the emergency's onset. If major uncertainty exists about the evolution of the crisis, the appeal presents the most likely scenarios and the response strategy for each. Flash appeals are usually revised about a month later, when more information is available. They may serve as the basis for funding applications to the CERF (among other donors): the RC/HC indicates which appeal projects the CERF should fund. The RC/HC, supported by OCHA, is responsible for producing the appeal. Organisations that have been asked to lead and coordinate the response within a given sector or area of activity (i.e. cluster or sector leads) have a key role: working with all relevant partners to develop the response plans and vet project proposals for inclusion in the appeal. Flash appeals should include priority projects from all key implementing agencies on the ground, including NGOs.

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## What is a Flash Appeal?

The flash appeal is a tool for structuring a coordinated humanitarian response for the first three to six months of an emergency. The UN Humanitarian and/or Resident Coordinator triggers it in consultation with all stakeholders. It contains an analysis of the context and of humanitarian needs (citing whatever specific needs assessments are available), response plans (at the general strategic level as well as sector plans including specific proposed projects), and statements on roles and responsibilities.

Because the appeal's first edition has to be issued fast, it inevitably is based on early estimates and best guesses, focusing on urgent humanitarian needs plus whatever early recovery projects that can be assessed and implemented during this early phase of a crisis. Given that flash appeals necessarily are based on early estimates, they and their projects can be revised at any point after the launch as more information emerges (i.e. agencies can continually adjust their projects on FTS). Usually, there is a scheduled general revision about a month after launch to incorporate fuller information and more recovery projects (especially connecting to government plans as they crystallise). The flash appeal may be developed into or succeeded by a consolidated appeal if an inter-agency response is needed beyond six months.

## Who does what?

- The Resident Coordinator or Humanitarian Coordinator (henceforth "RC/HC"), with support from OCHA, is responsible for the production, content and quality of the document.
- The Flash Appeal is prepared in consultation with key humanitarian actors, which *may* include government officials, donors, UN agencies, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), members of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), NGOs, and other relevant actors.
- Cluster and sector leads<sup>1</sup> have a key role, in bringing all organisations working significantly in the sector into the working group, leading and coordinating the development of response plans and writing them up for the appeal document, and leading the vetting of projects within their sector or area of activity.
- The Flash Appeal may include projects from UN agencies, international organisations, and NGOs. (Note: it may include project partnerships with the Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society of the country of operation<sup>2</sup>. Government ministries cannot appeal for funds directly in a flash appeal, but can be partners in UN or NGO projects.)

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity while cluster terminology is still under development, this document will use the term "sector" to cover both sectors and clusters. Sector and cluster leads have the same responsibilities in flash appeals whether the cluster approach has been formally adopted or not.

<sup>2</sup> The only Red Cross/Crescent National Society that can appeal for funding as a project partner for a UN Agency is the National Society of the country of operation. Participating National Societies (PNS) from outside the country of operation must work through the International Federation Appeal, or the ICRC. In principle, the IFRC may participate in (but not appeal through) Flash Appeals in the form of an Annex to the Appeal. In accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in particular independence, the IFRC and the ICRC manage their own, separate appeal funding mechanisms. The Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society of the country of operation may become a project partner of the UN, provided that it can adhere to the Fundamental Principles and policies of the International Movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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## **Why keep it brief?**

So that people read it and donors can respond swiftly. Be concise and keep the language simple. Readers (Government officials, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, the media, and other stakeholders) need to know what happened, the humanitarian consequences, what the humanitarian plan is, and the cost. Ten pages are more than enough. Use charts and tables to explain issues whenever possible.

## **What does the appeal's "duration" mean?**

Flash appeals have a defined duration so as to provide a common basis for calculating funding requirements and give a time horizon for the response strategy. The duration can always be amended after launch as new information emerges. If the maximum six-month duration is chosen, this of course does not mean that all projects must last exactly six months; they last as long as they need to, up to a maximum of six months, and budgets are calculated accordingly. Experience shows that the appeal's duration is often a source of confusion in the pressurised days of appeal development, so the RC/HC should decide early (see timeline below) and communicate clearly what is the unified time horizon for the appeal.

## **How does a flash appeal relate to the Central Emergency Response Fund?**

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a stand-by fund established by the United Nations to enable more timely, reliable and equitable humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and other types of emergency.

CERF is intended to complement – not substitute for – flash appeals. The CERF acts as a donor, and the flash appeal is the strategic plan and list of projects that CERF (and other donors) should fund. Flash appeals are necessary to form a framework of coordinated strategic response, and to obtain funding after and beyond the CERF (which cannot fully fund the humanitarian response in most situations). CERF can provide seed funds to jump-start critical operations planned in the appeal. (The CERF may also allocate further funds in a second tranche if needed, for example if donor response to critical activities in the appeal is inadequate.)

Flash appeal development and the request for CERF funds should both start immediately and proceed in tandem, to ensure that the earliest CERF-funded actions form part of a coordinated response. The RC/HC can send the CERF proposal package to the ERC as soon as it is ready, i.e. as soon as agencies can describe what they plan to do with CERF funds and what needs their activities will address. This might be before Flash Appeal publication (in which case the CERF request per project will be reflected in the appeal document).

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### What is the sequencing of CERF requests and flash appeals?

- RC/HC triggers a coordinated response, starting with rapid needs assessments and assignment of roles and responsibilities.
- RC/HC determines as soon as possible whether the event is likely to be of a scale that requires inter-agency response (exceeding capacity of any single agency plus affected country government).
- If yes, RC/HC triggers a flash appeal and (unless donor response is certain to be adequate) requests a provisional CERF allocation from the ERC according to best estimate of scale and immediate funding needs.
- RC/HC leads IASC Country Team to produce as soon as possible a clear articulation of humanitarian needs, priority sectors for response, response plans including specific projects, and roles and responsibilities. (These are the components of a flash appeal.)
- Simultaneously, as soon as the earliest critical needs and the implementing agencies able to respond to them are identified, agencies put these planned activities or projects into specific formal CERF proposals, approved by the RC/HC in consultation with the IASC Country Team up to the limit of the allocation announced by the ERC. The RC/HC assembles the proposals into a package to be sent to the ERC.
- The RC/HC immediately sends to OCHA whichever is ready first – CERF request or flash appeal – and completes the other as soon as possible. (Normally, the CERF request package should take less time to complete than the flash appeal, but this flexible method allows for exceptions.)

IN SUM: The CERF request and the Flash Appeal belong to the same process of coordinated response, and therefore should be mutually consistent. To gain time, the RC/HC sends to OCHA whichever is ready first, and then completes the other.

### What is the flash appeal procedure and suggested timeline?

- 1) DAY 1 OF APPEAL PREPARATION: Flash Appeal triggered by the UN RC/HC, in consultation with the IASC Country Team. The RC/HC in consultation with the IASC CT assigns one organisation to lead and coordinate the response in each priority sector or area of activity (i.e. cluster/sector leads). The RC/HC also assigns an appeal focal point in the field. The government of the affected country is consulted (though its *permission* is *not* needed for a flash appeal).
- 2) BY DAY 2: Needs assessments begin. All needs assessments are to be reported to relevant sector leads. Each cluster or sector group meets at national level to map capacity and assign roles and responsibilities within the sector or area of activity. The IASC CAP SWG telecons to coordinate any HQ-level issues.
- 3) BY DAY 3: RC/HC's team (OCHA if present) drafts general sections of appeal document. RC/HC decides on appeal duration and communicates this clearly to country team. Relevant organisations in each cluster/sector meet to analyse needs assessment information, agree general response strategy, and review and select their members' proposed projects. Cluster/sector leads coordinate and facilitate the consensus-building on project inclusion, draft response plan section, incorporate the

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\* In some situations, like a major earthquake in a heavily populated area, this initial determination can be made more or less instantaneously or intuitively, without waiting for detailed needs assessments.

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selected projects into the response plan section, and forward to OCHA. OCHA compiles these with general sections to produce assembled appeal draft.

- 4) BY DAY 4: RC/HC and country team approve final field draft of the appeal and sends to OCHA CAP Section (GVA), including cover photo (with credit). (Note that once the RC/HC and IASC Country Team have sent the document to Geneva, they cannot expect to have the opportunity to make further changes before publication. They will be consulted, however, if agency headquarters request any significant changes.) The document should consist of one file only. If there are pictures, graphs and tables, they should be inserted in the main document already; but please do provide the CAP section with separate Excel files containing the graphs and tables, so that they can be edited quickly if necessary.
- 5) DAY 5 OF THE EMERGENCY: The CAP Section shares the draft with IASC agency headquarters for 24-hour review. The OCHA desk officer incorporates (the same day if possible) any comments received by deadline.
- 6) DAY 6 OF THE EMERGENCY: The CAP Section style-checks and formats the document, registers appeal projects on the Financial Tracking Service, publishes the document on line (ReliefWeb), and prints copies by 13h00. After 13h00, the appeal is officially launched through a donor meeting in the field and/or at headquarters, or through a press release.
- 7) AFTER LAUNCH: Appealing agencies seek funding contracts directly from donors, and update OCHA CAP Section / FTS ([fts@reliefweb.int](mailto:fts@reliefweb.int)) on funding received and if any projects change. IASC CT continues in-depth needs assessments, monitors response implementation, and plans appeal revision (if needed). There are as yet no structures or procedures for joint flash appeal implementation reporting.

*Note: This is an ideal timeline that may vary according to the situation. However, undue delay is harmful to a flash appeal's credibility.*

*Note: Experience shows it is best not to schedule a launch meeting until the final field draft is received in Geneva.*

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## TEMPLATE AND CONTENT OF THE 10-PAGE FLASH APPEAL

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1 PAGE)

Brief summary of:

- the crisis
- priority needs and humanitarian response plan
- amount of money needed in US\$
- time span covered by this appeal (cannot be longer than 6 months)

### 2. CONTEXT AND HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES (1.5 PAGES)

#### 2.1 Context

- What happened?
- Where?
- What has happened since the onset of the crisis? (e.g. information gathered, government agrees to international assistance, immediate response by agencies, assessments done, etc.)
- If major uncertainty exists about the evolution of the crisis, what are the best, worst, and most likely scenarios?

#### 2.2 Humanitarian consequences

- Who is most affected and why? (Provide estimates, if possible, of specific groups most affected, disaggregated by sex and age)
- What are the needs (of specific groups, disaggregated by sex and age) as a direct and immediate result of this crisis?
- What would be the needs in the best, worst, and most likely scenarios (if major uncertainty exists)?
- What are the priority sectors for response? (Choose only from the IASC standard sectors: shelter and non-food items; health [including nutrition and psycho-social programmes]; water and sanitation; food; agriculture; protection-human rights-rule of law; multi-sector; education; mine action; coordination and support services; and economic recovery & infrastructure.)

### 3. RESPONSE PLANS (1 PAGE)

For each sector that the Country Team decides to include:

- Objectives (no more than two, each of which is specific and measurable)
- What is the strategy for achieving the objectives in each of the scenarios<sup>3</sup>
- Humanitarian actions that can be implemented within the time span of this flash appeal (maximum 6 months)
- Expected outputs and impacts
- Project tables as per model below (please do one table for each project and leave a space between each complete table). *NOTE: In a flash appeal there is no need for the CAP-style one-page project sheet. A summary box per project like the one below is sufficient.*

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<sup>3</sup> For example: what will be done if there is good access, and if there is no access; what will be done if all affected people flee to a neighboring country, and what will be done if they all return early.

SECTOR (e.g. FOOD)		\$
ACRONYM OF AGENCY/IES (e.g. WFP)	<b>Project Title:</b>	(Please be specific: "Health" for example is not a useful project title)
	<b>Objective:</b>	
	<b>Beneficiaries:</b>	Total Number: Women: Children:
	<b>Partners:</b>	(NOTE: "Partners" means only planned implementing partners in the sense of a sub-contracting relationship, not any organisation working in parallel.) (The Red Cross/Crescent National Society of the country of operation must be formally consulted and agree prior to being identified as an operational partner.)
		<b>(Just insert the amount required, no \$ sign)</b>

REAL EXAMPLE:

WATER AND SANITATION		\$
UNICEF INS-06/WS01	<b>Project title:</b> Provision of safe drinking water <b>Objective:</b> Assessment of water infrastructure and damage; Support for water trucking operations; Provision of water bladders and tap stands; Emergency repairs of water treatment plants, networks and shallow wells; Provide water purification chemicals for water treatment plants; Provision of household level water purification tablets; Provision of water storage containers and safe handling and storage information.	766,000
	<b>Beneficiaries:</b> 25,000 persons (8,000 women, 12,500 children) <b>Partners:</b> Oxfam, USAID/ESP, Plan International, Care, IRD, YDD, YKY, The YYY Red Crescent Society, Department of Public Works (PU), Municipal Water Authorities (PDAM), Ministry of Health	

NOTE: OCHA CAP Section provides project codes for all projects when the final field draft reaches Geneva.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (0.5 PAGE)

- Maximum 10 lines on how the response is being coordinated and who is responsible within the government and the UN
- Table indicating cluster/sector leads and the major humanitarian stakeholders (e.g. government, UN, Red Cross/Crescent of the country of operation, NGOs) that are responding to the crisis in affected regions, by sector.

ANNEX 1: ACRONYMS ND ABBREVIATIONS

While the CAP section does check acronyms, many are specific to a country, region or language. National authorities and local NGOs are typical examples you might encounter. Thus it is needed that the country team drafts an acronyms list. Example:

AWKAF	Ministry of Religious Affairs	When an acronym is in a foreign language, a translation is preferable
BF	Breast Feeding	
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process	
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	

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**OTHER NOTES AND TIPS:**

- Field staff do not need to spend time trying to add up project budgets to produce exact sectoral totals: OCHA CAP Section staff do this as a final step, when all last-minute budget modifications are done. (Field staff may wish to add them up approximately, so that the RC/HC has an idea of the total.)
- Financial tracking by cluster rather than sector simply means that the projects are grouped under a slightly different categorisation than the standard IASC sectors. The field may prefer that it be tracked by cluster if that reflects the actual coordination structure on the ground. The FTS accordingly will be able to do it both ways, and the appeal document can contain tables summarising requirements by either sector or cluster, or both.
- If a CERF request is being made, the projects in the appeal should show their entire funding target for the appeal's time horizon (i.e. not subtracting any expected CERF funding). If the specific amount per project requested from the CERF is known, OCHA CAP Section will indicate that in the document – see example below:

UNICEF  GBS- 06/P/HR/RL01	<b>Project Title:</b>	Child protection	250,000  <i>(incl. 145,890 requested from CERF)</i>
	<b>Objective:</b>	Provide support for the care and protection of women and children.	
	<b>Beneficiaries:</b>	5,000 women and 10,000 children from IDP and host families	
	<b>Partners:</b>	REJE, AMIC, CAAMI, Alternag	

- A project may have more than one appealing agency, if this reflects a reality that the project is shared. However, each agency must state its specific portion of the appealed amount. (This is to reflect the reality that donors commit funds to one agency at a time, not jointly under one contract to two or more agencies.) If no such breakdown per agency within a shared project is stated, FTS will split the overall project amount equally.
- Agency headquarters sometimes submit additional projects directly to OCHA CAP Section during the period of headquarters review. This is permissible in a fast-moving situation, but in these cases it is necessary for the agency to accompany the new project with evidence of the RC/HC's approval. (Deadlines do not allow the OCHA CAP Section to contact the RC/HC and await approval in the short period between agency HQ comments and publication.)
- Similarly, some agencies with limited or no presence in the affected country (e.g. regional offices only) may submit projects with the RC/HC's approval during the headquarters review period; or, better still, contact the appeal focal point in the field to incorporate the projects while the appeal is still being developed in the field. OCHA CAP Section can put such agencies in touch with the field focal point.