**Briefing Note:**

**Increased collaboration and positioning of IFRC with the**

**Global WASH (WatSan) Cluster.**

**Background:**

Since the inception of the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) IFRC has been an active member at Global, Regional and country level and in particular in operational terms in response to major disasters where the cluster mechanisms have been activated.

Our interaction at Global level has focused on attendance at regular and key meetings and technical working groups and in tools development (especially in the field of hygiene promotion research, development and training) and as a major WatSan player and WASH member agency, in influencing direction and decision making within the cluster.

Despite the successes of the WASH cluster however, we continued to have specific concerns, principally that improved coordination at country level in disaster response has still been inconsistent, and that the WASH cluster needed to increase its focus at that level, both in processes and procedures but also in increasing the availability of suitably trained and experienced human resources, across all cluster member agencies including ourselves, to better address and improve disaster response and coordination.

Added to this, we felt that WASH donors should have alternative means to direct funds to WASH member agencies, as ‘pass through’ funding through the WASH lead agency (UNICEF) proved to be complex and inefficient, a constraint that UNICEF themselves recognised and as a result we avoided. This has also made WASH donors much more open to cluster member proposals for direct or consortia funding approaches.

**Proposed Action:**

As a result of recent consultation with the WASH Cluster and fellow cluster agencies, we have decided to explore the potential for hosting dedicated WASH support human resources (potentially three positions initially) for a trial period of 18 months.

CARE, on behalf of interested WASH agencies including ourselves is about to submit a proposal which will seek full funding for several new WASH positions to be hosted by member agencies after a participatory inter-agency mapping process was undertaken at the recent WASH meeting in Oslo. The IFRC positions on offer to us are as follows:

1. One IFRC member of a new 3 member WASH Rapid Assessment Team (RAT), the other two positions to be hosted by CARE and Oxfam, the IFRC position potentially based in Budapest, potential back donor, through CARE is OFDA.
2. Two IFRC members of regionally based Regional Wash Cluster Advisors (RECA’s) which would be based in Americas (1 x Panama) and MENA (1 x Amman) respectively, again funded through CARE, back donor ECHO.

**Operational and management arrangements:**

From the outset it must be clearly understood that these IFRC recruited and hosted positions will not be IFRC Delegates in the normal tradition. Their role will be effectively and wholly in support to the Global WASH cluster, however, on a day to day basis managed and directed by IFRC, and subject to all the normal recruitment, management, security, conduct and performance measuring procedures.

All three potential positions will be based at zonal level, and the practicalities of this arrangement and concurrence of the hosting Zones will be required, as well as an agreed way forward on how those positions should be managed. In effect, as they are all Global WASH support positions, we propose they should be managed from Global level, by the WatSan/EH Unit in the Health & Care Department who will manage the links with the CARE led consortium, cluster donors and the WASH cluster. All costs that may be incurred by the zones to host these positions is catered for, at normal Delegate rates, in the budget allocation about to be submitted to the interested donors.

**Consultative Meeting:**

We were not the only active WASH member agency that have had concerns about the working modalities of the cluster, and as a result requested a consultation meeting with UNICEF senior management in New York in November 2010 to voice our collective concerns which we attended with CARE International, Oxfam GB, ACF and World Vision on behalf of all WASH member agencies.

The outcomes of that meeting precipitated three crucial outcomes:

1. That a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) would be formed to better represent WASH member agencies and influence and indeed take part in key decision making of the WASH cluster which has now been formalised and consists of IFRC, CARE, Oxfam, ACF, UNICEF and UNHCR.
2. That a new WASH Strategy for the next three years be concluded (now in its final draft) to direct WASH cluster management and activities and act as a marketing tool to encourage further donor buy-in and act as a means to better monitor and evaluate WASH progress systematically.
3. That IFRC would participate in a proposal to increase dedicated WASH human resources, to be field based, and in this case where the lead agency of a consortium would be CARE, who, if the proposal is accepted, act as a pass-through funding agency to IFRC, Oxfam and others, principally to increase dedicated WASH HR’s hosted by member agencies.

We have been encouraged by progress since the consultative meeting, which was reinforced by a recent meeting of the Global WASH Cluster, where most agencies were represented and to which key WASH donors also participated in Oslo last month. We have, as a member of the SAG, fed into the drafting of the new WASH strategy about to be finalised and endorsed.

**Conclusion:**

We see the recent developments as an opportunity to increase our influence on the WASH cluster momentum and direction, and better positioning of IFRC among fellow WASH providers at all levels. As a major Global WASH providor in emergencies, we feel we have much value to add to the improvement process of WASH response overall. Operationally, when WASH clusters are activated; we have a greater opportunity to influence better coordination and IFRC/RC/RC positioning.

We see the potential of IFRC hosting WASH positions, under our own terms and funded outwith the UN system as a significant move forward especially in the sense that full funding of those positions will not burden our existing funding sources.

If the hosting of these positions (which will be recruited and contracted by IFRC and open to NS staff) proves practical and fruitful, future expansion or direct funding arrangements may become feasible not only for key positions, but other WASH related activities such as further WASH related research and development.

WatSan/EH Unit, Geneva, 8th May 2011.