ICVA Summary Report

Experts Workshop: Taking Forward the Grand Bargain Workstream on Simplified and Harmonized Reporting

Geneva, 18 November 2016

On 18 November Germany and ICVA co-hosted at the German Mission in Geneva an experts workshop on reporting. The purpose of this workshop was to: 1) bring together key stakeholders up to date on the latest research by the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), and 2) to develop a plan of action.

Present for the presentation and discussion were representatives from
- donor perspectives: Australia, Canada, ECHO, Germany, the UK, and the United States (USAID/OFDA),
- UN agency perspectives: FAO, ICRC, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO;
- NGO perspectives: ICVA, NRC, and SCHR, and
- A think tank: the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi).

Summary Discussion

1. After initial introduction, objectives for the session were laid out, which included a) to listen and respond to the GPPi presentation of the Harmonized Donor Reporting paper, and b) identify agreement on next steps to carry forward the effort to implement harmonized reporting.

2. We had a very good presentation from GPPi, which also prompted very positive discussion. For those who were unable to attend, please refer to the completed report and presentation.

3. Participants recognized that the depth of evidence included in the GPPi study coincided well with the previous Less Paper More Aid (LPMA) work, and further emphasized the potential benefits of harmonizing and simplifying reporting.

4. The discussion and Q&A following the presentation was generally positive, with most participants finding the study well completed and helpful to better understand the reporting situation. Participants also supported the further development of the "10+3" reporting model outlined in the GPPi paper as the recommended option for moving forward. It was also agreed that further work is needed to determine whether report harmonization should focus on a common template, or more flexible guidelines, and which solution is more feasible for stakeholders.

5. Although there was general consensus to move forward with the report harmonization workstream, a number of linked concerns and issues were highlighted for attention. These included:

    a. Informal reporting, as identified in the GPPi report and LPMA, is an issue that clearly places a burden on staff but is not yet fully understood in terms of cause, frequency, and time burden on staff. To ensure that reporting mechanisms are truly simplified, it is important to better understand the role of informal reporting.

    b. In addition to the content of reporting, frequency is also a serious issue to consider. Different types of projects may require different frequency of reporting (e.g. short term emergency vs. longer-term transitional work). Risk levels identified in Partner assessments may also affect frequency.

    c. Representatives from several government donors identified the issue of legislative or legal requirements on reporting that could affect their ability to harmonize or simplify formats.

    d. Although the focus of the workshop was on operational or narrative reporting, the need to consider financial reporting was raised, and how that might be included in the harmonization efforts. Ongoing transparency work under the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was raised as a point to consider. Government donors (UK and Netherlands to date) may increasingly require reporting through the IATI framework. Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) was also identified as another system to be considered by the reporting workstream.

    e. The ongoing rollout of the new Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) was mentioned by some to have potential implications on the framework for reporting.

    f. Although there is current momentum on the report harmonization workstream, there is a need to be mindful of the link to the broader humanitarian project management cycle – PCA, proposal, design, etc. – to ensure harmonization efforts appropriately touch across these elements.

6. Following the discussion of the GPPi presentation, participants were invited to share any other key items they are currently working on that might have a connection to the work on reporting harmonization. A number of relevant workstreams were identified, however, two key areas were raised repeatedly:

    a. There is an ongoing shift toward multi-year planning, localization / AAP and budgeting. This is a significant change from previous grant agreements in the humanitarian field, which are typically for less than one year. Such a shift would likely have some implication on both frequency and content of reporting.

    b. It was widely reported across participants that internal revisions are currently underway to adjust reporting formats and frequency. That fact that such revisions

are already underway internally makes it even more critical to undertake a multilateral effort to harmonize reporting before individual organizations complete their work.

Key Outcomes – Next Steps

1. In the short term, it is important for key stakeholders to review the GPPi study – particularly the "10+3 template" proposal for harmonized reporting – and provide feedback to ICVA. Feedback received by the end of December will have the greatest impact on next steps.

2. Germany will likewise solicit feedback on the GPPi study from the GHD forum.

3. Based on the recommendations from the GPPi study and feedback from stakeholders, ICVA, Germany, and GPPi will develop the framework for a reporting pilot project in January. Donors and implementing partners who have an interest in participating in the pilot project should contact ICVA.

4. Key questions to be considered by the pilot project could include:

   a. What is the appropriate level of report harmonization (guidelines or template)?

   b. What common content is most appropriate to harmonize across donors?

   c. What is the most appropriate reporting frequency based on project type, duration, and risk?

   d. How can both formal and informal reporting be simplified with an overall reduced burden on field staff?

   e. Which workstreams need to be considered alongside report harmonization (IATI/transparency, financial reporting, CHS, etc.)?

   f. Other to be determined based on stakeholder input.

5. Following the development of the pilot project in January, stakeholders will be reconvened virtually to take stock of the planned pilot and be updated on progress every two months (or an appropriate agreed frequency).