

Recommendations for Strengthening the IASC Mechanism and Process

Introduction:

The IASC process should be viewed as both a mechanism for interagency cooperation and a consultative decision-making forum. So far, there has been a tendency to ignore the fact that a significant part of IASC decisions are taken through consultative processes, outside the IASC meetings. This process needs to be given a special recognition. Much of the dissatisfaction of members is related more to the process of meetings than with the concept itself.

The following brief analysis of the problem and recommendations relate both to the IASC and IASC-WG and aims to improve the IASC mechanism as a whole and not just the meetings.

1. Problems:

- IASC meetings often take up issues for which there are other more appropriate fora.
- There are no established criteria for selecting agenda items of meetings.
- The agenda has been set mainly by the IASC Secretariat, with little involvement of IASC members as a whole.
- Agenda items are identified and selected in an ad hoc way.
- There has been an absence of field participation.
- There is a lack of commitment to the IASC process by members.
- Agenda items tend to be more of information sharing nature than decision-oriented.
- There are too many meetings of too long duration.
- Too much time is spent in subsidiary group meetings.
- Not all members of IASC are engaged.
- Informal consultative processes for managing crises do not include important operational actors, (e.g. non-intergovernmental organizations).
- There is a general perception that the IASC is essentially a series of meetings rather than a mechanism.
- The IASC is not recognized as a major contributor to interagency policy shaping.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 Formulating the IASC-WG and IASC Meeting Agenda

2.11 Criteria for the Agenda of the IASC Plenary Meeting:

- The agenda should focus on major policy issues, operational issues, humanitarian principles, guidelines and procedures in the humanitarian field.
- The IASC agenda should be substantive in nature and targeted to produce concrete decisions.
- IASC members may wish to consider adopting one thematic issue for each of its meetings.
- The IASC should provide guidance to the IASC-WG by mapping out broad humanitarian areas for the working group to focus on in the coming year.
- The IASC advocates, as appropriate, recommendations of the IASC-WG.
- It allocates responsibilities among agencies in humanitarian programmes.
- The IASC should provide arbitration where no consensus can be reached at the IASC-WG level.

2.12 Criteria for what is included on the Agenda of the IASC-WG:

- An agenda item should be an issue which requires a decision.
- Issues should be formulated in a manner that leads to decisions.
- Issues that cannot be resolved in other fora or bilaterally between agencies should be brought to the working group.
- Issues should be relevant for the majority of IASC members.

- In general, agenda items should be those that do not require immediate action, e.g. reviews, evaluations; (exceptions may be made where issues to be addressed immediately coincide with meeting).
- Meetings should address issues of a global nature; (country issues should generally be addressed at country level and in HQ interagency fora that meet on an adhoc basis, to allow IASC-WG to focus on global/generic overarching issues).

2.13 Inputs to the agenda include:

2.131 Items from the annual work plan should provide a principle source of agenda items.

2.132 The IASC-WG has agreed to a number of standing items for the agenda. However the WG may decide not to consider a standing item if no action is required. Present standing items are:

- Specific issues relating to IDPs; (IASC-WG only);
- Review of action on previous IASC meeting decisions;
- One (max) in-depth country review (situation, strategy, coordination, policy) (as needed); (IASC-WG only);
- Agreement on future agenda and timing of IASC and IASC-WG meetings/house-keeping matters.

2.133 IASC members may ask to include an item on the agenda.

2.134 Humanitarian Coordinators should be an important source of agenda items ensuring a closer link with the field. The Secretariat should approach all HCs before WG meetings asking for suggested agenda items.

2.14 Examples of other agenda items:

- Security of staff;
- Advocacy role of the IASC;
- Coordination problems: Lessons learned in e.g. Kosovo, E.T., Angola;
- Feedback on OCHA's coordinating services to member agencies of IASC;
- Respect for international humanitarian law: principles, rules of engagement, access;
- Sanctions viz humanitarian action;
- In-depth review of country operations;
- Selection/training of HC/RCs;
- Theme for Year 2000.

2.15 The IASC-WG should be prepared to call off meetings if there are no agenda items.

2.2 Participation:

- Representation at IASC-WG should be decision-makers at Director of Emergency level.
- Representation at IASC should be at Principals level (as already established in the TOR).
- Continuity of participation should be ensured (avoid changing representatives wherever possible).

2.3 Procedures:

- Papers prepared by members for agenda items, should be circulated 10 working days in advance.
- Items may be dropped if no paper is prepared in time, unless decision points are provided.
- Papers to include suggested decisions to be taken.
- To the extent possible and where appropriate, ensure that consultative process is inclusive.
- System should be developed for tracking decisions of an IASC nature taken outside the IASC-WG meetings to ensure linkage between formal and informal consultations; (matrix to be prepared and shared with IASC members).
- There should be clear reporting lines, roles, "sunset" clauses, for subsidiary bodies of the IASC.
- The work plans for subsidiary bodies should be coordinated with the work of IASC-WG.

- Seek to avoid proliferation of subsidiary bodies, utilizing wherever possible existing bodies to take on new tasks and phasing out completed tasks.
- Subsidiary groups should not replace substantive discussions taking place in the IASC-WG.
- There should be increased use of electronic means of consultation, provided it is not at the expense of inclusiveness.

2.5 Frequency of meetings:

- Reduce the frequency of IASC-WG meetings from 6 to a maximum of 4 per year;
- Maintain the frequency of IASC at 2 per year;
- Schedule IASC meetings back-to-back with ACC meetings (to be put forward to principles for consideration);
- Reduce duration of IASC-WG meetings from 2 to 1 day only, with possibility of informal preparatory meetings evening before, as necessary;

2.6 Consultative Process

- Crisis management using modern communication, including teleconferencing should include all operational players.
- When ECHA agenda is sent to IASC members, the ERC could invite comments from IASC agencies who are not ECHA members which could then be fed into the ECHA meeting by the ERC.
- The Secretariat should monitor decision made by the ERC and elsewhere outside of IASC meetings which are of interest to IASC members and summarise them in a matrix which would be reviewed by agencies before IASC meetings.
- Joint operational decisions need to be communicated to the IASC.

NB: As there was no consensus that a proposal for an executive committee for the IASC should be discussed at the IASC-WG, the WFP has requested that this issue be taken up by the Principals.

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