

IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team – Meeting Notes

15 April 2015

Co-Chairs: Lisa Doughten (OCHA/CERF), Cecilia Roselli (ICVA)

Agenda

1. Update on Objective 4 on Transparency (FTS)
2. Update on HPC information services project, including FTS (OCHA/PSB)
3. Follow up on previous action points: PFWG membership and workplan (FCS)
4. CERF/CBPF reporting alignment (CERF and FCS)
5. Any other business

1. Update on Objective 4 on Transparency

Lisa Walmsley, OCHA/PSB, gave an update on Objective 4 of the Task Team’s workplan: “Improve transparency through strengthening empirical knowledge base on funding flows.” Nicolas Rost, OCHA/CERF and Task Team secretariat, gave an update on Activity 4.3, to “create an online inter-agency repository of humanitarian financing studies and analyses.” As the CERF secretariat already has an internal list of humanitarian financing documents and as OCHA’s Funding Coordination Section was planning to create a similar repository, the best way forward is to create one joint repository for all three. OCHA’s Information Services Branch was approached for technical solutions, and suggested to create the repository on ReliefWeb’s humanitarian financing page (<http://reliefweb.int/topics/humanitarian-financing>) and then link to it from other relevant pages, including the Task Team’s space on the new IASC website. Discussions are underway, and OCHA will keep the Task Team informed about further developments.

Ms Walmsley, on Activity 4.1, to “explore synergies between the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team,” said that initial discussions had taken place with representatives of the IATI Secretariat around the proposal to build a humanitarian extension of the IATI standard, which currently mostly focuses on development financing. OCHA’s Programme Support Branch (PSB) met with the IATI secretariat in January 2015, and they agreed to build a humanitarian extension by June 2015.

Ms Walmsley, on Activity 4.2, to “convene a technical sub-group and agree on three concrete steps to improve IASC reporting in FTS,” said that the sub-group had not been convened yet. Given that we are keen to focus on user needs around data exchange/entry on the one hand and data publication and presentation on the other, it might make sense to split the activity in two groups as these are likely to appeal to different professional functions within agencies..

2. Update on HPC information services project, including FTS

Nick Imboden, OCHA/PSB, briefed the Task Team on an OCHA project to upgrade information services around the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC). The objective is to build systems that

better link data streams. This will allow for better tracking of humanitarian financing data, as well as the activities funded and the impact they have. This, however, is only a technical solution. In addition, OCHA is working to review and revise workflows related to the HPC, including the Financial Tracking Service (FTS).

The project will take place during 2015 and 2016, using a staggered approach with two phases. The first priority is to upgrade the FTS front end, i.e., the website. The aim is to release a new version by June 2015. As a next step, the FTS back end, i.e., the database, will be upgraded. Aid agencies and others have expressed dissatisfaction with the way that FTS data is currently managed, although people noted that FTS is a valuable – and the only – source of near-real-time and comprehensive humanitarian financing data.

The new website will be easier to navigate, with more options for visualization, and data will be easy to download.

This is an iterative process. In June 2015, a beta version of the new FTS website will be launched, which will then be improved over the next one-and-a-half years, in line with feedback from stakeholders.

On the back-end, the plan is to replace the entire current Online Project System (OPS). In contrast to the old Consolidated Appeals Process, countries can now customize the way they develop strategic response plans (SRPs). This flexibility will be built into the new online system.

One key issue will be to address the ‘matching problem’, i.e. how to match donor contributions to SRP projects or activities, which is currently one of the main activities of FTS. In addition, FTS will exchange data with donors, agencies, and others in a more standardized, automated way, e.g., by using the standard of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). This will make it easier to update projects, in contrast to the current OPS approach, where projects are updated only once or twice a year. This system will be released in about a year, in time for the 2017 planning cycle.

Mr Imboden asked that anybody interested in this project answer an online survey. The link and additional information will be shared after the meeting.

Kate McGrane, NRC, asked how the feedback will be provided. Mr Imboden said that initially both the current and the new beta FTS website will be available. Anybody will be invited to provide feedback, including directly via the new website. Cecilia Roselli, ICVA and co-chair of the Task Team, asked whether NGOs had been consulted. Mr Imboden said that some NGOs had already been consulted and that further consultations will take place. Ms Roselli said that NGOs had several concerns about information management and the tracking of humanitarian financing data. Rachel Criswell, World Vision, said that World Vision appreciated the project. Several similar processes are underway, e.g., the UNHCR partner portal. Thus, it is important to create links between these different processes. Mr Imboden asked that anybody who had information about similar processes share these to OCHA. OCHA is already talking to UNHCR about the HPC information services project. Darla Silva, UNICEF, said that UNICEF had tried to improve its FTS reporting over the past year. However, there was often a delay between UNICEF reporting data to FTS and the data appearing on the FTS website. Ms Silva also asked about how to show carry-over funding on FTS. Mr Imboden said where possible, data exchange would be automated (where not, facilitated) to reduce the delay in

reporting funding. Ms Walmsley said she would follow up on how carry-over was displayed on FTS. Mateusz Buzcek, OCHA/CERF, asked about the availability of agency data. Some agencies report regularly and comprehensively, others do not. Thus, FTS should ensure that all humanitarian agencies report all their humanitarian funding on a monthly basis. Ms Walmsley said the project was not only about the technical aspect of fixing the website and database but also about reviewing workflows and encouraging participation by all aid agencies. UNDP said it would be good to have a dialogue with agencies that are weaker on reporting to find solutions that work for all agencies, e.g., quarterly reports may be more feasible than monthly reports. Ms Roselli said that a better website and database could create incentives, increase ownership and that it was important also to have an ongoing dialogue.

3. Follow up on previous action points: PFWG membership and workplan

Lisa Doughten, OCHA/CERF and co-chair of the Task Team, said that the terms of reference of the Pooled Fund Working Group (PFWG) had been shared with the Task Team again. Juan Chaves, OCHA/FCS, said that the PFWG had several key functions: It provides policy advice on country-based pooled funds at the global level, it provides advice on the management of pooled funds, and it tackles concrete issues at the country level as they arise.

The PFWG's workplan includes activities on partnerships between UN agencies and implementing partners, complementarity between CBPFs and other funding mechanisms, accountability, and the harmonization of donor requirements. A PFWG task force developed the workplan which was then shared with the PFWG for comments. The deadline for comments is today.

The new co-chair of the PFWG, in addition to OCHA, is Ireland, taking over from Norway. In addition to the co-chairs, the PFWG's members include the donors that contribute funding to pooled funds, three UN agencies and three NGO. There are ten UN agencies on the PFWG mailing list: IOM, FAO, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund office, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, WFP, and WHO. Thus, all relevant UN agencies receive information on the PFWG. Depending on the agenda items, all relevant agencies are invited to participate, to provide substantive contributions to the agenda items.

Ms Criswell said that it would be helpful if the agenda could be reviewed for feedback ahead of meetings, either in the Task Team or the NGO/CBPF platform meetings. Ms Doughten said that an ad hoc meeting of the Task Team could be organized, as has been done in the past. Mr Chaves, in response to a question from Ms Silva, clarified that all UN agencies could attend PFWG meetings, if agenda items are relevant to them. Marina Skuric Prodanovic, UNFPA, said that it was still not clear how the three UN agencies would be selected, and the co-chairs of the PFWG should provide guidance. Monika Brühlhart, UNHCR, said that it was up to the UN agencies to decide which agencies would attend PFWG meetings. Those that attend should brief the others. Ms Roselli said that the platform meeting would take place during the same week (Monday 15 in the afternoon) in June as the next PFWG meeting. ICVA Humanitarian Financing WG offers an opportunity to further discuss the PFWG agenda in advance. Mr Chaves agreed that UN Agencies should discuss among themselves to agree which agencies would participate and bring up issues during PFWG meetings as agreed with other UN agencies. This would be in line with the terms of reference, which do not specify a strict or rotational mechanism but allow for flexibility. If UN agencies still had concerns, these could be discussed with the co-chairs or at the next PFWG meeting. Shannon Howard, WFP, said it would be

better to agree among UN agencies rather than escalate the issue co-chairs or the PFWG. Ms Doughten suggested that UN agencies continue this discussion outside of the Task Team.

4. CERF/CBPF reporting alignment

Mr Rost briefed the Task Team on progress on Activity 1.4 of the Task Team’s workplan, to “explore options to align pooled fund (CBPF and CERF) reporting in SRP countries.” The CERF secretariat and FCS compared the three reporting mechanisms and found that they serve different purposes, have different objectives, are carried out at different levels, and each requires a different level of detail. SRP reporting, which is usually done in Periodic Monitoring Reports, takes place at the ‘strategic’ or emergency-wide level, and the objective is an overview of the overall humanitarian response. CBPF reporting focuses on individual projects by individual organizations. CERF reporting includes project results as well, and also a ‘chapeau’ section on the overall CERF application. As a result of these differences, there is not much overlap between the three reporting mechanisms, and thus it will not be possible to replace them with a single reporting framework. However, there are two opportunities for greater alignment: Pooled fund reporting should be aligned to SRP reporting as much as possible, and the contribution of pooled funds to the humanitarian response should be reflected in Periodic Monitoring Reports, as per their guidelines. Second, CBPF and CERF reporting templates can be more closely aligned, even if they cannot be identical. For instance, they should use the same terminology, structure, categories, etc. The CERF secretariat will revise its reporting template in the coming weeks, which will be an opportunity to achieve greater alignment of pooled fund reporting.

These findings are described in a paper, which was drafted by CERF and FCS, shared with the activity contributors and the CERF focal points of UN agencies, and then shared with the Task Team. Only UNICEF provided comments, saying that there should be a single reporting framework pegged to the SRP, instead of three processes. CERF and FCS believe that – given the differences listed above – this is neither possible nor desirable: More details would be required in SRP reporting, which would increase the reporting burden for all stakeholders.

Mr Chaves added that CERF and FCS had aligned the budget categories for applications and reports in line with the agreed UNDG categories. Alignment between CBPFs and SRP processes has been strengthened, for instance, the online grant management system for CBPFs allows to link CBPF activities to SRP objectives.

Caterina Galluzzi, WFP, introduced herself as David Matern’s interim replacement while he was with the HLP secretariat. WFP would appreciate more clarity about the methodology of the comparison between the reporting processes. For instance, have field offices been consulted? WFP welcomed the potential alignment of timing in reporting, and asked for more details. Ms McGrane asked why financial reporting was not included in the paper. She also asked about the CERF after-action review. Ms Silva said that it was still UNICEF’s position that it would be better to have a single reporting framework rather than three separate streams. She also noted that there was more back-and-forth in recent years for both CERF and CBPF applications.

Mr Rost said that field offices had not been consulted, however, the CERF secretariat and FCS had used their experience with pooled fund reporting processes, as well as lessons learned listed in CERF

reports. Thus, the review was based on solid evidence. The CERF secretariat can be flexible in adjusting its reporting deadline if that helps country teams to align CERF reporting with reporting on SRPs or potentially CHF standard allocations. Financial reporting is done separately from the substantial reporting by UN agencies' headquarters and therefore not included in the comparison. The CERF after-action review should help country teams to collect evidence and information for a report and kick off the reporting process. Ms Doughten said that UN and NGO focal points should share drafts with field colleagues for comments.

Mr Chaves said that all reporting templates and guidance for CBPFs were part of the new CBPF guidelines and thus everyone has had an opportunity to provide comments over the past year. FCS was open to making further improvements to templates as required. He said that aligning reporting deadlines for individual CBPF projects could be difficult, as each project has a different end-date. As the three reporting streams serve different purposes and objectives, they should be aligned as far as possible (in terms of definitions, terminology, categories, etc.). However, they cannot be fully merged.

Any other business

Ms Doughten said this was her last meeting as co-chair before her maternity leave and that Ms Silva would take over as co-chair.

Antoine Gerard, Deputy Director of OCHA's Coordination and Response Division, will cover as Chief of the CERF secretariat during Ms Doughten's maternity leave.

Ms Doughten informed the Task Team that the UN Development Group, the High-Level Committee on Management, and the Finance and Budget Network had discussed harmonizing cost recovery procedures for pooled funds. A Task Team, led by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund office, was established to develop options for applying a 7 per cent or 8 per cent cost recovery to pooled funds depending on their governance and administration. The paper should be under consideration and adoption by HLCM by June. The MPTF office is also updating the Standard Administrative Arrangement (SAA) that is signed between donors and the MPTF Office for contributions to MDTFs and Joint Programmes. Eight of the biggest pooled fund donors have been involved in the process, which is due to conclude also in June. The discussions are on-going in the Joint Funding Task Team within the UNDG structure. The SAA also is applicable to Common Humanitarian Funds, however, there may be some modifications to certain provisions for these funds.

Mr Rost said that the Task Team's mid-year retreat was planned for Tuesday, 16 June, during the ECOSOC week in Geneva. The retreat will take place from 10am to 3pm in the ICVA office.

Julie Belanger, chief of the secretariat of the High-Level Panel for Humanitarian Financing, thanked the Task Team for sharing the 'Future Humanitarian Financing' report. Almost all Panel members have been confirmed, and they will likely be announced in the next few days.

In addition to the four current members of the HLP secretariat – Ms Belanger, Hiroko Araki of UNHCR, Tensai Asfaw of OCHA, and David Matern of WFP – one secondee from UNICEF and one from Denmark will join the secretariat. The secretariat will share a list of its staff and responsibilities with the Task Team next week. Ms Doughten said that the Task Team was looking forward to working closely with the HLP secretariat.

Ms Roselli asked about an update on the study on the Global NGO Facility. Mr Chaves said that there were some delays with issuing the contract for Lydia Poole, the consultant who will conduct the study on the Global NGO Facility. She has already done some preliminary work. A first draft of the report should be available within 6 weeks of 2 months, and will be shared with the Task Team.

Ms Roselli said that the ICVA study on donor conditions had been finalized and could be presented soon. It will be a 'living document', which will be updated, for instance to reflect the new UNICEF PCA procedures and the updated OCHA CBPF guidelines. Ms Doughten said that the May meeting will focus on the Task Team's work on donor conditions.

Mirja Peters, IASC secretariat, introduced the new IASC staff. Ms Peters has replaced Katja Laurila; Tanja Schümer has replaced Manisha Thomas. She said no comments had been received from the IASC Working Group on the Task Team's workplan so it can be considered as final and approved by the Working Group. Task Teams should continue to provide inputs to the IASC newsletter. The new IASC website will be 'soft-launched' soon, and Ms Peters thanked the Task Team for already updating the new website.

Participants

Location	Name	Agency	
New York	Hiroko Araki	HLP secretariat	
	Tensai Asfaw	HLP secretariat	
	Julie Belanger	OCHA/HLP secretariat	
	Mateusz Buczek	OCHA/CERF	
	Juan Chaves	OCHA/FCS	
	Lisa Doughten (co-chair)	OCHA/CERF	
	Shannon Howard	WFP	
	Taija Kontinen	UNDP	
	Christelle Loupforest	IASC secretariat	
	David Matern	HLP secretariat	
	Mirja Peters	IASC secretariat	
	Nicolas Rost (secretariat)	OCHA/CERF	
	Darla Silva	UNICEF	
	Geneva	Monika Brühlhart	UNHCR
		Nick Imboden	OCHA/PSB
Kate McGrane		NRC	
Jordan Menkveld		IOM	
Cecilia Roselli (co-chair)		ICVA	
Tanja Schümer		IASC secretariat	
By phone/Webex	Lisa Walmsley	OCHA/FTS	
	Rachel Criswell	World Vision	
	Caterina Galluzzi	WFP	
	Mirela Hasibra	FAO	
	Caroline Hotham	Start Network	
	Paulette Jones	WFP	
	Joanna Purcell	WFP	
Marina Skuric Prodanovic	UNFPA		