IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

Reference Group for Gender in Humanitarian Action

Executive Summary
Review of the IASC 2008 Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action Policy Statement

I. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the review, called for by the IASC's Gender Reference Group (IASC GRG) in its annual meeting of 2014, is to look at how: i) the *IASC 2008 Gender Policy* strategic objectives have, or have not been reflected in the policy directives and operational guidance of the IASC and its membership; ii) the measures taken to date by the IASC leadership, its members and the humanitarian coordination mechanisms at the global and field levels to promote and protect the human rights of women, girls, boys and men in humanitarian action; and iii) the key components of gender equality programming that support effective humanitarian response and sustainable humanitarian outcomes, as defined by the Gender Policy itself, and how these have been successfully implemented.

The report includes a set of recommendations that are founded on normative frameworks and functional responsibilities of IASC members. The adoption of these recommendations affords the IASC a unique opportunity to affect a fundamental change in the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women for more effective and accountable humanitarian action to be taken forward in the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016. The review provides a foundation for the amendment of the existing policy development of an Accountability Framework as was originally prescribed in the policy.

The following methodology was used for the review:
- An in-depth desk analysis of the available/accessible IASC documentation and products;
- A series of face to face interviews with IASC member agency representatives and other IASC stakeholders – including the Subsidiary Body and Global Cluster representatives.
- Telephone interviews with a select number of field-based Humanitarian Coordinators and/or their representatives representing the following humanitarian crises typology: conflict, natural disaster, refugees, sudden onset disaster and protracted crisis.
- An online survey targeting the Cluster Leads and Cluster Coordinators in the selected field countries.
- Development of the report with support from a GRG Steering Group made up of UN Women, OXFAM, OCHA and CARE International.

Analysis of the results were inevitably constrained by the limitations derived from the challenge of balancing the personal views of the interviewees with the information solicited, and the fact that no field missions were undertaken during the implementation of the review, as it was not part of the methodology.

II. Key Findings of the Review

1.   IASC Leadership and the Integration of Gender in Humanitarian Action: An in-depth desk review of documentation issued by or on behalf of the IASC and conclusive discussions on achievements of, and challenges facing gender mainstreaming, revealed an inconsistency in the way the three key variables of the IASC 2008 Gender Policy – gender, age and diversity – are addressed and incorporated in directives, concepts, operational guidelines and position papers, and in reports of regular or *ad hoc* meetings issued by the various structures of the IASC. This is manifested as differing definitions, partial omission and even total omission of any reference to gender equality and women's empowerment in the documentation. In effect, there is a dissonance between the way that the IASC member agencies have addressed the integration of gender into their own respective individual agency's corporate policies, strategic objectives and humanitarian programming when compared to the outputs of the IASC which – as mentioned – are inconsistent or even remiss. This is despite the fact that the same individual agencies are making up the IASC membership and leadership.

2.   Strengthening Humanitarian Response and gender Mainstreaming

The IASC Transformative Agenda (TA): When launched in 2012, the TA identified leadership, coordination, accountability, capacity building for preparedness and advocacy/communications as key areas for humanitarian action. Despite the IASC Gender Policy explicitly setting out that "*gender equality [should be] addressed adequately in all aspects of the IASC's work and… overall coordination and norm setting functions"*, the review of various documents issued as part of operationalizing the TA - including its Action Plan - revealed that gender was given limited consideration. Requests by the Gender SWG for the IASC Working Group's support in raising the profile of gender in evolving TA discussions and the shaping of tools and outcomes, were seemingly not heeded.

IASC Thematic Priorities: Of the IASC thematic priorities issued in 2013, only the documentation relating to AAP/PSEA made specific reference to gender and age. The omission of gender in the IASC Priority Document on humanitarian financing was particularly unfortunate given its stated objective of improving the current funding architecture and providing aid to those who most need it. Also, given that is only the thematic priority focused Task Teams that report directly to the IASC Working Group (WG), the gender subsidiary body – now a Reference Group – does not have systematic access and input into ongoing work of the WG. As such, the opportunity to ensure that gender considerations are effectively integrated in the process of developing and implementing TA directives and guidelines aiming to strengthen humanitarian response was missed.

3.   *Operational Guidance*: The IASC Gender Policy refers to the responsibility of the IASC Working Group of ensuring that gender equality is incorporated in its operational guidelines. The *Operational Guidance for Cluster Leads* spells out the need for sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) while omits explicit reference to gender, or to women and men and refers to diversity without defining the term. The *Operational Guidance for Cluster Coordinators* instead refers to gender and other cross cutting issues (defined as age, environment, HIV/ AIDS, and human right) but refers to data in general terms. The *Cluster Performance Monitoring Guidelines* also explicitly refers to gender and age as cross-cutting issues in needs assessment and strategic planning. The *2014 IASC Guidance for Operational Peer Review* (OPR) omits explicit reference to mainstreaming gender, or to SADD although refers to appropriate gender representation. The OPR field reports reveal differences in the way gender is integrated voicing the concern over lack or limited SADD and the way it has affected gender mainstreaming.

4.   Integrating Gender in Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC): The HPC is integral to the IASC TA and provides for a single approach and response framework covering preparedness, needs assessment, strategic planning, monitoring, operational peer review and evaluation. Overall there is limited - if any - reference in these guidance documents to the humanitarian imperative to support gender equality and women's empowerment programming at the country level. For example, the *2014 IASC Guidance for Operational Peer Review* which refers to "*appropriate gender and geographical representation*' in respect of team composition, otherwise omits explicit reference to mainstreaming gender and other cross-cutting issues, or to SADD. Similarly, the *IASC HPC Revised Guidance Tools for 2015* do not include explicit reference to gender, age, diversity, other cross-cutting issues or SADD.

Humanitarian Needs Assessment Task Force (NATF), its strategy and work-plan explicitly refer to the importance of addressing "*the needs of vulnerable groups…..and address cross cutting issues such as gender, HIV and age*". Related tools including *Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments* and the *Multi –Cluster/ Sector Initial Rapid Assessment* (MIRA) include reference to gender, age, GBV, and gender balance in assessment teams. However the NATF mid-year update omits explicit reference to gender and cross cutting issues in the presentation of the activities and field missions in 12 countries and the Pacific as well as the 2012 MIRA Summary issued as a TA Reference Document omits mention of gender, age, diversity etc.

Conversely, the 2015 IASC Guidance for the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the 2014 IASC Guidance for Strategic Response Planning explicitly refer to the necessity of incorporating various gender related tools and

approaches, including gender analysis and the use of SADD. This inconsistency in the operational guidance is borne out by analysis of the outcome documents developed in the implementation of the HPC process   The accessible HNOs and the SRPs of the field countries covered by the current Review reveal significant variations in the extent to which these documents include an adequate level of gender analysis and the demonstrated collection and use of SADD. The SRPs in particular generally omit explicit mention of gender mainstreaming or gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition the *Humanitarian Dashboards* which are designed to facilitate analysis and strategic programming omit explicit reference to gender, age, diversity and SADD.

5.   **Accountability and Minimum Standards for Integrating Gender in Humanitarian Action**

IASC Members and Accountability: Accountability for mainstreaming gender has been taken on board by the IASC member organizations.   The IASC member organizations include reference to accountability to gender mainstreaming in their respective strategic objectives, and as such have internal regulations in place specifying staff accountability for mainstreaming gender. Indeed, accountability for gender mainstreaming in the UN system is linked to the *United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP*), requiring mandatory reporting on the part of UN agencies to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UNWOMEN), the designated custodian of SWAP. Despite this function, however, UNWOMEN has had its application for IASC membership denied. Although, the in-depth desk review indicates that UN –SWAP may apply to both development and humanitarian interventions, it does not appear to be a paramount consideration within the IASC stakeholder community.

IASC Leadership and Accountability: The IASC Gender Policy states that the *"IASC Working Group is, through the co-chairs of the IASC Sub-Working Group on gender in Humanitarian Action, responsible for developing an accountability framework for monitoring the implementation of this policy and review its content every 5 years"*. Crucially, this task was never undertaken and no institutional memory exists of why this is the case. Despite the 2012 IASC TA identifies accountability as a key cornerstone, citing mutual accountability 'within and between the HC, HCT members, Cluster Coordinators and other cluster partners, based on a clear, concise, time-bound and results-oriented strategy to deliver' it does not mention the IASC 2008 Gender Policy or the Accountability Framework contained within. Neither does the TA mention UN SWAP, even though SWAP is intended to also cover humanitarian action through its UN members.

Minimum Standards for Gender Mainstreaming: Though the 2008 IASC Gender Equality Policy does not explicitly refer to 'minimum standards' for gender equality programming, there is reference to 'international norms and standards that lay the foundation for gender equality in all areas of humanitarian action', and for applying 'common standards' in gender capacity building. IASC Members, as well as other non-IASC humanitarian agencies and networks, have issued position papers and reviews on minimum standards in humanitarian action. For example, the 2010 *Review of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse -* commissioned by the IASC - defines Minimum Operating Standards (MOS) supported by key indicators. The IASC 2012 Gender Marker Tip Sheets also call for minimum commitments for gender programming in thematic and sector areas. The IASC Global Protection Cluster contributed to the 2012 Minimum Inter-Agency Standards for Protection Mainstreaming. It indicates that '*all humanitarian actors are expected to mainstream protection in their humanitarian assistance activities covering assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation*', and includes reference to addressing gender discrimination and gender inequality in core standards underlying humanitarian response activities.

6.   **IASC Subsidiary Bodies -** *Task Teams & Reference Groups:* With the reorganisation to the current IASC architecture, what was previously the Gender SWG was - in July 2013 - reclassified as the *IASC Reference Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action* (referred to as the Gender Reference Group - GRG). By definition this downgraded its status and authority compared with that of the former Gender SWG, which had been prescribed in the Gender Policy an important role to "provide guidance and support to all bodies and structures of the IASC to be able to incorporate gender equality into relevant aspects of their work". This role included the development and oversight of the accountability framework. In effect, the IASC leadership signalled that gender is not an IASC thematic priority.

A review of the TORs of the other IASC Subsidiary Bodies indicate that gender is generally not reflected in their annual work plans, despite the policy statement explicitly stating they should do so. Indeed, there are discernible inconsistencies in the way the Subsidiary Bodies address and incorporate gender, age, diversity and SADD in their working documents. Discussions with IASC TTs and other Reference Groups representatives also reveal some ambivalence regarding the role of the GRG, stating that they are not very familiar with the GRG TORs and how the GRG actually works and are unclear how cooperation with the GRG is to be put in place – despite the policy stating that each subsidiary body nominate a focal point to maintain contact with gender subsidiary body and to be responsible for ensuring gender equality programming into their respective subsidiary body's AWP.

7. **IASC Cluster System - *Global and Field Level Clusters:*** The IASC Gender Policy is explicit on responsibility for gender mainstreaming at the field level, stating that the TORs of the RC/HC, the HCT and the cluster/sector leads '*incorporate gender analysis and actions into programming, assessment and policy development'*, and that the '*needs of women and girls as well as men and boys are addressed*'. The GM country report template includes a section on '*cluster participation'* covering the cluster system's '*commitment to gender*', noting that country reports apply different terms to evaluate cluster commitment to gender. Moreover, desk review of accessible cluster system reports reveals that performance of the same cluster in respect of commitment to gender mainstreaming varies from one country to another. With the exception of the Logistics Cluster, the TORs for Cluster Coordinators posted on the pertinent global cluster websites for CCCM, Early Recovery, Protection, WASH make no mention of the use of SADD. Many examples show that there is no explicit mention of gender and/or age in strategy plans, training tools, guidance notes, needs assessments or thematic priorities (only 34% of the selected documentation).It is important to note that the IASC Operational Peer Reviews (OPRs) conclude that the gender mainstreaming in the cluster system is faced with a complexity of challenges that required to be addressed.

8. **Gender *Standby Capacity (GenCap) Project and Gender Marker:*** The GenCap Project initiated in 2007 by the IASC under the auspices of the (former) Gender SWG, in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to strengthen capacity for and leadership in mainstreaming gender in humanitarian interventions through the deployment of gender experts has enjoyed numerous successes including multi-dimensional support to GBV prevention and response, providing guidance on mainstreaming gender in HPC and SRP, the development of the IASC Gender Handbook and other effective tools. Contributing to gender mainstreaming. There have been recurrent challenges impacting on the implementation of the GenCap Project particularly with respect to institutionalizing tools and mechanisms for gender equality programming. These include securing adequate funding and the link with sustainability of gender expertise and knowhow following departure of GenCap Advisers. It is also noted that relying on GenCaps to steward the IASC Gender Marker takes up too much of the GenCap Advisers' time and can overshadow other required inputs and distract attention from capacity building.

The Gender Marker - application of which is mandatory in the IASC humanitarian structure - is deemed to offer benefits to the clusters and ultimately to the affected population through more gender responsive projects, more aid effectiveness and gender accountability to the donors, better tracking of gender related humanitarian investments etc. A particular characteristic of the IASC GM is that it is a tool focusing primarily on the project design level, and there are currently calls to further develop it to encompass project implementation. Analysis of results and lessons learnt from implementing the GM reveals that *'challenges identified in previous years of Gender Marker application have yet to be resolved'*; specifically in terms of 'sustainability', 'ownership and engagement', 'coding confusion', and 'the association of Gender with women's and girls' issues', as well as collection and analysis of SADD.

III.   Recommendations

1. Addressed to the IASC Leadership

1.1 Gender Responsive IASC Architecture
- Nominate UNWOMEN to join the IASC group of (UN) Full Members to provide the requisite capacity to ensure the adequate and consistent integration of gender into the work of the IASC;

- Ensure that the IASC's directives clearly and consistently spell out the requirements for effective gender equality programming both through gender mainstreaming and targeted actions based on gender analysis (as called for in the IASC 2008 Gender Policy)

1.2 Gender in Humanitarian Financing

- Advocate for adequate levels of humanitarian financing required to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action and to develop the necessary capacity across the humanitarian system;
- Integrate gender as a central facet of the work of the IASC Humanitarian Finance Task Team;
- Support further development of the Gender Marker to cover both project design and project implementation.

1.3 Status of the IASC Gender Subsidiary Body

- Accord the GRG the required status and authority to function as an in-house resource and technical support for mainstreaming gender in humanitarian action with the required human and financial resources to effectively fulfil this function;

1.4 Gender in the IASC Normative Framework

- A proposal for effective inclusion and monitoring of the IASC gender sensitized normative framework in strategic objectives and work plans of IASC Subsidiary Bodies and the Global Cluster System;
- A proposal for a strategic approach to integrating the IASC gender sensitized normative framework in the work of the field level cluster system, and inter-cluster coordination;

1.5 IASC Gender Policy

- The IASC Leadership to: Update the IASC Gender Policy Statement, with the aim of ensuring it is 'fit for purpose' and reflects current global humanitarian system, as well as strategic and operational approaches to integrating gender across all facets of humanitarian response, including guidance on minimum standards for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action.

1.6 Mobilizing IASC Stakeholder Community

The IASC Leadership to issue directives for IASC Subsidiary Bodies and the Global Cluster System to:

- Update their TORs and annual work plans to effectively mainstream gender in humanitarian action.
- Check the gender sensitivity of their strategic and operational documentation, and update as needed;
- Utilize the GRG as in-house technical support for mainstreaming gender in their strategic objectives;
- Designate a Focal Point for systematically liaising with the GRG.

1.7 Cross-Cutting Issues

The IASC Leadership to provide clear guidance on how cross-cutting issues are to be addressed in IASC strategic objectives, operational guidelines and other relevant IASC products:

- Designate 'gender' and 'age' as universal key social determinants, rather than being submerged in other cross-cutting issues and develop consensus on the IASC definition of diversity.

2. Establish the Accountability Framework to Monitor Implementation of the IASC Gender Policy

The IASC Leadership to develop an accountability framework based on the following:

- Define the roles and responsibilities to develop a robust working accountability framework to monitor progress towards the objective of the policy with measurable targets and related indicators.
- Establish the required reporting mechanisms and responsibilities for all relevant IASC stakeholders and ensure that these are included in their TOR as deliverables.
- Set up an IASC oversight committee to work with the GRG to audit the accountability framework.

3. Establish IASC Endorsed Minimum Standards on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Humanitarian Action

- Establish and disseminate minimum standards for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action that reflect the key objectives of the (updated) IASC Gender Policy, to be incorporated in the TORs of members of the IASC stakeholder community at global and field levels;

   4. Strengthening Capacity for Integrating Gender in Humanitarian Action
   With guidance from the IASC Leadership:

- Develop gender capacity requirements for the IASC Subsidiary Bodies and global and field level cluster systems.
- Require the mandatory participation of members of the IASC stakeholder community in the IASC gender e-learning course or its equivalent; and advocate for its inclusion in staff performance templates where this is not yet mandatory in IASC Full Member organizations and Standing Invitee agencies.[1]
- Require the mandatory inclusion of the (updated) IASC Gender Policy, IASC Gender Handbook and IASC Gender Marker Tip Sheets in induction and refresher courses for existing humanitarian staff in IASC member agencies.
- Incorporate the good practice document and minimum standards for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action in gender capacity training of members of the IASC stakeholder community at global and field levels (refresher and induction training courses); and state and non-state actors in the pertinent country targeted for humanitarian assistance.
- Disseminate the good practice document for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action for consideration by the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, as part of the IASC document package to be submitted to this global gathering.

IV. Conclusion

The analysis of key IASC documents and products, together with the views and opinions solicited from interviews with global and field level members of the IASC stakeholder community, and the information captured through the Online Survey, reveal mixed results for the IASC's compliance with its 2008 *Gender in Humanitarian Action policy statement*.

There have been notable positive developments regarding the use and expansion of some specific gender mechanisms and tools which demonstrate some progress towards the integration of gender into the IASC's coordination mechanism. However, the review of the available TA documentation revealed a lack of reference to the IASC 2008 Gender Policy, and this is also reflected in the IASC architecture. This is reflected in the inconsistent way that gender, age, diversity and other cross-cutting issues, as well as SADD, are addressed in the TA's policy framework, mission guidelines and reports.

The findings of this review demonstrate that the IASC recognizes the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in ensuring effective and rights based humanitarian action. Nonetheless, the IASC needs to refocus its efforts and revisit the gender-in-humanitarian action commitments it made in 2008 so that they can brought up to date for the existing and future humanitarian landscape.

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[1] Taking into account that some IASC Standing Invitees agencies – with membership based on a network of national organizations - may require modifications in the approach to staff performance.