

Workshop Summary Report: Piloting Harmonized Donor Reporting

Berlin, 24 March 2017

As one of the 10 workstreams of the Grand Bargain initiative, donors and aid organizations committed to harmonize and simplify reporting requirements by the end of 2018. In order to work toward achieving these commitments, a group of donors, aid organizations, and UN agencies met in Berlin on 24 March 2017 to discuss the outline of a joint, two-year pilot on a common donor reporting framework, centered around a common donor template.

Key Discussion Points

Primary Objectives: Participants agreed to the primary objectives proposed in the concept note, to examine the effectiveness of a common donor reporting framework to:

- 1) *Meet the common narrative/operational (interim and final) reporting needs of humanitarian donors;*
- 2) *Reduce the burden of donor reporting for partners in the field.*

Several participants also emphasized throughout the meeting that it is important to keep in perspective the higher goal of the Grand Bargain process, which is to improve the overall effectiveness of aid. Several donors emphasized the importance of keeping the emphasis on improving reporting and accountability overall.

Secondary Objectives and Using the Pilot to Test/Collect Data on Additional Measures: Participants also agreed generally on the soundness of using the pilot to accomplish a number of secondary objectives, including to gather additional information to inform future harmonization measures and to ensure the pilot is in synch with other Grand Bargain workstreams. In particular:

- the added value of using the pilot to collect more information on **informal reporting**, in order to better understand informal reporting burdens and how to minimize them.
- the suggestion of exploring whether the pilot could either gather greater evidence about or test (in later stages) other elements of the reporting cycle, including common **financial reporting** and **common proposal templates**.
- the active observation of and adjustment to progress in other workstreams may also help both donors and aid organizations to be more comfortable with the developments in the harmonization workstreams.

This discussion resulted in the following actionable points in terms of pilot design:

- The core of the pilot will be to test donor reporting, both interim and final reporting
- The organizations charged with data collection, research, and analysis – GPPi and ICVA – will also collect more limited data related to the informal reporting, supporting reporting requirements, and financial reporting for the projects included in the pilot, and will include questions on these issues in the stakeholder interviews in order to provide greater evidence-based recommendations for next steps in the mid-term and final review periods.

- ECHO volunteered to develop a common proposal based on the template that is finally agreed upon. This might be voluntarily tested by participants later in the pilot once finalized.

Role of UN Agencies: Participants took significant time to discuss whether UN agencies should be acting as a donor or an implementing partner for the purposes of the pilot. Discussion suggested that having UN agencies act as both – testing the template both in their reporting to country donors, and using the template in reporting they require of implementing partners who report to them – would be best in terms of testing maximum harmonization. However, given the evolving nature of this pilot, participants agreed that for the pilot, UN agencies might choose to participate in either (or both) roles as they saw fit – either as a donor or as an implementing partner. UN agencies are encouraged to act as both wherever possible.

Reporting Template as a Substitute, not an Add-On to Existing Reporting: Participants were clear that the common template should substitute existing reporting requirements during the pilot. The harmonized common template is not an additional report to be completed on top of existing reporting, nor is it intended to create additional reporting burdens.

The finalized template will include options that make it use-able as an interim or final template. Interim reports will be used in data collection for the pilot, however, where interim reporting is currently not required by a donor, this pilot does not create any new interim reporting obligations.

Pilot countries: Three pilot countries were preliminarily selected (Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, with the intent to select a fourth location following the workshop). However, an important follow-up action step is for all participants to check back on a) which projects they have in each proposed country; b) their ability to participate in proposed locations. Final country decision is contingent on those results.

It is strongly preferred for all participants to participate in all 3 countries selected. However, participants agreed they would not want a situation in which a donor or implementing partner opted out because participation in one country was impossible. In this case, please participate in the countries you can.

Participants discussed a number of issues related to the selection of the pilot countries, with notable points including:

- Participants agreed on the importance of having countries where there was a higher likelihood of a “match” with donors and implementing partners participating in the pilot
- There was agreement that it would be good to have a variety of contexts in which to test the pilot in order to capture the range of humanitarian situations
- While some countries were hesitant about testing the pilot in countries that were high profile, L3 emergencies – in part because the level of reporting, including informal reporting, would not be representative there – others were adamant that at least one of these environments needed to be included in the sample for these very reasons. These are the most burdensome reporting environments, and the ones where harmonization might bring the most benefits, and so the pilot must be able to address them.

Participants appear to have arrived at a consensus to have at least 1 of these high profile L3 countries in the 3 countries, but not all of them.

- There was no clear support for applying the template in an emerging crisis (for example a natural disaster), despite that the situation might generate a situation where there would be the clearest case for a “match.”
- NRC and WFP noted that they are already working to test a version of the “10+3” template in South Sudan and Kenya bilaterally.
- Participants discussed the pros and cons of including a francophone Africa country (DRC). Ultimately the weight of opinion was that it would create too many issues for this pilot to take on in terms of language translation and burden, but it an important issue to consider going forward.

Eligible Projects and Participation: Participants discussed some of the parameters of which projects’ reporting should be included in the pilot. Key points:

- Reporting from existing projects can be included in data collection/the pilot (to increase the chance of greater data). This means that the template can be used for any reporting from May 2017, either for existing projects, or for new projects as they are contracted.
- Participants appeared to agree that there should not be a “cutoff” of not including projects whose final reporting will not conclude before the end of this pilot (May 2019); however, where final reporting is not available, the data from that particular reporting example will not be as robust as from projects whose reporting cycle completes within the course of the pilot. This is a methodological issue for the data collection/research organizations (GPPi/ICVA) to resolve, not a rule to exclude certain projects.
- Where participants apply the template more broadly than the pilot countries – for example, NRC and WFP’s ongoing initiative applying the template in Kenya and S. Sudan – it would be helpful for those engaged in the research and data collection (ICVA/GPPi) to identify ways to capture lessons learned within the mid-term and final reviews for this pilot project.
- Most agreed that if other donors or implementing partners chose to join the pilot later, then broader participation is welcomed. New participants would have to agree to the terms of the pilot.

What Does Participation Involve: There was a brief discussion about what participation in the pilot would involve. GPPi emphasized that after this initial organization and design stage, the primary burden for data collection should fall on those responsible for doing it (ICVA/GPPI), with some minimal time burden on staff as follows:

- At the beginning of the pilot, participating implementing partners should arrange with the pilot leads (ICVA/GPPI) for an easy way to send or make available interim and final reports as they are completed.
- GPPi will conduct stakeholder interviews in preparation for the mid-term and annual review with both participating implementing partners and donors, at both a field and headquarter level. Staff should expect these interviews to take on average 45 minutes. GPPi may also call contact points periodically in between these mid-term processes

(at a 6 month point) if necessary to check in on informal reporting or other process points.

- Participants will meet again at the mid-term point (May/June 2018) and final point (May/June 2019).
- Some participants proposed creating a community of practice at a local level in the pilot countries. This option will be explored and led by ICVA.
- There were suggestions that this could be an evolving pilot, with focus on the common template now, but discussion and progress on other harmonization efforts over the course of two years, for example, on a common proposal and financial report. This might involve having additional workshops periodically to discuss key (major) issues or developments.

Common Template: Participants suggested a number of wording changes, or re-weighting of different questions in the common template.

Most of these have been revisited in language changes and clarifying remarks in the revised templates. All participants, but particularly donors should go through this for redlines – elements that would absolutely prevent participation – with an emphasis on the need to broadly compromise.

A few important template elements were clarified:

- This is a maximum template. Donors may elect to ask fewer questions than appear on the template. (but please do not ask fewer of the core “10” in order to get more of the “+3” secondary questions).
- Word counts are preferable for limiting report length, but may be difficult to fix until the template is put into use. As a start, a 5-10 page limit for interim reports, and 10-15 for final (and less where fewer questions are asked) was suggested, but may be subject to change.
- There was significant discussion about the fact that the proposal and project design of each project will inherently require responses on particular thematic or project elements specific to that project. These should be understood from the proposal and subject matter of the project; the template cannot include questions pertaining to every thematic area, particularly not if streamlining and simplification are to be achieved.

Outstanding template issues:

- Greater discussion on logframes may be needed. An overall suggestion is to have results reported either narratively, in a logframe or both, and where a logframe is required, that it follow what was asked for in the proposal. However, a common logframe has been suggested based on an analysis of the key elements in most existing logframes. Some donors suggested it would be an important consensus point to at least agree on the core elements for the logframe.

Next Steps

- Germany/ICVA will disseminate as follow up:
 - 1-2 pager on the key requirements for participation in the pilot
 - Revised “10+3” template based on feedback
 - Four country options
- Participants will review materials and provide:
 - List of who they currently have projects with in the 3-4 countries (or if there has been a recent project, that seems likely to be continued, please also note)
 - Specific comments on the revised template with a focus on redlines and compromise points
 - Confirm with headquarters and field level ability to participate in pilot; where not, provide Germany/ICVA with recommendations of what issues would need to be addressed to enable participation
- Germany /ICVA to set up 3 phone conferences in mid-April to discuss outstanding points
 - NGOs (organized by ICVA)
 - UN agencies (organizes by ICVA)
 - Donors (organized by Germany)
- All participants should confirm participation by email to ICVA and Germany before April 30 2017.
Contacts: Jeremy.Rempel@icvanetwork.org and s08-00@diplo.de