

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE****SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION POINTS**

New York, 7 May 2020

**Introduction**

Mr. Mark Lowcock, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Chair of the IASC, convened an *ad hoc* IASC Principals meeting to discuss the COVID-19 response, including a discussion on the topics of Localization and Protection from Sexual Exploitation (PSEA) and Abuse and Sexual Harassment.

The revised Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for the response to the COVID-19 outbreak had been launched that day and would be followed by a donor briefing the following day. The ERC thanked WHO, SCHR, UNHCR and WFP in particular for their participation at the launch and extended his thanks to the Principals for the effort made by all colleagues, throughout the system, towards the revised GHRP. He noted that the GHRP was credible and evidence-based and that it strengthened the focus on the most vulnerable groups and issues that often get marginalized, such as gender-based violence (GBV), disabilities and mental health. It included a large additional financial ask. The ERC was broadly encouraged that the GHRP had already raised approximately US\$ 1 billion over the last six weeks. A further \$500 million had been committed to COVID-19 related activities through other channels. The ERC noted that he was confident that the IASC had the operational capacity on the ground to continue delivering; however, this issue needed to be further clarified in consideration of questions being asked. The ERC also asked the Principals for their support in ensuring that contributions were recorded through the Financial Tracking System (FTS). He indicated that, to date, 13 per cent of the total Global Humanitarian Overview had been funded, compared with 10 per cent at the same time in 2019. As such, he noted that there was no evidence that funding for the GHRP was occurring at the expense of funding for other humanitarian operations. A meeting between a number of IASC Principals and the Good Humanitarian Donorship group in early June would be an important opportunity to continue advocacy around flexible funding and reduced earmarking.

Lastly, revised dates had been shared for the regular six-monthly meeting of the IASC Principals at the end of June. The meeting would be a good opportunity for horizon scanning in light of the COVID-19 response and to discuss what needed to be done to ensure a more effective response. UN Secretary-General Guterres had confirmed that he would join.

**Health Update**

Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, WHO Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, updated the Principals on the COVID-19 outbreak, noting that WHO had now recorded

more than 3.6 million cases globally, an increase of 600,000 since last week. More than 250,000 people had succumbed. The increase in cases was slowing down in some European countries, such as France, Italy, Spain and Germany, but there were also increases in Eastern Europe. Cases were increasing in South East Asia, the Americas and Africa. It was important to continue to safely investigate and detect outbreaks everywhere.

WHO would be launching the revised Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) as a third pillar, alongside the GHRP and the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. As suggested by the UN Secretary-General, it was now important to have a comprehensive dashboard to monitor performance against contributions at the country-level.

Dr. Fall highlighted the publication on 7 May of new ***IASC interim guidance on Public Health and Social Measures for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Operations in Low Capacity and Humanitarian Settings***,<sup>1</sup> which included “*Special Considerations for Covid-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response to support those who reside in Urban Informal Settlements and Slums*” as an annex.

## **Update on Logistics**

Mr. Amir Abdulla, Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Executive Director of WFP, announced that the new air services were operational. He asked the Principals to encourage their colleagues to use the relevant booking services for passengers and cargo in order to help consolidate needs and prioritize flights. The first flight had left Belgium, carrying cargo for UNICEF and ICRC, and within the next day or two, the first flights would leave from the hubs in China and the United Arab Emirates. Early indications of demand for the passenger service suggested that there could be as many as 300 passenger flights per month. It was important to rationalize the use of the air service to be as effective as possible and to keep costs down and to use commercial flights, as they begin to commence work.

A financing model for both the hospitals and medical evacuation procedures was close to finalization. Preparations had begun with WHO to operationalize the first two field hospitals in Ghana and in Ethiopia, both of which should open within the next week and which would help address some of the concerns of staff. Careful consideration with WHO was needed regarding how many field hospitals were required and how best to locate them - although it was clearly preferable to have them ready and on standby.

## **Localization**

The ERC welcomed the upcoming interim guidance on localization and noted that localization efforts were essential and need to be stepped up, and that it was even more pressing in light of the COVID-19 response. However, he noted the need to be mindful and careful to avoid passing on the risks local actors.

<sup>1</sup> Link: [Interim Guidance on Public Health and Social Measures for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Operations in Low Capacity and Humanitarian Settings](#)

Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director of ICVA, acknowledged the leadership of IFRC, which co-chairs the localization workstream of the Grand Bargain with Switzerland, and UNICEF, as co-lead of the IASC's Results Group on Operational Response. The scale of the challenge following the COVID-19 outbreak highlighted the need for increased consistency and broader agreements on approaches to localization, as reflected in the GHRP. Mr. Packer suggested several ways in which this area could be strengthened. Community engagement should be localized and coordinated, building on the role of national and local actors to address the lack of information and trust; the planning of the response needed to take the lead from local and national NGOs and from women's rights and refugee-led organizations; the support of all the Principals was needed to call on Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) and cluster leads to implement the necessary changes to address, for example, language gaps and meaningful inclusion at national and subnational coordination; country-level planning should not be considered complete without sufficient and comprehensive input from the NGO community; a renewed focus on prevention was needed, advocating for strengthened health, safety and security measures in humanitarian organizations that apply equitably to all staff across the system, regardless of whether they are national or international; direct, flexible funding of frontline responders should be provided in a way that does not push the risk to other partners; and effective localization needed more than just a reliance on local actors, it required support to a diverse ecosystem. In conclusion, Mr. Packer said that the interim guidance on localization, drafted by IFRC and UNICEF, was a concrete measure towards these solutions and welcomed the level of engagement of IASC members. The guidance would be presented to the Principals for endorsement in the coming days.

### **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment**

Speaking as IASC Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Sexual Harassment, Mr. Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, updated the Principals on several initiatives that had become more urgent with the outbreak of the pandemic. There had been an increase in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other worrying trends, as the economic impact reached women and girls, including exploitation, early marriage, prostitution and reduced access to livelihoods. In this context, the opportunities for SEA are increasing and action to prevent it is even more urgent.

A technical note on ***Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19 Response*** had been shared among IASC members<sup>2</sup>. The ERC, with the High Commissioner and the UN Victims' Rights Advocate, had jointly written to all the RC/HCs to reinforce the key messages. The High Commissioner asked all the Principals to disseminate the guidance widely throughout their organizations. It was particularly important that the GBV and PSEA elements were included in the planning of all activities, especially in the health and water and sanitation sectors, and in communication with affected populations, and to offer channels for complaints to be raised. With the pandemic advancing, and with

<sup>2</sup> Link: [Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) during COVID-19 Response](#)

lock downs etc., it would be critical to involve women's and refugee groups more, in consideration of the likelihood of a lighter footprint by international humanitarian workers. To reinforce those messages, the IASC was developing a simple checklist for practitioners on PSEA in the COVID-19 response.

The High Commissioner updated the Principals that the Community Outreach and Communication Fund had been launched. The Fund, managed by ICVA, finances local NGO initiatives relating to PSEA, including strengthening channels for complaints and redress. To date, ICVA had already received 79 project proposals. UNHCR had contributed \$200,000 and hoped that others would also contribute.

Next week, an interactive IASC learning package for partners, "*Saying No to Sexual Misconduct*," would be launched, which builds on earlier work done by IOM. A communication package on sexual misconduct was also under development, intended in particular for high level advocacy, as well as an e-learning tool on investigation and a collection of good practices on culture change initiatives from around the world.

The ERC thanked the High Commissioner for extending his tenure as Champion for PSEA and Sexual Harassment until the end of the year, when it would then be handed over to Dr. Nathalia Kanem, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund.

## **Discussion Summary**

The Principals broadly welcomed the update of the GHRP and looked forward to the outcome of discussions with donors. ICVA particularly welcomed the sections in the GHRP relating to funding flows and the funding requirements for NGOs. However, on behalf of SCHR, Oxfam International, as well as ICVA, Concern Worldwide and CRS, reiterated concerns about the speed and flexibility of funding to NGO partners. FTS showed that only about one percent of the resources had reached NGO partners so far and disbursement by the Country-Based Pooled Funds had been relatively slow and inconsistent. While there was clear commitment and leadership at the global level, it was important to find solutions at the country-level. UNHCR, UN-Habitat, UNFPA, among others, strongly emphasized the importance of flexible funding and the need for accelerated funding to front line responders.

UNHCR noted that, of the initial COVID-19 funds received, it had been necessary to spend approximately \$200 million on central procurement of PPE and other supplies, which had detracted funds that would have normally been shared with the field operations. With the revised GHRP, more could now be directed towards NGO partners. UNICEF reported a good response on frontloading of donations, now \$100 million shy of the \$652 million appeal. With the revised GHRP, the UNICEF ask had increased to \$1 billion. The ICRC appeal of \$254 million was now 63 per cent covered. The appeal would be revised later in the month, as part of the consolidated appeal with IFRC.

The World Bank updated the Principals that there were now 59 approved country operations in Phase 1 of their COVID-19 response financing and 20 more were in the pipeline, with a total commitment of \$3 billion. The World Bank was preparing for Phase

II. The next challenge was getting the funding to countries and the World Bank was working closely with the UN Supply Chain initiative.

UNICEF agreed with the ERC that it was important to emphasize to donors that the humanitarian community did have the operational capacity to keep delivering. UNICEF also reported that a communications campaign had been initiated with OCHA, centered around the IASC key messages for the fast-tracking of health workers, aid workers and supplies at borders and in-countries and asked the Principals to support the campaign.

UNDP said that it would be important to advocate for complementary development funding, as the GHRP explicitly excluded support to social and economic consequences and only included a modest \$169 million for early recovery. This included advocacy for contributions to the UN Secretary-General's UN Response and Recovery Fund. The countries covered by the GHRP were not eligible for the Multi-Partner Trust Fund and there was a risk that the socio-economic impact in those countries would be underserved, particularly fragile, conflict-affected contexts. UNDP said that the humanitarian and development nexus was more important now than ever. Collective efforts would be necessary to ensure that financing frameworks were fit for purpose and that gaps were covered. The UN Development Coordination Office and UNDP were co-chairing a task team to discuss the socio-economic impact and hoped to collaborate with the IASC to ensure joined-up efforts.

UNHCR and IOM had shared a paper, ***COVID-19 Access Challenges and the Implications of Border Restrictions***,<sup>3</sup> to support advocacy and UNHCR was drafting a paper on the impact of COVID-19 on large population movements and trafficking, which would be useful for resource-mobilization efforts. Concern Worldwide was particularly interested in the economic impact of border closures; there were real challenges in tackling these issues in major crises.

CRS indicated the need to be more coordinated in terms of how we respond in contexts, noting that the response in some countries was slowing down and picking up in others. UNICEF agreed with this point, noting particular concerns with South Sudan.

The ERC, joined by UNICEF, CRS and UNFPA, thanked WHO for the work on low resource settings, noting that it was one of the key pieces of work delivered in the last weeks. UN-Habitat thanked WHO for the inclusion of Annex 1, *Special Considerations for COVID-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response to support those who reside in Urban Informal Settlements and Slums* and reported an increase in forced evictions in Africa that needed to be addressed.

The Principals welcomed the forthcoming guidance on localization; UNICEF and FAO both reiterated their support and SCHR noted it was excellent that localization and PSEA were getting so much attention. UNFPA recommended that the interim measures be timebound and aligned. The gender lens also continued to be extremely relevant, especially in working with national and local authorities, including local women's organizations, as key partners.

<sup>3</sup> Link: [COVID-19 Access Challenges and the Implications of Border Restrictions \(UNHCR & IOM\)](#)

UN-Habitat highlighted that local authorities were also front-line responders, as had been stated by the UN Secretary-General, and therefore they should also be included in the discussion on localization. In agreement that the frontline comprised local governments, as well as civil society representatives and local faith-based networks, CRS stressed that it was important to ensure provision of care for them should they become infected with COVID-19. As agreed in December during the discussion on the Grand Bargain, a framework to better engage with government and local authorities in assessment, planning and programming was also needed. UN-Habitat informed the Principals that through the IASC Operational and Policy Advocacy Group (OPAG) and Results Group on Operational Response, this framework would be ready for the June meeting of the Principals.

The presentation on PSEA was also widely welcomed by SCHR, CRS, UNFPA, and UNICEF. In the effort to make the technical note on ***Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19 Response***<sup>4</sup> widely accessible, UNFPA had translated the document into five languages. UNICEF confirmed that PSEA was now included in all programmes with a focus on training local partners and UN-Habitat echoed their support to the PSEA efforts and committed to sharing information on high-risk areas. SCHR asked that all IASC Principals be champions on the culture change needed to address SEA.

UNFPA reported that new research by the agency and its partners last week had shown that the pandemic was having a catastrophic effect on women and girls and expressed appreciation to all the Principals for ensuring that GBV was at the forefront of the sexual and reproductive health strategy and embedded throughout the GHRP. This would translate to better services for people in need. The COVID-19 outbreak added a new dimension to challenges around birth control, safe pregnancy and safe transportation.

Regarding the new air services, CRS, UNICEF, UNFPA and InterAction expressed their thanks to WFP. UNFPA had already relied on it for the shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE), which was particularly important for midwives and others. UNFPA was also concerned for their current and surge staff.

Now that there were transport options, InterAction highlighted the difficulties of some NGO partners in applying for, or obtaining, visas. InterAction was aware that the UN Secretary-General had planned to speak with some Member States, but it seemed to be an emerging issue of concern. UNICEF pointed out that this was particularly a problem in Yemen and other fragile settings; it was an important issue to address.

FAO highlighted the need for attention on food security, particularly during the farming season. Funding was crucially needed to prevent the health crisis from expanding into a food security crisis, therefore there were high expectations for the donor briefing.

Regarding Somalia, Concern Worldwide flagged that it appeared there were increases in the number of people being buried in graves, a concerning indication of unreported cases. Concern Worldwide also reiterated the willingness of the consortia to share data on in-country capacities to support advocacy efforts.

<sup>4</sup> Link: [Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) during COVID-19 Response](#)

### Follow-up actions:

1. Report on results and achievements through a comprehensive dashboard to better reflect progress and the use of the mobilized funds for the GHRP to support advocacy efforts. [*IASC Members to share with OCHA*]
2. Ensure the consolidation of requests for passenger and cargo air services by utilizing the recently established WFP platforms – this will be critical for streamlining requests and to assess the volume of demand. [*IASC Members*]
3. Take note of concerns raised regarding the ability of humanitarian workers to obtain visas and step up advocacy efforts to support access [*OCHA in support of RC/HCs*]
4. Finalize a cost-sharing solution for MedEvac services to ensure that the necessary financing requirements beyond the GHRP funding are met [*WFP and OCHA*]
5. Identify concrete ways to address the challenges of access to fast, flexible funding for NGOs. [*ERC*]
6. Support a communications campaign centered around the recently endorsed *IASC key messages for the fast tracking of health and aid worker and supplies at borders and in countries*, including by ensuring that they are flagged on organizations' platforms [*IASC Members*]
7. Support the accelerated endorsement of the *IASC Interim Guidance on Localization and the COVID-19 Response* developed by IFRC and UNICEF. [*IASC Members*]
8. Widely disseminate the PSEA background materials shared as background to this meeting. [*IASC Members*]

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### List of participants:

1. Mr. Mark Lowcock, Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA
2. Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, WHO
3. Mr. Sean Callahan, President and CEO, CRS
4. Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF
5. Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, UNHCR
6. Ms. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, UNFPA
7. Mr. Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide
8. Ms. Abby Maxman, Chair of SCHR (President and CEO, Oxfam America)
9. Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-HABITAT
10. Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, ICVA
11. Mr. Gareth Price-Jones, Executive Secretary, SCHR
12. Mr. António Vitorino, Director General, IOM
13. Mr. Roger Yates, Chair, ICVA (Regional Director, Plan International)
14. Mr. Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, WFP
15. Ms. Maria Immonen, Vice Chair of SCHR (Director of the Lutheran World Federation)
16. Ms. Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General, OHCHR
17. Mr. Robert Mardini, Director General, ICRC
18. Ms. Asako Okai, Assistant Administrator, UNDP
19. Mr. Toomas Palu, Adviser, Global Coordination Health, Nutrition & Population, WB
20. Dr. Mike Ryan, Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme
21. Mr. Julien Schoop, Acting Vice President, InterAction
22. Mr. Laurent Thomas, Deputy Director-General, FAO