

## IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting

SESSION I

21 May 2020

### Summary Record

---

#### INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) held the first session of its third regular meeting on 21 May 2020. This was the first of a series virtual sessions to be held over several weeks in light of the impact of COVID-19 which necessitated changing the originally planned two day meeting in Rome, Italy which was to be hosted by the FAO. The primary objective of the first session was to discuss how to operationalize a global collective service for Risk Communications and Community Engagement (RCCE) while building upon existing structures and to discuss progress made by Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion on the OPAG-agreed 2020 workplan and its reprioritization as a result of COVID-19.

In their introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chairs, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri and Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, expressed special thanks to the OPAG members and the Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion for their continued dedication and hard work despite the challenging circumstances.

#### SESSION 1.1: RISK COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (RCCE)

The co-Chairs of Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion (UNHCR and UNICEF) noted that the discussion was a follow up to the IASC Principals decision made on 28 April, where they agreed to task the Results Group 2 to further consult the RCCE proposal made by WHO, IFRC and UNICEF on "A Collective Service for Communication and Community Engagement during COVID-19 response and beyond" prior to discussion at the IASC's Emergency Directors Group (EDG), to determine how to operationalize it by building upon existing structures. To this end, Results Group 2 convened consultations and reached agreement on the importance of including local and front-line communities and workers, as well as persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups into overall response. They also agreed to capitalize on the complementarity with existing approaches and coordination at global, regional and country level, including with the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)<sup>1</sup> RCCE Group, the Global Cluster Coordinators Group (GCCG), country clusters and RCCE coordination structures at field level. They welcomed the discussion at the OPAG explore synergies with other Results Groups and the EDG.

The co-leads of the RCCE sub-group under Results Group 2 (UNICEF and IFRC) noted the increasing importance of integrating coordinated community engagement into all aspects of response operations due to the recent pandemic. Key areas of coordinated community engagement were highlighted, including sharing life-saving information and essential services, ensuring the uptake of protective and health seeking behaviours and ensuring community participation in relief efforts. Operational research on collective approaches to community engagement and accountability was presented, including highlighting case studies from Central African Republic, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Indonesia. Lessons from the Ebola crisis were underlined for their relevance to the COVID-19 response, including acting on local knowledge and community feedback and avoiding duplication of response

---

<sup>1</sup> The GOARN RCCE, coordinated by WHO, UNICEF and IFRC, is a network of technical institutions and networks globally that respond to acute public health events with the deployment of staff and resources to affected countries.

structures. The Global Collective Services initiative will connect with the GOARN RCCE Group and will be supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It aims to address the growing demand from partners at country, regional and global levels to share resources in a coordinated manner, support the adaptation of overall response by improving the quality of community engagement and strengthen local responses and capacities.

In the ensuing discussion, OPAG members broadly welcomed the RCCE initiative and commended UNICEF, UNHCR and IFRC for the progress made to date. They also recognized the need to ensure continued work among the various structures, including the OPAG and its Results Groups, EDG, GCCG and cluster lead agencies, while linking with the Grand Bargain Workstream 6 on the Participation Revolution. The importance of linking with the localization agenda was also highlighted, including the need to support existing coordination structures and initiatives, while directly engaging at country level.

ICVA noted the importance of the initiative to advance two-way communication between responders and communities. UNHABITAT highlighted the need to improve horizontal communication between communities, while underlining the need to tailor risk communications and engagement in informal settings. Christian Aid highlighted the role of local faith leaders as a valuable interlocutor for trusted two-way communications, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.

UNFPA noted the importance of aligning and integrating existing structures and initiatives on RCCE led by local actors, while considering the sensitivities around Gender-Based Violence (GBV). UNFPA offered support for the initiative, noting its ongoing contributions to RCCE in line with the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), particularly around women's rights.

IOM stressed the need for the initiative to follow lessons learned from the Ebola responses, while bringing together areas of accountability to affected people at global, regional, and country level, including RCCE and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), for which the Results Group 2 has an important role to play. IOM further suggested the utility for regional hubs to liaise with pre-existing data and community level information networks to assist with the risk communication efforts.

IFRC highlighted the need to build the initiative on local contexts by engaging local actors in coordination structures beyond limiting them as 'implementers' of community engagement approaches. This calls for agility and flexibility, to consider distinct country contexts and build upon what already exists on the ground, and to ensure that knowledge, capacities, and structures put in place at the collective level remain even after the pandemic, better preparing the communities for future emergencies.

UNDP suggested finding a way for the learning and knowledge from community voices to feed into the upcoming round of COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessments, which will form the foundation of socio-economic recovery plans in many crisis contexts. World Bank commended the Results Group 2 for its thorough analysis as well as the collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

OCHA noted the importance of linkages at country, regional and global levels and the preference not to create parallel structures. It suggested that the discussion should continue under the auspices of Results Group 2 until there were clear and concrete recommendations based on engagement with communities that can inform EDG decisions and support to the field. UNHCR also suggested embedding the initiative under the Results Group 2 and requested the Results Group 2 to share a regular update to the OPAG. UNHCR further noted the importance of ensuring diversity in the collective membership by including governments, refugees and migrants, among others.

WFP suggested focusing on gaps, including on urban areas and remote operations and link directly with country-level clusters beyond the GCCG. The importance of focusing at the country level was seconded by FAO. SCHR offered support to the initiative, noting that the Grand Bargain Workstream 6 on Participation

Revolution was already being consulted. UNICEF suggested documenting lessons learned from the initiative to inform a way forward in a longer term.

The co-leads of the RCCE sub-group (UNICEF and IFRC) agreed on the need to connect with the localization agenda through the Results Group 1 on Operational Response as well as with the PSEA agenda, noting that the connection with the Grand Bargain initiative was already being formed. They fully agreed with the preference to avoid creating parallel structures. They reiterated that two-way communications were important between communities, as well as between communities and aid workers. The Results Group is working towards aggregating community feedback to improve overall situational understanding. They added that a specific timeline for the six-month review was being explored. They also invited interested OPAG members to engage in the separate sub-group working on urban and informal settlements and different marginalized groups.

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of IASC secretariat, recapped that the OPAG broadly welcomes the initiative and the direction presented by the Results Group 2 and noted the need for the initiative to be connected with Results Group 2, GCCG, EDG, clusters, and the Grand Bargain Workstream 6 on Participation Revolution. As next steps, the Results Group 2 was requested to clarify how the initiative would build on existing coordination structures at the country-level, while engagement with the EDG should be postponed until this is done.

The OPAG co-Chairs stated the benefits of cross-fertilisation between the EDG and OPAG, while reiterating that more time was needed to make the work around RCCE clearly presentable to the EDG.

**Follow-Up Actions:**

1. Clarify how the RCCE Common Service will connect and build upon existing coordination structures at country level [*Results Group 2*]
2. Ensure that, in addition to consultations with Results Group 2, consultations with the GCCG, cluster lead agencies as well as the Grand Bargain workstream on Participation Revolution take place to ensure complementarity of efforts [*IFRC, UNICEF*]
3. Share regular updates on the RCCE Common Service initiative with the OPAG, including on lessons learned to inform systemwide RCCE efforts [*Results Group 2*]
4. Following completion of Action Point 1 above, engage with the EDG to inform its operational decisions by providing concrete recommendations based on community feedback, perceptions and social insights [*OPAG/Results Group 2*]

**SESSION 1.2: PROGRESS UPDATE - RESULTS GROUP 2 ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSION**

The co-Chairs of Results Group 2 opened the session by thanking the OPAG members and the IASC secretariat for their continued support to the work of the Results Group 2. They noted that key deliverables were in the pipeline as follows: (i) Develop a Global Accountability and Inclusion Results Tracker; (ii) Develop a Collective Accountability and Inclusion Framework for HCs/HCTs; (iii) Develop the Global Accountability and Inclusion Service Directory; and (iv) Strengthen coordinated and effective technical support to HCs/HCTs and other operational stakeholders on PSEA and Sexual Harassment prioritising a victim and survivor centred approach. It was noted that they were working towards systematically embedding accountability and inclusion into the humanitarian architecture over time.

In addition to the original workplan, they agreed on taking forward four additional workstreams to support the COVID-19 response, namely: (i) Map COVID-19 resources related to accountability and inclusion,

encompassing Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), PSEA and Sexual Harassment, age, gender, disabilities and Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) [completed]; (ii) Adapt briefs and guidance [completed – *Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) during COVID-19 Response, Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak and key messages on how to apply the IASC guidance of persons with disabilities to the COVID context; ongoing – a guidance note for older persons*]; (iii) Link to the RCCE initiative led by UNICEF, IFRC and WHO [ongoing]; and (iv) Provide a bridge between the health and humanitarian response [ongoing]. They recognized the growing need to reinforce accountability and inclusion in an innovative way in light of the pandemic and provide cohesive messages on COVID-19 and the changing environments as a result of the pandemic, including the increased risks of SEA, GBV and socio-economic needs. They further stressed the importance of inclusion, as older persons and persons with disabilities were at heightened risks.

OPAG co-chairs thanked the Results Group 2 co-Chairs for the clear set of priorities relevant to the current context and suggested additional thinking on how to link the new priority around bridging between the health and humanitarian response with the socio-economic response.

In the ensuring discussion among OPAG members, UNFPA suggested examining how the various IASC Interim Guidance issued were being implemented at country-level, considering the deteriorating circumstances around GBV, forced prostitution and reduced livelihoods opportunities for women and girls as a result of the pandemic. UNICEF announced that it was finalizing steps to provide secondment to support the work of the IASC secretariat on PSEA, and encouraged all OPAG members to follow up with their country representatives to support the priorities in the recent letter from UNHCR, the IASC Champion, the UN Victims' Rights Advocate and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on PSEA during the COVID response. ICVA highlighted the need for Results Group 2 to continue its focus on PSEA and GBV, and introduced the *PSEA Community Outreach and Communications Fund*, launched in February by ICVA and UNHCR, through which local NGOs applied for financial support to contextualise and localise advocacy material. OCHA supported the work involving the RCCE initiative and PSEA and Sexual Harassment. IOM expressed support for the work on persons with disabilities and stressed the importance of active implementation and monitoring at field level.

Reacting to the OPAG's feedback, the co-Chairs of Results Group 2 noted that initial brainstorming was taking place to bridge the health, humanitarian and socio-economic responses through discussions around the RCCE initiative and intersectionality between accountability, inclusion and PSEA. They highlighted efforts to disseminate guidance, including through surveys and webinars. It was also mentioned that the Global Accountability and Inclusion Results Tracker would facilitate monitoring the uptake of guidance on the ground. Finally, the Results Group 2 continues active engagement with wider constituencies beyond the IASC, including the Youth Compact, Gender Reference Group and other Inclusion groups.

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of IASC secretariat, acknowledged members general support for the progress made by the Results Group 2 on its workplan, as well as the reprioritization in response to the impact of COVID-19, noting the need to integrate PSEA and attention to different vulnerabilities into the COVID-19 response. She further noted the reiterated call for better socializing IASC guidance.

#### **Follow-Up Actions:**

1. Support ongoing efforts by Results Group 2 to implement its workplan, including reprioritized activities in support of the COVID-19 response [OPAG members]
2. Capture how the relevant Interim Guidance for COVID-19 is operationalized and applied to vulnerable groups, including women and girls [Results Group 2]

\*\*\*

## **ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST**

<b>OPAG Co-Chair</b>	Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
<b>FAO</b>	Mr. Daniele Donati
<b>ICRC</b>	Ms. Avigail Shai
<b>ICVA</b>	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi Mr. Jeremy Wellard
<b>ICVA - ACBAR</b>	Ms. Fiona Gall
<b>ICVA - COAST</b>	Mr. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
<b>ICVA - FRD</b>	Mr. Azmat Khan
<b>ICVA - IMC</b>	Ms. Mary Pack
<b>IFRC</b>	Prof. Cecile Aptel Ms. Victoria Stodart
<b>InterAction</b>	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barrasso
<b>InterAction - Care USA</b>	Ms. Sheba Crocker
<b>InterAction - Global Communities</b>	Ms. Pia Wanek
<b>IOM</b>	Ms. Tristan Burnett Ms. Angela Staiger
<b>OCHA</b>	Mr. Rein Paulsen
<b>OHCHR</b>	Mr. Roberto Ricci Ms. Emilya Cermak
<b>SCHR</b>	Mr. Gareth Price Jones
<b>SCHR - Christian Aid</b>	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
<b>SCHR - Save the Children</b>	Ms. Leah Finnigan
<b>UNDP</b>	Ms. Rachel Scott
<b>UNFPA</b>	Mr. Ingo Piegeler Ms. Maryline Py
<b>UNHABITAT</b>	Mr. Filiep Decorte
<b>UNHCR</b>	Mr. Arafat Jamal
<b>UNICEF</b>	Mr. Manuel Fontaine Ms. Segolene Adam
<b>WFP</b>	Mr. Brian Lander
<b>WHO</b>	Mr. Rudi Coninx
<b>World Bank</b>	Mr. Jos Verbeek

### **Presenters:**

Ms. Meritxell Relano and Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth, co-Chairs of Results Group 2  
Ms. Alexandra Sicotte-Levesque and Mr. Charles-Antoine Hoffman, co-leads of the RCCE subgroup

### **IASC secretariat:**

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat