IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting
SESSION VII
9 July 2020

Summary Record

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) held the seventh and last session of its third regular meeting on 9 July 2020. The objective of this session was to discuss (i) digitization and data responsibility in light of COVID-19 and (ii) progress made by the IASC Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy (RG3) on the OPAG-agreed 2020 workplan and its reprioritization as a result of COVID-19.

SESSION 7.1: DIGITIZATION AND DATA RESPONSIBILITY IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

In her introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri noted that the COVID-19 crisis amplified the risks related to digitization and data responsibility. She added that the Results Group 1 on Operational Response (RG1) had been developing a joint system-wide operational guidance on data responsibility, while FAQs on Data Responsibility in the COVID-19 was developed to support organizations and staff around the world working with data in the COVID-19 response. RG1 co-Chair, Mr. Julien Schopp outlined the background of the sub-group noting that it had started working in January 2020 under the auspices of RG1 under the leadership of OCHA Center for Humanitarian Data, UNHCR and IOM. The objective was to obtain IASC Principals' endorsement by the end of the year.

Mr. Stuart Campo (OCHA), the co-lead of the digitization and data responsibility sub-group, first outlined the concept of data responsibility that it entails a set of principles, processes and tools that support the safe, ethical and effective management of data in humanitarian response. The objective of the group - composed of around 20 members from UN and NGOs both at headquarter and field levels - was to produce an IASC-endorsed joint system-wide operational guidance, devise an implementation strategy, and build a community of practice. The operational guidance aimed at (i) generating a response-wide data ecosystem map, including a diagnostic of data responsibility; (ii) developing a response-wide Information Sharing Protocol (ISP), including a Data and Information Sensitivity Classification; (iii) support coordination, decision-making and collective action on responsible data management via existing mechanisms; (iv) establishing a Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) for tracking and managing data incidents; (v) offering shared services to support safe management of sensitive data; and (vi) ensuring meaningful engagement with national authorities on issues of data responsibility.

Mr. Craig Burgess (WHO), co-author of the operational guidance, outlined key trends and needs in the health sector, which was increasingly in need of disaggregated, cross-border and real time data, enhanced security in encryption and privacy policies, digital tools and underlying ethics for commoditization. Emerging tensions were noted around data sharing, particularly in terms of partnerships with citizens, as well as strong government coordination mechanisms, long-term system strengthening while embracing innovation, coordination across different levels to facilitate budgeting and planning, and safeguarding data protection while promoting open-data initiatives by building trust between governments and citizens.

Mr. Edgardo Yu (WFP), co-author of the operational guidance, provided an update on digital humanitarian assistance. He reflected on the over ten-fold increase in the number of social protection measures across the world. This included an over three-fold increase in cash-based interventions and an over six-fold increase in in-kind assistance. Scaling up digital assistance was challenging, particularly in terms of beneficiary and distribution management and integration of diverse cash assistance technologies and digital identity standards. Risks were noted with regard to different data protection frameworks between UN agencies, NGOs and service providers. To mitigate these risks, alternative methods were being adopted, including biometrics which can be used to forego personal data collection, encryption and internal privacy management. Mr. Yu concluded that data-related concerns were being escalated in light of COVID-19.

In the ensuing discussion, OPAG members expressed broad support for the operational guidance on data responsibility and emphasized the need for inter-agency coordination and cooperation. SCHR invited the sub-group to share any recommendations on how NGOs could help strengthen the partnership aspect of data responsibility. UNICEF affirmed its intention to engage clusters and information management teams in the development of and follow-up to the operational guidance and stressed the importance of strengthening linkages with relevant development and other streams, including human legal identity agenda group and WFP biometrics working group. In terms of additional areas of focus, the importance of risk assessment related to digital technologies for IDs, biometrics, and digital contact tracing and surveillance was conveyed. OHCHR underscored the need to clarify processes around sensitive personal data.

UNHCR raised five points as follows: (i) commitment to further support the drafting process of the inter-agency operational guidance as co-lead of the sub-group; (ii) the need to explore and adopt remote data collection systems via innovative technologies in the context of COVID-19; (iii) the importance of sharing data protection principles to inform coordinated action, including by engaging with vulnerable populations; (iv) the need to explore contactless methods for safe biometrics registration procedures for refugees, given the likely long-term impact of COVID-19; and (v) greater focus on trusted digital identities. UNHCR is distributing around 80 per cent of its cash transfers via bank accounts or mobile money, with over a third being digital. The operational guidance should build on existing resources, such as OHCHR's guidance on digital human rights and the recently published UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

IFRC expressed appreciation for the constructive dialogue on the development of the operational guidance on data responsibility and emphasized the responsibility aspect of the guidance. During IFRC's involvement in the health response, the question was raised to which extent humanitarian organizations could support proximity tracing, especially in contexts where the use of data may not be in line with the right to data privacy. Data responsibility needed to be aligned with humanitarian principles and the 'do no digital harm' concept, in the context of COVID-19 and beyond. Data responsibility should also cascade down to local partners, considering that they are often initial collectors of data. This makes it essential for the sub-group to focus on partnerships and community engagement as part of the bigger localization agenda. To this end, IFRC offered to share with the sub-group key findings of consultations conducted by IFRC and ICRC on the digital inclusion of partners.

ICRC echoed IFRC's comments regarding 'do no digital harm' and referred to OHCHR's upcoming report on possible impacts, opportunities and challenges related to emerging digital technologies used to promote and protect human rights, especially in light of the accelerated digitalization during the pandemic response.

IOM suggested developing a set of inter-agency minimum standards similar to the Sphere Standards. In addition, the sub-group was requested to connect with the UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy for reference to data responsibility in general terms. Tapping into mobile devices was also suggested as a way

to facilitate access to services, considering that migrants and Internally Displaced People often use mobile phones.

CARE highlighted the need to ensure systemic inclusion of gender analysis and disaggregated data through the operational guidance. WFP suggested seeking further discussions and clarifications on the different data sharing regulations applied by the European Union and the UN System and collaborating with European NGOs subject to the European Union regulations.

InterAction underscored the criticality of data protection relating to victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19 with several governments having requested access to sensitive data. To this end, the issue should be approached from a partnership lens to involve international and local NGOs and ensure training along the delivery chain from organizations collecting data to donors funding the project.

The OPAG co-Chair, Mr. Geir-Olav Lisle highlighted the need for structures to monitor and assess rapidly changing needs and reflect them in data responsibility guidance, including with regard to data breaches. He further echoed International Medical Corps' question around the extent to which governments should be consulted, given inherent tension between humanitarian and development approaches and obligations.

OCHA as co-lead of the sub-group committed to taking the OPAG's feedback forward within the sub-group, while acknowledging the importance of developing a flexible guidance to allow it to adapt to different contexts by focusing on core principles, tools and procedures. While not legally binding, the guidance will help field colleagues navigate challenges arising from legally binding commitments. The RG1 co-Chairs, Mr. Julien Schopp and Mr. Rein Paulsen, noted OPAG members' reiterated calls to establish linkages with other data initiatives.

In closing, the OPAG co-Chair Ms. Guarnieri highlighted key points raised, including wide support for the development of the operational guidance, the call for prompt finalization of the guidance, the need of partnership engagement including at the local level, the identification of minimum data standards, and the linkages with relevant stakeholders.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Accelerate the finalization of the operational guidance on data responsibility in light of the COVID-19 operating context, given the broad OPAG support for its development [*RG1 sub-group on data responsibility*]

2. Further develop elements on personal data safety in the operational guidance to ensure a 'do no harm' approach (including on data ownership and access) [*RG1 sub-group on data responsibility*]

3. Adapt remote data collection methods to the realities of the COVID-19 operating context and explore related innovative technologies [*RG1 sub-group on data responsibility*]

4. Consider developing inter-agency minimum data standards (similar to the Sphere Standards) [*RG1 sub-group on data responsibility*]

5. Strengthen linkages with key stakeholders, including development actors and legal entities [*RG1 sub-group on data responsibility*]

SESSION 7.2: RESULTS GROUP 3 ON COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY - PROGRESS UPDATE

The RG3 co-Chair Ms. Shoko Arakaki reminded the RG 3 priority areas for 2020 as follows: (i) determine how best to address the impact of counter-terrorism measures and the growing trend for the criminalization of humanitarian action in specific contexts; (ii) identify two to three contexts and develop a clear humanitarian diplomacy strategy, capitalizing on the IASC membership at the various levels, to address protection and/or access challenges; (iii) develop common narratives on specific issues of concern (such as enhancing respect for IHL, IHRL, humanitarian principles and core protection framework) to support IASC members' efforts in their collective and/or bilateral advocacy efforts, including during upcoming key anniversaries; and (iv) capture and disseminate lessons learned and best practice with regards to engagement with non-State armed actors.

The RG3 co-Chair Mr. Michel Anglade, highlighted the key achievements of the RG3 as follows: (i) key messages on protection and COVID-19 developed by the Global Protection Cluster; (ii) lessons learned on the advocacy effort around proposed listing of Al-Shabaab under a new sanctions regime; (iii) the advocacy strategy on climate change and humanitarian action to influence key global climate change moments in 2020. Work was underway to develop key messages on food security and climate change and a common narrative on climate change and humanitarian action to engage on the humanitarian dimension of climate change. Due to COVID-19, the deliverables around a counter-terrorism strategy and best practices document on the engagement with non-state armed groups were postponed. With regard to the humanitarian diplomacy strategy on Syria, the RG3 co-Chairs sought the OPAG's guidance on what added value RG3 could offer, given that a lot of advocacy and influencing work was being conducted at global, national and local levels in formal and informal ways. Overall, the RG3 co-Chairs were seeking advice on complementary advocacy focus areas, as well as how to capture the areas where Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) required guidance to bring about behavior change.

In the ensuing discussion, SCHR recalled that the rationale of initiating RG3 was to establish trusted channels to coordinate different yet complementary messages from UN and NGO IASC members. In terms of the non-state armed actors, the objective had been to restore the norm that contacts with non-state armed actors were part of humanitarian work. Such understanding had been challenged in recent years as a result of counter-terrorism legislations.

InterAction commented that working on the humanitarian diplomacy work around Syria revealed general challenges faced by Results Groups in terms of engaging with fast-moving events. At the Principals level, however, there may be space for collective advocacy. The IASC secretariat commented that ICRC had originally suggested humanitarian diplomacy as an agenda item of the IASC noting that more could be achieved collectively if there were clarity on what actors were undertaking which initiatives. Recognizing the sensitivity of these topics, the discussion had subsequently revolved around coordinated messaging concerning anniversaries. InterAction, SCHR and IOM noted that the OPAG and RG3 would benefit from strengthened linkages with the IASC Principals and the Emergency Directors Group (EDG), which would enhance the collective advocacy of the IASC as a whole. UNHCR further recommended to seek synergies with the Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration.

UNHCR, UNICEF and ICVA underscored their strong support for the key protection messages being developed in collaboration with the Global Protection Cluster and for them to be endorsed by the Principals. UNICEF added that feedback from the EDG and Principals would be useful to increase the utility of the key messages. In addition, ICVA highlighted the need to support RG3 in remaining focused on priorities, whether in terms of geographic or thematic areas. Foundation for Rural Development (FRD) added that RG3 could support local actors to navigate country-specific bureaucratic impediments.

The RG3 co-Chairs thanked the OPAG for their constructive comments and noted that the suggestions would be taken back to RG3. They noted that showcasing tangible and measurable progress in terms of

advocacy was difficult and referred to the issue of risk appetite as discussed in the Principals' meeting with UN Secretary-General. They affirmed that they would continue efforts to take forward the work around counter-terrorism measures, welcoming the suggestion to strengthen linkages with other IASC structures. Furthermore, the work around common narratives would be pursued in terms of climate change and humanitarian action in consideration of COVID-19 contexts. Finally, in terms of engaging with non-state armed actors, closer partnerships would be sought with relevant thinktanks, such as Geneva Call and Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation, as well as HCTs in relevant countries.

The OPAG co-Chairs summarized that the OPAG was seeking holistic and complementary advocacy guidance by the RG3 that could benefit the IASC as a whole, including by strengthened linkages with other IASC structures. In addition, they highlighted broad support expressed for the key messages that were being finalized, while requesting RG3 to reprioritize the work around counter-terrorism measures and non-state armed groups.

Follow-Up Actions:

6. Support the expedited finalization and endorsement of the protection key messages [*OPAG*]

7. Ensure focused efforts to:
    *   Finalize best practices relating to the engagement with armed non state armed groups [*RG3*]
    *   Prioritize work on the impact of counter-terrorism legislation in humanitarian action [*RG3*]

AOB

Referring to the localization agenda, the OPAG co-Chair Mr. Lisle expressed appreciation to UNHCR and ICVA to take on the co-leadership role, with ICVA to identify a national NGO for this role. The need to strengthen linkages between Results Groups 1 on Operational Response, 5 on Humanitarian Financing and 2 on Accountability and Inclusion was acknowledged, including by ensuring synergies with the Grand Bargain. The IASC secretariat was going to follow up with the new co-leads to take forward the OPAG decisions.

The OPAG co-Chairs further noted progress around duty of care that ICVA was identifying UN agencies to co-chair the timebound OPAG task team. The task team is requested to convert the Protecting humanitarian workers against COVID-19 paper into a set of IASC minimum standards and commitments in complementarity with the EDG and the UN secretariat, while considering what concrete measures need to be put in place to ensure the protection and wellbeing of all staff. WFP volunteered to co-lead the task team, while IOM and UNICEF expressed interest to participate.

Regarding the rising concerns of racism and racial discrimination, the IASC secretariat was working on a zero draft for a collective statement and set of commitments for voluntary sign-up by IASC members, as well as a questionnaire to capture best practices in addressing racial discrimination amongst IASC members. At the same time, OHCHR was looking into repurposing current and forthcoming guidance on racial discrimination to ensure more effective mainstreaming among IASC members.

In closing, Mr. Lisle referred to the progress reports of the Associated Entities with the IASC which were shared for information prior to the meeting. OPAG members were invited to indicate interest to arrange an additional session to discuss the work of the Associated Entities.

The Head of the IASC secretariat, Ms. Mervat Shelbaya indicated that she would engage with OPAG members for bilateral consultations on the review of IASC structures.

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ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chair	Ms. Valerie Guarrieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP
	Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Etienne Juvanon du Vachat
	Ms. Angela Hinrichs
ICRC	Ms. Avigail Shai
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
	Mr. Jeremy Wellard
	Mr. Jeremy Rempel
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
ICVA - IMC	Ms. Mary Pack
IFRC	Ms. Cecile Aptel
	Ms. Victoria Stodart
InterAction	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barrasso
InterAction - CARE USA	Ms. Sheba Crocker
InterAction - Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
IOM	Ms. Tristan Burnett
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci
SCHR	Mr. Gareth Price-Jones
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmann
SCHR - Save the Children	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Ms. Rachel Scott
UNFPA	Ms. Ingo Piegeler
UNHABITAT	Mr. Philip Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Arafat Jamal
UNICEF	Ms. Meritxell Relano
	Ms. Segolene Adam
WFP	Mr. Brian Lander
	Ms. Gina Pattugalan
WHO	Mr. Rudi Coninx

Presenters:

Mr. Julien Schopp, RG 1 co-Chair
Mr. Stuart Campo, Team Lead, Data Policy, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data
Mr. Craig Burgess, Unit Head, Data, Analytics & Delivery for Impact, WHO
Mr. Edgardo Yu, Chief of Beneficiary Services, Technology Division, WFP
Mr. Michel Anglade, RG 3 co-Chair
Ms. Shoko Arakaki, RG 3 co-Chair

IASC secretariat:
Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat