

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

SESSION I

18 September 2020

Summary Record

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 18 September 2020. The focus of this session was: (i) Review progress achieved and stepping up efforts around localization in light of COVID-19 and beyond; and (ii) discuss progress, challenges and opportunities in addressing duty of care issues in light of COVID-19.

SESSION 1.1: STEPPING UP EFFORTS AROUND LOCALIZATION IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

In her introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair Ms. Valerie Guarnieri welcomed Ms. Lisa Piper, the Director of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), and thanked Ms. Fiona Gall for her dedication to the IASC during her tenure. The OPAG co-Chair Mr. Geir-Olav Lisle expressed appreciation for the assumption of the co-chairmanship of the localization sub-group by the Somalia NGO Consortium alongside UNHCR having. Mr. Lisle noted that present session, follows discussions held in June 2020. He reminded the OPAG of the localization-related action points agreed at the last meeting:

1. Ensure coherence of work on localization across the various IASC structures;
2. Identify benchmarks to measure progress in taking forward the localization agenda;
3. Share data and analysis on the meaningful engagement of local actors in HCTs, clusters, etc. and advocate for more equal representation of local actors in coordination structures in the field; and
4. Operationalize the [IASC Interim Guidance on Localization and the COVID-19 Response](#).

The Results Group (RG) 1 co-chair, Ms. Rein Paulsen, thanked UNICEF and IFRC for leading the localization sub-group through the development of the localization guidance

Mr. Rein called upon the new co-Chairs of the new localization sub-group co-Chairs, Ms. Stella Ogunlade (UNHCR) and Ms. Nimo Hassan (Somalia NGO Consortium). He noted that the co-Chairs, recently concluded their first introductory meetings with the Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion and Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing, while meetings were planned with the Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration and the Grand Bargain localization workstream. This is meant to identify and strengthen synergies across the different groups and entities.

Ms. Ogunlade noted the sub-group's agreed immediate priorities: 1) Extend participation to local NGOs based on criteria yet to be identified. OCHA highlighted the importance of involving Humanitarian Coordinators in discussion with the objective to strengthen localization.

2) Facilitate the meaningful engagement of local actors in Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and other field-based coordination structures.

3) Identify benchmarks to measure progress on the localization agenda. Ms. Ogunlade noted that the group would build on existing guidance, including from the London School of Economics and the Grand Bargain localization workstream.

4) Operationalizing the localization guidance in the field through avenues such as the Grand Bargain localization workstream, UNICEF led efforts and collaboration with Peer-2-Peer and field clusters. IASC members were encouraged to roll out the guidance within their respective agencies at all levels.

Ms. Ogunlade also drew attention to the guidance note by UNHABITAT on the engagement of local governments. Mr. Lisle underscored the importance of promoting field uptake of the localization guidance.

In the ensuing discussion, UNFPA stressed that strengthening meaningful participation of local actors in coordination structures required enhanced capacity support to local NGOs. This should go beyond financing support, to include coaching and mentoring, especially in terms of on-the-job training. Assistance could be provided in terms of proposal-writing, financial management, and the preparation for audits.

SCHR/Christian Aid applauded the sub-group's intention to strengthen the participation and voice of local actors. ICVA and ICVA/COAST conveyed local partners' concerns of low **funding levels** to local partners, which impeded their ability to operate. COASC furthermore requested clarify on overall funding levels to local NGOs (for example within the COVID Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)). ICVA noted that the UK had made funding to international NGO contingent upon, passing on a share of overhead costs to local partners, and the use of a simplified reporting template. They appealed to other donors to follow suit. They also noted that the Grand Bargain localization workstream has commissioned a study to demonstrate how pooled funds could be used to accelerate localization. UNICEF commented that the agency had channeled more funding to national civil society partners during the current COVID response, than at any time before. They noted that a substantial component of COVID-19 response funding was earmarked towards the financing of supplies, which may be contributing to misperceptions of funding levels. OCHA expressed appreciation for UNICEF's transparency in reporting COVID-19 funding, and highlighted efforts to track the funding flows through the Financial Tracking Mechanism (FTS) to better understand the funding received through the overall \$40 billion requested for humanitarian action in 2020, inclusive of the \$10 billion ask under the Global Humanitarian Overview.

IOM updated the OPAG on the CERF allocation channeled to NGOs through IOM. To date, 24 NGOs from Bangladesh, Haiti, Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan and South Sudan, inclusive of 6 international and 8 national NGOs had received funding.

UNFPA echoed the importance of **UNHABITAT's guidance note on engaging local governments**. UNHABITAT commented they would seek high-level commitment from the IASC and the Local Government Network (as the most representative mechanism of local governments). In collaboration with the University of Geneva, UNFPA offered to facilitate dialogue between local governments and the humanitarian community. UNHCR emphasized the importance of the work undertaken by UNHABITAT with local governments in light of local governments' positive influence. UNFPA also underscored the importance of involving local organisations, especially women-led organizations, in coordination arrangements.

UNHCR underscored the importance of coherence, looking at information management to make the work coherent, for example by linking it with joint strategies (such as Protection). IOM also noted that the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG) is integrating, as a key indicator, the existence of inclusive coordination arrangements into cluster-coordination performance monitoring. To this end, ensuring complementarity between the work of the IASC and clusters was key. OCHA drew attention to the Emergency Directors' Group's (EDG) review of field-based coordination structures during its Annual Review of Operations, which

tracked local actors' participation in national coordination mechanisms. However, OCHA noted that transformative change required quality engagement not just increased participation – a point also raised by UNICEF and ICVA/FRD. ICVA-FRD further urged the inclusion of local actors in all five Results Groups and highlighted that some Humanitarian Coordinators had not responded to calls for greater inclusiveness in coordination arrangements.

IFRC applauded the sub-group's intent to build on existing guidance and urged that any additional guidance needed to be concise and simplified. SCHR and SCHR/Save the Children noted that the Charter4Change Commitments and the Core Humanitarian Standards served as a useful resource. Ms. Ogunlade invited all OPAG members to share any existing guidance to support learning and strengthen complementarity.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Accelerate progress in taking forward the previously agreed actions, namely,
 - Ensure coherence of work on localization across the various IASC structures [*OPAG members with support of IASC secretariat*];
 - Identify benchmarks to measure progress in taking forward the localization agenda [*Results Group 1*];
 - Share data and analysis on the meaningful engagement of local actors in HCTs, clusters, etc. and advocate for more equal representation of local actors in coordination structures in the field [*OCHA*]; and
 - Operationalize the IASC interim guidance on localization [*OPAG members*].
2. Facilitate quality engagement of local partners in field-based coordination structures, including Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT), the Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and within clusters [*OCHA and Cluster Lead Agencies*]
3. Strengthen collaboration with and participation of local organizations in the Results Groups, working in collaboration with ICVA to identify local partners, broaden circulation/ mailing lists and facilitate regular dialogue and consultative forums [*All Results Groups*]
4. Capture a clearer and evidence-based narrative around funding of frontline responders to address the perception concerns [*IASC Members and FTS*].

SESSION 1.2: DUTY OF CARE

In her opening remarks, Ms. Guarneri pointed out that increasingly duty of care needed to be considered as a systems issue and not just institutionally within the organizations, just as security had gradually become a systems issue. She applauded the efforts by WFP in support of system-wide efforts during COVID-19 crisis. To date, WFP has provided passenger services to 21,500 humanitarian staff, of which 44 per cent have been NGOs. In addition, WFP also facilitated medevac services on behalf of the system, with over 40 medical evacuations having been conducted to date.

Ms. Guarneri recalled that the OPAG had requested the establishment of a duty of care task team co-chaired by ICVA and WFP that would address the gaps in duty of care within the COVID context. The team was tasked to convert the ICVA paper on duty of care into IASC minimum standards.

Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, the Co-Chair of the duty of care task team, highlighted efforts to ensure complementarity to the work of the EDG, which has a focus on ensuring operational continuity; as well as the work of the UN's High-level Committee on Management. She furthermore noted that advice from human resources and legal departments on aspects of duty of care were key to inform identification of minimum standards. Mr. Giammichele de Maio, the co-Chair of the task team, highlighted requests to expand the scope of the Minimum standards, beyond COVID-19.

Ms. Guarneri appreciated the linkages created between the EDG and OPAG, and invited UNICEF and SCHR, who serve both as OPAG and EDG members, to reflect on complementarities.

In the ensuing discussion, IFRC and UNHCR voiced support for striking a balance between developing minimum standards on duty of care in light of COVID-19 vs. more long-term arrangements, especially in light of the increased attacks on aid workers and other risks. UNHCR suggested to look at the issue from a broader perspective to identify existing standards and building on these. Members noted the importance of private security companies' compliance with duty of care standards. UNICEF suggested via social media driven communication enhancing duty of care and countering stigma against humanitarian workers and as a way to counter misinformation, enhance aid worker security and reclaim humanitarian workers' credibility as impartial actors. UNICEF also voiced concern that the drive to create greater coherence among humanitarian, development and peace actors within the nexus framework had contributed to blurring the perception of humanitarians' impartiality.

UNICEF also referred to the importance of promoting **accountability** by humanitarian country leadership. Duty of care should be central to the performance of HCs and HCT. UNICEF also suggested managing expectation, especially in light of resource constraints, to which SCHR concurred.

UNFPA expressed its interest in joining the task team. UNFPA and InterAction stressed the need for an inclusive approach to duty of care, taking into consideration national and international staff, as well as consultants recruited by humanitarian organizations, and local partners. The COVID-19 crisis had emphasized the importance of investing in staff's **mental health and well-being**. They noted the crucial significance of addressing the mental health component to duty of care, due to isolation, stress and the impacts it is having on the individual level and driving domestic violence.

InterAction echoed the task team co-Chairs' call that additional work was required to operationalize minimum standards, including building **dialogue with donors**, including the GHD. It was suggested that costs related to implementing these standards need to be reflected in partnership agreements. To this end, the discussion on operationalizing may need to distinguish between standards that could be implemented by organizations without cost implications, and those that required increased financial commitments from donors, e.g. increasing budget lines for security costs, and medical insurance for national staff. ICVA/COAST and ICVA-ACBAR commented that local organizations often lack duty of care provisions, such as medical insurance. Results Group 4 and Results Group 5 Co-Chairs agreed to collaborate on engaging with donors on this issue. OHCHR voiced concern that increased costs for duty of care should not simply be matched by enforcing so-called efficiencies, which would be to the detriment of programs.

Ms. Guarneri appreciated the task team's ambition to present a first draft of the minimum duty of care standards by mid-October. In concluding, she identified the following key issues: (i) need for clarity, the scope and accountability for duty of care, duty of care, by who for who; (ii) Cultural issues, understanding what cultural barriers need to be overcome at the organizational or systems level; (iii) cost Issue- how we pragmatically address the cost issue; communication- Increased engagement by the Principals, within different organisations and the system, as well as communication to address perception issues.

Mr. de Maio noted that the task team would focus the work towards identifying minimum duty of care standards around the points raised in ICVA's paper, as per the previous OPAG discussion. He informed participants that duty of care would feature as one of the themes in WFP's annual partnership consultations.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Take forward previously agreed actions by the OPAG, namely:
 - Converting the ICVA paper into a set of IASC minimum standards and commitments to be adopted by IASC (draft to be delivered for OPAG's consideration by 15 October 2020) [*Duty of care task team co-led by ICVA and WFP*]

AOB

The Head of the IASC secretariat, Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, explained that the extension of the IASC structures through 2021 was a demonstration of the value and relevance of the structures, through a track record of success. She stated that the structures have been agile and responsive, especially on the COVID response. In addition, she commended the level of inclusion, bringing on board NGO partners including local partners and partners from outside the IASC. She called on the OPAG and RG Co-Chairs to continue the momentum, However, more needs to be done. The IASC Principals asked for the further strengthening of collaboration between the OPAG and EDG; translating policy to practice; rationalizing structures to increase efficiency and further prioritizing areas of work by the Results Groups

During the OPAG meeting on 25 September 2020, the RG co-Chairs will be asked to present on their key priorities. It will also be an opportunity to discuss rationalizing of structures and strengthening collaboration and working methods.

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chair	Ms. Valerie Guarrieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Ms. Fiona Arnone Ms. Angela Hinrichs Mr. Daniele Donati
ICRC	NA
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi Mr. Jeremy Wellard
ICVA/ACBAR	Ms. Lisa Piper
ICVA - COAST	Mr. Rezaul Karim
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
ICVA - IMC	Ms. Mary Pack
IFRC	Ms. Cecile Aptel
INTERACTION	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barrasso
INTERACTION - CARE US	Ms. Sheba Crocker
INTERACTION/ GLOBAL COMMUNITIES	NA
IOM	Ms. Tristan Burnett Ms. Angela Staiger
OCHA	Mr. Rein Paulsen
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci
SCHR	Mr. Gareth Price-Jones
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmann
SCHR – Save the Children	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Mr. Roberto Paganini
UNFPA	Ms. Ingo Piegeler
UNHABITAT	Mr. Philip Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund Mr. Guido van der Heyten
UNICEF	Mr. Manuel Fontaine Ms. Meritxell Relano Ms. Segolene Adam Mr. Luc Chauvin
WFP	Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri
WHO	Mr. Aiman Zarul

Presenters:

Ms. Stella Ogunlade, RG 1 localization sub-group co-Chair
Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, Duty of care task team co-Chair
Mr. Giammichele de Maio, Duty of care task team co-Chair

IASC secretariat:

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat