

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

SESSION II

25 September 2020

Summary Record

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 25 September 2020. The primary objectives of this meeting was to (i) agree on the priorities of the Results Groups in light of the extension of the mandate and identify areas of strengthened collaboration across the Results Groups and beyond; (ii) agree on the way forward to streamline work among the Results Groups and rationalize structures; and (iii) identify opportunities to strengthen the working methods of the OPAG and Results Groups, including in terms of the interaction between the Results Groups and the OPAG; translating policy to action to better support the field; and strengthening the collaboration between the OPAG and the IASC's Emergency Directors Group (EDG).

SESSION 2.1: REFINED PRIORITIES OF EACH RESULTS GROUP AND AREAS OF COLLABORATION

In their introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chairs, Ms. Valerie Guarneri and Mr. Geir Olav Lisle noted that the discussion was a follow up to the IASC Principals' request to the OPAG to consider ways to better streamline work and rationalize IASC structures and the Entities Associated with the IASC. The extension of the mandate of the IASC structures demonstrates the IASC Principals' recognition of the value of the work by the OPAG and its subsidiary bodies, especially over the recent months during the COVID-19 response. By prioritizing and focusing their work, the Results Groups would be better placed to support and respond to asks from the IASC Principals in a more timely manner, as well as to consider creative approaches to support the field in translating already endorsed normative work to practice.

The co-Chair of the IASC Results Group 1 on Operational Response, Mr. Julien Schopp presented three priority areas to be taken forward during the next 15 months of the extended mandate: 1) The centrality of protection, 2) Addressing bureaucratic and administrative impediments and 3) Strengthening localization. These suggested priority areas of work respond to specific requests from IASC Principals or the EDG. The other areas of work contained in the workplan -- including humanitarian leadership, early warning and early action and Emergency Response Preparedness, and data responsibility -- will continue and will be reported on, linking up with Results Group only on key decision points. The co-Chair encouraged OCHA to lead the work on the mapping of bureaucratic impediments, noting capacity constraints faced by the Results Group's NGO members. He further noted that the Results Group would strengthen efforts to link with the EDG and translate the normative work at the field level. Mr. Schopp also called for an OPAG session to discuss the centrality of protection, with a particular focus on a UNHCR paper which lays out options to better integrate protection concerns into the work of all IASC subsidiary bodies, and the draft Terms of Reference of a suggested review of the 2016 IASC Protection Policy.

In the ensuing discussion, the OPAG members expressed broad support for the reprioritization of work around the three key areas and the need for an in-depth discussion on protection. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) stressed the importance of the work around bureaucratic

and administrative impediments, calling on RG1 to establish a clear timeline especially with respect to the case study countries. He offered to facilitate the case study in Afghanistan. IFRC raised the need to mainstream collaboration around localization across all Results Groups. IOM suggested possible areas of strengthened collaboration between Results Group 1 and other Results Groups. Collaboration with Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion; Results Groups 3 on counter-terrorism measures, as well as their work on collective advocacy, and Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing. The Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) suggested that OPAG and the Results groups should focus collaboration on policy formulation and not operationalization. COAST further highlighted a perceived gap between policy and implementation, particular the low uptake by operational organizations; noting opportunities presented in the context of the UN reform.

The co-Chair of the IASC Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion, Ms. Bernadette Castell-Hollingsworth presented the following three priorities: (i) Refine, socialize and support the operationalization at the field level of the tools and guidelines developed, including; the Accountability Framework, the Global Platform, and the Service Directory and Results Tracker; (ii) Identify ways to foster cooperation with other key workstreams, for example with the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC) process, Results Group 1 around localization and protection, and Results Group 3 around collective advocacy; and (iii) Identify ways to break silos within the Results Group, bringing together, Accountability, Diversity and PSEA, and; looking at affected people in a holistic way, identifying the intersectionalities in terms of age, gender and disability.

In the ensuing discussion, the OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Guarnieri suggested the Results Group – as the most suitable platform – to take forward the Principals’ request around racism and racial discrimination. This was supported by SCHR, UNICEF and COAST.

OPAG members expressed widespread support to the refocused priorities of the Results Group. WFP noted that the Results Group had accomplished all its priorities and thus should focus on socializing and operationalizing the developed tools. WFP further encouraged the Results Group to revisit their priorities with a more strategic lens, noting that the second and third priorities, as presented were more like ways of working. COAST stressed the need for simple and easily accessible field-based complaint response mechanism which draw on soft technology and local languages. IOM highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration with other Results Groups. UNFPA noted the need for a new IASC guidance to strengthen accountability to affected populations, especially with regard to affected populations in difficult to reach areas.

The co-Chair of the IASC Results Group 2 stressed that the development of an Accountability Framework was in response to requests from humanitarian country leadership. The strategic priorities will contribute to mainstreaming accountability and inclusion. The Results Group would discuss how to take forward the discussion around racism and racial discrimination, as well as around complaints and feedback mechanisms at its next monthly meeting.

The co-Chairs of the IASC Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy, Mr. Michel Anglade and Ms. Shoko Arakaki presented the following three priorities: (i) Address the impact of counter-terrorism measures and the growing trend for the criminalization of humanitarian action (building synergies with Results Group 1’s work on bureaucratic impediments); (ii) Capture and disseminate lessons learned and best practice with regards to engagement with Non-State armed actors; and (iii) Develop common narratives on specific issues of concern to support IASC members’ efforts in their collective and/or bilateral advocacy efforts. The work around developing a humanitarian diplomacy strategy would be de-prioritized, considering ongoing work in this regard in other fora. Co-Chairs suggested the Results Group will focus its advocacy

efforts on adding value to the Principals' advocacy and on convening relevant stakeholders around key issues, as well as linking policy and practice.

In the ensuing discussion, the OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Guarneri highlighted a strong need for collective advocacy to be a part of the work of all Results Groups, while noting opportunities for OCHA to lead on some concrete advocacy efforts. Ms. Guarneri invited the OPAG members to consider the possibility of merging the Results Groups 1 and 3, given their strong synergies around issues of non-state actors, counter-terrorism measures and bureaucratic impediments. The OPAG expressed wide support to the refocused priorities of the Results Group as suggested by the Results Group 3 Co-Chairs. SCHR stressed the important role of the Results Group as a convenor to effectively coordinate different voices and complement them, rather than as a producer of common messages. UNHCR, recognizing the added value of the Results Group, urged closer links with the Results Groups 1 and 2. OHCHR suggested further thinking around how to ensure consensus more effectively to complement the Principals and EDG's advocacy efforts which often require a quick turnaround. ICVA noted the difficulty to tease out a concrete added value of the Results Group, while suggesting strengthened linkages with the Results Group 5 in taking forward the work around counter-terrorism measures. COAST stressed that collective advocacy should take place in a decentralized manner, especially at country level as well as within each institution. COAST further emphasized the importance of promoting the demand side to narrow the gaps between policy formulation and implementation. InterAction noted that the Principals' collective advocacy should be more about finding solutions than discussing the problems. InterAction also agreed with de-prioritizing work towards a humanitarian diplomacy strategy.

In conclusion, the Results Group 3 Co-Chairs suggested a future strategic focus on facilitating practical action on the ground in support of the HCs and HCTs, and to further tighten priorities to avoid duplication, ensuring inclusivity and amplifying the voices of affected populations, and promoting a more decentralized advocacy. In conclusion, Ms. Guarneri highlighted opportunities to further align the work of Results Group 1 and 2, in particular around the issue of COTER and best practice on non-state armed actors. She also reiterated the role of Results Group 3 as a convener, rather than an originator of a common voice.

The co-Chairs of the IASC Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration, Ms. Marta Valdés García and Ms. Rachel Scott, suggested maintaining the following five objectives through 2021, namely: (i) Support the system-wide response to COVID-19; (ii) Disseminate the [IASC Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes](#); (iii) Provide inter-agency guidance on humanitarian-development collaboration and its linkages to peace; (iv) Disseminate good practices on humanitarian-development collaboration; and (v) Support country operations through a system of pooling capacities. They noted that the Results Group will shift its focus from policy to practice by allowing greater space to local actors and field practitioners, engaging more actively with peace actors and cultivating further synergies with other Results Groups.

In the ensuing discussion, the OPAG members expressed wide support to the Results Group's suggested way forward, particularly in terms of supporting country operations and bridging the gap between policy and practice. COAST, furthermore, noted the significance of the humanitarian-development collaboration which is necessary in bringing about human rights and sustainable peace. COAST further noted that donors' practice often led to siloed assistance, which called for continued advocacy both at national and international levels. UNICEF underlined that humanitarian and development had its own course of actions and objectives, which should not be blurred. IOM echoed UNICEF on the importance of clear narratives to ensure complementary but also distinct roles between humanitarian, development and peace actors. UNHCR and UNFPA noted the close linkages between the Results Groups 4 and 5 around financing instruments for joint humanitarian-development programming. WFP expressed interest to contribute to the issue paper on peace currently under development, which was welcomed by IOM.

In response to the OPAG co-Chairs' suggestion to consider a possible merger between the Results Groups 4 and 5 as a way to maximize synergies, several OPAG members voiced significant concern, while some noted opportunities for stronger collaboration between both groups. SCHR underlined the distinct roles and objectives of the two Results Groups. UNICEF noted that focusing on merging funding streams could lead to further politicization of humanitarian financing. ICVA noted the expected difficulty to achieve time-bound and qualitative achievements in case of a merger. The Foundation for Rural Development (FRD) highlighted that the urgent need at field level was earlier action from the development actors, so that the humanitarian needs do not increase due to lack of risk-informed development.

The co-Chairs of the IASC Results Group 4 reiterated the need to bring in risk-tolerant investments early and deliver results so that a deterioration towards a humanitarian crisis can be avoided. They also noted that the nexus should not overly focus on financing. The importance of safeguarding complementary but distinct roles between the humanitarian and development actors was restated. Co-Chairs reiterated that presently there are very few overlaps between the work of Results Group 4 and Results Group 5. They also stressed Result Group 4's distinct role in bringing relevant stakeholders together and amplifying the voice of local organisations.

The co-Chairs of the IASC Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing, Ms. Marcy Vigoda and Mr. Jeremy Rempel, presented the following three priorities: (i) Strengthening the provision of quality funding and cascading the benefits of quality financing to frontline and local actors, including reducing earmarking, expanding multi-year funding and strengthening accountability; (ii) Financing the nexus, through improving engagement with development actors to anticipate and reduce humanitarian need; and (iii) Strengthen harmonization and simplification of financing systems, with a primary focus on IASC systems. A key focus in this regard would be to achieve broad adoption of flexibility in funding, further enhance efforts to unlock access to funding and reduce administrative burdens that prevent efficient allocation of funds to NGOs. Co-Chairs noted opportunities for strengthening linkages with all Results Groups 1 on localization; Results Groups 3 on counter terrorism measures, and with Results Group 4 around development co-benefits. Co-Chairs also noted the Groups' strong developed links with the Grand Bargain, the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) and the OECD and respective relevant workstreams, in particular around quality funding and the simplifications of financing systems.

In the ensuing discussion, SCHR suggested further thinking around aid transparency in humanitarian financing, while expressing overall support for the refocused priorities. UNFPA, expressed strong support to the Results Group's priorities, calling for enhanced IASC engagement with the Grand Bargain and GHD by further streamlining and complementing efforts around common workstreams. Echoing UNFPA, SCHR noted a potential role for the IASC to influence the future vision for the Grand Bargain. The International Medical Corps (IMC) and Results Group 5 Co-Chairs sought to gauge support for innovative financing, given top donors' emphasis on burden sharing and expanding the donor base. OHCHR questioned how the Results Group would reflect financing due diligence for national staff in its ongoing work. COAST stressed the fundamental importance of implementing the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard to promote aid transparency, inquiring whether it was being prioritized by the Results Group. SCHR, UNFPA, UNDP and UNHCR, again, voiced doubts over the suggestions to Results Groups 4 and 5.

The co-Chairs of the IASC Results Group 5 agreed to consider how to address due diligence for national staff within its workplan. They further called for distinguishing between technical and political work and noted that quite a few issues being discussed at the OPAG had common elements around operational advocacy and financing. Co-Chairs agreed to continue the strong collaboration with Results Group 4 on relevant financing related issues.

Follow-Up Actions:

Results Group 1 on Operational Response

1. Agree to prioritize the following: (a) centrality of protection; (b) revitalizing the work on bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and; (c) focusing and making progress on the localization workstream.
2. Support the ongoing work of the sub-groups on humanitarian leadership, data responsibility and early warning and early action. Sub-groups leads are to table issues to the attention of the Results Group 1 for critical decisions or to address possible bottlenecks.
3. Strengthen enhanced collaboration with Results Group 2 on protection, with Results Group 3 on counter terrorism (COTER) work, and engagement with all Results Groups on localization.
4. Hold a separate OPAG meeting to discuss progress and next steps on protection.

Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion

1. Agree to finalize and focus efforts on socializing the four main tools that Results Group 2 has been working on, namely: (a) Accountability Framework, (b) Global Platform, (c) Service Directory, and (d) Accountability and Inclusion Results Tracker.
2. Consider ways to prioritize and build in complaints and feedback mechanism for affected people.
3. Ensure strengthened engagement with Results Group 1 on protection and localization; with Results Group 3 on advocacy; with the HPC Steering Group to include AAP in the HPC process; and with the Grand Bargain on the Participation Revolution.
4. Take on the time-critical work on racism and racial discrimination and capitalize on the good work and progress done on PSEA/SHA to inform the development of an action plan to address this critical issue.

Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy

1. Agree on the need to prioritize the following: (a) mitigating the impact of COTER on humanitarian action; and (b) finalizing work on engagement with non-state armed groups.
2. Ensure strengthened engagement with Results Groups 1 and 5 as well as OCHA on COTER.
3. Recognizing that advocacy is a cross-cutting issue carried out by the IASC Principals and subject-matter experts through the various Results Groups, recommend the Result Group 3 to be agile and respond to specific requests from the Principals or the EDG for the development of key messages, if and when relevant.
4. Agree to de-prioritize the work on humanitarian diplomacy as it is done at the Principals level.

Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration

1. Agree to maintain the following priority areas through 2021: (a) Socialize the IASC Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes; (b) provide inter-agency guidance on humanitarian-development collaboration and its linkages to peace; (c) identify, document and exchange good practice on humanitarian-development collaboration; and (d) support country operations through a mapping of expertise and capacities.

2. Facilitate shifting from policy to practice through socializing learning and best practice, identifying the required outputs that would support a change towards a Nexus approach on the ground, within the RG4 giving more space to local actors and field colleagues, and including more development and peace actors into conversations.
3. Collaborate with Results Group 5 on promoting financing instruments supporting humanitarian interventions with development co-benefits.

Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing

1. Agree to maintain the following priority areas:
 - a. In collaboration with the Grand Bargain, continue to facilitate the development and implementation of approaches to reduce earmarking, expand multi-year funding, and maintain accountability; support the rollout of mechanisms to ensure quality funding benefits are cascaded to local actors.
 - b. Facilitate a broad adoption of IASC contractual funding flexibility measures to contribute to simplifying and harmonizing UN systems and reduce administrative burdens and barriers that prevent efficient allocation of funds to the field.
 - c. Collaborate with Results Group 4 on promoting financing instruments supporting humanitarian interventions with development co-benefits.

SESSION 2.2: RATIONALIZATION OF STRUCTURES

The OPAG co-Chairs highlighted the need to consider how to achieve greater synergies across the Results Groups moving forward, noting some overlaps observed during the past year. They called upon the OPAG members to consider ways to streamline work and simplify structures, including through potential mergers of certain Results Groups which share similar priorities - for example consider greater synergies between or merging of Results Groups 1 and 3 given the strong linkages around the work on bureaucratic impediments and COTER measures, and consider greater synergies between or merging of Results Groups 4 and 5 to further capitalize on their established collaboration around financing the nexus. Recognizing the distinct mandates and priority objectives of each Results Group, they saw value in exploring opportunities for bringing together certain structures. As a follow up to the Principals request, they also noted a call was being arranged with the EDG Chair to discuss opportunities to strengthen the OPAG-EDG linkages.

In the ensuing discussion, InterAction, reflecting on a similar exercise which took place within the Grand Bargain, highlighted the importance of political will to translate commitments into implementation, which cannot be achieved by simply changing structures. InterAction suggested reconsidering the division of inter-agency work between Results Groups and OCHA, as well as revitalization of the IASC Deputies Forum, given its potential synergies with the OPAG and potential for amplifying the OPAG's achievements. SCHR and UNHABITAT suggested leaving any potential major structural changes to after the Principals' discussion anticipated for May 2021. WFP saw a potential value in merging certain structures over time, but voiced concern over the limited timeframe. ICVA suggested conducting an independent evaluation to examine the added value of IASC subsidiary structures. The findings could inform the Principals' discussion in May 2021. ICRC suggested ensuring the work of the Results Groups was aligned with the Principals and EDG's decisions, emphasizing the OPAG members' accountability in translating the Results Groups' work into practice by capitalizing on different roles and mandates of member organizations.

The OPAG co-Chairs noted members' limited support for immediate structural changes in the composition of IASC subsidiary bodies. They also highlighted members' interest in seizing opportunities to streamline structures over the course of 2021. They urged OPAG members and Results Groups Co-Chairs to deliver in a timely manner on their agreed priorities going forward, and to focus on translating policy into practice, amplifying representation of local actors within each Results Group and leveraging complementarities across different Results Groups and beyond.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Agree to maintain the current structures of the Results Groups, pending the Principals' discussion on future IASC structures in May 2021 [*OPAG members*]
2. Ensure timely delivery on the agreed refined priorities, while focusing on translating policy into practice, amplifying representation of local actors within each Results Group and leveraging complementarities across different Results Groups and beyond [*All Results Groups*]
3. Enhance linkages between the OPAG and EDG. Results Groups 1 and 3 to share suggestions with the IASC secretariat on how to better collaborate with the EDG, considering that their work provides key entry points [*OPAG members & Results Groups 1 and 3*]
4. Schedule an OPAG discussion on the future of the Entities Associated with the IASC [*IASC secretariat*]
5. Support translating the Results Groups' work into practice [*OPAG members*]

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The OPAG co-Chairs noted that a separate session would be arranged to discuss a way forward of the Entities Associated with the IASC as a follow up to the IASC Principals' request. They concluded by thanking the OPAG members and the co-Chairs of the Results Groups for their constructive engagement throughout the meeting and their continued work in support of the normative work of the IASC.

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chair	Ms. Valerie Guarrieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Dominique Burgeon Ms. Angela Hinrichs
ICRC	Ms. Clare Dalton
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi Mr. Jeremy Wellard
ICVA - ACBAR	Ms. Lisa K. Piper
ICVA - COAST	Mr. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
ICVA - IMC	Ms. Mary Pack
IFRC	Prof. Cecile Aptel Ms. Emanuel Boscardin
InterAction	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barrasso
InterAction - Care USA	Ms. Sheba Crocker
InterAction - Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
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 Mosselmans
SCHR - Save the Children International	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor
UNFPA	Ms. Shoko Arakaki Mr. Ingo Piegeler
UNHABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund Ms. Lea Moser
UNICEF	Mr. Manuel Fontaine
WFP	Ms. Annalisa Conte
WHO	Mr. Aiman Zarul
World Bank	Ms. Maria Dimitriadou

Presenters:

Mr. Julien Schopp and Mr. Rein Paulsen, Co-Chairs of RG1 on Operational Response
 Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth and Mr. Charles Antoine Hofmann (representing Ms. Meritxell Relano), Co-Chairs of RG2 on Accountability and Inclusion
 Mr. Michel Anglade and Ms. Shoko Arakaki, Co-Chairs of RG3 on Collective Advocacy
 Ms. Marta Valdes Garcia and Ms. Rachel Scott, Co-Chairs of RG4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration
 Ms. Marcy Vigoda and Mr. Jeremy Rempel, Co-Chairs of RG5 on Humanitarian Financing

IASC secretariat:

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat
