IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting
5 November 2020

Summary Record

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 5 November 2020. The primary objective of this meeting was to discuss the purpose, achievements, challenges and priorities moving forward of the Entities Associated with the IASC[1].

In their introductory remarks, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri and Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, OPAG co-Chairs noted that the session responded to the IASC Principals' decision to extend the mandate of the IASC structures through 2021 and their request for the OPAG to consider further streamlining and rationalizing of the structures of the current Results Groups and Entities Associated with the IASC for more efficiencies. They noted that the meeting would be dedicated to discussing the Entities Associated with the IASC, as a follow up to the 25 September OPAG meeting which focused on priorities and ways of working of the Results Groups.

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat, set the scene by explaining the rationale of the association of the Entities with the IASC at the juncture of the IASC reform in January 2019 and their engagement to date with the OPAG. All Entities existed years before the reform of the IASC structures with distinct governance structures, accountability lines and purpose. The association of the Entities with the IASC was determined largely based on political reasons, including strong lobbying from the Entities to signal their objectives' priority and credibility bestowed on their work through official linkages with the IASC.

Ms. Shelbaya noted that while the IASC reform indicated that the Entities would be accountable to the OPAG, there were no further details or parameters that dictated what that accountability meant or should look like. The reform also stipulated that the Entities would link/interact with other IASC bodies, as appropriate, including by providing inputs to the development of new IASC policies or guidelines. The Entities so far engaged with the OPAG by submitting progress reports and policies/guidelines for review prior to endorsement by the IASC. In light of competing demands, interaction between the OPAG and the Entities has been limited; the Entities have operated largely independently with little guidance or oversight from the OPAG.

Ms. Shelbaya invited the OPAG members to discuss the way forward of the Entities in terms of what added value their association brings to the IASC; whether the Entities require this association for legitimacy and credibility; what needs to be improved to ensure efficiencies of the Entities; and how to better distinguish areas of work/platforms specific to OCHA's work versus areas of work/structures that merit association with the IASC.

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[1] The Entities Associated with the IASC are composed of the following five groups: Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group (IAHE-SG), Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG), Humanitarian Programme Cycle Steering Group (HPC-SG), Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (MHPSS-RG), and Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action (GRG).

SESSION 1: GLOBAL CLUSTER COORDINATION GROUP (GCCG)

Ms. Marina Skuric Prodanovic, GCCG Chair and Ms. Linda Doull, Global Health Cluster Coordinator noted that the Group was established as an informal body following the roll-out of the cluster approach. It is currently composed of 11 Global Clusters, 4 Areas of Responsibility (AoRs), the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) and OCHA. At the operational level, the GCCG strives to enhance functioning and contextualization of country-level inter-cluster/sector coordination. At global level, it supports the IASC structures with the revision and development of appropriate tools and guidance for inter-cluster coordination. The GCCG is the only forum where clusters and AoRs can come together and discuss a comprehensive range of issues. Its strength lies in its focus on translating and promoting mainstreaming of normative policy into operational practice and accountability to Cluster Lead Agencies and the cluster partnership.

The GCCG has provided critical support to the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP). The GCCG also pivoted its workplan in light of the pandemic by developing key messages on inter-cluster coordination related to COVID-19, a matrix on inter-cluster engagement for COVID-19, a minimum support package for non-cluster countries, and other support packages for the field which catalyzed associated multi-sectoral discussions. Remote field support continued, while field missions were hindered due to travel restrictions.

The GCCG has faced several challenges, most notably around the GHRP which placed additional demands on global clusters who have had to in addition to supporting countries with activated clusters also found themselves supporting a much wider constituency with constrained resources. However, this has also offered an opportunity in enabling closer humanitarian development collaboration. Other challenges related to coordination issues larger than the clusters, such as cash coordination and the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) initiative.

The following priorities were proposed going forward: (i) continuing with remote field support by building on a collective multi-sectoral and inter-sectoral approach; (ii) promoting improvements in performance monitoring; (iii) engaging and mainstreaming specific thematic issues, including localization, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and gender; (iv) collecting humanitarian coordination data on various aspects of cluster functioning; (v) continuing engagement on the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) and the Global Information Management, Assessment and Analysis Cell (GIMAC) on COVID-19; and (vi) engaging on emerging trends and fit-for-purpose coordination, including area-based coordination.

Regarding its association with the IASC, the GCCG requested greater clarity around opportunities for interaction with the Results Groups and a stronger strategic steer from the OPAG and the Emergency Directors Group (EDG). The GCCG will pursue constructive dialogues on fit-for-purpose coordination and emerging trends, considering that changes to IASC guidance and structures will require engagement of the system at large at various levels. The OPAG was requested to review and endorse the GCCG's revised Terms of Reference (ToRs).

In the ensuing discussion, some OPAG members expressed support for the **continued association of the GCCG with the IASC**. Several organizations, including WFP, IOM, InterAction, ICVA, UNFPA, and UNDP, reaffirmed **the importance of strengthening direct linkages of the GCCG with the EDG**. OCHA, in turn, noted that the de facto EDG GCCG connection was already in place, given that most of the cluster coordinators report to their respective Emergency Directors. The GCCG had already noted in the past a connection and need to closely work with the EDG given its focus on operational field support. In this context, UNHCR requested clarifying the accountability and reporting lines of Cluster Lead Agencies. In response,

the GCCG said that many, but not all of the Global Cluster Coordinators had a reporting line to Emergency Directors of their respective CLAs.

Several OPAG members requested more time to review the GCCG's revised ToRs to reflect the discussion, including the proposal for co-chairing agreements.

Some OPAG members recommended **a co-chairing arrangement with an NGO**. To facilitate an increase in participation of local and national actors, COAST further emphasized the use of local languages. In response, the GCCG responded that while the ongoing review of the ToRs presented an opportunity to consider the current chairing arrangement, it was worth noting that it was dependent on current GCCG membership which reflected existing global cluster leadership arrangements and hence would require a deeper reflection. It was also highlighted there was significant NGO participation in country-level clusters with 79% of cluster meetings held in local languages.

OCHA and ICVA stressed the need for the GCCG to **maintain both an operational and normative focus**, while UNHCR asked to further clarify the roles and focus of the GCCG, regardless whether it reports to the EDG or the OPAG. Adding to UNHCR, WHO requested clarifying OPAG's roles in tasking and overseeing the Entities. OCHA added that a strategic steer from the OPAG and closer linkages to the Results Groups needed to be reinforced to ensure full coherence and visibility. WFP suggested the GCCG bring requests that exceeds the GCCG's operational role and capacity to the OPAG's attention, so that the OPAG could identify the most appropriate mechanism to address them. UNHCR agreed noting that the current workplan contains **issues, such as cash, that are not best suited for the GCCG**. UNHCR recognized the GCCG's critical role in advancing the GHRP. The GCCG commented that considering the linkages that existed between GCCs and CLAs, it would make sense for the GCCG to have connections with both the EDG and the OPAG. The GCCG further stressed that the annual workplan is agreed in full consultation with Global Cluster Coordinators and shared periodically with the OPAG. Its work around cash, had originated both from WB and Cash CALP reports reinforced by requests for guidance from the field, and was in the end put on hold in recognition of the fact that the issue went beyond the realm of the GCCG and required IASC engagement at other levels.

ICVA inquired about the GCCG's role to support non-cluster structures, noting that clusters are not activated in a number of major humanitarian settings and in the great majority of small-medium disaster contexts.

The OPAG co-Chairs concluded by noting the OPAG's wide support for the important role played by the GCCG. They highlighted the expressed need to strengthen linkages between the GCCG and the OPAG and Results Groups, particularly in terms of socializing normative work with field operations. They asked the GCCG to channel requests from the field or other parts of the system beyond its remit to the OPAG for consideration and appropriate tasking. They also requested the GCCG to strengthen its links with the EDG by capitalizing on the EDG-OPAG dual membership. They invited OPAG members to share feedback on the GCCG's revised ToRs.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Strengthen linkages between the GCCG and the Results Groups to better inform critical policies and tools being issues [*Results Groups and GCCG with the support of the IASC secretariat*]

2. Consider adopting a co-Chairperson arrangement together with OCHA, including the possibility of an NGO co-Chair [*GCCG*]

3. Get a stronger strategic steer on GCCG priorities. *[OPAG and EDG]*

4. Engage the EDG on opportunities to strengthen the EDG-GCCG linkages and consider the possibility to establish a direct reporting line between the EDG and the GCCG [*OPAG and EDG Chairs*]

5. Review the GCCG ToRs and provide comments [*OPAG members with the support of the IASC secretariat*]

6. Channel requests from the field, or other parts of the system, that exceed the GCCG's role to the OPAG to determine the most appropriate approach and forum to take these issues forward [*GCCG*]

SESSION 2: HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE STEERING GROUP (HPC-SG)

Mr. Andrew Wyllie, HPC-SG Chair noted that the HPC-SG was created during the Transformative Agenda. Its purpose was to help coordinate and support the HPC in the field and to address any related normative or operational gaps. In practice this meant facilitating the development and roll-out of HPC approaches, guidance and templates; coordinating technical backstopping of teams in the field; pooling efforts to strengthen capacities to implement the HPC; and the integration of lesson learning in the HPC.

Key achievements in 2020 include (i) finalization of the 2020 HPC Multi-partner Review and the ongoing preparations for the 2021 Review, and the 2021 HPC package and HPC trainings; (ii) contribution to the 2021 Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) Guidance and support for its application in the field; (iii) contribution to the guidance for the estimation of the People in Need (PiN) based on the approved JIAF Guidance and in alignment with guidance on estimated number of persons targeted and the number of persons reached; (iv) support to the JIAF Helpdesk to assist with the application of JIAF Guidance in the 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO); and (v) provision of inter-agency trainings on disabilities in collaboration with the IASC Disabilities Task Team.

Priorities going forward include (i) consolidating inputs to the planned independent review of the JIAF to inform the next HNOs; (ii) updating the IASC Operational Guidance on Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises of 2012; (iii) conducting the Data Entry and Exploratory Platform (DEEP) Secondary Data Review project; (iv) advocating with clusters and partners for greater inclusivity and inter-sectoral understanding of gender, disability, age and etc., both in need analysis and response planning; and (v) conducting a review on costing practices on the field drawing from the GHRP experiences.

The HPC-SG has faced several challenges, including the need to reconfigure the group to ensure consistency of participation at the right level for more efficiencies and effectiveness. In addition, the group will consider adopting a co-chairing arrangement. Clarification is also required around identification of new initiatives and the roles of OPAG. The review of costing practices, for example, was included in the group's workplan upon request from partners on the ground, without official tasking from the OPAG.

The HPC-SG Chair stressed the importance of its continued association with the IASC, which was a prerequisite to effective implementation of critical guidance on the ground.

In the ensuing discussion, OPAG members, including WFP, ICVA and UNHCR, expressed broad support for the critical role played by the HPC-SG. Several OPAG members reiterated the need to **strengthen the HPC-SG's accountability to the OPAG**, particularly for review and clearance of policy guidance. WFP and UNHCR stressed that all HPC guidance developed by the HPC-SG should be validated by the OPAG before dissemination to the field. SCHR commented that it would be unnecessary for the OPAG to review technical details at granular level to avoid the danger of reopening closed conversations inadvertently. ICVA

requested further clarity in terms of the criteria for an IASC-endorsed product and the field consultation process of IASC products. The HPC-SG Chair welcomed greater clarity on the OPAG's role in tasking and reviewing the work of the HPC-SG.

On **participation and chairing arrangement**, OPAG members, including WFP, ICVA, UNHCR and OCHA expressed support for the HPC-SG's intention to reconfigure its membership and consider a co-chairing arrangement. They also suggested mapping all sub-groups and relevant entities, such as the JIAF and GIMAC, to assess how their work fits into HPC-related elements. WFP commented that fewer participants at a more senior level and a rotating co-chairing arrangement would add value. ICVA, SCHR and OCHA reiterated the need to **enhance engagement of NGOs**. In this context, ICVA and SCHR welcomed the envisaged review of its membership. COAST stressed the need for more clarity on the HPC-SG's approach to **localization**. COAST further suggested that references to "capacity building" be replaced by "capacity exchange" as a way to highlight the two-way communication, noting that local partners have capacities to share – a suggestion welcomed by the HPC-SG Chair. In this context, FRD called for the HPC-SG's attention to develop the HPC guidance with the involvement of local actors, noting that HPC-related indicators are often set by the global actors. UNHCR called for increased attention to the displaced people. UNFPA underlined the importance of the HPC-SG as a central entity for inter-sectoral coordination on needs analysis, capacity building, guidance and inclusivity regarding HNOs and other various processes. The HPC-SG Chair commented that the HPC-SG had undertaken preliminary mapping of the parallel work of different entities, which would be updated as per the OPAG's request. The HPC-SG Chair welcomed SCHR and ICVA's interest in stepping up NGO participation, noting that the forthcoming review of ToRs would take this into account.

Follow-Up Actions:

7. Revisit the HPC-SG membership, including number and level of participants, and update the HPC-SG's ToRs [*HPC-SG in consultation with the OPAG*]

8. Strengthen linkages of the HPC-SG's normative work to the OPAG, including by ensuring OPAG endorsement of any guidance that will affect or need to be implemented by the IASC [*HPC-SG and OPAG with the support of the IASC secretariat*]

9. Carry out a mapping of all HPC-related entities (such as the JIAF and GIMAC) and clarify roles and responsibilities [*HPC-SG*]

SESSION 3: REFERENCE GROUP ON GENDER AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION (GRG)

Ms. Julie Lafrenière and Ms. April Pham, GRG co-Chairs underlined the value of the GRG as a unique global coordination mechanism and a key resource that connects INGOs and the UN on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) in humanitarian action. The GRG's work relates to various global initiatives, including the UN System Wide Gender Parity Strategy and the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on GEEWG, among others.

Key achievements include (i) update of the IASC Gender Policy in 2017 and development of the Gender Accountability Framework; (ii) annual reporting for the Gender Accountability Framework for 2018 and 2019 (forthcoming); (iii) update of the IASC Gender Handbook and ongoing roll-out; (iv) provision of collective guidance on COVID-19, notably Gender Alert for COVID-19; and (v) contribution to integrating gender across the Results Groups, including via linkages with the Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion.

Key priorities going forward include (i) continuing support to the roll-out of the 2017 IASC Gender Policy; (ii) following up on recommendations of the 2018 and 2019 Accountability Framework reports; (iii) implementing data collection and analysis of the 2020 Accountability Framework report; (iv) strengthening the Community of Practice; (iv) providing strategic and technical advisory to global policy platforms informing on gender in humanitarian action; and (v) sharing good practice to inform humanitarian stakeholders of planning processes. The GRG will focus on mobilizing collective action to implement the findings and recommendations from the IAHE on GEEWG and the Accountability Framework reports and facilitating the implementation of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Call to Action.

In the ensuing discussion, some OPAG members expressed support for the GRG and its **linkages with the IASC** as an important symbolic gesture that reconfirms the IASC's prioritization of the gender agenda. The OPAG co-Chairs echoed this call. The GRG co-Chairs confirmed their dedication to promoting and mainstreaming gender across all IASC structures and strengthening links with relevant global platforms, such as GBV Call to Action and the Grand Bargain.

UNFPA, Christian Aid, COAST and FRD called for better inclusion of **women-led NGOs in ongoing humanitarian operations,** particularly within decision-making processes. In response, the GRG co-Chairs underlined that the call for better inclusion of local women and girls in decision making processes was in line with the findings of the forthcoming IAHE on GEEWG. ICVA suggested building upon the findings of the ongoing **IAHE on GEEWG as a way to build an evidence base**. UNFPA stressed the importance of the **Gender Accountability Framework** across humanitarian clusters. WHO called for the speedy finalization of the 2019 Gender Accountability Framework report. The GRG co-Chairs committed to leveraging the findings of the IAHE and the annual Gender Accountability Framework reports to move the agenda forward, including in the functioning of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs).

The OPAG co-Chairs concluded by noting the OPAG's broad support for the important roles played by the GRG.

Follow-Up Actions:

10. Strengthen linkages between the GRG and IASC Results Groups and other IASC Associated Entities [*GRG*]

11. Identify concrete avenues towards better engaging women-led organizations in humanitarian operations and coordination structures [*GRG*]

12. Build upon the findings of the forthcoming IAHE on gender to strengthen evidence base on gender programming [*GRG*]

SESSION 4: INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATIONS STEERING GROUP (IAHE-SG)

Ms. Kelly David, IAHE-SG Chair noted that the objective of the group was to ensure system-wide learning and accountability regarding the effectiveness of collective humanitarian response efforts to inform and shape future policies and operations. Since its establishment in 2008, the IAHE-SG has conducted several system-wide evaluations which have informed policy initiatives, such as the Transformative Agenda and the Agenda for Humanity. The work of the IAHE-SG is linked with the IASC Scale-Up protocols, whose activation automatically trigger an IAHE. Starting in 2017, the IAHE-SG has expanded its focus beyond emergencies,

launching evaluations on specific cross-cutting issues in humanitarian programming, including the ongoing IAHE on GEEWG.

Three major evaluations were recently concluded, including the IAHE of the Response to Cyclones Idai in Mozambique which was the first to assess the contribution of the new Scale-Up Activation Mechanism since its adoption, and the IAHE on International Drought Response in Ethiopia. These evaluations have produced robust evidence on the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, including in terms of strong collaboration and complementarity with government emergency systems and improved response capacity that saved lives and strengthened protection. In both evaluations, the IAHE-SG took the first-ever household survey to capture feedback from people in need, which found that most people felt that they had received needed support and placed emphasis on the need for early recovery. The forthcoming IAHE on GEEWG strongly urges a better inclusion of gender considerations in global structures, while recognizing that global efforts have made a meaningful difference in supporting the field to increasingly ensure that specific needs of women and girls are met, in particular in contexts where clusters benefited from longer-term deployment of an inter-agency gender advisor at a strategic level.

All evaluations point to inadequate funding and expertise. Similar areas of weaknesses were found around needs assessments, data management, accountability to affected populations and involvement of local NGOs and civil society. In Mozambique and Ethiopia, the need to act quicker on early warning data and shift earlier to recovery was highlighted. Barriers to making changes were identified, including challenging operating environments, existing funding architectures and a focus of many reform efforts on policy development rather than implementation.

One of the criticisms that the IAHE-SG constantly faces is the notion that the evaluations do not show more than what is already known. However, independent and collective evaluations prompt reflection of decision makers, including the Security Council, parliaments and journalists, as became evident in the case of the IAHE on Mozambique. Great efforts have been made to reduce the burden on the field, including by better coordinating with individual agencies with the agreement of foregoing their own evaluations if an IAHE is to take place.

The priorities of the IAHE-SG in 2021 include IAHEs of the Yemen response, the COVID-19 response and the GHRP. Following the findings of the IAHE on GEEWG, a companion review will be launched to explore gender integration in the humanitarian-development nexus. The co-Chairs of the Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration and the new UN Women Empowerment and Rights Group under the SDG were invited to join the advisory group.

The IAHE SG would welcome greater engagement with the OPAG, for example through an annual dialogue with the objective to inform the OPAG of its workplan and identify opportunities to advance issues, particularly of high stakes with Member States and donors, based on independent evidence and assessment. In addition, a separate briefing for the OPAG could be arranged at the conclusion of an IAHE to automatically embed findings of relevance into the normative work.

In the ensuing discussion, some OPAG members expressed appreciation for the critical work of the IAHE-SG and supported systematized links between the IAHE-SG and the OPAG to ensure that recommendations of evaluations inform policy work. WFP and UNHCR supported holding an annual dialogue and create space to discuss evaluation outcomes. SCHR called for better utilizing the findings of the evaluations. UNFPA expressed strong support for the work of the IAHE-SG around gender equality and empowerment of women, especially considering that programmes targeting women and girls remain critically underfunded. ICVA

welcomed increased NGO engagement, including in the Management Group for the Yemen IAHE. Members welcomed the upcoming IAHEs on Yemen and the GHRP as requested by the ERC.

The OPAG co-Chairs concluded by noting the OPAG's wide support for the important role played by the IAHE-SG.

Follow-Up Actions:

13. Strengthen linkages between IAHE-SG and the OPAG by ensuring that outcomes of the IAHEs influence policy deliberations and normative work [*IAHE-SG in collaboration with the OPAG and the Results Groups*]

14. Arrange an annual dialogue between the OPAG and the IAHE-SG to inform its workplan [*IAHE-SG in collaboration with the IASC secretariat*]

15. Welcome regular briefings by the IAHE-SG to the OPAG and Results Groups on outcomes of Evaluations [*IAHE-SG in collaboration with the IASC secretariat*]

SESSION 5: REFERENCE GROUP ON MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN EMERGENCY SETTINGS (MHPSS-RG)

Dr. Fahmy Hanna and Ms. Sarah Harrison, MHPSS-RG co-Chairs noted that the Reference Group was established in 2007 following the Principals decision to operationalize the IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings. The MHPSS-RG provides a unique space bringing together 60 full member agencies, nine observers, including eight donor organizations. At the global level, the MHPSS-RG works closely with the GCCG, Results Group 2, IASC Disabilities Task Team, donor groups, SPHERE, Standby Partners and OCHA. At the country level, the group provides critical support to the MHPSS Technical Working Groups (MHPSS TWG) in 50 countries. At country level, MHPSS TWG is a platform that brings together mental health and psychosocial actors in health, protection, including CP and GBV AORs, education, CCCM, and nutrition sectors. Country-level operations often face challenges due to a lack of attention to MHPSS, absence of a designated budget code in the Financial Tracking System and stretched and limited human resources.

In an effort to address the human resources constraints this year, the MHPSS-RG in collaboration with the Dutch Standby Partner (RVO) launched the first inter-agency MHPSS surge support mechanism to direct human resources at country level. Twelve countries have received or will receive deployments in 2020. The group has also been agile and timely in providing support in light of COVID-19, which includes 26 MHPSS coordination calls conducted to-date in 2020, as well as the publication of the Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak (available in 23 languages), IASC Guidance on Basic Psychosocial Skills (available in 23 languages), My Hero is You, Storybook for Children on COVID-19 (available in 130 languages and 45+ accessible formats) and IASC Guidance on Operational considerations for Multisectoral MHPSS Programmes during the COVID-19 Pandemic (available in 6 languages). The remarkable uptake of products developed by the group as shown in the number of translations reflects the relevance at country level, and the need for such products. Inputs were furthermore provided to the GRHP which now includes an MHPSS-specific indicator, and which shows that the number of country level MHPSS Technical Working Groups in humanitarian settings increased during the COVID-19 pandemic from 22 to 50 countries.

Key upcoming priorities include (i) continuing technical support for country level MHPSS TWGs; (ii) scaling up the roll-out of surge support to country-level MHPSS TWGs; (iii) addressing suicide in humanitarian settings through a multisectoral approach; (iv) providing staff support guidance for local NGOs in humanitarian settings; and (v) finalizing "Action for Heroes, Guide for Heart-to-Heart Chats with Children to accompany reading of My Hero is You" and "Practical Tools, Approaches and Case Studies Linking MHPSS and Emergency and Disaster Risk Reduction", guidance on linking mental health psychosocial support to peacebuilding architecture and updating "A Common Monitoring Evaluation Framework for MHPSS in Emergency Settings of 2017" with a full set of standardized Means of Verifications to measure collective impact."

The MHPSS-RG co-Chairs called for maintaining the group's association with the IASC, arguing that this association vouches for the group's neutrality, allowing it to mobilize funds to provide technical support to 50 countries and establish the surge mechanism. It has also provided the legitimacy for rolling out guidelines and products.

In the ensuing discussion, several OPAG members expressed strong support for the continued association of the MHPSS-RG with the IASC. ACBAR highlighted the group's value in light of increasingly protracted conflicts and displacement, as in Afghanistan, for example, more than 80% of people in need have a disability. IMC and UNHCR welcomed strong linkages between the MHPSS-RG and relevant IASC and non-IASC partners sharing lessons learned. IMC expressed appreciation for the **strong focus on translating policy to practice**, including through technical and surge support on the ground. IMC further highlighted the **strong NGO engagement** within the MHPSS-RG, noting that the group is one of the most inclusive bodies within the IASC with NGOs co-chairing several MHPSS TWGs.

Save the Children expressed appreciation for the work of the MHPSS-RG in serving a critical operational, normative and coordinating function, as recognized by actors globally and in country operations, while MHPSS still remained neglected in emergency response. ICRC noted the group's value as an important community of practice, as well as an excellent source of technical support, harmonization, guidance and standards. UNFPA underlined the need to direct dedicated funding and programmatic attention to MHPSS, stressing rising needs with the worldwide spread of COVID-19. UNFPA emphasized the IASC Principals decision in December 2019 that MHPSS should be prioritized in humanitarian response as a cross-cutting issue – a point echoed by Save the Children. UNICEF suggested that the group should report to high-level policy or operational structures – either OPAG or EDG - to maintain and reflect its cross-cutting nature.

The MHPSS-RG co-Chairs appreciated strong support from the OPAG. They highlighted that 85% of the group's membership were non-UN actors, providing a strong operational wing to the produced guidance. Efforts will continue to translate guidance into a wide range of local languages.

The OPAG co-Chairs concluded by noting the OPAG's wide support for the critical role played by the MHPSS RG. They called for stronger linkages with the OPAG and the Results Groups and invited the MHPSS-RG co-Chairs to share lessons with the Results Groups and other Entities in terms of linking policy to practice.

Follow-Up Actions:

16. Capture best practices from the MHPSS-RG in converting policy to practice to inform the work of the Results Groups and other Associated Entities through a briefing [*MHPSS-RG with the support of the IASC* secretariat]

17. Move forward in implementing the agreed actions points from the IASC Principals meeting of 5 December on MHPSS, namely:

- Treat MHPSS as a cross-cutting issue that has relevance within health, protection, nutrition, education and CCCM sectors/clusters, in all emergencies [*IASC members*]
- Reflect MHPSS indicators in relevant planning documents and establish dedicated budget lines, as well as specific MHPSS codes within financial tracking systems [*OCHA*]
- Support for the creation of and the work of country-level MHPSS Technical Working Groups in all migration, refugee and humanitarian contexts as crosscutting groups [*IASC members*]
- Protect and promote mental health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers facing extreme stressors, including trauma, hostile environments and chronic stress [*IASC Members*]
- Finalize the inter-agency Minimum Service Package for MHPSS [*WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR in coordination with IASC members*]

AOB

The OPAG co-Chairs concluded by thanking the OPAG members and the Chairs/co-Chairs of the Entities Associated with the IASC for their constructive engagement throughout the meeting and their continued support to the IASC. A follow up discussion would soon be scheduled to continue the discussion on the way forward regarding the Entities Associated to the IASC.

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IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chairs	Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director for Operations Services, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Daniel Donati, Ms. Fiona Arnone
ICRC	Ms. Alexandra Boivin
ICVA	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	Ms. Victoria Stodart
InterAction	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barrasso
InterAction – Care USA	Ms. Sheba Crocker
InterAction - Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
IOM	Ms. Angela Staiger
OCHA	Mr. Rein Paulsen, Mr. Christopher Gerlach
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci, Ms. Maria Andrea Echazu Aguero
SCHR	Mr. Gareth Price Jones
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
SCHR - Save the Children International	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor
UNFPA	Mr. Ingo Piegeler
UN-HABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund, Mr. Guido van Heugten, Ms. Eva Garcia Bouzas
UNICEF	Mr. Manuel Fontaine, Ms. Segolene Adam, Mr. Nisar Syed
WFP	Ms. Annalisa Conte, Ms. Marie-Helene Kyprianou, and Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri,
WHO	Mr. Rudi Coninx
World Bank	Ms. Maria Dimitriadou

Results Group 1 on Operational Response Mr. Julien Schopp and Mr. Rein Paulsen

Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion Ms. Meritxell Relano and Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth

Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy Mr. Michel Anglade

Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing Ms. Marcy Vigoda and Mr. Jeremy Rempel

Peer-2-Peer project Ms. Aida Mengistu

Presenters:
Ms. Marina Skuric Prodanovic (GCCG Chair) and Ms. Linda Doull (Global Health Cluster Coordinator)
Mr. Andrew Wyllie (HPC-SG Chair)
Ms. Julie Lafrenière and Ms. April Pham (GRG Co-Chairs)
Ms. Kelly David (IAHE-SG Chair)
Dr. Fahmy Hanna and Ms. Sarah Harrison (MHPSS-RG Co-Chairs)

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

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