

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

24 March 2021

SUMMARY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 24 March 2021. The primary objectives of this meeting were: (i) Identify and address barriers to the meaningful engagement of local actors in coordination structures at field level – including discussing what success looks like and how can progress be measured/tracked, (ii) Review and discuss the draft IASC Guidance on strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms at field level, (iii) Discuss status of RG1 priorities for the remainder of 2021 and agree on a way forward.

In his introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair, Mr. Geir Olav Lisle welcomed participants to this OPAG meeting, and conveyed apologies from the co-Chair Ms. Valerie Guarneri who was on mission and unable to attend.

SESSION 1: LOCALIZATION

Mr. Lisle opened the session by highlighting the valuable contribution of national and local actors in ensuring a more effective, efficient and sustainable humanitarian response. He noted that while progress has been made to increase access to funding by national and local actors, the system needs to do more to ensure we meet our Grand Bargain commitments on strengthening leadership and decision making by local actors. Based on 2019 data, National NGOs (including national NGO consortiums) constituted only 7% of HCT membership globally. Less than 3% of Inter-Cluster Working Groups (working on thematic issues) were chaired or co-chaired by a national NGO. He noted that more needs to be done to address barriers to the meaningful engagement of local actors in humanitarian coordination structures in the field, effectively track success and how we can hold ourselves accountable.

Mr. Andrew Wyllie, the co-Chair of IASC Results Group 1 on Operational Response provided an overview of the Results Group's work on localisation. He highlighted the consultative and participatory process, with over 100 national NGOs and civil society organisations in the development of the Draft **IASC Guidance on strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors**. He identified three key issues for OPAG's strategic guidance; (1) global targets for indicators developed, (2) affirmative action for local and national actors particularly in HCTs, and (3) collection of disaggregated data on women lead and women rights organizations.

Ms. Stella Ogunlade, co-Chair of RG1 Localization sub-Group, briefed on the draft Guidance. She highlighted the key elements of the Guidance, which went through a consultative process, including different Rights Groups. She noted that the Guidance, focused on the coordination aspect of localization, seeks to promote **participation** of

national and local actors, through among others addressing the challenges and risks to participation in coordination structures. The Guidance proposes the **strengthening of leadership** by national actors in humanitarian coordination structures, through the definition of clear roles, as well as TORs and a transparent and fair selection process. It also seeks to promote **capacity strengthening** through a two-way process that will include among others coaching, shadowing, and peer to peer support. Other key elements include, strengthening **visibility** for local actors for the work they do individually and with international actors/coordination structures. In addition, engagement and participation of local and national actors in the **Humanitarian Program Cycle** is emphasized. **Accountability and monitoring** are key pillars of the draft Guidance through the establishment of global and local indicators, collection of best practices and lessons learnt to support learning and course correction. The Guidance is progressive in its targeted efforts to promote the participation and **engagement of women and women-led organizations**. She also noted the need for broader diversity in the representation of local actors and civil society, inclusive of not just women and women-led organizations, but also, youth led organizations, persons living with disabilities, among others.

DISCUSSION

Members expressed their appreciation for the Guidance and particularly the consultative approach in its development. It was noted that the Guidance would provide a basis for advocacy by national and local actors, which is why there was a call to keep it simple and practical. However, members noted the Guidance was modest and reflected the current state of affairs. There was a need to be more ambitious on localization and not push for more business as usual in order to be more effective in our response. It was noted that the guidance does not go far enough to provide a clear way forward on addressing the limited representation of local actors in humanitarian coordination systems. Participants recognised that the guidance was limited to the engagement of local and national actors in IASC coordination structures and that work was required on broader localization efforts such as risk sharing and other issues.

Within the same spirit, it was noted by some members that the role of UN agencies and INGOs should be limited to monitoring and technical assistance, with greater leadership role by local and national actors in the response. Suggestions were made to enhance and strengthen the Guidance, to ensure it is ambitious in its scope and content. As a starting point, there needs for clarity in the terminology and approach, ensuring principled partnerships, and not using local actors, merely as contractors. Participants discussed the value of establishing **minimum targets** for participation in the HCT, ICCG and clusters or whether a baseline was needed, as they recognised that this could diminish the decision-making authority /leadership of the HCs. The drafters of the Guidance were asked to potentially consider proportional representation in the setting of targets and not merely numbers. While there was no agreement on whether or not global targets should be introduced, it was noted that the IASC does not have a baseline to measure progress. In addition, there is need for clear **leadership** and accountability, with a link to the HC/RC system. Another key consideration was the clarification of **responsibilities** for tracking of global and country level indicators. There was general agreement with the suggestion that data would not be segregated by WLO/WRO categories due to the lack of an IASC definition of what that category includes. Furthermore, the Guidance should also support a more

inclusive approach to ensure participation by a diverse group of marginalised and vulnerable groups who stand a risk of being left behind. In reaction to the note in the guidance that specifies that the guidance was not applicable in refugee contexts, a number of members suggested that this issue be clarified. UNHCR noted that a best practice guide on localization in refugee settings is being developed looking at refugee-led organizations. As a number of members noted that it would be important to avoid embarking on a separate consultation process, UNHCR clarified that separate guidance was not being issued, but that the best practice document could be seen as complementary and therefore referred to within the IASC Guidance.

Members also called on RG1 to take on a progressive approach in the development of the Guidance, among others; ensuring appropriate support to national coordination systems, rather than expecting them to adapt to international humanitarian coordination structures. Effort should also be made to ensure the Guidance is in tune with progressing thinking and work on addressing racism and racial discrimination, and the decolonisation of aid. There was a call to better capture best practices in localisation to inform operations and that OCHA can play a critical role here. Responding to the question of responsibility for tracking, OCHA offered to monitor and track progress against the agreed targets at the global level, building on the data already collected through the annual mapping of IASC coordination structures done by OCHA and the clusters. Members were cautioned not to consider the proposed measures such as participation of local actors in the HCT as an end in itself but rather part of a much effort broader effort on enhancing localisation. It was also clarified that the Guidance presented has a focus on IASC humanitarian coordination structures and not localization generally.

CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW UP-ACTIONS

1. Make necessary revisions to the Draft **IASC Guidance on strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors** taking into consideration feedback received from the OPAG including **[IASC RG1]**:
 - More clearly articulate the desire to have a minimum standard/targets for local representation in HCTs, ICCGs and clusters on the agreement that this would be based on baselines that would be determined in Q3 2021 and after consultations with HCs/field operations.
 - Ensure the guidance articulates responsibility/ownership for tracking of suggested country level and global indicators.
2. Share the revised draft Guidance for OPAG review and endorsement. **[IASC RG1]**
3. The Guidance is applicable to all contexts where IASC agencies operate, UNHCR to provide appropriate language (**UNHCR**).
4. Share an annual overview tracking progress in the meaningful engagement/participation of local actors in IASC coordination structures for the IASC's consideration and agreement on next steps in Q3 of 2021. **[OCHA]**.

SESSION 2: RG1 WORKPLAN- PROGRESS UPDATE

Mr. Andrew Willey, RG 1 co-Chair provided an overview of Results Group's status of delivery for the remainder of 2021. He noted that the Results Group was able to adapt and deliver to the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some key outputs include; Development of the ToRs of the IASC Protection Policy Review;

Completion of HCT Protection Strategy reflections (will feed into the development of CoP indicators); Development of a discussion paper on countering stigmatization for OPAG; Completion of the Myanmar case study on bureaucratic and administrative impediments; Issuance of the interim IASC guidance on localization and COVID-19 response; Issuance of the IASC guidance on data responsibility; Completion of the updated HC Handbook; Issuance of interim ERP guidance for COVID-19 response; Issuance of Early Warning Early Action reports.

In addition, RG1 contributed to and influenced several policy discussions at the IASC level. For instance, the Centrality of Protection sub-group have informed the IASC Principals' horizon scanning session with inputs on key protection issues in several operations while also developing a paper on countering stigmatization, which informed the final edition of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. Likewise, three OPAG meetings have now focused on localization since June 2020 with significant contributions from RG1. Finally, RG1's work on Data Responsibility has informed policy discussions at OPAG with a comprehensive operational guidance issued in February 2021.

RG1 went through a prioritization exercise with the Humanitarian Leadership, Data Responsibility and Early Warning Early Action sub-groups no longer formally associated with RG1. Note that they continue to operate under individual agency leadership with guidance and support from RG1 co-chairs when needed.

Based on the ERC's decision to extend IASC structures mandate until end 2021 and the IASC Principals' discussion in May 2021 (now postponed to Q4 2021) to review current IASC structures, RG1 has expedited delivery of key priorities. In the short term, RG1 sub-groups will prioritize progress on the following outputs; Finalization of localization guidance by mid-April; Commencement of the IASC Protection Policy Review by May 2021; Finalization of at least one new case study on Bureaucratic and Administrative Impediments by May 2021; Finalization of agreed, specific and measurable Centrality of Protection indicators by July 2021.

CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

1. Expedite and urgently deliver on the following priorities **[RG1]**:
 - a. the **protection indicators**
 - b. Revised **IASC protection policy** (as well as feedback on the country reflections).
 - c. addressing **bureaucratic and administrative impediments**

AOB

The OPAG co-Chair Mr. Lisle concluded the meeting by thanking OPAG and EDG members, RG co-Chairs and representatives of the GCCG for their constructive engagement throughout the meeting. The meeting closed on a reminder that the next OPAG meeting on 26 March would discuss opportunities and challenges to address

bureaucratic and administrative impediments and mitigating the impact of counter-terrorism legislation on humanitarian action.

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chairs	Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Mr. Patrick Jacqueson,
ICRC	Ms. Alexandra Boivin
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
ICVA - ACBAR	Ms. Lisa K. Piper
ICVA – COST	Mr. Reza Chowdhury
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
ICVA - IMC	Ms. Mary Pack
IFRC	Mr. Frank Mohrhauer
InterAction	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barasso
InterAction – Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
IOM	Ms. Tristan Burnett Ms. Angela Steiger
OCHA	Mr. Rein Paulsen
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
SCHR – Save the Children	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor, Mr. Hugh Macleman
UNFPA	Mr. Ingo Piegeler
UN-HABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund Ms. Guido van Heugten
UNICEF	Mr. Manuel Fontaine
WFP	Mr. David Kaatrud Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri
WHO	Ms. Cristina Contini Mr. Aiman Zarul
World Bank	Ms. Maria Dimitriadou
Results Group 1 on Operational Response	Mr. Andrew Wylie
Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion	Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth Ms. Merixell Relano
Localisation Sub-Group, RG 1, GCCG	Ms. Stella Ogunlade, Ms. Marina Skuric Prodanovic
IASC secretariat:	Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head, IASC secretariat
