

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

22 April 2021

SUMMARY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 22 April 2021. The primary objectives of this meeting were to (i) Review the Management Response Plan on the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG), (ii) Reflect on the key findings and recommendations of the IAHE on the Mozambique Scale-Up response and the IAHE on the Drought Response in Ethiopia and agree on a way forward.

SESSION 1: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE PLAN FOR THE IAHE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In the introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair, Mr. Geir Olav Lisle welcomed participants to this OPAG meeting.

Mr. Lisle opened the session by noting that the Management Response Plan for the IAHE on GEEWG provided an opportunity to identify and reflect on specific and concrete system-wide efforts to deliver on the collective ambition to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Ms. April Pham, co-chair of the IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action (GRG), provided an overview of the key elements of the Management Response Plan, which entails input from the IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action (GRG) as well as OPAG members. Ms. Pham expressed her appreciation of the IAHE report on GEEWG. She emphasised the critical role of leadership to ensure the needs of women and girls are prioritized and embedded throughout humanitarian response. She pointed out that all humanitarian actors had a responsibility to advance gender equality and gender experts provide targeted knowledge and expertise.

Ms. Pham outlined the key areas where OPAG's leadership and guidance is required: First, there is a need for sufficient technical expertise from the start of any humanitarian response through the commitment of agencies and clusters. Such a mechanism would have to be sustainable with dedicated funding and relevant supportive organizational policy. Secondly, IASC member organisations need to demonstrate their leadership at country level, through the fulfilment of the accountability mechanisms introduced by the Gender Accountability Framework. OPAG was asked to support this mechanism. Third, women-led organizations need to be brought to the table as part of decision-making processes. Finally, the involvement of UN Women in IASC mechanisms should be strengthened, noting that UNWOMEN has huge potential to support HCTs and HCs in gender equality, women issues and GBV. Ms. Pham observed that, in order to fast track progress, the evaluation's findings need to be taken forward robustly and members should consider ambitious steps going beyond the Management Response Plan.

DISCUSSION

Members expressed their appreciation for the Management Response Plan, thanking OCHA and the IASC Secretariat for their role in drafting the Plan, and requested another circulation for final red line comments. Participants reinforced crucial elements in the Plan through the following suggestions: Support was expressed for the critical role of the GenCap project and the need to reinforce the mechanism further, while also strengthening agency capacities. The GRG was asked to enhance its engagement with IASC structures, to ensure a gender responsive approach in the development of policies and guidelines. However, caution was expressed to avoid the risk of this becoming burdensome and leading to bottlenecks if the Reference Group has to review all documents. It was noted that the IASC structures review provides an opportunity to further embed gender within the IASC. It was noted that HPC planning tools such as the Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) provide an opportunity for meaningful integration of gender and GBV programming and as such their utility needs to be enhanced. Members encouraged an inter-sectional and people-centred analysis of humanitarian needs which would include sex and age disaggregation, among others. Also, the need to strengthen the linkages between GBV and PSEA was highlighted.

Members noted that the Management Response Plan was ambitious and called for prioritisation of the key proposed actions due to time and resource constraints. There was a call to promote the meaningful participation and engagement of women -led organisations in coordination and decision-making platforms as a means of promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. In this regard, it was noted that, a definition of what constitutes a women-led organisation needs to be agreed upon, as this is crucial in establishing minimum standards of participation. Members suggested that, in order to validate some of the proposed actions of the Management Response Plan, it was important to consult women-led organisations. In addition, it was proposed that the Management Response Plan should be tabled and discussed at the IASC Principals level.

CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW UP-ACTIONS

1. Make necessary revisions to the **Management Response Plan for the IAHE on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls** reflecting discussions at the OPAG [**GRG co-chairs with the support of the IASC Secretariat**]
2. IASC structures and organizations to take forward the agreed actions, and report back as part of the IASC Gender Accountability Framework [**IASC Structures and IASC members**]

SESSION 2: IAHE FINDINGS ON ETHIOPIA AND MOZAMBIQUE

The IASC OPAG co-Chair Ms. Valerie Guarnieri welcomed participants to the second session of the meeting focusing on the evaluations of the drought response in Ethiopia and the Scale-Up response to Cyclone Idai. She noted that there were critical lessons to be learned from the evaluations. She informed members that in both countries, HCTs have developed management response plans to the country-level recommendations of these evaluations and the OPAG meeting would tackle the global recommendations and how they can be taken forward.

Ms. Kelly David, chair of the IAHE Steering Group, welcomed the evaluators, Ms. Julia Steets and Mr. Jock Baker who provided an overview of the global level findings coming out of the drought response in Ethiopia and Cyclone Idai in Mozambique.

Mr. Jock Baker provided an **overview of the methodology**, indicating that both evaluations applied community level surveys using outcome level information that ensure direct engagement of the affected populations. In both Mozambique and Ethiopia, more than 500 interviews with affected populations as well as focus group discussions were conducted. The study also benefitted from IFRC's real time evaluation and other sources in Mozambique. In terms of **findings**, the evaluations found that the humanitarian response improved in saving lives compared to the previous decade. In Mozambique, cholera emerged but was quickly responded to by all humanitarian actors. Coordination and joint action have showed signs of progress in both countries. protection and PSEA were prioritised by the HCT in Mozambique from the very start, demonstrated by the establishment of a joint complaint mechanism.

In terms of **areas of improvements**, more needed to be done to enhance the quality and credibility of needs assessment data. While OCHA, REACH and ACAPS invested in needs assessments through the course of the crisis in Mozambique, some gaps remained. In Ethiopia, the credibility of needs assessments was questioned while in Mozambique the system for collecting and analysing needs assessment data needs to be strengthened. On AAP, most communities felt they were treated fairly, however a significant number did not know what assistance they would receive. Knowledge of feedback and complaints mechanisms were generally sub-optimal, with between 19-54% aware of how to use them. More needed to be done to ensure meaningful engagement of local actors, particularly in terms of direct and quality funding. In Ethiopia, local and national actors benefited from only 5 per cent of funding from the country based pooled funds. In Mozambique, it was noted that little was done to tap into the agency and capacity of local actors to promote community level preparedness and to address protection and vulnerability concerns. Early recovery was another area requiring attention. Despite initial investments on early recovery, humanitarian actors focused their efforts on urgent humanitarian assistance missing opportunities to link up with development programming.

Ms. Julia Steets provided an overview of the key recommendations, calling for a management response at the global level given that some of the findings need to be tackled beyond country teams. She called for a shift in thinking to ensure IAHE recommendations are implemented and working jointly to overcome bottlenecks. She emphasised the need for systematic learning and continuous improvement to support follow-up of IAHEs and capturing of lessons learnt and replicate them as appropriate. In terms of bottlenecks, data collection and needs assessment practices needed to be improved. Efforts must be made to ensure direct consultations with affected people. Likewise, in terms of early warning and preparedness, early warning analysis needed to feed into decision making processes of HCs and HCTs. Anticipatory action needs to be strengthened and made sustainable going beyond individual commitments, this is in addition to multi-year funding. The role of decentralised coordination systems, such as the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) in Ethiopia was considered to be extremely helpful in promoting preparedness and early action. In terms of localization, there was acute need to make it easier for local NGOs to access Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) particularly in Ethiopia. Direct funding to local actors could be a game changer and more needed to be done to achieve a step change.

DISCUSSION

Members expressed their appreciation of the presentations, agreeing with the findings and recommendations. Many of the proposed solutions are already being considered at the IASC level, hence there is a need to re-enforce efforts in these critical areas. It was noted that the identified challenges and constraints were clustered around three key issues: people, money and localisation. There was strong emphasis on investments in anticipatory action to save

lives, alongside calls for enhanced advocacy for multi-year funding. Calls were also made on strengthening of data collection with focus on direct engagement of affected populations in needs assessments, ensuring affected populations are at the centre of humanitarian response. It was observed that localization remained problematic in both contexts as the contexts are not very conducive to local action. CBPFs provide opportunities to enhance the capacity of local actors, not only through the provision of direct funding to local NGOs but also to showcase their work to other donors to build trust and raise funds. Local NGOs spend months going through capacity assessments and therefore action on this front could make a big difference. In addition, to IAHEs, global learning needs to be enhanced through after-action reviews. It was noted that global clusters should undertake more after-action reviews. For instance, only three after action reviews took place in Mozambique and these were the more operational ones (logistics and Emergency Telecommunications). Members also noted the need to monitor the implementation of the progress of Management Response Plans at the country level so as provide necessary course corrections.

CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

1. Ensure that ongoing OPAG/RG work addresses key identified system-wide obstacles and barriers in the IAHEs for Mozambique and Ethiopia - including Multi-year funding for NGOs; strengthening direct consultations with the affected populations; engagement and empowerment of local organizations and networks [**IASC Results Groups 1, 2 and 5**]

AOB

Mr Lisle drew members attention to the OPAG discussion on localization on 24 March, noting there were mixed reviews whether the guidance should be limited to HRP countries or also to include refugee contexts.

UNHCR noted that the Guidance should apply to refugee actors, however not to refugee coordination mechanisms, in the same way it does not apply in development, or peace coordination mechanisms. Noting that UNHCR received Member State buy-in for a global compact for refugees that is government-led. Ms. Guarnieri, OPAG co-chair noted that the guidance should be applicable to contexts where humanitarian actors work, rather than where IASC coordination mechanisms apply, as guidance is not a regulation. This position was echoed by the WFP representative. UNHCR offered to provide appropriate language in the Guidance and suggested the Guidance is shared with OPAG members for redline comments.

CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

1. Ensure that the IASC draft guidance on localization is updated to reflect its applicability to all humanitarian contexts [**RG1 sub-group on Localization**]

The Next meeting will be on 29 April providing an opportunity for a deep dive on Accountability to Affected Persons and review of progress by Results Group 2.

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chairs	Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Patrick Jacqueson,
ICRC	Ms. Avigail Shai
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
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ICVA – COST	Mr. Reza Chowdhury
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
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InterAction – Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
IOM	Ms. Tristan Burnett Ms. Angela Steiger
OCHA	Mr. Andrew Wylie
OHCHR	Mr. Said Al-Madhoun
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
SCHR – Save the Children	Ms. Leah Finnigan
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor,
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