

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

10 February 2021

SUMMARY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 10 February 2021. The primary objectives of this meeting were (i) to discuss the key findings of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) – the first thematic IAHE - and the required follow-up to strengthen system-wide accountability on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and (ii) to learn about and inform upcoming IAHEs including the IASC's Scale-Up Activation for the COVID-19 response, the Yemen Operation, as well as ongoing ones on Gender in humanitarian-development collaboration and its linkages with peace.

SESSION 1: INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION (IAHE) ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS (GEEWG)

In her introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri welcomed participants to this OPAG meeting, extending a warm welcome to the Emergency Directors who were able to join. Ms. Guarnieri recalled OPAG action points from 5 and 27 November 2020 which underscored the need to strengthen synergies with the Entities Associated with the IASC and for the outcomes of IAHEs to inform policy deliberations and normative work and for the OPAG to have the opportunity to inform IAHE evaluations. Ms. Guarnieri emphasized that today's discussion represented an opportunity to reflect on areas that require stepped up efforts to deliver on our collective ambition to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. She furthermore highlighted the criticality of IAHEs for system-wide learning and accountability.

Dr. Terrence Jantzi, Evaluation Team Leader for the IAHE for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, briefed on the IAHE's findings and recommendations. Dr. Jantzi underlined that the IAHE GEEWG Evaluation was commissioned to track the progress that has been made in integrating Gender in longer term operations from the Revised IASC Gender Policy, the Gender Handbook and the Gender Accountability Framework launched in 2017 to 2020. Key finding of the evaluation was that while progress has been achieved, more must be done to strengthen gender mainstreaming and gender equality. While a wealth of policy and best practice is available, there are gaps in implementation in country contexts.

Ms. Mariangela Bizzarri, Senior Evaluation Consultant, presented the IAHE's findings drawn from different country contexts. Findings indicate, some progress was identified in mainstreaming gender in medium to longer term humanitarian responses. The IASC and individual agencies have invested in policies, tools and dedicated capacity in country contexts which have facilitated humanitarian agencies to respond to crises in a gender responsive manner and to operationalize gender equality commitments. Nevertheless, findings also found a significant shortfall in mainstreaming gender at the initial phase of the humanitarian cycle. Gender aspects are insufficiently taken into consideration in analysis and programme planning and implementation. The IAHE also found only marginal meaningful participation of women and girls at decision-making level at the design and implementation phase of the humanitarian response. Progress, however, has been achieved in terms of more inclusive and gender conscious consultation. Feedback and complaint mechanisms were found to have been diversified, however barriers for meaningful participation by women and girls in the overall humanitarian

response remain. The evaluators noted the need for earlier and greater participation of women's rights organizations from the early stage of the humanitarian response.

A major conclusion of the evaluation is the significance of having dedicated gender mainstreaming expertise at both the strategic and at operational level and embedded in clusters. The overall reliance on GenCap advisors in country coordination mechanisms, advisers who are often deployed short term and perceived as external, is insufficient. This is compounded by established country coordination mechanisms being insufficiently connected to field operations, creating a further disconnect between gender mainstreaming efforts and the cluster level.

The evaluation identified two main systemic factors contributing to the shortcoming in gender mainstreaming: 1) While gender is highly valued at the global normative level as also identified in inter-agency policies, it is much less recognized through the humanitarian system and at operational levels; and 2) implementing gender consideration often depended on voluntary commitments which are insufficient to systematize gender. Dr. Jantzi noted further the evaluation found that even though gender funding requests had increased, funding allocation to gender specific programming had not.

Recommendations were divided in three general categories:

- 1) **Country-level adjustments:** strengthening gender equality expertise in sudden on-set emergency response, more meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision-making and increasing HCTs access to strategic and technical expertise in GEEWG.
- 2) **Structural adjustments:** improving IASC strategic planning and monitoring of gender results outcomes and strengthening global leadership and capacity on gender.
- 3) **Accountability and tracking:** the need to strengthen strategic technical expertise in GEEWG both at strategic and cluster levels, enhancing management response to the gender accountability framework and accountability for GEEWG action, and improving tracking of GEEWG resources and expertise.

Discussion

In the ensuing discussion, members welcomed the focus of this particular IAHE, noted they agreed with its recommendations and that they were already taking action to implement the recommendations in their work. They expressed their desire to contribute to a collective management response.

OCHA noted that the IAHE findings clearly resonate with other evaluations on the implementation of the gender policy and accountability framework, and that although the system is improving there is still much room for improvement. OCHA expressed its commitment to take forward the IAHE's recommendations to make sure that gender is mainstreamed and prioritized in the humanitarian program cycle. OCHA suggested as an area of focus for further collective action a much more robust analysis of gender equality in the tools available and to review the existing tools adoption resulting in changing practice. OCHA furthermore suggested to spell out more explicitly the responsibility of cluster leads and to strengthen gender capacity at country and sub-national levels. It finally encouraged the OPAG to continue the conversation around gender to improve our collective understanding and response.

COAST, while welcoming the evaluation, highlighted the findings would have benefited from a more participatory approach including in particular local stakeholders and affected populations.

UNICEF endorsed the recommendations, noting the robust methodology and country-level engagement, and supported a call for a joint Management Response Plan. UNICEF noted that it is already taking action to advance the report's recommendations through the rollout and implementation of its revised Core Commitments for

Children in Humanitarian Actions. Additionally, UNICEF's new Strategic Plan and accompanying Gender Action Plan 2022-2026 will also include updated benchmarks for gender equality in humanitarian action, which aligns with key recommendations in the report.

UNFPA expressed its appreciation for the evaluation as an excellent effort to map efforts to mainstream gender equality in humanitarian action. As a collective, UNFPA reminded that existing programmes related to child protection and gender-based violence for instance are integral to gender mainstreaming and constitute cornerstones to achieve gender equality. UNFPA and UNHCR highlighted gender inequality was the root cause of gender-based violence (GBV) against first and foremost women and girls, noting much more must be done to address GBV. UNFPA stressed it was important to strengthen the participation of women, in particular local women, within humanitarian organizations as a core principle of humanitarian action. In addition, FAO emphasised the importance of bringing women into decision making in all humanitarian settings, where humanitarian clusters can play a pivotal role and that all efforts to be exerted in line with the localization agenda to ensure that women-led national NGOs or groups will be included in HCTs, where feasible .

UNHCR noted it was actively collaborating with the RG2 and the Gender Reference Group and highlighted the good work of RG2 around the accountability framework and results tracker for HCTs. UNHCR raised awareness to its internal commitment to ensure women represented 50% of its national staff. UNHCR highlighted the Global Protection Cluster's severe underfunding for gender specific protection programming. Gender equality and empowerment are critical for the prevention of GBV. WFP noted it has recruited six regional gender advisors and 40 gender officers deployed in regional operations. Moreover, WFP is committed to a gender policy that strives to commit 15% of program expenditures to activities promoting gender equality. WFP is finalizing a corporate system to track gender-related expenditure.

Some members expressed concern of the evaluation having taken a binary approach to gender; there is a risk of marginalizing the LGBT, which goes against the IASC's commitment to leave no marginalized groups behind.

WHO suggested it would take the recommendations into consideration in its forthcoming revision of its Emergency Response and Preparedness Framework. It suggested strengthening preparedness considerations in the evaluation. WHO noted further that the recommendations would benefit from the inclusion of measurable success criteria.

OHCHR endorsed the IAHE's findings and recommendations. In October 2020, OHCHR has been mandated by the HRC to report on the rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings and will soon share a call for inputs. The report will be presented in the first session of 2022.

OCHA noted that in terms of tracking dedicated resources and expertise, it was important to find a common approach tracking funding for GBV programming. With regard to recommendations 1 and 2, it observed that individual and collective action through clusters are both fundamental. Lastly, OCHA noted the importance of striving to achieve gender parity, especially in senior management. ICVA suggested to advocate for more funding to gender interventions rather than merely rely on the tracking of existing funding. It expressed interest in investing further in women-led organizations, explaining that they are an important element to support participation and coordination structure at country level.

The OPAG co-Chair, Geir Olav Lisle, concluded by thanking the presenters and members for their rich contributions. He welcomed the progress made with gender mainstreaming, particularly in protracted crisis situations, but also acknowledge challenges with gender mainstreaming at the onset of an emergency and the shortcomings in terms of capacity and resources on the country level. He highlighted the issue was not around a lack of commitment, policies, tools or guidance, but a challenge of implementation and monitoring. He also highlighted a link to localization and the call to strengthen women's participation in country level coordination

structures. Finally, he thanked members for sharing good examples and good practice and acknowledged the important work of RG2 and the GRG RG.

Follow-Up Actions:

1. Develop a joint Management Response Plan for the IAHE on GEEWG, laying out the appropriate actors/organizations/platforms that can take the recommendations forward [**OCHA in collaboration with Gender Reference Group (GRG) and the IASC secretariat**]

SESSION 2: INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATIONS

OPAG Co-chair Ms. Valerie Guarnieri introduced the second session aimed at gaining an insight on and contributing to three forthcoming IAHE on (i) the response in Yemen, (ii) a compendium Review of Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) into humanitarian, development and peace nexus agenda, and (iii) the system-wide Scale Up Emergency Activation response to the COVID-19. OPAG members welcomed the focus of these three forthcoming evaluations and expressed their strong interest to contribute to their development and to reflect around their preliminary findings.

With regard to the compendium **Review of Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) into humanitarian, development and peace nexus agenda**, Ms. Kelly David, Chair of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG) noted that the IASC on GEEWG found that the promotion of gender equality is key to achieve progress towards strengthening humanitarian development and its linkages to peace. The review focuses on identifying entry points to help humanitarian stakeholders strengthen programming linkages with development and peace actors to support long-term gender transformative initiatives. Key emerging findings include conceptual weakness and lack of collective understanding over the concept of humanitarian development collaboration and its linkages to peace, as well as a lack of an overarching framework for gender mainstreaming. The review offers an opportunity focusing on a cross cutting theme to better articulate what humanitarian development collaboration means in practice, for instance by focusing on areas such as cash transfers, social protection and localization. The evaluation is expected to be released in March 2021 and the IAHE SG values a follow up discussion around the review's findings and recommendations.

In the ensuing discussion, UNFPA repeated its call for enhanced and long-term funding for promoting gender equality and preventing and responding to GBV and other lifesaving aspects to protect in particular women and girls. It argued that increased and sustainable funding is a core aspect to enable meaningful positive change and to achieve a positive impact for women's resilience and empowerment in protracted crises. FAO shared learning from an internal evaluation of gender and humanitarian development and peace collaboration. It found that some progress had been achieved but that more needed to be done to achieve gender equality and to enable women to proactively contribute to peace and conflict management and addressing the root causes of conflict. ICVA encouraged the evaluation team to reach out to RG4 on Humanitarian Development Collaboration.

The ERC has launched an **IAHE of the Scale Up response in Yemen**. Ms. David noted that the IAHE on Yemen was significantly delayed due to ongoing conflict. Because of significant travel restrictions compounded by the COVID-19 crisis an innovative light approach that keeps the burden off the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is deemed critical. The crisis' complexity and constraining factors for humanitarian operations are seen both as a detriment but also a significant learning opportunity. Ms. David welcomed the OPAG's engagement in the inception phase of the IAHE guiding the evaluation's approach and key questions and ensuring it is both well targeted and its recommendations are of value to and implementable by the HCT.

In the ensuing discussion, OHCHR suggested that the assessment should also address the challenges around role of humanitarian action in sustaining Yemen's war economy, as highlighted by reports monitoring sanctions and the Security Council Resolution 2140. FAO suggested clearly articulating the impact of COVID-19 on the response, as well as addressing the issue of localization and humanitarian-development collaboration and linkages to peace. UNHCR urged a timely conclusion of the IAHE. Members discussed the appropriateness of recruiting national staff as part of the evaluation team, noting the importance of the evaluation's independence. ICVA offered to connect the evaluators with national NGO platforms in Yemen and strongly encouraged a clear participatory approach, which Ms. David agreed to.

The third evaluation reviews the **System-Wide Emergency Scale-Up Activation in response to the COVID-19** pandemic. Ms. David stressed that the rapid global scale up of the humanitarian system to the first ever IASC response to a global infectious disease event must be seen as a significant achievement. The aim of the evaluation is to identify what aspects went well and what must be overhauled so that we can adapt future IASC responses to a infectious disease event in multi-country contexts. It also offers an opportunity to review the applicability of the Scale Up Response Activation protocol in a global context. It might also offer learning around other aspects of the UN reform agenda.

In the ensuing discussion, ICVA suggested the IAHE to also reflect on how IASC policies and guidance contributed to the pandemic response. IOM and UNHCR expressed their interest in participating in the country level reference group to advise on new developments given the rapidly evolving situation. IOM suggested to increase conversation around the Covid-19 evaluation, recognizing that this is the first extensive review for scale-up of big emergencies. Members noted it was useful to review the Scale-Up Emergency Activation protocol in a multi-country context.

In conclusion, Ms. David welcomed increased consultations with OPAG as these evaluations develop. Co-chair Ms. Valerie Guarnieri thanked participants for their feedback and reiterated the OPAG's desire to contribute to the evaluations development and to provide input on their preliminary findings.

Follow-up Actions:

2. Share the key preliminary findings of the Review of Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) into humanitarian, development and peace nexus agenda **[IAHE SG in collaboration with IASC secretariat]**
3. Share evaluations carried out on gender and/or the response to the COVID-19 to inform the two IAHE evaluations **[OPAG members in collaboration with IASC secretariat]**
4. Share with the OPAG for comment the ToRs of the IAHE on the Scale-up Activation in response to COVID-10 **[IAHE SG in collaboration with IASC secretariat]**

AOB

IFRC briefed on the draft "Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations," which it is promoting alongside the ICRC and which aims to articulate the humanitarian voice and the commitment of humanitarian actors in climate change policy discussions. The objective of the Charter is to make a commitment around two main action points: 1) become more climate smart in terms of adapting the way that we work as humanitarian organizations, and 2) to 'green ourselves'. The development of the Charter is being advised by a committee of experts, which includes IASC members, and includes regional consultations. OPAG members have separately received the link for feedback and their views on the draft text are warmly welcomed. While the aim is for humanitarian organisations (from local to global) to sign on individually (once the text is final), IFRC

and ICRC have received suggestions about proposing the Charter for IASC endorsement. IFRC and ICRC would welcome any views on this, noting the aim of ensuring an equal consultation with members within and beyond the IASC, in particular civil society organisations.

UNHCR briefed on its “partnership talks”, which take place on the 15th of every month and invited OPAG to join the next meeting on 15 February 2021, from 2-4 p.m. (GVA) which features a presentation from Robert Piper focusing on the UN development system reform and what the reform means for mandated agencies.

The OPAG co-Chairs closed the meeting by reminding members that the next OPAG meeting is scheduled for 3 March 2021, focusing on localization. The objective of the meeting is to gain an overview of key elements of localization guidance and agreeing on ‘success criteria’ and possible targets to deliver on the localization agenda. The OPAG will also reflect on efforts to strengthen local representation in the RGs, as well as review the status of delivering on key RG1 priorities including protection and bureaucratic impediments.

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chairs	Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director for Operations Services, WFP
FAO	Mr. Dominique Burgeon Ms. Shukri Ahmed
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. David Fischer
InterAction	Ms. Kate Phillips-Barasso
InterAction – Care USA	Ms. Sheba Crocker
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
UNFPA	Mr. Ingo Piegeler
UN-HABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund Ms. Yvette Muhimpundu
UNICEF	Mr. Manuel Fontaine Ms. Meritxell Relano Mr. Omar Robles
WFP	Mr. David Kaatrud Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri
WHO	Mr. Rudi Coninx Mr. Kevin Ousmane
World Bank	Ms. Maria Dimitriadou
Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)	Mr. Allan Calma
Action Against Hunger	Ms. Isabelle Moussard Carlsen
US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)	Ms. Chloe Canetti, Esq.
Results Group 1 on Operational Response	Mr. Rein Paulsen, Mr. Julien Schopp
Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion	Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth, Ms. Meritxell Relano
Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy	Mr. Michel Anglade
Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing	Ms. Marcy Vigoda
GCCG	Ms. Marina Skuric Prodanovic Mr. Dher Hayo

Presenters:

Dr. Terrence Jantzi, Evaluation Team Leader for the IAHE for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls & Senior Evaluation Specialist for the KonTerra Group

Ms. Mariangela Bizzarri, Senior Evaluation Consultant, Founder of GenderConsult

Ms. Kelly David, Chair, Inter-Agency Steering Group for Humanitarian Evaluation

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