

IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting
6 October 2021

TOPIC: IASC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

SUMMARY RECORD

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 6 October 2021. The meeting focused on the IASC Strategic Priorities, with the objective to exchange views on possible IASC Strategic Priorities for 2022-2023 and reflect on the structures required to take them forward. In his introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair Mr. Geir Olav Lisle welcomed participants.

The Head of the IASC secretariat Ms. Mervat Shelbaya presented the outcome of consultations with IASC members across the IASC structures and with select external stakeholders on the IASC's new biennium strategic priorities (2022-2023), as well as the feedback on the performance of current structures. She noted that the current IASC strategic priorities and structures were endorsed in January 2019 and extended in September 2020 for an additional year. Following today's discussion and building on the prior consultation, the IASC Deputies Forum will convene on 15 October to review proposed biennium strategic priorities to inform the subsequent Principals meeting on 20 October. A proposal – informed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator's (ERC's) vision, the ERC's bilaterals with the IASC Principals, informal consultations with IASC officials, and consultations with Chairs of the various structures, as well as the feedback from OPAG - will be shared as background note ahead of the Deputies Forum. Initial consultations point to the continued relevance of the IASC's strategic priorities, however, there are strong calls to focus the work of the IASC further, particularly on issues that have the most impact on the effectiveness of the humanitarian response on the ground, and to further streamline structures in the interest of efficiency. The objective was to enable potential new structures to swiftly commence their work delivering against the new biennium strategic priorities.

Thematic priorities where consultations pointed towards a convergence of views amongst IASC members to prioritize were: **humanitarian diplomacy** with a focus on access negotiations with governments and non-state armed groups, as well as the Centrality of Protection, including gender-based violence (GBV); **delivering on collective protection outcomes** on the ground; **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)** including prevention, investigations, accountability, victims' support, capacities and culture; **Accountability to Affected People (AAP)** in terms of a demand rather than supply driven perspective, feeding realtime feedback into needs assessments and response, as well as field leadership; **localization** with a focus on engagement, sharing capacities, and funding; and further strengthening the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN)** with a view of engaging development actors, as well as firewalling humanitarian action.

There are also calls for a closer reflection on the triggers to activate the **Scale-Up protocols** to make it more effective; the need to **strengthen analysis** (including with external actors) to inform **early**

warning and early action by the system; the need to strengthen **collaboration with the Grand Bargain** and capitalize on the IASC and the Grand Bargain's comparative advantage; the need to consider the **outcome of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement**; the need to reflect on the response to the COVID-19 and equip the system to **better respond to future pandemics**.

Less convergence among IASC members was found around the areas of cash; humanitarian financing; climate although the IASC's focus in this area should be on the response to climate-related displacements; the humanitarian impact of counterterrorism measures, bureaucratic and administrative impediments; politicization of aid; duty of care; gender although the focus should be on making it an integral component of the response; donor presence on humanitarian country teams (HCTs); and racism and racial discrimination.

As for **structures**, overall they were deemed to have performed well also during the pandemic as they were more linked to IASC decisions and focused on results; and more inclusive, such as with the inclusion of local actors and collaboration with external stakeholders. As for facts and figures over the past 2,5 years, 5 IASC scale-ups had been declared, 48 guidances endorsed, 70 % of Principals' action points implemented, and members had invested significantly in the work of the IASC. At the same time, consultations had revealed that there were still too many structures, too many meetings and too little space for learning and reflection, a need for better linkages between the OPAG and the EDG, and a need to improve the translation from policy to practice. Specifically, some members had called for the Principals to focus on strategic issues, the Deputies Forum to be formalized (e.g. to tackle racism and racial discrimination, cash, coordination, PSEA, policy to practice) or to dismantled, the OPAG to remain as key normative body; the EDG to continue as operational body and strengthen its focus on preparedness; the Results Groups (RGs) to reduce in number; the Reference Groups to be disassociated from the IASC while continuing their good work as relevant; the IASC secretariat to strengthen a better information flow among structures, streamline efforts with the Grand Bargain, address concerns regarding the risk to its neutrality given its placement in OCHA's Coordination Division, and support IASC structures in becoming more inclusive of global south voices.

DISCUSSION

The OPAG co-chair Ms. Valerie Guarnieri reiterated that OPAG members' thinking will inform the consultation and the forthcoming co-chairs' discussion with the ERC. Overall, the RGs developed many operationally relevant products within their 3-5 thematic areas, while past discussions had revealed the struggle to translate policy into practice.

On the **working methods**, the OPAG co-chair mentioned that a more focused approach on fewer issues may imply a more sequential approach regarding the issues on which less convergence will be found, or the uptake of these issues in other forums. In this context, members suggested that issues be prioritized, managing expectations regarding the IASC's possibility to ensure **operational relevance**, e.g. regarding the centrality of protection, and access negotiations. Such an approach may imply that the selection of workstreams be driven by demand from the field; that a light review may be considered in terms of the uptake of the existing IASC guidance; that the IASC focus on the socialization and implementation of products on the ground, taking into account the resource

implications associated with the roll-out of policies. In addition, a need for Member States' and donors' support, including at the field level, were highlighted, such as in the framework of access negotiations.

To promote the **policy to practice** flow, members recognized that this was resource intensive in terms of budgets, staff time and training. Respective suggestions encompassed: OPAG members ensuring that policies are disseminated internally; OCHA taking ownership informing Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and clusters on the ground; IASC members categorizing documents and tools into 'must dos' for HCs and field-based humanitarians, as well as providing a synopsis of the content; IASC members continuing the community of practice approach (e.g. regarding the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDPN)); and better use of podcasts. Members further deemed that it was not the Emergency Directors Group's (EDG) role to enhance the policy to practice linkages. As for **learning**, members noted that a reflection was warranted on what kind of discussions at OPAG would enable the operationalization of guidance and tools at operational levels; as well as how the IASC strategic priorities linked to the review of the broader humanitarian system.

On the **strategic priorities**, members reiterated their strong support on the four non-negotiables (Centrality of Protection, AAP, PSEA and GBV). Members suggested to also consider **leave no one behind** which would help to ensure attention to the needs of different vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with a disability, IDPs, indigenous populations, stateless populations, LGBTQI - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex). In terms of the **quality of the response**, **AAP** constituted the core business to improve the collective delivery of humanitarian assistance in terms of the scale, effectiveness and appropriateness of the humanitarian response, and could possibly be featured in the inter-agency humanitarian evaluations (IAHE). **Localization** was another theme that could feature under the quality of the response while gender equality was another area requiring attention.

Multi-mandated IASC members placed emphasis on the **HDPN**, including by linking it to anticipatory action, climate, and food insecurity agenda, which would also feed into joint programming at the country level. A continued engagement between the IASC and the OECD was deemed key to advance on nexus approaches, and IASC members' involvement in UNDP's Nexus Academy was encouraged. In addition, clarity was warranted on the **PSEA/GBV** leadership to ensure better integration of both thematics. Reference was made to the ongoing external review on the effectiveness of PSEA over the last ten years. As for **protection**, a call was made to not approach protection in different structures; and to ensure that recommendations of the forthcoming Protection Policy Review will be actionable and addressed to relevant actors at the global and field level. Regarding **climate**, there were divergent view as an area of focus for the IASC. Some members suggested that it be the primary lens to approach humanitarian issues, and others suggested addressing it with a broader lense as it was not primarily a humanitarian issue. Additional suggested priorities included **principled humanitarian action**, including access, non-state armed actor engagement, bureaucratic and administrative impediments, as well as counterterrorism measures.

Regarding **structures**, some members noted that while RGs were deemed useful to progress key work, the number of sub-groups may have become too much of a burden for IASC members. Suggested alternatives included the establishment of **timebound task teams** or **lead agencies** initiating a product, leading collaboration with IASC members and subsequently disseminating it to the wider IASC, including to the field level. Some members expressed caution that this may result in a siloed approach

and place the emphasis on output rather than impact. These would be overcome by ensuring an inclusive approach in the membership of Task Forces and thinking issues through by considering, among others, socialization of outputs within and beyond the IASC. . Concerns were voiced regarding the disassociation of the entities associated with the IASC. In addition, it was emphasized that **complementarities between the Grand Bargain and the IASC** should imply avoiding duplication (e.g. regarding AAP, localization, quality funding). Further, some members noted the importance of **inclusion of local actors** in the IASC structures beyond the OPAG while others suggested strengthening linkages between global clusters and the IASC. ,

OPAG members queried the accelerated time frame of consultations and suggested that endorsement could take place virtually after the Principals' discussion offering space for reflection; this might imply extending the current structures for a transition period.

ACTION POINTS

- 1) Share the presentation with OPAG [**IASC secretariat**].
- 2) Share the proposal on IASC strategic priorities, informed by OPAG's feedback, as background note ahead of the Deputies Forum. [**IASC secretariat**].
- 3) Consider a joint OPAG/EDG meeting possibly focusing on better translating and opportunities for closer collaboration [**OPAG co-chairs**]

ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST

OPAG Co-Chairs	Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
FAO	Mr. Daniel Donati
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
ICVA - ACBAR	Ms. Lisa K. Piper
ICVA – COAST	Mr. Reza Chowdhury
ICVA - FRD	Mr. Azmat Khan
ICVA – IMC	Ms. Mary Pack
ICRC	Ms. Alexandra Boivin
IFRC	Mr. Isabelle Granger
InterAction – Global Communities	Ms. Pia Wanek
IOM	Ms. Tristan Burnett
OCHA	Mr. Andy Wyllie
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci
SCHR	Mr. Gareth Price Jones
SCHR – Save the Children	Ms. Leah Finnegan
SCHR - Christian Aid	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor
UNFPA	Mr. Ingo Piegeler
UN-HABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte
UNHCR	Ms. Annika Sandlund
UNICEF	Ms. Meritxell Relano
WFP	Mr. David Kaatrud
WHO	Mr. Rudi Coninx
World Bank	Ms. Maria Dimitriadou

Emergency Directors Group

FAO Mr. Rein Paulsen

RG co-Chairs

Mr. Julien Schopp, co-Chair RG1 on Operational Response; Vice President of Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction

Ms. Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth, co-Chair RG2 on Accountability and Inclusion, Deputy Director, Division of International Protection, UNHCR

Presenters:

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