

## IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting

15 June 2022

### SUMMARY RECORD

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 15 June 2022 to review the areas of work and deliverables that the IASC TF 3 on Preserving Humanitarian Space - with a focus on Bureaucratic Impediments (BAI) and Counter Terrorism (COTER) and the IASC Task Force (TF) 2 on Accountability to Affected People (AAP)- will prioritize during their term; reflect on how to ensure operational impact on humanitarian responses; and discuss what more can be done to ensure that the work of the TFs feeds into deliberations of other IASC structures including the Emergency Directors Group and the Committee of the Principals. The meeting furthermore provided an opportunity for the OPAG to deep dive on priority issues requiring advice and feedback of the OPAG to support the TFs.

In their introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chairs, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri and Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, welcomed participants, including five new OPAG members. They sincerely thanked outgoing OPAG members for their time, engagement, energy and field realities that they brought into the OPAG discussions, noting they hoped colleagues will continue to contribute to the work of the IASC at large.

#### SESSION 1: IASC TASK FORCE 3 ON PRESERVING HUMANITARIAN SPACE

Ms. Valerie Guarnieri welcomed the co-chairs of TF2 and TF3 and thanked them for moving fast to organize the TFs' work. She recalled that all TFs were asked to build on the success of the previous Results Groups, ensure a focus on supporting humanitarian operations including promoting the socialisation and use of IASC policies and products, contribute to collective advocacy, and facilitate engagement and collaboration across IASC TFs as well as with critical actors and partners within and beyond the IASC including local actors.

Ms. Guarnieri reminded members that while the OPAG and the TFs perform largely a normative role, OPAG had committed that we will do more to ensure that our work is meaningful and benefits humanitarian operations. As such, OPAG will have to be very selective about new policies and guidelines being produced and focus even more on tools and practical guidance.

Ms. Guarnieri thanked the co-Chairs for engaging with members of the former Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy, particularly on its key deliverables relevant to counterterrorism and bureaucratic impediments and invited the co-Chairs to also share how they engage with key relevant actors outside the IASC. Mr. Geir Olav then invited the co-Chairs of IASC TF 3 to update the OPAG on the workplan developed by the TF to deliver against their Priority Areas of Work.

TF 3 co-Chair, Ms. Emma O'Leary, opened the presentation with a focus on counterterrorism (COTER) and sanctions. She emphasized that the TF's work remains at a very early stage, having only met twice, but noted that the group has a strong base to build on, through the relevant work completed under the

former IASC Results Groups 1 (on Operational Response) and 3 (on Collective Advocacy). Ms. O'Leary acknowledged the extensive work of OCHA, Save the Children, and InterAction as part of the former subgroup on COTER and Sanctions, expressing hope that the new TF could emulate their strong work. Ms. O'Leary highlighted that the TF has already begun substantive work building on these groups, with updates to previous documents on Afghanistan, Ukraine, and other topics, being circulated with members for comments. In concluding her introduction, she noted that the detailed workplan would be finalized as part of the next TF meeting.

Ms. O'Leary then offered an overview of the draft detailed workplan, emphasizing the focus that each priority area of work, under objective one on COTER and sanctions, would take. Under priority area 1.2, the TF will focus on disseminating and sensitizing existing guidance, as well as providing ad hoc support. Ms. O'Leary reiterated the need for flexibility in the workplan. Under priority area 1.2, the TF will build on the existing dashboard, developed by the former Results Group 3, seeking to address challenges around data input through a renewed push and sensitization. Ms. O'Leary noted that information sharing on cases of sanctions, COTER, and impediments is a standing agenda item at TF meetings. Regarding area of work 1.3, the TF notes the need to provide strong and timely key messages for the IASC Principals. The TF is currently finalizing a paper on beneficiary screening to that effect. The TF sees joint positioning on key challenges as a vital task, noting that differences in positions within the humanitarian system on sensitive issues provide opportunities for push back and undermine a clear message. Finally, on priority area of work 1.4, the group is working to update an existing paper drafted by Save the Children through a highly consultative process, tightly focused on solutions. Ms. O'Leary reflected that the TF recognizes that there is little appetite for new broad guidance and the need for targeted and operational deliverables that respond to members' needs.

Finally, Ms. O'Leary highlighted that to be successful, the TF relied on the participation of members, building linkages with the other IASC structures, notably TF4 and TF5, as well as the support of the IASC secretariat.

TF3 co-Chair, Mr. Aurelien Buffler, offered reflections on the COTER and sanctions workstreams, highlighting that COTER and sanctions impacts continue to grow, but that existing momentum on the topic offers opportunities that the TF can capitalize on. He proposed that the TF will work closely with UN entities with a mandate and remit covering COTER and sanctions. He concluded by emphasizing the added value of the TF as a community of practice supporting coordination and advocacy at operational level.

Turning to BAI, Mr. Buffler noted that the discussion was at a different level to the other workstreams, that it is highly context-specific and driven by national and local issues. The TF will focus on supporting HCs and HCTs to successfully advocate with parties to conflicts to mitigate impacts. In terms of actions, Mr. Buffler set out that the TF will focus on supporting the operationalization of guidance adopted in 2021; help HCs/HCTs track and monitor BAI and think about how the system can be more successful in collective advocacy. The TF hopes to engage closely with Access Working Groups in the field, aided by the fact that they are generally co-chaired by OCHA and NRC. Towards this, the TF will host its first peer-to-peer exchange with Access Working Groups in the coming weeks, looking at significant challenges, good practices and gaps to inform reflection on common methodology for tracking BAI and inform discussion on development of guidance for country teams on engaging with parties to conflict, as well as feedback on what has and has not worked. The outputs from this process will be validated through a

second peer-to-peer exchange. The TF recognizes the challenge of bringing the views of diverse contexts together and recognizes the need to focus on common impediments across different crises.

Mr. Buffler supported Ms. O’Leary’s emphasis that the TF needs to be a collective effort with active participation beyond OCHA and NRC. He noted the need to re-energize members, following the transition between Results Groups and Task Forces. Mr. Buffler called for evidence-based advocacy and encouraged all members to share information on COTER, sanctions, and BAI openly, recognizing sensitivities but stressing that generic policy messages will be insufficient. Finally, he outlined the TF’s approach to engagement outside of the IASC and their decision to keep it issue specific, either inviting partners to relevant meetings or arranging bilateral engagement through best-placed TF members.

## DISCUSSION

In the discussion, OPAG members commended the co-Chairs and TF on their work so far and expressed their appreciation for the clear workplan and linkages drawn to workstreams and deliverables of the predecessor groups.

OPAG members recognized that the plan for COTER and sanctions engagement needs to be centred at global level whereas BAI will be focused at local and national levels and welcomed more thoughts on how ensuring that the impact of global level engagement is felt at local level. In addition, they raised the question of ensuring the localization angle; thinking about local actors who may be excluded from any deals made at global level. They encouraged the BAI focus on distilling common impediments with concrete areas, while querying whether the TF might also look at whether collective efforts to address general BAIs can be used to address context specific BAIs.

Regarding the impediments dashboard, OPAG members suggested that it is not a lack of awareness of the dashboard that is limiting reporting to it. The co-Chairs agreed that there is broadly good awareness of the dashboard and highlighted that the TF will try to be more transparent about how analysis will be used to bring benefits for contributors. They proposed that the OPAG members pass the message to their organizations that inputs to the dashboard are required, as well as a discussion on how to protect and handle sensitive information.

OPAG members expressed a hope for greater engagement both from UN agencies and local actors in the TF, including by trying to include information from local actors on how they navigate measures in practice, in addition to trying to shield them from impediments. They also noted the need to engage donors, both advocating on legislation directly, as well as encouraging them to advocate on BAI. The co-Chairs noted that discussions have already been undertaken with TF5 on localization, including about risk transfer, which goes beyond COTER and sanctions. They reflected the TF was eager to make sure products are useful also for smaller actors who do not have capacity to do their own analysis, including local actors. In addition, they emphasized a need to distinguish between different kinds of COTER impacts and decision-makers. They noted that a lot of COTER policy is drafted at capital level, where local representatives of international actors and local actors have less influence and that the TF’s advocacy should consider their needs. They further reflected the need to build trust between donors and local actors, including linking to the localization agenda and outlined that any access and BAI support or guidance would strike a balance between common and context-specific issues, noting that this will be established in discussion with the access working group.

Members expressed interest to see how the TF will move forward with regional or country level discussions, noting that contextualization is important. A follow up to the draft beneficiary screening could be addressing the issue of partner vetting.

A concern was raised that the TF's approach was very focused on donor governments. Members highlighted conversations at the Emergency Directors Group about peer-to-peer sharing between affected governments, suggesting the TF to reflect this. Another area of interest was impediments on commercial providers. The co-Chairs welcomed the suggestion of including the needs of commercial providers in COTER/sanctions exemptions discussions. They further welcomed the suggestion of in-person meetings, contingent on funds being made available to ensure the attendance of local organisations.

Ms. Guarnieri thanked OPAG members and the IASC secretariat for the discussion.

## **ACTION POINTS**

- 1) Share finalized workplan with OPAG for review and endorsement by 30 June [TF3].
- 2) Strengthen engagement in TF3 [OPAG].
- 3) Boost membership diversity, ensure linkages with relevant other IASC TFs and collaborate with the broader community beyond the IASC [TF3].
- 4) Articulate additional requirements and benefits of IASC Dashboard to enable more effective evidence-based advocacy on COTER legislation, sanctions, and BAI, while underscoring that confidentiality is ensured; IASC members to ensure the continued use of and contribution to the dashboard with the objective to more effectively report COTER and BAI challenges [TF3].
- 5) Explore opportunities for peer-to-peer events that allow for exchanges with and between affected governments [TF3].

## **SESSION 2: IASC TASK FORCE 2 ON ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE**

Mr. Geir Olav Lisle welcomed the co-Chairs of TF 2 on Accountability to Affected People, and Mr. Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (DRHC) for Syria, connecting from Gaziantep. He invited the TF co-chairs to inform on how the TF is approaching the endorsed Priority Areas of Work with the objective to agree on the areas of work and deliverables that the IASC Task Force 2 will prioritize during its term. He also requested the co-chairs to lead OPAG in a deep dive on some of the priority areas of work, such as the piloting of the tools, to gain a better understanding of their impact.

The TF2 co-chairs provided an overview of the workplan and their engagement so far with the core membership of the TF2. They referred to the recommendations that were made by the OPAG Timebound Taskforce, which functioned through the second half of 2021, presenting interim recommendations to the OPAG in November, and finalizing their work in February 2022. These recommendations form the basis of the draft TF2 workplan, which also builds on the work of RG2, in particular the tools such as the results tracker and the complaints mechanisms.

The TF committed to analyze how AAP works at country level and support HCs and HCTs to prioritize collective AAP; to investigate how to bring the voices of affected people into decision making processes and identify what this means in terms of course correction; and to bring key actions and messages to the decisions makers. The draft TF2 workplan seeks to strengthen systems and inclusive architecture, and

support HCs to implement existing IASC guidance on localization. On quality resourcing, it seeks to build leadership engagement with donors to improve funding in support of collective AAP approaches in a more predictable and timely manner. Finally, the TF2 will support HCs and HCTs in strengthening AAP through the establishment of a global inter-agency roster of technical capacity on AAP and deploy technical capacity.

In terms of core membership, the co-chairs are committed to ensure diversity and representation, and to create a broader community of engagement in order to drive systemic change. TF2 members are currently providing feedback on the draft workplan and on proposed expanded core membership.

The co-chairs updated OPAG on the current status of implementing these priorities. They highlighted the just concluded workshop with the HCT in Lebanon which led to an agreement on seven priority actions; a further workshop is planned in Bangladesh with strong UN leadership at various levels as well as government engagement. TF2 will consolidate the lessons learned from these workshops. Regarding the roster for AAP Capacity, under UNICEF's leadership and interagency efforts, there is a draft road map to guide the operational development phase and advocate for additional resources. The documentation of good practice and lessons learned has been undertaken to inform operations and leadership how to implement AAP initiatives and ensure it is a cross-cutting priority. Case studies have been developed covering Syria, CAR, DRC, Indonesia, Uganda.

The OPAG co-chairs invited Mr. Mark Cutts (DHC for Syria in Gaziantep) to offer his reflections on AAP.. Mr. Cutts highlighted the importance of diversity and participation of local actors and their engagement in all aspects of this work. He recalled the AAP workshop of November 2021, co-facilitated by the IASC Secretariat, which gave a lot of impetus to work already started. Since then, the team has been able to develop an action plan, resulting in changes in the way of working. For example, all meetings now offer simultaneous translation as local colleagues prefer to speak in local language. Mr. Cutts emphasized the need to ensure that people from inside North-West Syria are part of all meetings, not just as participants, but also as presenters, and that today there is stronger participation of Syrian civil society in meetings; today approximately 50% of participants are Syrians and there is an effort to also correct the gender imbalance. Another focus is on ensuring the same level of change in all clusters; eight out of nine clusters have a Syrian cluster co-coordinator in an effort to ensure Syrians are making the decisions. He emphasized that the issue was not only about the numbers, but that it was important to genuinely listen to affected people. He emphasized his team was no longer explaining why things cannot be done differently, and that the focus of the action plan lay on safer and more dignified living conditions as requested in feedback from affected people.

## DISCUSSION

Mr. Olav Lisle, the OPAG co-chair, thanked Mr. Cutts for his inspiring comments and requested OPAG members to provide any additional feedback virtually to the IASC Secretariat on the plans presented by the TF2 co-chairs before the end of the week.

Participants shared their overall agreement with both the work plan of the TF and the theory of change as they are a natural continuation of the work done by the previous Results Group. Members reminded the co-chairs of the need to ensure appropriate linkages and cross-fertilization between the TF2 and TF5 (localization) around enhancing engagement and leadership of local and national actors as one of the

outputs of TF5 is to report and deliver on benchmarks of local actor engagement. It was noted that the piloting of IASC tools, particularly of complaints and feedback mechanisms, is harmonized with the work done by PSEA groups particularly as they are now reporting directly to the Deputies Group.

It was furthermore suggested that, given the timeframe, the TF should have different tiers in terms of prioritizing the first 2-3 key areas of work and then moving to a second tier. With regard to action C (i.e., oversight of use and development of resources and tools), it was suggested the TF considers the integration of activities in some of the existing activities in the work plan.

Some OPAG members welcomed the proposal of bringing donors into the conversation to ensure there are no duplications with the conversations taking place within the Grand Bargain and to facilitate advancing some of the core commitments.

Participants were reminded that there are HCT compacts in about 34 contexts only which needs to be factored in going forward around the proposed actions on monitoring or reviewing performance of country level leadership. Looking at accountability across the Nexus was deemed important, ensuring that there is engagement with development counterparts and donors. Members commended the work done on strengthening capacities to support AAP across the system.

Close coordination with the TF on Localization was deemed important. TF2 was encouraged to find modalities of working that will keep the ability to engage in an inclusive manner, as in the previous RG2, by keeping a small leadership core group to steer the work while having complementary processes that allow for inclusiveness.

Ms. Tanya Wood, co-chair of the TF2, welcomed the feedback and broad appreciation of the workplan. She noted the comments on the need to ensure the integration of the work of the TF2 with both the localization and the PSEA TFs; on the ambition set up by the TF against the deliverables and the membership it wants to have; and on the importance to connect on AAP across the Nexus while leveraging the momentum around pooled funds and the connections with the Grand Bargain.

Mr. Olav Lisle reminded participants that AAP is about the concrete actions taken to drive change in the way we work. He concluded by thanking Mr. Mark Cutts and the co-chairs and participants for their contribution. Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, reiterated her thanks to Mark for an inspiring presentation and strong leadership. Mr. Cutts thanked the IASC Secretariat for “pushing us to do more” and for the good dialogue on AAP.

## **ACTION POINTS**

- 1) Provide additional feedback on suggested TF3 workplan to IASC secretariat by 17 June 2022 [OPAG].
- 2) Share finalized workplan with OPAG for review and endorsement by 30 June [TF2].
- 3) Ensure alignment between piloting the AAP Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms with PSEA tools [TF2].
- 4) Prioritize key Areas of Work/Deliverables [TF2].



- 5) Collaborate with other relevant TFs, in particular TF5 on Localization, and align respective workplans [TF2 and TF5]
- 6) Explore donor participation in some of the TF conversations, as well as alignment with the Grand Bargain [TF2].

## AOB

The OPAG co-chairs informed members that the time has come to revise the IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action, as agreed upon its endorsement in February 2021. Given the dynamic and evolving nature of the challenges and opportunities for data responsibility in humanitarian action, the IASC committed at the time to reviewing and updating the Operational Guidance through a collaborative and consultative bi-annual process. The Data Responsibility Working Group (DRWG) - a global coordination body co-chaired by DRC, IOM, OCHA and UNHCR – has formally requested delegation from the OPAG to lead the revision of the Operational Guidance between June 2022 and January 2023. This process would consist of remote and in-person engagements with IASC members, DRWG members, and other stakeholders at both headquarter and field levels (regional and country). The DRWG would aim to submit a draft of the revised IASC Operational Guidance for formal review and endorsement by the OPAG in February 2023. The co-Chairs requested OPAG members to support the delegation of authority to move forward swiftly.

The co-chairs concluded the meeting by thanking the members for their constructive engagement and support.

## ACTION POINTS

- 7) Revise the IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action and share with OPAG for endorsement by February 2023 [DRWG].

## **ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST**

<b>OPAG Co-Chairs</b>	Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
<b>FAO</b>	Mr. Patrick Jacqueson
<b>ICRC</b>	Ms. Avigail Shai
<b>ICVA</b>	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
<b>ICVA – Somalia NGO Consortium</b>	Ms. Nimo Hassan
<b>ICVA – Tamdeen Youth Foundation, Yemen</b>	Mr. Jameel Abdo
<b>ICVA – Concern Worldwide</b>	Mr. Kirk Prichard
<b>IFRC</b>	Mr. Frank Mohrhauer
<b>InterAction</b>	Ms. Erin Weir
<b>InterAction – CRS</b>	Ms. Emily Wei
<b>InterAction – NRC</b>	Ms. Cecilia Roselli
<b>IOM</b>	Ms. Tristan Burnett
<b>OCHA</b>	Mr. Andrew Wyllie
<b>OHCHR</b>	Mr. Roberto Ricci
<b>SCHR</b>	Mr. Gareth Price Jones
<b>SR on HR of IDPs</b>	Ms. Kim Mancini
<b>UNDP</b>	Mr. Peter Batchelor
<b>UN-HABITAT</b>	Mr. Filiep Decorte
<b>UNHCR</b>	Ms. Sara Baschetti
<b>UNICEF</b>	Ms. Segolene Adams
<b>WFP</b>	Ms. Karie-Helene Kyprianou
<b>WHO</b>	Mr. Kevin Ousman
<b>World Bank</b>	Ms. Maria Dimitraou
<b>IASC Secretariat:</b>	Ms. Samantha Louise Newport