

IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) Meeting
23 June 2023

Summary Record

INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee convened on 23 June 2023. The OPAG co-chair, Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, welcomed participants from OPAG and the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) as well as the co-chairs of the IASC Task Forces and Associated Entities.

SESSION BRIEFING

The ERC announced the Flagship Initiative to the IASC Principals in November 2022 as an initiative to “explore how to transform the way that humanitarian response is coordinated, delivered and financed to strengthen operational effectiveness and improve delivery.” OCHA briefed the IASC Deputies Group in January 2023 on the initiative and the Deputies underlined the importance of leadership. Mr. Lisle noted today’s briefing was a welcome opportunity to increase the collective understanding of the initiative, take stock and reflect on how members best engage and strengthen synergies with other IASC workstreams. He welcomed the presenter, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham welcomed the opportunity to brief on the Flagship Initiative. He stressed that while not an IASC initiative per-se, IASC members and their organisations at global and country level were essential partners in making it a success. He expressed the hope that the Flagship Initiative will be an opportunity for the whole system to learn lessons together, including with key stakeholders beyond the IASC. Innovation and reflection were key in light of increasing humanitarian need and shrinking budgets. Four pilot countries, Colombia, Niger, the Philippines and South Sudan, have been invited to re-envision humanitarian coordination and response to make it lighter, driven by needs, based on the priorities and capacities of crisis-affected people, and bring affected people to the table not just to lead the response but also envision their future and identify solutions.

Mr. Rajasingham noted that Flagship Initiative will be rolled out in three phases: Phase one focused on the awareness raising of the Initiative. The initiative is now at the start of phase two, in which each country under the leadership of the Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators (HC/RC) and the Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) develop an approach to engage with communities and conceptualize a response that reflects their priorities and capacities. Phase three will see the implementation of the response and the monitoring of its progress. He stressed that learning was central to the Flagship Initiative, supported by a team of international and national evaluators. Credible data on the success of this initiative was expected after two years of implementation. Furthermore, OCHA would develop a community of practice to support the country implementation.

The presenter summarized those approaches being adopted by each of the Flagship countries as follows:

- In Colombia, the initiative is expected to focus on results-driven coordination and would be implemented in 2-3 locations where the government has little capacity with the objective of gradually bringing government attention and capacity to those areas. The RC/HC is looking into developing an HCT localization strategy to promote local NGOs' response to actions identified in area-based strategies; a regional Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) is also being explored.
- In the Philippines, communities have identified the need for humanitarian action that contributes to strengthening resilience to climate events. NGOs and Community-Based Organizations will be central to the Flagship approach, reflecting their prominent role in the HCT and strong support for a community engagement approach with coordination and financing around community-identified solutions.
- In South Sudan, the initiative aims to shift implementation to subnational levels to ensure close proximity and unfiltered community engagement. Under an 'Area-Based Leadership' (ABL) approach, assigned UN agencies will lead coordination in different states. The ABL approach has previously proven effective, so the Flagship seeks to scale it up and ensure that community-driven responses guide the efforts. Donors and the Government support the ABL approach, and existing CBPFs in the country will provide financial support for the Initiative.
- In Niger, the RC/HC is emphasizing dignity and 'graduating' from reliance on humanitarian assistance to self-reliance. Initially, new approaches will be implemented in the regions in two pilot regions and there is strong support from the Government, including the Governors for these two regions. NGOs have engaged with the HC on different models of how to do unfiltered community engagement. The HC is currently exploring how to build on existing initiatives and assessing what would need to change.

Mr. Rajasingham urged those present to encourage their field level colleagues to be engaged in the initiative at country levels so that the initiative becomes as inclusive as possible. He stressed that as the initiative progresses there would be multiple opportunities for engagement. He also noted he would welcome providing OPAG and the EDG with regular updates.

Mr. Lisle thanked Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing. He then invited members to share their comments and reflections.

DISCUSSION

OPAG members welcomed the presentation, noted their support for the Flagship Initiative and welcomed with enthusiasm the opportunity to weigh in on its development. Those present furthermore appreciated the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of existing coordination structures and ways of working in the interest of lightening and simplifying structures and processes and with the objective of strengthening efficiency and effectiveness. They agreed with the ambition of putting people at the centre of the response, testing new approaches and learning how humanitarians can better service the needs of affected people.

Members urged OCHA to engage with the broadest set of actors in taking forward the initiative, including donors and development and peace actors beyond the IASC. Highlighting the central and already ambitious role of HC/RCS and the significance of from the outset working in close collaboration with local actors including affected people, members appealed to OCHA to ensure

both the HC/RC and local civil society organisations would be provided additional capacity, without which their leadership and collaboration could not be ensured.

They requested further information on how the initiative intersected with other reform initiatives such as the Independent Review of the Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement, the IASC work on the Centrality of Protection, Accountability to Affected People (AAP), localization, the Humanitarian-Development Nexus and Linkages to Peace, the reform of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, the Joint Inter-Sectoral Assessment Framework (JIAF), and the Secretary-General's Emergency Platform initiative, as well as to existing country-specific planning frameworks which they suggested needed to be safe-guarded. They stressed the Initiative would benefit from building on existing IASC guidance and tools and creating synergies with ongoing workstreams and to use existing planning frameworks in the countries to avoid duplication. Members emphasized that as the initiative focused on the IASC's collective response, it required a collective approach both at the country and global level, inviting more opportunities for systematic engagement.

The co-chairs of the IASC Task Forces promised to share relevant information and to support the initiative at country levels, including through their existing networks, which could be one avenue of bringing in additional capacity and expertise.

Mr. Lisle observed the broad support for this initiative. He then emphasized members' advice to OCHA on providing capacity support to local actors. He also queried what more OCHA and partners could do to leverage donor interest.

In response, Mr. Rajasingham welcomed partners' engagement in country and reaffirmed OCHA's intent to engage across all stakeholders in envisaging the future and a new way of working. He reflected on the need to link the various planning documents and ensuring they speak to each other, which was a job of the HC/RCs. He then agreed that the Flagship Initiative would build on ongoing reform initiatives and IASC workstreams. It was up to the country teams to determine and agree how broadly they strove to reconceptualise existing coordination and planning framework and how to go about localising the initiative.

In conclusion, Mr. Lisle thanked all participants for their passionate engagement.

ACTION POINTS

1. Continue sharing information on the Flagship Initiative with the IASC [OCHA].

CHAIRS' CLOSING REMARKS

The OPAG Co-Chair closed the meeting by thanking Mr. Rajasingham and the OPAG and EDG members for their constructive engagement during this meeting. He recalled that the next OPAG meeting was scheduled for September 2023, focusing on the role of humanitarians in the provision of basic services. Lastly, he noted that the inter-agency team tasked with reflecting on the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on the COVID-19 response had started its work. As a first step the group will undertake a desk review that maps actions IASC members will pursue towards addressing recommendations of the IAHE on the COVID-19 response and other actions to address the system-wide deficiencies identified and to strengthen system preparedness. Mr. Lisle requested members to share with the IASC secretariat by 30 June 2023 any relevant resources, such as any evaluation/review that their organization had produced

of their respective organisations' COVID-19 response including any internal response to the recommendations of the IAHE on the Covid-19 response.

Annex: Participants list

OPAG Co-Chairs	Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary General, NRC
FAO	Ms. Dervla Cleary
ICRC	Ms. Avigail Shai
ICVA	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
ICVA - CARE	Isadora Quay (ED)
ICVA - Tamdeen Youth Foundation, Yemen	Mr. Jameel Abdo
ICVA- NGO Humanitarian Forum, Colombia	Mr. Jose Lois Berreiro Garcia
IFRC	Mr. Frank Mohrhauer (and co-chair TF2)
InterAction	Ms. Sarah Fuhrman
InterAction – Catholic Relief Services	Ms. Emily Wei
	Ms. Jennifer Poidatz (ED)
InterAction – NRC	Ms. Cecilia Roselli
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society	Mr. James Orlando
IOM	Mr. Federico Soda (ED)
	Ms. Angela Staiger
OCHA	Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham
	Mr. Aurelien Buffler (co-chair TF3)
	Ms. Kelly David (chair IAHE SG)
	Ms. Marina Skuric-Prodanovic (co-chair GCCG)
OHCHR	Mr. Roberto Ricci
SCHR	Mr. Gareth Price Jones (and ED)
SCHR – Save the Children	Ms. Gabriella Waaijman (ED)
SCHR - The Lutheran World Federation	Mr. Allan Calma (ED)
UNDP	Mr. Peter Batchelor
UNFPA	Mr. Ingo Piegler
UN-HABITAT	Mr. Filiep Decorte (and ED)
UNHCR	Ms. Sara Baschetti
	Ms. Bernadette Raymonde Castell (co-chair TF1)
	Mr. Shoko Shimoszawa (ED)
UNICEF	Ms. Hazel de Wet
	Ms. Segolene Adam (co-chair TF5)
UN Women	Ms. Osnat Lubrani (and ED)
	Mr. David Coffey (co-chair GRG)
WFP	Mr. Giancarlo Cirri
WHO	Mr. Aiman Aiman Zaru
Save the Children	Ms. Michelle Brown (co-chair GCCG)
CHS Alliance	Ms. Tanya Wood (co-chair TF2)
Near Network	Ms. Alix Masson (co-chair TF5)
Oxfam International	Ms. Marta Valdes (co-chair TF4)
IASC secretariat	Ms. Mervat Shelbaya