

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

### SESSION VI

19 June 2020

## Summary Record

---

### INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) held the sixth session of its third regular meeting on 19 June 2020. The primary objectives of this session was to (i) follow up on the previous discussion around how best to leverage new opportunities created in light of the pandemic to speed up localization efforts; and (ii) discuss the shared responsibility around duty of care for all humanitarian workers, including national staff, particularly from a prevention vantage point.

### SESSION 6.1: STEPPING UP EFFORTS AROUND LOCALIZATION IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 (II)

In her introductory remarks, the OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Valerie Guarnieri noted the discussion was a follow up to the OPAG discussion on the [IASC Interim Guidance on Localization and the COVID-19 Response](#) held on 4 June, including with a particular focus on the aspect of duty of care. She commented that previous OPAG discussions, such as the ones on risk communication and community engagement, funding as well as the one on the nexus had highlighted the linkages with localization from different angles.

Ms. Victoria Stodart, the co-lead of the localization sub-group, reiterated the six recommendations presented at the previous localization briefing relating to: (i) clarifying accountabilities for the Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and the Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs); (ii) advancing solutions for duty of care; (iii) lessons learned and best practices on the impact of sanctions on local actors in the COVID-19 context; (iv) flexible funding and quality reporting from local actors; (v) harmonizing donors' and agencies' due diligence processes; and (vi) roll-out of the Localization Guidance within each IASC member. Ms. Stodart also provided a quick overview of the points raised by the OPAG members at the previous localization meeting which included: (i) the need for the IASC to use the interim guidance on localization as an opportunity to formalize a holistic policy on localization; (ii) consideration as to what opportunities the humanitarian system can leverage to operationalize localization commitments from the global to the country level; 3) what mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure accountability of Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinator in the implementation of the interim guidance and localization more broadly; 4) ways to measure progress on localization at all levels beyond the amount of funding to local actors; and 5) the need to ensure that the IASC work links up with the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream where the discussion is also about how to ground the commitments and discussion at the country level. Accordingly, closer linkages with the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream as well as across different Results Group workstreams were recommended.

In the ensuing discussion, OPAG members reaffirmed the importance of the Localization Guidance and emphasized the need to translate the guidance that focused on the coordination aspect into concrete actions. SCHR suggested that Principals request the HCs to discuss the guidance to advance its implementation at the country level; for agencies to roll out the guidance internally; and that OPAG convene a discussion on a quarterly basis to track progress.

In response to UNICEF's query regarding the establishment of an additional Localization Results Group, the IASC secretariat commented that most of the Results Group themes were cross-cutting, and to this end co-leads of the workstream were invited to conduct consultations across various Results Groups, especially in view of translating the different aspects of the Localization Guidance into action.

UNFPA recommended focusing on seeking greater clarity around the barriers of local actors, including based on age, gender and disability to identify how to strengthen their engagement in coordination mechanisms; as well as on pursuing greater linkages with the Grand Bargain workstream on localization. OHCHR reflected that localization should be more than the integration of local actors into humanitarian coordination structures, given the lack of sustainable impact of humanitarian interventions. Regarding ICVA's query concerning local actors' access to quality funding, OCHA outlined the respective steps that had been undertaken, notably: the IASC harmonized approach proposal that was on its way to the IASC Principals; Results Group 5's engagement with the GHD co-Chairs to follow up on the 5 June discussion; and efforts undertaken to report on funding channeled to NGOs in the monthly GHRP progress updates.

Save the Children pointed to a [two-pager](#) that outlined benchmarks to measuring progress on the localization agenda. OCHA outlined its localization efforts from a funding and coordination angle. Regarding the latter, OCHA proposed IASC commitments and benchmarks based on IASC cluster guidance, particularly in terms of transition, that could possibly be tested in a few pilot contexts. OCHA further reaffirmed its commitment to collect data on engagement of local actors in humanitarian coordination. Foundation for Rural Development (FRD) highlighted that for local actors to uphold coordination following a transition, both cluster coordination skills and resources needed to be transferred to the local actors.

The OPAG co-Chairs summarized the discussion underscoring the need of targets to measure localization progress at the country, agency, and system level. Given the expanded mandate given by the co-Chairs to the sub-group and given its co-chair role of the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream, IFRC noted its inability to continue serving as a co-lead of the localization sub-group. However, IFRC reiterated that it would continue to remain engaged in the sub-group and provide the linkage with the Grand Bargain workstream as well as supporting the IASC secretariat to engage other interested agencies, as well as the Results Group 1 co-Chairs in terms of handing over this responsibility.

#### **Follow-Up Actions:**

1. Identify two OPAG members (UN and non-UN) to take on the co-leadership of the localization workstream under the Results Group 1 to ensure coherence of work on localization within the Results Groups and across the various IASC structures, as well as with key stakeholders outside of the IASC (including the Grand Bargain) [*OPAG members with the support of IASC secretariat*]
2. Identify benchmarks to measure progress in taking forward the localization agenda (beyond the 25% of funding (including CBPF resources) going to local actors as per commitments at the WHS); including by supporting the RC/HCs accountability and reporting on localization commitments [*Results Group 1*]
3. Share data and analysis on the meaningful engagement of local actors in HCTs, clusters, etc. and advocate for more equal representation of local actors in coordination structures in the field [*OCHA*]
4. Step up efforts to operationalize the IASC interim guidance on localization, including through the actions of individual IASC organizations [*OPAG members*]

## SESSION 6.2: DUTY OF CARE

The OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Guarnieri, opened the second agenda item highlighting that organizations had a duty of care vis-à-vis their national staff, and that there was an increasing call to take action as a system. To date, such action had been taken in the field of security regarding local staff's exposure to security risks in the implementation of their work. WFP had also contributed to the duty of care by operationalizing the common services in the COVID-19 context.

Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, ICVA's Director of Policy, outlined the key areas of its [paper](#) on duty of care for humanitarian workers, including national staff, with a particular focus on prevention. The objective of the paper was to initially to roll out recommended prevention measures across the ICVA membership in terms of occupational safety and health measures. The effect would, however, be stronger if related measures were implemented by the entire IASC membership. Overall, the issue of duty of care has strong linkages with both localization and protection. As shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, the "do not harm" principle to the affected population requires for the sector to invest adequately in protecting humanitarian workers. Most of the humanitarian workers are national staff, which means that, while the duty of care standards should be enhanced, efforts are needed to ensure all humanitarian workers equally benefit from them, regardless of their status as international or national staff. While this requires a long-term investment of the entire sector, there are certainly low-hanging fruits. Ms. Shuteriqi proposed the following three actions: (i) Suggest OPAG considers on regular basis duty of care for all humanitarian workers, including national staff; (ii) Invite the EDG to share with OPAG any analysis on gaps in duty of care and proposals for solutions in terms of sectorial policy and guidance; and (iii) Ask the Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing whether they can work on some draft standard clauses for UN-NGO partnership agreements.

In the ensuing discussion, OPAG members expressed their broad support for the recommendations outlined in the ICVA draft paper. As OPAG co-Chair, Ms. Guarnieri noted that any system-wide suggestions were easier to be made once an organization internally already started reviewing its duty of care. WHO and WFP underscored its joint efforts with OCHA and others to set up the medevac system, noting that once the pandemic would reach the low resource countries, organizations' duty of care provisions would become critical as local health systems would become overstretched.

WFP and UNHCR shared their respective good practice on equitable duty of care, such as their efforts to support mental health in terms of offering flexible working arrangements; procuring PPEs, as well as enabling medevac for local staff and their official dependents, including within the country. WFP pointed to the link between national government's rules and regulations, and the constraints these posed for local staff. To this end, consideration needed to be given also to the continuity of operations. UNFPA reaffirmed the importance of the recommendation referencing the equitable treatment of staff, including flexible working arrangements to support the mental health of staff.

The co-Chairs underscored the criticality of the procedures that needed to be in place among all IASC members, including INGOs and NNGOs, in order to ensure consistent duty of care arrangements at the system level, while bearing in mind policy and resource constraints. ICVA-FRD echoed WFP's comment of duty of care being affected by NNGO's already stretched resources, and noted the importance of OPAG approaching duty of care as a system. ICVA-IMC suggested to also use the standards, once developed, as an advocacy tool with donors.

Summing up the conversation, the co-Chairs highlighted the linkages of this conversation with the IASC Principals' discussion on racism and discrimination; echoed the need for minimum standards on duty of care for all IASC members by acknowledging policy and resource constraints; and underscored the need to advance this discussion by ensuring linkages with the EDG taskforce on duty of care.

**Follow-Up Actions:**

5. Establish a timebound task team, co-led by ICVA and a UN agency (UN agencies are welcome to express interest in taking on this role) to look into the following:
  - Consider converting the ICVA paper into a set of IASC minimum standards and commitments to be adopted by IASC members
  - In preparation for the spread of COVID19 in low resource settings, consider what concrete measures need to be put in place to ensure the protection and wellbeing of all staff (ensure that we de-conflict/complement efforts by the EDG and UN secretariat)

**AOB**

Further to the IASC Principals' request on racism and discrimination, Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, the Head of the IASC secretariat, inquired about OPAG's willingness to hold another ad hoc session on this issue, and noted that the IASC secretariat would be in contact with the OPAG co-Chairs.

\*\*\*

## **ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST**

<b>OPAG Co-Chair</b>	Ms. Valerie Guarrieri, Assistant Executive Director, WFP Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
<b>FAO</b>	Mr. Daniele Donati
<b>ICRC</b>	Ms. Avigail Shai
<b>ICVA</b>	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi Mr. Jeremy Wellard
<b>ICVA - FRD</b>	Mr. Azmat Khan
<b>ICVA - IMC</b>	Ms. Mary Pack
<b>IFRC</b>	Ms. Victoria Stodart
<b>IOM</b>	Ms. Angela Staiger
<b>OCHA</b>	Mr. Rein Paulsen
<b>OHCHR</b>	Mr. Roberto Ricci
<b>SCHR - Christian Aid</b>	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
<b>UNDP</b>	Mr. Romano Lasker
<b>UNFPA</b>	Ms. Ingo Piegeler
<b>UNHCR</b>	Ms. Arafat Jamal
<b>UNICEF</b>	Mr. Manuel Fontaine Ms. Segolene Adam
<b>WFP</b>	Mr. Brian Lander
<b>WHO</b>	Mr. Rudi Coninx

### **Presenters:**

Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, Director of Policy, ICVA

### **IASC secretariat:**

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head of the IASC secretariat