

FPA Task Force Meeting

	MINUTES
DATE	24 June 2015
TIME	10.00 – 11.30
PLACE	ECHO Offices
PARTICIPANTS	<p>VOICE FPA Watch Group : Marianna Addonizio (COOPI), Belinda Eguis del Toro (Handicap International), Celia Cranfield, Carolina Morgado, Magali Mourlon (VOICE)</p> <p>ECHO: Giuseppe Angelini (Adviser to the Director B – Operations), Anne Simon (ECHO C/3 Team Leader of the Partner & Desk Support Coordination) and Reka Dobri (ECHO C/3 Legal Officer)</p>

This discussion on the HIPs process was requested by the FPA Task Force following the last meeting of the FPA Watch Group. The objective was to exchange on the HIPs process and present some suggestions developed by the Watch Group. The contracting negotiations phase was also discussed.

1. HIPs Process

Process

The HIPs process is following an ECHO internal calendar with set deadlines, but should be seen as a continuous process where both partners and ECHO headquarters and field staff interact to feed information that help developing the HIPs. Here are some indicative dates for the process this year:

1. 1st of July - 31st of August: consultation phase within the geographical units and with other services. This is an opportunity for partners to contact the Desks /TAs and exchange views on priorities.
 2. End August – Mid September: internal review to ensure consistency between the proposal of the geographical units and the sectorial policies.
 3. By the 17 September: final draft HIPs submitted to the Director of Operations
 4. By the 25 September: submission to the Director-General for final agreement.
 5. Early October: submission to the Cabinet. In parallel, the operational priorities (GOFA) and the World Wide Decision are also approved.
 6. By mid-October the Cabinet expresses its opinion, after which a formal inter-service consultation is launched.
- ➔ The target is to publish the HIPs by 6 November 2015, subject to the adoption of the 2016 Worldwide Decision.

Mid-term review

ECHO is currently carrying out the mid-term review for 2015 HIPs: not only to allocate additional funds from the internal operational reserve, the EDF and the EAR (to propose extra funding for some crisis), but also to start shaping the programme for 2016.

The Integrated Assessment Framework (IAF) gives an idea of the exposure of different countries to vulnerabilities. It supports ECHO to be able to evidence-based decision-making.

However IAF presents limitations. For example, if ECHO had to stick to IAF, ECHO would never intervene in Colombia because the tool does not capture vulnerability pockets. Likewise, the IAF does not justify in itself ECHO's decision to devote as much funds to the Syria crisis.

Latest IAF has been shared within ECHO since mid-June. It initiates the development of the next HIPs.

Consultation with partners

The Task Force raised the importance of sharing the information captured by IAF per country/region with the partners and to organize a consultation in the field in July. Last year, there were very good experiences in sharing and consulting just before the publication of the HIPs – Dakar was considered a good example by ECHO partners.

Through a meeting ECHO partners and TA would be able to exchange on their assessments of the situation and next year's needs. For partners it might also be an opportunity to identify possible collaborations. This consultation does not have to imply formal invitation, it can easily be published in ECHO website to be visible by all partners.

It was also suggested to take the opportunity of such meeting for the TAs to share their feedback on the mid-term review of the HIPs as well as some factual information around contracting (current number of contract, average amount, and potential adaption for the next year).

According to ECHO, many field offices already do organize such meetings. The potential benefit is understood and ECHO will encourage its team based in the field to arrange this in the coming weeks. However formalizing such consultation may impact the overall duration of the process and therefore not be beneficial for the partners. Also partners should be reminded that at that stage of the year since budget are not yet approved, it is difficult to share information about it.

Deadlines for submission

The Task Force recommended foreseeing a minimum of 6 weeks between the publication of the HIPs and the deadline for the project proposal to be submitted in Appel. The Task Force also requested ECHO to clarify on whether such deadlines are strict or indicative.

ECHO reminded that HIPs deadlines are in most cases indicative (exception being e.g.the HIP Public Awareness, Information and Communication) and ECHO has the right to consider Single Forms transmitted after the indicated date, especially in case certain needs/ priorities are not covered by the received Single Forms. However partners should be conscious that time is needed for ECHO staff to make comparison of proposals while maintaining equal treatment between the partners. A funding request will, in principle, not be rejected because of being submitted after a deadline, but it might be that the funding is already allocated. If the partner is facing delays, it is advised to interact with the Desk and inform about the intention to submit a proposal within the next X days. Proposals submitted after deadline may also be funded at a later stage if there is fund left or in the next HIP revision. Nonetheless, when a deadline is short or there is a precise hour, it should be understood that there's some kind of urgency behind.

The Task Force suggested setting up different deadlines according to the different budget lines or countries gathered into a HIP. The Central Africa HIP 2015 was a very good example. From an organisational point of view it makes it easier as very often the same Desk deal with the different countries within a region.

ECHO stressed that geographical units are firstly invited to set deadlines based on operational needs (season, projects, etc.) which may or not imply different deadlines. Also the internal way a unit organises itself can impact this.

2015 HIPs novelties: regional HIPs and integration of DIPECHO

The Task Force asked feedback on the regionalisation of the HIPS as well as on the integration of DIPECHO. They expressed concerns on this mainstreaming: how useful it is for ECHO, especially with the idea of handover of these projects to DEVCO or other donors. DIPECHO has become a specific “brand” in ECHO which was considered as a positive development for ECHO to be able to handover. With the integration, FPA partners wonders whether it may not affect such eventuality.

ECHO's feedback on the regional HIPs is very positive since it made it easier to make modifications inside the HIPs, etc. On the integration of DIPECHO, there is still some way to go in terms of having an integrated approach where DIPECHO is part of the overall response. This intention has not been enough communicated and understood by ECHO partners.

From next year it will impact the DIPECHO programming: the selection of country of intervention through DIPECHO will be done according to the information from INFORM and additional criteria like the willingness/capacity of the local authorities to buy-in the project. However, the global budgetary envelope will be maintained.

Communication HIP

The Communication HIP is expected to be published in the coming days. The deadline for submission of proposal it is in this case not indicative.

2. Contracts negotiations

Partners welcomed very much that the negotiation phase was formalised. For many NGOs/projects the process was smooth, but for others it was challenging with very late signature of contracts.

Apart from the liquidation stage that has to be done within 60 days, all the other deadlines are self-imposed by ECHO: 14 days for the appraisal, 30 days for the negotiations and few weeks for contracting. The average number of proposals reviews is 3 (not 2 as initially expected), but it is considered as a shared responsibility. ECHO assesses itself as satisfactory if in 95% of cases internal deadlines are respected. If not ECHO would revise it. For the time being ECHO wonders if it is necessary to put internal pressure on deadlines for actions having a starting date in few weeks or months. ECHO is in the process of reconsidering this. Combining the appraisal and the negotiation phases into a single phase with one deadline could be a solution.

The Task Force agreed that such process would be fair for proposals relating to upcoming actions. Partners are concerned when the operation has already started. These contracts should have the priority. There should be a clear indication that for example, by the end of March, 90% of contracts should be signed. Otherwise it delays the operations especially since an increasing number of NGOs tend to reduce their financial/treasury risks and field missions are requested not to launch any investment (main procurement, consultancy; etc) before a contract is signed.