

FPA WATCH GROUP MEETING

BRUSSELS, 13TH MAY 2008

10.00 – 17.30, AT VOICE

MINUTES

1) Introduction

Each participant described the contribution his/her participation in the Watch Group (WG) could make. Participants also stated the extent of their relations with ECHO (how many projects, etc.). List of participants in annex.

2) The FPA Watch Group in the implementation phase

a) Profile of the group: profile and commitment

The profile of the FPA Watch Group must be based on commitment. The Watch Group is not so much a group for learning, as much as a group where members are expected to give contributions concerning the implementation of the FPA. Membership in the Watch Group must be limited to dedicated participants who are able and willing to bring input into debates. Members should be able to guarantee a regular attendance at meetings and e.g. in e-mail discussions. VOICE's role is that of facilitator.

In principle, each organisation delegates one person to the FPA WG. "Family" organizations should work out how they want to be represented.

The reconstituted FPA Watch Group is composed of 31 NGOs. 28 are P-partners and 2 A-partners. In relation to the previous group, there are 8 new NGOs represented. The NGOs involved come from the following countries:

AT	BE	DE	DK	ES	FR	IE	IT	NL	PL	UK	Int	Total
1	2	4	3	1	3	1	3	2	1	8	2	31

b) Recognition of representation by the FPA Watch Group

A process needs to take place in order for the Watch Group to gain the status as a legitimate representative of all ECHO NGO partners. To increase the weight of the Watch Group in discussions with ECHO, the group must obtain a recognition of representation by ECHO partners. VOICE will send the list of NGOs participating in the FPA WG to all ECHO NGO partners, asking them to acknowledge their approval of the group and their willingness to be represented by it (similar processes have taken place in the past). The process will be concluded by the end of August.

c) Task Force

Since some members of the Task Force left the group, the Task Force should be reinforced. Members of this working group should be very familiar with the problems in their own organization in terms of the FPA. They would be able to give extra time and energy to the Watch Group. Besides the intermediate work between Watch Group meetings, preparing meetings, etc., the Task Force would be responsible for drafting documents, give regular feedback, propose additional activities.

Action points:

- VOICE sends the Recognition of Representation form to all ECHO partners.

- VOICE updates the website: publish the list of NGOs participating in the reconstituted FPA WG, terms of reference and minutes.
- At the end of this process, a letter will be sent to ECHO by VOICE.
- FPA WG members will contact VOICE to express their interest in becoming members of the Task Force.

c) Discussion of the Terms of Reference

Draft Terms of Reference based on the TOR drafted for the Watch Group in 2004 were presented. The Group approved the draft:

TERMS OF REFERENCE FPA WATCH GROUP

I - Background

The first FPA Watch Group was formalised in 1999, following on from the work of the “Dialogue group”. Its initial task was to monitor the implementation of the new FPA. The group was later charged with consulting, on behalf of ECHO Partner NGOs, on certain aspects of the 2003 Framework Partnership Agreement. Following the consultation process resulting in the 2003 FPA, the necessity arose of continuing the Group to monitor the implementation of the new FPA and any future modifications.

II – Purpose

To represent the views of ECHO NGO partners in the monitoring, review and consultation of all matters relating to the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) that governs the contractual relations between ECHO and its NGO partners. To work towards a common interpretation and consistent application of the FPA between ECHO and its Partner NGOs.

III – Commitments

1. To defend the general interest of all ECHO NGO partners as related to the FPA
2. To collect and organise any comments that are made from the wider community of ECHO NGO partners with regard to the ongoing implementation of the FPA, and to communicate to ECHO any important issues that arise
3. To collect and organise any comments and feedback towards improvement of the FPA that are made from the wider community of ECHO NGO partners
4. To be the contact representing ECHO NGO partners to which ECHO may refer when wanting to discuss any planned or potential changes to the FPA
5. To analyse any difficulties working with the FPA, as well as any planned or potential changes to the FPA, from the view point of ECHO’s NGO partners
6. To share any important issues arising from discussions with ECHO with the wider community of ECHO NGO partners
7. To identify and facilitate the sharing of any new tools towards the better comprehension and implementation of the FPA
8. To provide and share input spontaneously or in response to solicitations from the TF

IV - Members: organisations represented by individuals

1. The group will be composed of around 30 NGOs that are ECHO partners, or networks representing ECHO NGO partner organisations. These organisations must have good knowledge and a regular contractual relationship with ECHO. The Watch Group will consist of a range of NGO partners, from a variety of European countries, and membership of the Watch Group is open to all NGO partner organisations regardless of size or partner status (‘A’ or ‘P’).
2. Each of these member NGOs must designate one individual to be part of the FPAWG and attend meetings.
3. The names of the organisations and of the individuals representing them will be communicated to ECHO by the group.

V - Methodology

a) FPA Watch meetings

1. The group will aim to meet at least 2 times a year to discuss any comments and proposals that have arisen either from ECHO NGO partners or from ECHO.
2. The Group will establish a yearly calendar of meetings, with each meeting being confirmed 3 weeks in advance.
3. Minutes of meetings will be written within 2 weeks of each meeting, filed with the Secretariat of VOICE and

published on the VOICE website in order to be available to the community of ECHO partners.

4. The meetings will usually take place in Brussels, hosted by VOICE. However, the group will endeavour to hold meetings in other European locations if it is advantageous and cost-effective to do so.

b) Meetings with ECHO

5. The group will be led by a Task Force (and establish other ad hoc working groups as required) that will meet with ECHO to discuss ideas and comments that have arisen, and to negotiate issues as necessary. The meetings between this working group and ECHO will be scheduled as necessary.

6. From time to time, and at the request of either ECHO or the FPA Watch Group, representatives of ECHO may be invited to some FPA Watch Group meetings.

c) Consultation, analysis and reporting back

7. The group will receive from the wider community of ECHO NGO partners any comments that arise in relation to the FPA. These will be communicated via the Secretariat of VOICE, including via the FPA Watch email (fpa@ngovoice.org).

8. During or in between the meetings, the group will analyse any comments or issues that have been received from the wider community of ECHO partners, and any changes to the FPA that ECHO are proposing.

9. When there is a need to get a broader perspective, the group will consult with the wider community of ECHO partners using the infrastructure of VOICE and through various channels.

10. At various points during the year, the group will provide a report on progress to the wider community of ECHO NGOs partners through various channels: e.g. the annual VOICE General Assembly, ECHO's annual partner meeting.

VI. FPA Watch member organisations agree to respect the following rules:

1. To be an ECHO NGO partner organisation, or a network that represents ECHO NGO partner organisations
2. To have a regular contractual relationship with ECHO
3. To have their nomination agreed by ECHO NGO partners having accepted the representativity of the FPA Watch Group
4. To nominate one individual to work on FPAWG matters and attend meetings
5. To be able to participate in a minimum of 2 FPA Watch Group meetings per year
6. To commit to confidentiality concerning practicalities discussed by the Watch Group

VII. Additional indications

1. Membership in the Watch Group shall be reviewed and reconfirmed each two years.
2. The role of VOICE in the FPA Watch Group shall be limited to the stipulations of the above Terms of Reference.
3. The names of all the organisations and individuals in the group will be communicated to all ECHO NGO partners, and to ECHO.
4. The above information will be communicated to all ECHO NGO partners and to ECHO by VOICE.

3) 2007 achievements

In 2007, the legal and financial unit of ECHO focused on two main activities: the elaboration of the Fact Sheets and the revision of the Framework Partnership Agreement. The members of the WG and the Task Force (TF) have been very active on these matters, monitoring closely and providing feedback on the documents produced by ECHO.

The fact sheets aim to ensure consistency and coherence in interpretation among ECHO field offices and HQ staff in different units, an issue which has been repeatedly raised over the last years.

As far as the FPA revision is concerned, ECHO considered it an opportunity to introduce certain simplifications and address weaknesses of the 2004 FPA. The most important changes to the 2008 FPA are a new "control system" (A-control and P-control) and the recognition of internal procedures for P-control NGO partners.

The recognition of the NGOs' procurement procedures has been one of the major requests of the FPA WG since 2005.

Moreover, additional simplifications, which have been requested by NGOs over the past 4 years, have been introduced with the new FPA, such as abandoning rules of origin and nationality, and the ex-post publications of awarded contracts.

In relation to the revision of the FPA, the consultation with the FPA Watch Group officially started in July, although the Task Force had already started to work with DG ECHO in April. Facilitated by VOICE, five meetings between ECHO and the NGOs have been dedicated to this intense process, in addition to the preparatory meetings and work carried out by the WG and the TF.

While the process was characterized by transparency and constructive communication between ECHO and the NGOs, a quite ambitious revision and an extremely short timeframe put strong pressure on NGOs, who however managed to react timely and efficiently. For the first time, ECHO organised meetings including desks from ECHO and other partners (UN, Red Cross). This kind of meetings was considered very positive by the Task Force.

The work done by the Watch Group and VOICE has become one of the cornerstones of the partnership with ECHO and it is widely recognised. The FPA WG has proved to be a very valuable platform to move the FPA and related-issues forward.

4) Current concerns in the implementation of the new FPA

The following main challenges were identified:

Support materials and interpretation of texts and forms

- ECHO training (inconsistencies in the interpretation and lack of knowledge of field reality)
- Guidelines and fact sheets (still in draft formats)

Procurement

- Lack of guidelines
- NGO procurement procedures (implication of the new ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement on NGO procedures)

Management issues related to the 2008 FPA

- Financial format
- Transition rules
- ESingle Form

The group decided to follow up these issues with ECHO B2. Over the next few months the group will pay special attention to these topics.

5) Work Plan for 2008

A work plan for 2008 was discussed and approved by the participants (attached).

6) Exchange with ECHO B2 (Herman Mosselmans, Head of Unit)

The main objectives of the new FPA were to strengthen the results-oriented approach, to diversify partnership (recognising the procedures of some partners) and to simplify procedures. However, one year period is needed in order for the new FPA to run fully accurately. ECHO B2 Unit has been recently reorganised. There are 4 branches: 1) financial management; 2) Partner relationship related issues; 3) support and training; 4) legal procedures issues. A team of 6 people deals with partners requests. The ECHO FPA mailbox tries to reply in 24 hours to the requests of the partners as well as ECHO desks and experts.

Concerning trainings and support to partners, ECHO launched a tender aiming to guarantee regular training and a helpdesk on FPA related matters to its partners and experts in the field. The external contractor should be selected by August and operative from October onwards.

ECHO is also working on reviewing its communication with partners. The Appel-survey will be reviewed. Appel will be redesigned and enlarges to that NGOs should find easily all the needed information they need. ECHO website will be improved as well. Frequent Asked Questions (FAQs) will be updated regularly on ECHO website (shortly a new version is foreseen). ECHO will also send a FPA news Flash to all its partners; this document will contain all the main topics related to the FPA.

ECHO is aware of the concerns related to the financial report. ECHO B2 is working with some partners in order to propose 3-4 examples to be given to partners by end of June. These models will not be compulsory.

Section 4.3.2 of the Single Form can be considered as an “operational reporting”. The amounts per result will not be analysed by auditors on the eligibility-compliance (this is done on the basis of the final financial report). Following the results oriented approach, ECHO accepts that figures in section 4.3.2 are not 100% precise. The total per result is not necessarily the same as the one reported in “means and costs” (the objective of the sections 4.3.2 is to give indications to the desks), but its expected that at least 80% of the main costs are explained.

ECHO is still working on the guidelines. They will be finalised in June. Same for the Fact Sheets (one more fact sheet on “communication” will be drafted).

Transition rules (see letter sent by ECHO on 31 March): ECHO wants that the old and the new FPAs run together for a short time. To avoid confusion, projects ending after June 2008 were proposed for applying the new FPA, however exceptions for some projects ending up to September 2008 were accepted. ECHO will contact NGOs to inform if their request for derogations was accepted or not. ECHO does consider the transfer to the new rules a problem for the audits.

Funding decisions: ECHO wants to reduce the timeframe necessary for the adoption of the decisions. Although ECHO is already looking into other kind of decision mechanisms, there are not concrete proposals on paper at the moment.

7) Presentation of the ESingleForm followed by discussion (Amine Othmane, DG ECHO/B/1.IRM)

DG ECHO is working on an online version of the Single Form, which should enable ECHO Partners to write proposals and submit reports online via the APPEL database. This tool will be called the “eSingle Form” and is supposed to replace the current paper based version by the end of this year.

For ECHO the main advantages of this new service are:

- The main objective and *raison d'être* is that ECHO information on Projects will be structured, consistent, available anytime and anywhere to the relevant people.
- Speeding up the processing of documents related to Projects.
- Consulting in real-time the status of each Project.

19 NGOs were contacted and invited to participate at trial sessions in May.

With these selected partners DG ECHO is currently undergoing a test phase, which should end September this year, to further develop this tool. During the training sessions, ECHO received some feedback from NGOs. ECHO plans to consolidate all the feed-back received from the users and also to explain and propose solutions & workarounds. ECHO is open to compare with the feed -back you will collect from the FPA Watch Group.

The group raised several issues/concerns:

- The transition from an email/documents-based system to an online web-based system.
- The realities of the field (e.g. internet connections, urgency, NGOs internal capacities, etc.).
- The tool is not a working document. Track changes or other editing tools are not available yet. Only one single user per organization will have access to the website.
- Inconsistencies between the Esingle Form and the current Single Form.

Action points

The group decided to carefully follow the development of this tool.

Following the discussion in the meeting, Sonia, Laurence, Alexandra and Jane will draft a paper summarising the main concerns by mid-June. VOICE will coordinate.

8) Next steps

- VOICE will draft the minutes. Minutes will be published on VOICE website.
- The Task Force will meet ECHO to discuss all the draft guidelines and Fact sheets.
- Next meeting will take place in September/October.

SG/June 2008

Annexes: List of Participants

	Organisation	Name and Surname
1	ADRA DE	Thomas Petracek
2	AVSI	John Makoha
3	CARE International	Cecile Benhamou
4	COOPI (IT)	Efrem Fumagalli
5	CORDAID (NL)	Nicole Bos
6	Danish Refugee Council	Una Verdel
7	Handicap International (BE)	Laurence Leclercq
8	IMC (UK)	Peter Medway
9	Intermón Oxfam (ES)	Raquel Reyes i Raventós
10	IRC UK	Jane Ellis
11	Islamic Relief UK	Affan Cheema
12	MAG (UK)	Abigail Eason
13	MDM (FR)	Laurent Bacos
14	Mercy Corps UK	Alexandra Angulo
15	Merlin UK	Marinella Bebos
16	Mission East	Mags Bird
17		Marianne Le Floch
18	Polish Humanitarian Organisation	Anna Zielinska
19	Save the Children UK	Naomi Bourne
20	Solidarités	Marija Manevska
21	Welthungerhilfe (DE)	Annette Wulf
22		Steffen Schulz
23	VOICE	Sonia Giannone

Apologies: Janine Lietmeyer (Malteser); Eva Pineda Hansen (DanChurchAid); Judith Stemerding-Herret (Hope 87); Claudia Höchst (World Vision); David Bennett (Oxfam GB); Elvira Rodriguez (ACF); Diana White (EU-Cord).

Work Plan 2008	Issues to be worked on in 2008	Activities	Timeframe	Who	Progress
	(1) Reconstitution of the FPA Watch Group	<p>1.1 Launch the reconstitution process and get recognition by ECHO partners</p> <p>1.1. Organise and follow up meetings, keep ECHO and partners informed about the process (e.g. VOICE website)</p>	First half of 2008	VOICE	Reconstitution process launched in February. 30 NGOs applied. First meeting on 13 May.
	(2) FPA WG Recommendations to ECHO	2.1. Update and revise the 2005 FPA WG recommendations on the basis of Mr. Cavaco's reply (December 2006) and changes in new FPA	Second half of 2008	Task Force (lead)	
	(3) Interpretation and consistent application of the FPA between DG ECHO (HQ and field) and its Partner NGOs	<p>3.1. Monitor ECHO communication tools (website, e-mails)</p> <p>3.2. Collect examples of incoherent communication and of constraints related to the FPA and provide feedback to ECHO – <i>Specific focus on financial reporting and results-based approach</i></p> <p>3.3. Create and update an incident report to monitor concerns on the application of the FPA</p>	Ongoing process	Task Force Watch Group VOICE	Incident report created, shared among WG members and presented to ECHO B2.

	Issues to be worked on in 2008	Activities	Timeframe	Who	Progress
	(4) Consistency and clarity of the FPA and all related documents	<p>4.1. Analyse draft guidelines (on SF, GA, procurement, financial format, visibility) and fact sheets and provide written feedback to ECHO</p> <p>4.2. Analysis of ESingleForm and monitoring of other FPA related tools (e.g. training; helpdesk)</p>	<p>January – June</p> <p>June-December</p>	<p>Task Force (lead) Watch Group VOICE</p>	<p>2nd Draft Single form guidelines have been analysed and discussed with ECHO B2 in March</p> <p>Several members have attended ECHO trainings on FPA and E-Single Form. By mid of June a paper summarising the main concerns on the ESingleForm to be shared with ECHO</p>
	(5) Improve transparency	<p>5.1. Lobby ECHO to guarantee that NGOs receive explanations if proposals rejected</p> <p>5.2. Lobby ECHO to create a database (internal registration system) on proposals rejected</p>	<p>May-December</p>	<p>VOICE Task Force Watch Group</p>	
	(6) ECHO Audits	<p>6.1. Share information on internal procurement procedures and annual assessment</p> <p>6.2. Prepare and distribute a questionnaire on main problems and concerns linked to audits to WG NGOs and VOICE members</p> <p>6.2. Analyse and distribute the results</p>	<p>June - December</p>	<p>Task Force (lead) VOICE</p>	