

## FPA Watch Group Meeting

	MINUTES
DATE	02 July 2014
TIME	10.30 – 17.00
PLACE	IFRC Office
PARTICIPANTS	FPA Watch Group (Cf. Participants List) ECHO: Jean-Pierre Buisseret (Head of C/3) with Anne Simon (C/3) and Simon Horner (Adviser ECHO B)

*Mags Bird welcomed ECHO and explained that in its morning session FPA Watch Group had discussed a) FPA issues to feed into HIPs process, b) other aspects of new FPA implementation that should be looked at in first stocktaking exercise. As the process of developing the FPA Guidelines is still ongoing, the Group remains ready to contribute further input.*

### **FPA issues to feed into HIPs process**

*The comments and concerns identified by the Watch Group (WG) are not necessarily new issues, but it is relevant to pay attention to them, particularly in the current funding situation.*

*Three areas were highlighted:*

#### Consultation with partners:

*-Consultation on developing HIPs remains extremely variable, depending on the geography. In some cases only partners with current contracts are contacted for discussion. Measures to increase transparent interaction would be welcomed for the new round of HIPs.*

#### Timings and deadlines

*-Short deadlines are a concern: there were examples in 2013 of only some weeks between release of HIP and submission deadline, but then a long delay in feedback from ECHO on those projects.*

*-The delay in feedback becomes even more of a concern when then revisions to proposals are requested with again extremely short deadlines. This is particularly challenging when working on consortia or regional proposals which require a lot of discussion and coordination.*

*- A clear timetable in advance on expected HIP release and expected deadlines would assist partners' planning. Spreading the timing of publication of the different HIPs would also help.*

*- There is additional concern regarding the probable gap in programming between end of 2014 contracts which have been impacted by the funding situation and start of 2015 contracts.*

#### Communication

*-Clearer cues to discuss strategy and future plans with TAs in the field could improve partner contribution to HIP development. Partners are not aware of ECHO's internal HIP process timing and so miss opportunities to make suggestions and give input. The Watch Group recommends that HIP processes could be made clearer, possibly via the ECHOES partner newsletter?*

ECHO recognises that it is important to have a proper procedure when it comes to proposals presentation, and the HIPs process has been under internal discussion. The new FPA abolishes the previous use of concept notes. It is important that proposals are presented through APPEL in order to ensure equal treatment. This does not mean that discussions with TAs in the field are 'forbidden': discussions on needs and strategies are crucial. But draft proposal documents should not be exchanged for TA comment as a substitute for submitting a proposal through APPEL.

Regarding timing, the World Wide Decision mechanism has administrative advantages in putting all geographical funding decisions together, so this will not change. The cycle of releasing HIPs and

deadlines for the main ECHO geographies at the same time is unlikely to change. The short deadline/long response time has been particularly extreme this year in the context of the financial situation; we expect 2015 will be back to a more normal rhythm.

The publication of the HIPs is planned as usual in October; no delay expected in association with change of Commissioner.

ECHO continues to work on the assumption that they will receive the 250 million 2014 budget reinforcement as requested. There are encouraging indications that the request to raise level of payments up to commitments in the 2015 may be possible. The importance of life-saving operations seems now to be widely accepted, but of course there is no assurance until final budget decisions are taken.

*WG members noted continuing lack of clarity over the degree to which HIPs are open to all partners. Some partners experienced last year that only NGOs that had previously presented projects were invited e.g. to Sahel HIP. Some were advised in close meetings with TAs that it would be very difficult to receive funding because they were not 'preferred partners', especially in the funding situation.*

*The Watch Group highlighted some good examples of partner consultation, i.e. DIPECHO which are an added-value for the proposals and requested increased clarity of the HIP process and consultation supported by clear internal communications to ECHO staff. .*

ECHO explained that the HIPs are open to everyone, unless it is specified. All FPA partners are 'preferred partners', unless there is a specific reason. This is also why it is important to submit the proposals through APPEL. If an organisation only holds conversation with TA, and does not formerly submit a proposal, then there will not be formal response as to why its project was not accepted.

The work done by the TA and the Desk on the HIP is a long process starting in May-June. An ongoing discussion with a TA is already very important input since it is the role of the TA to be in constant dialogue with the partners.

*The WG suggested that sharing of HIP development timeframe with partners– in the ECHOES for example – could encourage partners to discuss strategy and operational suggestions with TA in order to feed into HIP process. This would especially prompt partners who are not in continual interaction with TA to take up contact e.g. who do not have an ongoing ECHO project in a particular geography.*

*The Group also noted cases of inconsistent practice where some ECHO staff had requested 'light proposals', (word/pdf version not sent through APPEL). Some partners understand that this can facilitate discussion on strategy/proposals, however, it can lead to additional workload and is equivalent to the Concept Note practice which is in theory eliminated in the new FPA. Some ECHO representatives take the other extreme and appear to refuse communication with partners prior to submission. It is thus important to have a common understanding for ECHO and partners of what practice linked to discussion on proposals should be.*

ECHO has carried information and training sessions for Desks, and is also reviewing issues arising during the first 6 months of experience of the new FPA and will report to Mr Sorensen on this. When conclusions are reached, ECHO will inform WG of internal measures taken to clarify guidance / instructions to the field regarding consultation and communication with partners.

*VOICE Director expressed that it is good to know the positive outlook of ECHO anticipating a more normal rhythm of contracting in 2015, but stressed the importance to NGOs of considering all possible situations, especially as budget discussions may be lengthy. The focus on life-saving is crucial but it will also be important to go back to resilience activities. Is there any consideration to have a phased contracting plan if required by the money situation?*

ECHO stressed that it will try to avoid a repeat of the two-phase contracting approach. There has not yet been a discussion on the 'rounds' of HIPs, to be applied. Everything is not back to normal, but ECHO is trying to arrange the operations to avoid extra work for partners and staff. Planning continues on the basis that it is extremely likely that the process runs like the years before. Resilience is still part of the programming, but life-saving is still the fundamental basis of humanitarian assistance. This year it was possible to do the life-saving assistance, as well as almost all the DIPECHO.

*Following concerns raised in last WG meeting, VOICE Director was still wondering how ECHO will guarantee that there is sufficient recognition of the special financial situation of 2014 in the FichOp. How is ECHO internally working on that?*

ECHO explained that there are no internal specific measures being taken. Partners have to clearly mention it in the Single Form, so it can be read during the evaluation and the audit. During the implementation, it is also responsibility of the organisation to inform ECHO on the difficulties. There will be a communication in the annual report of ECHO, but if a project is implemented well, there is no need to mention it. The FichOp is only for Desks' project management. Each action is different, so ECHO cannot impose what they write there. The best place to put the special situation is in the final report which will be read by everyone concerned (Desks, auditors, etc.).

*The FPA Watch Group suggested that clear recommendation on this to all partners should be put in the ECHOES newsletter.*

### **Other initial comments from FPA WG on initial experience of new FPA use**

*A member of the Task Force presented the main issues and questions arising from the Watch Group's morning discussion on the KRIs:*

- *There has been some quite positive feedback from people in the field. Use of KRIs could give a clear framework on what is expected from ECHO. NGOs also appreciate the flexibility with the possibility of creating their own KRI.*
- *However, it has been quite challenging to determine means of measurement for some KRIs, especially when the NGO has no previous experience doing it. A continued flexibility from ECHO would be welcomed both on measurement means and custom indicators.*
- *Guidance for partners regarding the KRI is still unclear. When introduced, including at the Partners Conference, partners were asked to use a minimum of one KRI and now the approach seems to be 'as many as possible'. The Group stressed the importance of having clear guidance and opportunities to justify not using KRI.*
- *Some KRIs which might be expected for particular sectors are missing, others need to be updated (particularly the baseline). Is ECHO intending to review / adapt them according to partners' use?*
- *Is ECHO intending to evaluate the KRI and data collection arising from it? Partners would be interested to know a) if the system is producing the anticipated aggregated data on operations that was one of the drivers for KRI introduction and b) if KRIs are seen to have improved the quality of proposals. Feedback at the Partner Conference would be welcomed.*
- *Some TAs seem to push for the use of a particular KRI, but if the organisation cannot measure it, it is impossible to use it. What is the guidance TAs have received for such situations?*

It is true that now the recommendation from ECHO regarding KRIs is to use them 'when they apply'. This means not only when a particular indication is relevant for the action, but also when it is measurable and monitorable. In practice these latter requirements can limit the use of KRI quite a lot.

The evaluation of the KRIs is foreseen, but it will take time and might not be possible by the Partner Conference: Unit A/4 is now discussing with IT teams the aggregation of data and the data base also

still needs time to be filled up. But it should be possible to give an overview of how many KRIs have been used, the nature of justification of not using them, etc.

The future adaptation of the KRIs is foreseen, maybe after one year of use. It is the responsibility of the regional experts in the regional offices to capture information about the use of KRIs and the need by the partners for revision. This also implies organising regular thematic meetings with partners – it would probably be the best place to discuss it. Any question can be sent to the thematic expert in the RSO.

ECHO has organised information sessions and training for TAs, but of course it takes time to establish clear practice across all locations. Guidelines for TAs will be developed. In specific cases partners can always send an e-mail to C/3. As for all areas of operation, it is important to have the TAs' advice confirmed in writing.

*Another member of the Task Force presented the key issues and questions arising from the Watch Group's morning discussion on the gender-age marker:*

- *It is taking time for NGOs to integrate use of the marker into their systems and staff trainings, so continuity of a flexible approach is also important here. Training organised has been very useful but not everyone was able to go to one. How ECHO is integrating the marker in-house?*
- *The combination of gender and age in one marker is challenging. Generally, NGOs already have tools and policy for gender approaches, but it is more difficult for age, especially since ECHO's categorisation is not always the same as the one used by partners. In addition the section 5 of the Single Form does not allow explanations.*
- *The 'non-applicable' (N/A) option is no longer available in the Single Form.*
- *The Watch Group also highlighted the importance of having an opportunity for consultation on the upcoming resilience marker.*

The N/A option disappeared to be in line with the gender toolkit. If the marker does not apply to the action, the organisation has to put '0'. Section 5 of the Single Form is not intended to explain the gender-age approach of the project, this can be done in the beneficiaries section. If there are any more technical issues with how information is dealt within the Single Form, the Watch Group can contact directly Directorate A.

The 6-month trial period is not intended to continue. The discrepancies between self-assessment and ECHO scoring are due to the fact that the system is built to foster dialogue. The box in the Single Form reflects the organisation's own assessment, while TAs and Desks do theirs in the internal 'FichOp' based on the information provided in the section 3.

*The Watch Group expressed some concerns on the meaning of having a 0 in the score because gender and age still cannot be addressed in certain situations.*

ECHO stressed that it has no implication on the selection for the moment.

There is no consultation is foreseen for the resilience marker so far. It should be available for next HIPs.

### ***Next steps FPA including guidelines development***

The annual assessment has been launched. Indicative deadlines have been set in accordance with the General Conditions, i.e. 6 months after end of a partner's fiscal year but these are flexible and can be extended. There is now a specific question on the audit to see if partners are following up previous audit main recommendations

ECHO has developed a new function in APPEL for partners to inform on any legal changes; documentation can be uploaded e.g. statutes changes – this is no longer covered by the annual assessment.



VOICE FPA Watch Group

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The discussion with the Desks on the guidelines has recently been completed. The resulting changes need now to be integrated and the guidelines need to be made more practical and user-friendly. As soon as the first draft is finalised, they will be sent to the Watch Group and there will still be a possibility to discuss them in September. The draft guidelines are already the basis for the HelpDesk website and then will be regularly updated as changes are agreed.

C/3 is working on the programme for the Partners Conference which will take place at the end of November. It will be a 'normal' ECHO conference format with a panel discussions on 1<sup>st</sup> day and working groups on 2<sup>nd</sup> day. The idea is to address themes linked to the preparation of the World Humanitarian Summit.

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*CM / MB July 2014*