

FPA Watch Group Meeting

	MINUTES
DATE	14 October 2014
TIME	10.30 – 17.00
PLACE	ECHO Offices
PARTICIPANTS	FPA Watch Group (Cf. Participants List) ECHO: Jean-Pierre Buisseret (Head of C/3) with Anne Simon (C/3 – Partner Support), Reka Dobri (C/3 – Legal affairs), Albert Garralón (C/3 - Finance), Dominique Albert (Deputy Head of A/4) and Helena Soares (A/4).

Discussion with ECHO: General overview on the FPA process

VOICE thanked ECHO for welcoming the FPA Watch Group and for maintaining this regular exchange with the group.

Resilience Marker: update on its development

The Watch Group expressed their willingness to have an update on the development of the marker, its implementation and to know if the resilience marker will be integrated for the next HIPs.

The commitment of the EU regarding the resilience is well known. The introduction of a resilience marker into ECHO projects has been foreseen into the EU Action Plan on Resilience. The process to define this marker is similar to the one of the gender and age marker. The idea is to give a tool to assess how each project can contribute to increased resilience of the local community. It is supposed to be a quality marker - not a criteria for eligibility. The objective is to have a platform for dialogue with TAs and Desks on how resilience can be integrated in different contexts. As a donor, ECHO wants to monitor this implementation.

ECHO did some testing: in July in Kenya and in September in Bangladesh. The contexts are very different with regards to what resilience means to humanitarian action. In both locations, partners were consulted – overall ten ECHO partners tested it and provided feedback. The marker has been revised on the basis of these feedbacks.

Currently ECHO is finalising the marker, a draft with four criteria is available and is accompanied of a guidance note.

The four questions foreseen to be included into the single form are:

- 1) Does the proposal include an adequate analysis of vulnerability and risks?
- 2) Is the project adapted to reduce risks and vulnerable?
- 3) Does the project link with, and contribute to policies and priorities of development actors, including local and/or national government?
- 4) Does the project reinforce local capacities to avoid or face a crisis in the future?

ECHO does not expect all projects to “score high”, even if they are good projects. Resilience is not possible in every context. Focus is particularly put on protracted crisis, projects working with local partners and authorities.

ECHO would like to introduce the resilience marker as from January 2015. The first six months will be a trial period likewise the introduction of the gender-age marker.

Members of the Watch Group raised concerns regarding the lack of consultation with the Watch Group and the DRR Working Group as well as the introduction of this novelty in the next HIPs, highlighting the necessity of adequate training sessions. Since this marker is based on the gender and age marker, the

Watch Group wondered how ECHO has assessed its implementation in order to feed into this new marker.

ECHO does not foresee more consultation since there is a time constraint. Many NGOs have been consulted in the field; ECHO can share a list of partners that were involved. There is a functional mailbox open to any question or feedback as well as the [capacity4dev platform](#). However feedback will be welcome for the finalisation of the guidelines.

Regarding trainings, ECHO does not foresee the same amount of trainings as per the gender and age marker. This resilience marker follows the same logic and procedure.

There has not been yet any formal and complete assessment of the gender and age marker, but ECHO is monitoring it from Brussels and in the field, including communication with partners. A formal assessment will be done most probably the first semester of 2015.

FPA in practice - 10 months after its launch: General Feedback

VOICE explained that the Watch Group found it timely to have a first discussion on the implementation on the FPA and a first general feedback on it. A member of the Task Force presented the main issues and questions arising from the Watch Group's morning discussion:

- *Achievements:*
 - *Fast-track liquidation*
 - *Reporting (Final report and general ledger)*
 - *PDF Single Form as a tool*
 - *Flexibility of KRIs*
- *Challenges:*
 - *Difficulty to assess how much this new FPA brought simplification considering the funding situation and the additional administrative burden it had implied.*
 - *Gender and age marker: The fact that both criteria are merged generates some difficulties for partners. Training is useful and will continue to be since not everybody has got the opportunity to join.*
 - *Incurring costs: this novelty of the FPA remains a challenge for partners; in particular in the Wash sector where different examples of questions around eligibility of costs were shared. The Watch Group remains concerned on how this could potentially become an administrative burden if partners would need to ask for (no) cost extensions or amendments.*
 - *The e-Single Form and APPEL are welcomed but partners have been facing some technical issues like:*
 - *Duplication of activities in the logframe*
 - *Difficulty for proposals covering multiple regions and consortia*
 - *Errors not appearing in the PDF but when uploading it to APPEL*

Action Point: The Watch Group will share these concrete technical difficulties with ECHO.

From ECHO perspective, the implementation of the new FPA has been hijacked by the funding situation, making it quite early to provide a comprehensive feedback. So far, ECHO shares the same analysis as the Watch Group did; with the main challenges in the understanding of the notion of incurred costs, procurement and use of stocks. It also has been double work for ECHO reviewing several proposals with the two-phase approach, but they are generally happy with the analysis of final financial report. General ledgers are said to be helpful to fasten the liquidation process.

In terms of incurred costs, ECHO has shifted its approach and is now in line with NGOs accountings system. Therefore, NGOs should not change anything in their accounts.

Regarding the equipment purchased in the end of the action, when ECHO detects this, either ECHO asks for complementary information or does a partial payment. If there is reasonable information,

ECHO would generally accept. Partners are encouraged to include explanations as early as possible and at least within the final financial report.

ECHO detected some issues regarding the distribution of the remaining goods, so they are working on additional information in the guidelines.

Trainings:

ECHO reminds the Watch Group that trainings are very costly and there is a high amount of registered participants not showing up or not knowing the basics so it becomes very difficult for the trainers. ECHO also recalls that it is expected that participants would first attend the distance learning course in order to get the basics knowledge when attending the session.

Watch Group members highlighted that very little training is planned now. Online training is not perceived as a good-enough substitution. They had not realised the issue of attendance.

New trainings are organised started from November – they are already full with a long waiting list. ECHO faces the same problem as NGOs: they need to wait for the next budget. ECHO also encouraged the training team to do an assessment of last year's trainings.

Guidelines:

ECHO received the Watch Group's feedback on the guidelines. Some of them have already been taken into account. The response will be sent soon in order to have a first final draft ready for the Partners Conference. In any case the guidelines should be a lively document that will be updated when necessary. Those guidelines will be mainly a mirroring of the website which is easier to use. The website will be adapted according to the information in the guidelines and vice-versa. It is thus important for Partners to keep following the newsletter, the FAQs and the website.

The Watch Group reported that it might be quite challenging to monitor ECHO tools so it would appreciate if ECHO could send an email whenever a change is made.

ECHO agreed to check if it is possible to flag the changes.

Updates on Single Form and Visibility

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

- *Inconsistency in the application of the visibility checklist*
- *What is its purpose?*
- *What is its status?*
- *What is the link to the penalty?*

The check-list was discussed during negotiation on the standard visibility and the penalty. Internally, the TAs and Desks have to monitor partners' visibility and so they needed a kind of checklist. Initially, the idea was that by reading the proposals, they would be able to assess whether standard visibility would be implemented in this action. But then they realised that they don't have this information when the partner just ticks the box of standard visibility. At the end of the action, ECHO has to see if it has been fulfilled or not, and if there is no good reason for not having done it, penalty may be applied. At the same time, ECHO received many request from partners asking what standard visibility is.

One option is to keep the checklist as an annex to the Grant Agreement. The other proposed option is to add specific elements of 'standard visibility' in the Single Form ([suggested example](#)). All elements would be ticked by default. Partners may have the possibility to "untick" some options and would be invited to explain into the descriptive boxes.

ECHO visibility Unit insists on having this benchmarking.

The Watch Group raised some concerns regarding this novelty. First, it goes against the principle of simplification as it was negotiated last year. Partners would like to understand ECHO communication strategy and how communication at project level feed into it.

The Group asked for clarifications about:

- 1) *the difference between parts A and B;*
- 2) *the 'please provide additional details' implies an expectation from ECHO for more information which is against the spirit of simplification, so it was suggested to make it clear that this is optional;*
- 3) *what would ECHO expects form partners at reporting stage.*

When a box is “unticked”, the partner has to explain the reason why and eventually ask for derogation. For the part A, if one box is “unticked”, it leads automatically to a request for derogation (usually security reasons). For the part B, when partner is not in capacity to fully implement standard visibility as foreseen, it is encouraged to discuss with the visibility unit. In any case (of the two option), the reporting would remain the same.

ECHO explained that it is crucial to raise awareness among the European public about European funded actions. What is requested by this checklist is stated within the General Condition. ECHO is asking the FPA Watch Group to provide feedback on which of the two options is preferred as soon as possible since ECHO intends to implement this to all projects by mid-November.

Action Point: The Watch Group shares consolidated feedback to ECHO by 24/10.

ECHO Partners' Conference

Initially, it was foreseen to have a one-day Conference, but since partners complained about it, and the limited space for dialogue it would have implied it has been decided to go back to a one-and-a-half day conference. Workshops will take place on the second day. This opens the possibility to have more discussion on the first day. ECHO warned that the security in the Charlemagne building is extremely heavy; there are two different checks and participant needs to bring their invitation. Also participants are invited to join early.

The Watch Group welcomed this decision as it will give space to debrief on the workshops. It was also highlighted that funding and strategy questions are not prominent enough in the agenda.

Updates on HIPs publication and processes

A letter is in preparation and it will be sent this week explaining with the current situation. The problem is that ECHO will only know more at the end of October (with the adoption of the 2015 budget by the EP) and in November (with the conciliation to try to come to a common decision starting on the 28 October for three weeks). If there is no common stand, the Commission has to propose a new budget after these three weeks. It was the case last year.

VOICE Director asked about the backlog.

ECHO explained that the 2014 draft amending budget n°3 it is still in the pipe. The decision will be taken by the end of November.

The Watch Group asked about the repercussion on the HIPs.

If ECHO does not receive the 250 million € (from the draft amending budget), the HIPs will have to be reviewed, even if the 2015 budget is already higher. ECHO has committed the full amount in 2014; the additional funds will help paying the second and final payments and reducing the backlog. For 2015, ECHO decided to avoid contracting in two phases. A calendar of meetings organised by Desks is ready; it will be mainly in the field and in Brussels for major crises. It is not yet published, but the signature of the contracts should not be delayed.