CASE STUDY #3

Harmonised Reporting

How ICVA’s sustained work on donor reporting has successfully influenced the debate and policy and is connecting policy to practice at the field level.

Overview

The harmonised narrative reporting work serves as an example of a complete cycle of ICVA’s sustained policy engagement to change the humanitarian system. Beginning in 2015, ICVA helped lead the initial research into reducing reporting burdens, followed by global policy debate support by the Less Paper More Aid paper, which led to the Grand Bargain workstream on reporting, the development of the common 8+3 template with donor support, the implementation of a pilot project, and practical change in field practice.

Details

ICVA launched the Less Paper More Aid campaign in 2015 in collaboration with several NGOs, VOICE, and CHS Alliance.13 A study was conducted showing the impact of fulfilling donor conditions on NGOs with the help of ICVA staff in document review, interviews with field staff, collecting data, and editing the report. The study demonstrated the negative impact of excessive donor requirements and concluded that significant time-savings could be realised through harmonisation of the content and frequency of narrative reporting. It also suggested concrete ways to harmonise and simplify reporting procedures and formats. The campaign presented the study’s findings and held discussions with UN agencies and member states to influence the debate ahead of the Grand Bargain.

The Grand Bargain was launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in April 2016 and represents a deal established between the five largest donors and six largest UN Agencies and NGOs to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian operations, thereby freeing additional existing resources for operational use. The Grand Bargain initiative relied extensively on the Less Paper More Aid study, particularly in forming a dedicated implementation work stream for ‘Harmonised/Simplified reporting requirements’. Within the Grand Bargain structure, the workstream on harmonised narrative reporting is co-led by ICVA and Germany.

Working together as co-conveners of the workstream, ICVA and Germany jointly planned a pilot project to test usage of a harmonised narrative reporting template in Iraq, Myanmar, and Somalia. Early in the process, Germany also contracted with the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin to develop the technical guidance for harmonised reporting, conduct data collection during the pilot, and lead mid-term and final reviews. ICVA and Germany held overall control over the pilot process and direction, with ICVA leading communications with NGOs and UN agencies, and Germany focused on donor governments.

An initial meeting between ICVA, Germany, GPPi, and key stakeholders was held in November of 2016. This was the point at which the concept for harmonising reporting was validated, and the decision was made to move forward with developing a harmonised template to pilot was made. Key developments since then include:

- In March 2017, stakeholders from UN, NGOs, and donor governments met again in Berlin to discuss a proposed template to pilot that became known as the “8+3” template. Participants agreed to support pilot work, and agreed on Iraq, Myanmar, and Somalia as the primary pilot locations.

- The March Berlin meeting was followed in June 2017 with a formal “go” decision by ICVA and Germany to launch the pilot work. This decision was based on a critical mass of donors who were willing to test the “8+3” template with NGO partners, including a mix of governments and UN agencies. Notably, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP agreed to join the pilot, representing a large pool of funding for both international and national NGOs.

- In July 2018, GPPi published a mid-term review of the pilot based on document review of completed reports, field interviews, and discussions with donors. The mid-term review validated the work so far, with participants sharing generally favorable views of the 8+3 template and the pilot process.14

ICVA continues to co-lead the workstream and refinements to the template guidance will be implemented in 2019.

13 https://lesspapermoreaid.org/
14 Initial pilot report showed 8+3 template required less or equal time for 76% of NGOs