Concept Note: Piloting a Common Donor Reporting Framework

As one of the 10 workstreams of the Grand Bargain initiative, donors and aid organizations committed to harmonize and simplify reporting requirements by the end of 2018. Specific commitments include reducing volume, identifying core requirements, developing a common report structure, and investing in technology and reporting systems.

In order to work toward achieving these commitments, a select group of donors, UN agencies, and humanitarian organizations have committed to pilot a common reporting framework over a two-year period. As of August 2017, 11 donor countries and UN organizations and 15 leading humanitarian organizations have agreed to participate. The core of the pilot involves adopting a reporting framework for projects funded by participating donors and implemented by participating partner organizations in three pilot countries (Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia) between August 2017 and May 2019.

Pilot Objectives

The primary objective is to test the adoption of a common donor template, both final and interim templates. In addition to the primary objectives centered on the formal reporting framework, the reporting pilot can allow for better understanding of additional factors that contribute to the time and resources required to complete donor reporting, including informal reporting, supporting documentation, and financial reporting. Additional data will be collected on these elements to inform the final recommendations and suggest future initiatives.

Participating in the Pilot

Participation in the pilot is very simple: donors and aid organizations who participate should continue project management and oversight as normal, but any interim or final narrative reporting formats should be based on the common reporting template (the “8+3” template), rather than any past forms used. A research organization, GPPi, will be responsible for data collection to enable a mid-term and final evaluation of the pilot (presented in June 2018 and June 2019 respectively). In order to support this data collection, participants should be available for a short qualitative interview at the mid-term and final review periods. Donors will also be responsible for forwarding on any reports submitted against the 8+3 template format. These will be used to support the evaluation of the pilot but will not otherwise be shared, transferred, or disclosed in whole or in part with any other actors.

Pilot Management and Questions

Germany and ICVA are the co-convenors and leaders of the pilot, and are available for any overall questions on the pilot, suggested adaptations to the model over the course of the two-year pilot, or other proposed initiatives. ICVA will also take responsibility for a “Community of Practice” (CoP) set up to ensure that participants – NGOs, UN agencies, and donor governments – are appropriately oriented to the pilot process, and create a basic support structure. GPPi is primarily acting in a research capacity, but is also available to provide technical support or answer questions about the template.
Here are some answers to other frequently asked questions:

- **The pilot will replace existing reporting, not require double reporting against multiple frameworks.** Donors participating in the pilot will only ask implementing partners to complete one set of reports using the common harmonized template in the agreed pilot locations.

- **The pilot does not alter the timing, deadlines, frequency or sequencing of reporting.** All reporting deadlines and the frequency of reporting continue to be governed by the project proposal and contract. Given the goal of streamlining, donors are encouraged to limit narrative reporting to an annual basis only for new projects, but this is ultimately at the discretion of donors. In addition, although deadlines do not have to be harmonized among pilot participants, donors and implementing partners should inform the research partner, GPPi, of the reporting deadlines to facilitate data collection.

- **UN agencies are encouraged to participate in their capacities as both donors and partners, or the one they find most relevant to their role.** For the pilot, it is up to UN agencies if they wish to participate as a donor, as a recipient of funds or both.

- **Reporting for projects that began before, or continue after, the pilot dates can be included in the data analysis.** Some projects, and reporting on those projects, may have commenced before 01 August 2017, or be completed following 30 April 2019 – the begin and end dates for data collection. Where it does not present an issue with the existing reporting and contract, those projects can also be included in the pilot, but the only reports examined will be those completed in the “8+3” template between 01 August 2017 and 30 April 2019.

- **The harmonized template is the maximum expected from a report, not minimum.** The primary objective is to reduce burden on the field. If the common harmonized template used in the pilot has 8 core report items, and only 5 are required in a donor-partner relationship, donors would not ask partners to report more than what is required.

- **The additional questions (the “+3”) in the common template are not optional questions.** The common template provides a baseline number of questions, and then gives donors the choice to also include up to 3 additional questions in their version of the template. These additional questions are not “optional” or secondary in nature, but simply allow for limited variation among donors while ensuring a core set of harmonized questions. Where donors have selected one of these additional questions (up to 3) in their template, it is mandatory that implementing partners respond to the question.

- **Donors are still able to conduct field/beneficiary monitoring and verification.** The pilot does not limit other aspects of reporting. However, to better understand the full reporting cycle and how this affects (or is affected by) the common template, GPPi will conduct a simple survey or qualitative interviews with relevant staff to document what other monitoring and reporting processes happen alongside narrative reporting for the pilot projects.

**More questions?**

Melissa Pitotti (ICVA): melissa.pitotti@icvanetwork.org
Jeremy Rempel (ICVA- Less Paper More Aid): jeremy.rempel@icvanetwork.org
Christiane Kapashi (German FFO): s08-00@diplo.de
GPPi: harmonizingreporting@gppi.net