

FPA Watch Group Meeting – Exchange with ECHO

	MINUTES
DATE	15.03.2018
TIME	14.30 – 16.30
PLACE	ECHO 86 rue de la loi
PARTICIPANTS	cf. List of participants

ECHO representatives: Charles Pirotte, Deputy HoU, ECHO D1, Anna Dmitrijewa, Marzia Conte, Virginie Jonet (ECHO D1), Roxane Henry, (ECHO B4, Desk Syria Region),

I. Exchange on the Crisis modifiers and the Key Result Indicators & Key Outcome Indicators (KRI & KOI):

- **Crisis modifiers (CM):**

Since this was the first exchange on this thematic, the FPA WG mainly shared NGO perspectives and questions with ECHO linked to the use of crisis modifiers

- Overall, NGOs are positive about the possibility of using Crisis modifiers inside ECHO contracts given the potential flexibility it provides to adapt to new or changing needs. It is the first time that the crisis modifiers are formally mentioned and requested in some technical annexes of the HIP 2018¹. DRM and DIPECHO projects are the ones being the most concerned by the use of crisis modifiers.
- From those who had experiences with crisis modifiers different practices were shared. It was noticed that there was a different interpretation of the tool between field and HQ level and throughout the different types of sectors and contexts. Partners also wonder if the scope of the action can be expanded when triggering CM or if it only covers the geographical and sectoral scope described for the action. In terms of implementation: NGOs wonder if a “plan B” is systematically required (in case the CM is not used, coming closer towards the end of the project). Does the inclusion of a Plan B in the proposal from the start relieve partners of the need to introduce a modification request? If it does not, ECHO could foresee a simplified process to accept the modification request

Recommendation: the FPA Watch Group recommends working with ECHO on some guidance regarding the use of crisis modifiers at different stage of the project cycle.

ECHO feedback: *Charles Pirotte*

- Before developing any guidance on Crisis modifiers, it would be useful to have a clear definition and to collect evidence and examples from NGO partners to see the context in which they are currently applied.
- ECHO highlighted that they would be interested in looking at the Syria approach and seeing what the links are between crisis modifiers and rapid response mechanisms (as currently used in the Syrian context). Both should be compared to see the advantages and challenges of each mechanism.

¹ The use of crisis modifiers is mentioned in 8 Technical Annexes for HIP 2018. The most developed requests being HIP TA Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (p 17) and HIP TA Horn of Africa (p22)

AP: FPA WG to collect evidence on the use of crisis modifiers and to discuss it further with ECHO in the next FPA WG meeting

- **KRI and KOI:**

- The FPA WG reiterated that FPA partners would appreciate receiving more clarity from ECHO on the use of the KRI and KOI. It is important for partners to understand what ECHO is planning to achieve with the collected data. The FPA WG would be interested in knowing if ECHO is aggregating the collected data and to what extent it could be shared with partners for their own communication use.
- On the use of KRI and KOI, some issues remain. For instance, requesting hard numbers instead of accepting percentages makes it difficult and not necessarily adapted to a given situation. Overall, the process increases NGOs' workload since they are being forced to monitor ECHO indicators in addition to their own custom indicators.

ECHO feedback: *Charles Pirotte & Anna Dmitrijewa & Roxane Henry*

- Before the introduction of the KRI and KOI, exchanges at proposal stage were very long before both parties agreed on the right indicators. KRI and KOI have facilitated this dialogue. Percentages can be added next to hard numbers in the e-Single form when indicating the expected target.
- KRI and KOI were launched to reflect on the level of quality of the aid delivered. ECHO also explained that at desk level, indicators are a guarantee for having the relevant information at the final report stage and reducing the use of the 'Stop the clock' mechanism. It also provides clarity for partners on minimum standards that sectorial activities should reach.

II. FPA WG feedback on the HIP process 2018 and changes to the e-Single Form

- **HIP 2018**

- Partners are very thankful for having received the HIP narratives early and that deadlines for the submission of proposals were better spread.
- However, it seems that consultations at field level arrived quite late in the process and not all partners present in the countries had been invited to join the discussion. It would be welcomed for next year to encourage open and early consultation with all partners present at field level.
- Regarding rejection letters, partners would appreciate having more concrete feedback in order to be able to use it as lessons learnt.

AP: Partners are still monitoring the whole HIP process timeline and will come back to ECHO once finalised – including on contracting time.

ECHO feedback: *Charles Pirotte & Roxane Henry*

- ECHO selection process: when receiving proposals ECHO does a dashboard on an excel table and each proposal is then assessed by desks, TA and sectorial experts following set criteria: above, below or respecting the standards. Then, ECHO organises a video teleconference with the field staff where every proposal is being deeply discussed. Finally, colours are attributed to each proposal: Green: proposals are approved for funding, with the occasional request for a second proposal. Orange: proposals that might be accepted but with request for second proposal or pending until the desk receives more funding. Red: proposals are rejected because the quality is not good enough.

- ECHO acknowledged that the first feedback process can be slow if the proposal is pending and classified as “orange”. Partners are then asked to re-submit a proposal later in the year to adjust to the needs. ECHO will explore how to inform partners earlier in the process that their proposals are pending while waiting for top up funding. The option already seems to exist on APPEL.
- Regarding the rejection letter, it usually only gives the three main reasons for rejection. Thus, ECHO encourages partners to contact field staff or desks afterwards to get further detailed feedback on why the proposal was rejected.
- Partners shared with ECHO that they would like to know, at least informally, as soon as the proposal has been flagged “red”, and accept to wait for the official detailed rejection letter before asking for more details on the causes of rejection. This way they could gain some time and move forward with other projects or submitting proposals to other donors.
- For some proposals, directors are involved in the final negotiations with partners (large amount or ‘flagship project’).
- ➔ Partners requested to have access to Desk and TA organigrams. This request cannot be fulfilled by ECHO due to their data protection system. [The website Who is Who](#) is still the most up-to-date when looking for ECHO staff contacts.
- **Changes in the E Single Form at the end of 2017:**
 - At first, NGOs were surprised to see the latest change to the eSF in the middle of the HIP process 2018 and without pre-notification to the FPA Watch Group. However, partners found ways to provide the newly requested information even if it adds to the administrative burden. Partners were also wondering about the reason behind this new request from ECHO and in which context it was decided.
 - ➔ ECHO requested this change to the eSF as a follow up to the [European Court of Auditors report](#) highlighting that ECHO should better report on projects’ real costs, which in turn implied that ECHO be better informed on the cost structure of Actions; this translated into more specific information being requested as to direct costs’ structure (it was noted in passing by ECHO that the level of detail of financial information requested from partners was below what some other donors, notably OFDA, would actually require). ECHO’s latest change to the eSF also aligns with the cost-effectiveness agenda and the European Court of Auditors’ recommendations to document better the cost-effectiveness of proposals to be made by ECHO. Nonetheless, ECHO is aware that high direct support costs can be due to the format of the programme costs and the nature of the action.

Finally, this conversation will also be taken forward in the upcoming FPA consultation.

III. Main findings of the Comprehensive evaluation of the EU's Humanitarian Aid 2012-2016

The external evaluators' [report of the Comprehensive evaluation](#) of the EU's Humanitarian Aid 2012-2016 was published on 09 March on the ECHO website. The report will also be published in the EU Bookshop portal once the translation into French of the executive summary is ready.

On the basis of this external report, the Commission is now preparing a staff working document, which will present the results of the evaluation. The staff working document should be published by the end of June. A presentation of the findings might be planned after the release of the staff working document.

The evaluation main outcomes:

The evaluation is overall positive, underlining the fact that the EU performed well in the field of HA under the period in question. The evaluation concluded that the Commission-funded humanitarian actions were overall needs-based and implemented in line with humanitarian principles. The evaluation confirmed that there is clear added value in the EU supporting humanitarian aid. The actions made an important contribution to the core objectives to save lives, reduce morbidity and suffering as well as improve dignity of life of the populations affected by disasters. EU added value was also found in relation to the Commission's use of a global field network (key unique factor compared to other donors) and the focus on forgotten crises. The EU is also recognised as a global player, contributing to shaping the international humanitarian system.

The external evaluators also made 5 strategic recommendations. ECHO will have to analyse them carefully, notably in the context of the next FPA review. These include:

1. DG ECHO should implement a multi-annual strategy and, where possible, multiannual programming and funding
2. DG ECHO should review its partnership approach: towards large and middle and local partners
3. DG ECHO should reinforce its approach towards sustainability through resilience and cooperation
4. The EU should communicate more pro-actively and explicitly the constraints associated with strategic programming and funding decisions towards its staff, including the field network, but also its framework partners and other external stakeholders
5. DG ECHO should adapt its management and monitoring systems to make them more suitable to analyse the effectiveness and value for money of its actions