IARAN 2017 Annual Progress Review

A shift to global priorities
The Inter-Agency Regional Analysts Network (IARAN) is a collaborative initiative to explore and mutualise foresight and strategic planning capacities in the humanitarian ecosystem.

For the majority of 2017 the IARAN covered four regions: the Middle East, West and Central Africa, East Africa, and Asia, delivering over 30 foresight reports and supporting 16 country offices.

In addition to its regional capacity, in 2017 the IARAN operated with an enlarged global team. This was in response to the request for IARAN to dedicate more time to global level projects and invest significant department resources in the uptake and use of analysis.

The results of this effort have yielded several high profile analytical reports, which have had substantial pick-up from the humanitarian community and by IARAN organisations: 72% of global staff read and shared IARAN reports in 2017 and over 50% of survey respondents used IARAN support in developing strategies, reports, and evaluations.

The IARAN made a greater share of its work publicly available in 2017. This has significantly increased the diversity of actors exploiting IARAN analysis to feed their thinking and planning including, networks of foreign embassies and consortia of policy makers.

In line with the objectives set for the IARAN at the end of 2016, the IARAN team has also invested time and resources into projects preparing for the end of the IARAN pilot phase, which concluded in December 2017.

As requested by Action Against Hunger’s IEC, 2017 marked a significant shift from country-based work to a global focus for the IARAN. There was a 30% increase in outputs and the level of support dedicated to global level projects between 2016 and 2017. As a result, activities delivering on the global portfolio accounted for over 50% of those undertaken by the IARAN over the past year.

In addition to a greater focus on global level work, IARAN altered the division of staff time between the production of analysis and the support of decision makers using the analysis. In 2017, over 60% of the IARAN activities were to support the use and uptake of analysis.

In 2017, there was a greater diversity in the provenance of requests for support or analytical studies; this included a higher number of requests from across the IARAN consortium (including Action Against Hunger, The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs and The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership) and the introduction of external support.

Though requests from staff across IARAN partners continued to make up 79% of the activities undertaken by IARAN staff (62% from within Action Against Hunger), in 2017 IARAN dedicated time and resources to engaging with organisations external to the IARAN. This shift was in response to the objective set at the end of 2016 to increase the outward facing work of the IARAN, building relationships with other operational agencies and research institutions.

The external requests for support to which IARAN responded in 2017 came from a plurality of different organisations including consortia such as InterAction and the Start Network, international NGOs such as the Red Cross and Save the Children and private and research institutions such as GIZ and the University of Naples. Much of the external engagement centred on the Future of Aid: INGOs in 2030 report.

Work requested and support to IARAN partner organisations was spread across their geographic portfolio with some of the highest number of commands coming from Regional Leadership and Country Directors, continuing the trend seen in previous years that the bulk of requests stem from Operations staff at field level. However, the biggest increases in engagement between 2016 and 2017 were with staff in IRIS and CHL, the Action Against Hunger IEC who doubled the number of requests to the IARAN (from 8 to 16%), and the Directors of Operations.
The types of analytical outputs created by the IARAN have been fairly consistent across the three years of the pilot phase as the IARAN has developed and tested tools for the strategic foresight and strategic planning toolboxes. These toolboxes have underpinned the analytical outputs produced by the team in 2017. In 2017, as in previous years, scenario analyses form a substantial portion of the IARAN work plan (18 studies). Though only one dedicated quantitative study was produced by the IARAN this year, the IARAN team has included quantitative components in a number of reports in 2017.

In 2017, as part of IARAN’s engagement with Country Offices, the team has continued to support country and regional teams with strategic planning. Three strategic planning workshops were conducted in Uganda (Karamoja), Egypt, and Bangladesh. In Egypt, the outputs of the workshop were shared with donors, presented at Headquarters, and are being used to underpin the country office strategy.

The workshop held in Bangladesh was the first sub-regional workshop that brought together Action Against Hunger staff and partners from Myanmar and Bangladesh to jointly plan for a response to the protracted cross-border crisis. Though the onset of the emergency immediately following the strategic workshop has delayed the implementation of the strategy, the Country Office will be resuming the process, adapting the strategic options that best fit the new conditions. Feedback from the process however, has been very positive.

Juliet Parker, Operations Director, Action Against Hunger

"Although the nature of our work dictates that many of our operations are in fragile states, the time and resource available to country programs to reflect and share lessons learned with one another is often limited. Collaborating with the IARAN on this piece provided our team with a unique opportunity to compile best practice and learning from our work in fragile states and summarize it for the benefit of practitioners across the Action Against Hunger network.

The added value here is that, when coupled with the prospective forecasting, it becomes clear how this learning can be used to shape future programming, ensuring it is appropriate and effective in conflict-affected and fragile states. Combining historical best practice with cutting edge methodologies for prospective forecasting really helps Action Against Hunger ensure we continue to serve those in need in the best way possible."

Hildegarde Thyberghien, Deputy Country Director, Bangladesh

"Getting a strategy in a more systematic way enables us to look wider than just the organization. It makes us look at partnership and allies to make the approach more holistic and comprehensive on the longer term."

An Outlook of State Fragility: A Reflective and Foresight Analysis

In 2017 the IARAN, together with support from the Bubble team in Action Against Hunger, explored a new kind of study which would marry a reflective study analyzing monitoring and evaluation data from Action Against Hunger’s work in fragile states, as well as case studies and interviews, with foresight analysis exploring the potential evolution of these contexts. By including both a retrospective and prospective component to the study the teams were able to give recommendations for how Action Against Hunger’s strengths and lessons learned could be applied to address the drivers of fragility that were identified and, as a result, how the organization could more systemically engage in these contexts to achieve lasting change.
Teaching and Training

Teaching and training also became a more significant part of the IARAN work plan in 2017. This component of the IARAN was predominantly achieved through the Humanitarian Manager Masters\(^1\) at IRIS, where foresight modules were integrated into the programme and the Humanitarian Leadership Program at CHL, where foresight tools were used as part of the course – both in the English and French editions\(^2\). Training existing and future humanitarian decision makers on the use of foresight and strategic planning and reinforcing the need to think about humanitarian work in a more futures focused way is a critical investment for the IARAN transformative agenda.

The IARAN also complemented these formal courses with a dedicated training for Action Against Hunger decision makers held in February 2017. The five-day course hosted in London focused on:

- Reflections on the use of strategy in the humanitarian sector
- Giving participants the ability to use the tools designed to develop a futures focused context sensitive strategy
- Training on the facilitation of the strategic toolbox so participants can run the process alone.

Participants unanimously agreed that the training met or somewhat met its objectives and 90% of respondents to the survey agreed that the format of the training, where they had the chance to exchange different perspectives on the benefits and challenges that they face, was beneficial\(^3\).

Though there were challenges that some participants foresaw with the IARAN Strategic Planning approach, including the time commitment and pulling together a good panel of participants for the workshop, no respondents preferred the existing form of strategy development and only 10% felt that the process was over complicated. The majority of reported seeing the benefits of the IARAN approach. Particularly, respondents highlighted the strength of the approach to develop a more robust strategy, which can better manage uncertainty, and adapt to the context in which we work.

In 2017, the IARAN worked to ensure that decision makers requesting IARAN products received sufficient support in using the analysis provided. The type of support varied depending on the objectives of the project and the team with which IARAN was engaging. However, the majority of activities centred on presentations and representation where IARAN partners used IARAN work and staff to build their visibility and engage with external stakeholders.

Activities included under the banner of content support and support for workshops represent the switch in focus from output generation, to supporting teams to get greater utility from IARAN analysis. Some of these activities included providing briefings to staff on changes or developments in contexts that the IARAN studied, writing updates on reports, contributing to proposal development and advocacy messaging and running workshops with key decision makers to embed the key findings of analysis and to support them in designing next steps. In 2017, over 70% of respondents felt that the IARAN was useful in supporting their teams with their priority projects\(^4\).

Though the IARAN has dedicated more time to supporting teams to use analysis in 2017 and, only 10% of respondents felt that they were unable to access the IARAN team, there is still more work to be done to support teams and offices with the use of analysis. Only 41% of survey respondents felt that they received sufficient support in 2017\(^5\). As the IARAN further reduces the number of studies it engages in, increasing support to teams to use analysis will continue to be a key priority for 2018. This will take many different forms, for example integrating and adapting new tools to support the operationalisation of analysis and support to transform analysis into messaging and policy.

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\(^1\) In 2017 there were 35 students enrolled in the Humanitarian and Development program at IRIS.

\(^2\) In 2017 12 students attended the English Humanitarian Leadership Program and 10 attended the French course.

\(^3\) Of the participators in this Action Against Hunger Strategic Planning Training respondents to the feedback survey considered the facilitation as beneficial.

\(^4\) 8.52% of the participants in the Action Against Hunger Strategic Planning Training responded to the feedback survey conducted after the workshop.

\(^5\) 6. In 2017, there were 38 students enrolled in the Humanitarian and Development Program in IRIS of the IARAN was predominantly achieved through the Humanitarian Manager Masters\(^1\) at IRIS, where foresight modules were integrated into the programme and the Humanitarian Leadership Program at CHL, where foresight tools were used as part of the course – both in the English and French editions\(^2\).
Uptake

The value of the IARAN initiative is in providing analysis that is useful and used by humanitarian decision makers. As a result, the uptake of analysis has always been a focus for the IARAN team and this continued to be a priority in 2017. In 2017, the utility of IARAN analysis was widely recognised; 87% of respondents to the Annual Survey agreed or strongly agreed that the IARAN analysis they had received was useful to them.11

There is a great diversity in how decision makers use IARAN analysis. However, in 2017 increasing visibility and integrating futures thinking were the top two ways respondents reported using IARAN analysis and support, which is consistent with feedback from 2016.12 Designing positioning for Action Against Hunger on key issues, informing decision making more generally and informing a country office strategy were also common responses.

For the technical, advocacy, donor relations unit and communications teams increasing visibility was one of the top three ways that IARAN analysis was used, but contributing to thinking on organisational priorities and developing a shared understanding on key issues were more popular responses.

External engagement was a priority for the IARAN in 2017 and the team had several successes in contributing to several high-level publications including:

- The UNOCHA World Humanitarian Data and Trends Report 2017 where the IARAN Outlook on Hunger: A Scenario Analysis on the Drivers of Hunger Through 2030 was profiled13 and;
- The Deliver Collective Outcomes: Transcend Humanitarian-Development Divides paper which was written with colleagues from the Food and Agriculture Organization, to report on the progress humanitarian actors have made to achieving the World Humanitarian Summit commitment 4c - Transcend Humanitarian-Development Divides.13

In addition, in 2017 the IARAN team published the Future of Aid report that received significant coverage and a multitude of humanitarian actors have used it spurring discussion of their role in the humanitarian ecosystem and in their strategic planning.

How have you used IARAN analysis/support?13

- Increase Action Against Hunger’s visibility with media, donors, partners, governments etc.
- Integrate futures focused thinking into my work
- Design positioning for Action Against Hunger on key issues
- Inform my decision making
- Inform the strategy for my/a Country Office
- Develop/underpin an Action Against Hunger policy
- I have not found them useful

Future of Aid

The Future of Aid report built an outlook of the humanitarian ecosystem and the global contexts in which it could exist in 2030. The paper focused on the role of INGOs and it explored potential changes in how they operate which could ensure they are fit for purpose at the end of the outlook. This report was downloaded over 5,500 times in 2017 and has become a reference point for humanitarian actors. The report has been recognized for its insight and value-add to the thinking on the future of the ecosystem by NGOs, international organizations and donors including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ikea, ECHO, and the World Food Program.

In 2017:

- The Future of Aid report was presented to over 20 organizations, networks and conferences. This included events hosted by five Action Against Hunger Headquarters and IRIS as well as events such as the Humanitarian Congress in Berlin.
- The report was picked up by several news outlets including The Guardian (UK) and National Public Radio (USA) and, several Action Against Hunger Headquarters reported that the Future of Aid content yielded their highest levels of social media engagement of the year.
- As many as eight humanitarian organizations have used the Future of Aid as part of their strategic processes including the START Network, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children.

"The Future of Aid report was an incredibly useful document for several reasons. It provided thoughtful and critical analysis of so many layers of our sector, including different elements of our work and how they intersect. This type of analysis was especially useful as we rolled out our five-year strategic plan.

I see it as a living document; something we’ll return to again and again in the coming weeks and months as our sector changes and we are presented with new challenges. The research and information available in the report doesn’t have an expiry date any time soon -- it will be relevant for some time. This is what the best type of research should be.”

Danny Glenwright, CEO Action Against Hunger, Canada
IARAN 2018 - End of Pilot Phase

The IARAN pilot phase concluded at the end of 2017. The learning from the three-year pilot phase which began in Action Against Hunger at the end of 2014 will be consolidated, along with the learning from the test phase in Save the Children, into a series of papers to be published in 2018. In addition, the IARAN will complement its self-reflections and the publication of its toolboxes with an evaluation of the project.

Moving forward from the pilot phase the IARAN will continue to focus on integrating strategic foresight and planning into the humanitarian ecosystem, working with, and through its members, to deliver support to decision makers and explore new areas of research and method development. In 2018, the staffing structure of the IARAN will be different, reflecting new funding streams that will be contributing to the project and priorities of IARAN members.

In 2018, the IARAN will keep the same leadership structure with a Director and Deputy as well as a Communications Officer based in London. The IARAN will have a Chief Analyst and Humanitarian Futures Analyst focusing on delivering global reports working remotely through Action Against Hunger and a South East Asia and Pacific Analyst to be based with the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership in Melbourne.

IARAN 2018 Objectives

• To write and publish the learning from the test and pilot phase, including the Strategic Foresight and Strategic Planning toolboxes with facilitation guides.
• To continue to deliver high-quality, relevant, and useful analysis to decision makers in IARAN members and the across the humanitarian ecosystem promoting collaborative approaches, long-term, and systems thinking.
• To scale-up an interagency collaboration hub to facilitate the development and use of strategic foresight.
• To look for revenue generating opportunities for the IARAN.

Financial Analysis

The total income for the IARAN for 2017 was 1,005,086 euros. The spend in 2017 was broken down between IRIS and Action Against Hunger.

As in 2016, the largest cost was human resources. In 2017 IARAN had between 9-10 full time staff. Both IRIS and Action Against Hunger managed portions of this account.

Under the budget managed by Action Against Hunger, team travel and learning and development (which includes the Junior Analyst Program) were also significant portions of the budget.

Reflecting the IARAN commitment in 2017 to increase external engagement, the budget for trainings, workshops and events is a clear priority – the largest item under this category was the Strategic Planning Training run for Action Against Hunger Staff in February 2017.

IRIS continues to manage the budget for Humanitarian Foresight Research focusing on the development of the IARAN toolboxes and research projects with partners such as the Sahel 2030 report written with Futuribles.
The IARAN would like to thank all our current partners for their continued support and we look forward to welcoming new members into the consortium.

For more information or to get in touch:
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