# SAG Retreat 2015

### Objectives: Review how the SAG has been working in 2015, analyse achievements and challenges, and define the way forward for 2016.

### Participants:

**In the room:** Miguel Urquia (UNHCR), Shaun Scales (UNHCR), Pablo Medina (IFRC), Graham Saunders (IFRC), Joseph Ashmore (IOM), Jake Zarins (Habitat for Humanity), Luca Pupulin (ACTED), Hilmi Mohamed (Interaction), Tom Newby (CARE), Martin Suvatne (NRC), Andy Powell (Save the Children).

**Online:** Brenda Rose Daniel (World Vision)

**Apologies:** Esteban Leon (UNHABITAT)

### Welcome from GSC Coordinators (G. Saunders)

G. Saunders thanked those who worked on the background documents and expressed a hope that during these two days decisions will be made and that interventions will be aimed at creating convergence rather than divergence.

### 1. GSC Governance options

**Background**

S. Scales started this session by asking if the members of the SAG had any remarks related to the way SAG functioned in 2015, in reaction to which the following points were brought up:

* The SAG, in addition to mechanics of coordination, should also focus on content and programming, for example by setting technical standards.
* Lead agencies should be clear on what issues the SAG can realistically affect and which ones not, due to UNHCR and IFRC internal policies, and direct the focus of the discussions to the former not to waste time.
* Questions were raised around lead agencies being funded for the global leadership role and that it is one of the obstacles for other SAG member agencies to raise money for activities related to the Global Shelter Cluster. Global Coordinators from IFRC and UNHCR explained that their agencies have a commitment to be the global leads however none of their funding is guaranteed. In any case, the funding is not sufficient to cover all the needs therefore awareness should be raised to donors and they should be approached.

As agreed in the preparation of the retreat two background documents were shared: Donor Consultation Group ToR and GSC Governance options handout. Based on these documents the following decisions were made:

**Decisions:**

* SAG meetings to be co-chaired by a SAG agency representative and global co-lead agency representatives, rotated on an annual basis.
* SAG ToR to be reviewed and revised by the current SAG to ensure clarity and agreement on the authorities and accountabilities of the SAG and participating agencies. The SAG ToR are available for comments at [this link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vBqbNXCJ0D3w6QAJJ48lbbie3lYG46IZYvJ0tw0VzJA/edit?usp=sharing). **Comments should be made before the 5 February 2016** for finalisation at the SAG February meeting (on the 25 February)**.**
* SAG agencies to nominate a deputy/acting representative to participate when the primary representative is not available. Deputy/acting representatives will have the full authority to represent their agency.
* Monthly SAG meetings to be held with an agreed rolling agenda to manage regular business, based on an annual calendar modified as required. Ad hoc meetings to be held at the request of the SAG co-chairs or a SAG member to discuss one-off issues e.g. donor grant management, new level 3 emergencies etc.
* SAG to provide an annual report to the GSC meeting published on the website detailing activities, participation, contributions and achievements.
* Donor Consultation Group to be established. The draft ToR are available for comments at [this link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nhOX1xvseuixNvOkzoT9cUmvChmG5gV1Lq2cPGwPmUE/edit?usp=sharing). **Comments should be made before the 5 February 2016** for finalisation at the SAG February meeting (on the 25 February)**.**
* SAG to request expressions of interest from shelter agencies to take on the responsibility to undertake and resource defined shelter cluster functions at the global and/or country level (e.g. as ACTED/REACH has taken on the responsibility for the needs assessment function).
* SAG to define the functions to be undertaken and the parameters for such an undertaking. This could include resourcing core functions in the country level coordination teams (e.g. technical coordination, environmental advisors), hub coordination etc.
* The agency undertaking such a commitment would benefit from GSC endorsement to assist in securing both internal and external resources for this commitment. Any such commitments would be non-binding, but the SAG would review the extent to which an agency has delivered on a given commitment, the related GSC endorsement and whether this should continue on an annual basis.
* Formalize feedback mechanism from country level cluster partners to the SAG.
* During monthly calls the SAG should follow up with working groups on their progress, specifically on tasks they have been assigned to accomplish.
* Working Groups (WG) areas of work should be defined more clearly. Technical and Innovation, for example, is a very broad theme. As per the agreed GSC structure document, WG should be much more targeted on addressing a concrete output rather than covering a whole area of work.

**The following point needs more discussion:**

* The SAG agencies to sign individual or common “letter of commitment” to the SAG role with reference to the revised ToR.

### 2. GSC engagement in sector programming initiatives

**Background:**

T. Newby and J. Ashmore have prepared briefing notes outlining questions on GSC’s involvement in the sector programming. Issues such as what is good/bad technical advice and setting strategic technical directions and standards were provided as examples of engagement in sector programming.

**Decisions**:

* G. Saunders, J. Ashmore and T. Newby will further discuss this topic focusing on the process, and come back with a proposal on how to operationalize engagement in sector programming.

**Key discussion points**

* The SAG agreed to set sectorial priorities that are relevant to the global sector as opposed to priorities which are relevant to specific countries or agencies only. These priorities should be set on an annual basis with no more than 2 or 3 per year. Consider the possibility of dedicating a full day of the next GSC Meeting and a full day of the next SAG Retreat to setting these priorities. These priorities would be informed by a 3W mapping of what shelter actors are doing at the global level.
* Calls for Expressions of Interest should be launched for leading in certain areas, or leading a process of pulling a policy together (via hiring a consultant or allocating a portion of time of the existing staff).
* After priorities are set, and agencies are addressing them, the SAG can act as a peer reviewing body.
* The SAG should be careful not to overlap with other initiatives that already exist when setting sectoral priorities.
* The SAG should be mindful of the limited capacity it has. The cluster should find those who are interested in doing these priority activities.
* The SAG needs to be careful that the cluster does not become a fundraising tool.
* In addition to the setting priorities as part of the GSC Meeting, individual agencies (either at the country or global levels) should be able to raise a theme for the SAG to review and promote as a priority.
* Conflict and migration have been neglected in comparison to natural disasters.

### 3.GSC bodies

**Background**

Two background documents were shared and reviewed: GSC Structure and a Discussion paper on Communities of Practice (CoPs). Working groups (WGs) in the past have been activated for long periods, with often too ambitious work plans rather than being time-bound to achieve a concrete output. Some of them have actually been working as CoPs. On the other hand, CoPs were not clearly defined in the past, and there is a need to strengthen them.

**Decisions**

* WGs: they will be re-focussed as per the original definition of WGs. They will be created on a needs basis to produce a concrete output. They will be activated with open calls for interest on specific tasks, with one clear deliverable/output and initially for no longer than 3 months. Once they have achieved the task, they will be dissolved. They report to the SAG which will decide to create them, extend their lifespan if needed and dissolve them. CoPs can also request the SAG to create a WG to address an issue. The creation of WGs can be done by email, it does not need to be tabled at a meeting.
* CoPs will be focused on the ongoing tasks of the GSC. Each of them will be looked after by a member of the GSC Support Team.
* The SAG will oversee the work of CoPs and how they function on a yearly basis.

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| **Areas for the CoPs** | | **Focal Points** |
| 1 | Coordination | GSC Global Focal Points (GFPs) for Coordination |
| 2 | Technical | NRC may be able to resource a Technical GFP, in the meantime J. Ashmore |
| 3 | Information Management, including GIS, Assessments, M&E, Data management | GFPs for IM (N. Bauman & Bo Hurkmans) |
| 4 | Environment | Charles Kelly |
| 5 | Gender | CARE may be able to resource a Gender GFP, in the meantime T. Newby |
| 6 | Recovery & Urban Settlements | Habitat for Humanity (J. Zarins) & UNHABITAT. Urban settlements may become a separate CoP. |

* CoPs will have the following functions: remote desk support on specific areas, answer questions from the field within a predictable timeframe (accountability and predictability are very important); develop and revise tools; identification and capacity building of new potential staff.
* The CoPs will initially work by email. Questions from the field will come to the person managing the CoP who will internally ask the CoP, consolidate the answers received from the different CoP members, and provide one consolidated answer to the field.
* The GSC Support Team willdevelop ToR to define minimum quality and coherence parameters of the CoPs such as a meaningful response within 24h.
* The GSC Support willcreate email addresses such as global.technical@sheltercluster.org or global.environment@sheltercluster.org, etc., so that there can always be someone responsible for it (a few experts connected), rather than a personal email.
* The answer from the CoP should have a disclaimer explaining that the information is provided in good faith but that neither the GSC cluster nor its leads or partners can be liable for any damage caused by this information.

**Key discussion points**

* One email address per thematic area/CoP is better than one general email address with a person responsible to “triage” emails to the different CoP. CoPs can refer questions to each other if the question is wrongly asked to one CoP rather than other or if the question involves more than one CoP.
* Important to define what the SC means by “technical”, as it may include both “bolts & screws” and more strategic planning.
* How to manage complaint mechanisms (to be discussed further).

### 4. Cash and Shelter

**Background**

ToR for cash desk review and Low Level Panel Paper on Cash were prepared as background documents for this session. Cash is being used more often for humanitarian responses and this is a welcomed development. However, cash programs are often implemented by practitioners from the food security sector, which is very different from the shelter sector. Issues such as quality of materials, quality of construction and others have enormous implications for beneficiaries in the shelter sector and need to be managed.

**Decisions**

* This is an important and urgent issue. A Cash WG will be created in the GSC to address it but given its urgency some actions should also be undertaken immediately.
* The SAG will develop a statement on the use of cash to meet shelter needs. CARE to lead. This statement was produced during the SAG retreat and can be found in Annex 1. This statement will be presented at the GCCG meeting and at the meeting of the Global Cash WG with an aim to focus the conversation on how to address the sector specific issues, and how to ensure recipients are able to manage all their risks, not only around shelter.
* A longer paper on Cash and Shelter providing further explanations on the statement is being prepared by J. Zarins. SAG members should provide feedback to this document.
* A literature review on Cash and shelter/housing should be drafted to gather all the written evidence available. It should include housing as there is a lot of peer-reviewed academic literature, for instance on housing benefits programs. This will provide evidence for the longer paper on cash. It should also prepare the ground for a potential comprehensive review. UNHCR to lead and fund.
* Initial guidelines on the use of shelter and cash will be prepared and piloted. IFRC to lead and fund.
* The need for other additional activities such as training materials or other tools will be assessed in upcoming SAG meetings and tasked to the Cash WG.
* A communication plan has to be defined, on how the GSC can disseminate the messages, where/in which contexts, and when.
* ACTED to do an assessment review of field level Cash WGs by the end of January.

**Key discussion points**

* Multi-purpose cash is intrinsically multi-sectorial, which means that no specific sector is responsible for addressing it (although multipurpose is not necessarily unconditional). How to include this in existing coordination mechanisms? And who is responsible for the monitoring?
* The current modalities do not consider the crucial issues of the shelter sector, especially because cash programs often focus on other issues, such as food security. Shelter actors should be more present in the discussion on cash.
* Deployable capacity in analysing markets is needed, the shelter-related market analysis are broader than those used for food security. Funding could be used to do supply chain and market assessments in the field, with country staff. The potential for private sector to play a role in this area was also discussed.
* Could the GSC include WASH, Livelihoods and other sectors to work jointly instead of sectorially? Linkages with other clusters - e.g. a multi-cluster working group - could be established.
* Need to declare an ownership and responsibility on Shelter and Cash, as key donors are willing to shift 40-60% of their funding to multipurpose grants. For instance, it is important to point out how Shelter is key in safety and protection, because just by distributing cash, people may (and will) build back unsafe houses.
* Possibility to do an interagency workshop to understand what works, and from there disseminate the knowledge
* There is still a lack of capacity building/trainings available for Cash in Shelter.
* Multipurpose Cash alone cannot work, as it doesn’t ensure the fulfilment of humanitarian standards such as Sphere, or the “do no harm” principle. If the discussion on standards starts, shelter will immediately become an important sector to consult, because it is the one that can ensure many of the humanitarian standards to be respected.
* There are issues in monitoring outcomes: with multipurpose cash grants it is easy to monitor inputs, but often it is harder to monitor how the money is spent and what that spending brings in the mid to long term.
* Rent or construction are bigger issues than general items, so they play a major role and it is harder to include them in multipurpose grants that are targeted at diverse baskets and can actually address different needs, including health, food, water.

### 5. 2016 Planning

**Background:**

L. Pupulin and M. Suvatne presented the priorities and action points identified as a result of the GSC Meeting - Defining Priorities for 2016 session. After which the participants broke up into small groups to further specify the priorities indicating outcomes, outputs and a responsible GSC body.

**Decisions:**

* The following WGs to be created in 2016:

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| **2016 Working Groups** | | **Chair** |
| 1 | Cash WG | J. Zarins |
| 2 | NFIs: to gather all the tools and good practices that have been developed for NFIs and make them available to all country-level shelter clusters | There should be a focal point for NFIs. One of the UNHCR Support Team GFPs has already been acting as a focal point for NFIs. |
| 3 | Shelter Projects |  |

* The existing 2015 WG will transition as follows:

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| **2015 Working Groups** | | **Will become** |
| 1 | Technical and Innovation | Technical CoP. This WG will have a meeting to close the WG. It had three main areas in its workplan: technical coordination around NFIs, coordinators toolkit, Shelter Projects. Shelter Projects will become a WG. NFIs will become a WG. The coordinators toolkit will be updated by the Support Team. |
| 2 | Regulatory Barriers | Transition into Recovery CoP if necessary |
| 3 | Accountability | Examples on accountability need to be finished in 2016. The rest of the issues are IM related so they will transition to the IM CoP. The WG will have a final meeting to identify if there are any other gaps. |
| 4 | Outreach and Capacity Building | It achieved the task of creating the online training. The main remaining task was to increase the capacity of the cluster by reaching out to shelter organizations that still do not engage with the GSC. This task is still necessary but the SAG is better placed to address it and CoPs are also expected to engage and bring new people to the GSC activities. |
| 5 | Early Recovery | Recovery CoP. The SAG should be closely involved in early recovery. |

* There is a need for a Technical GFP. NRC might be able to contribute to the resourcing of this position.
* Priorities will be set by the SAG on an annual basis. However, the planning in the GSC meeting will be for 2 years.
* Mid-year teleconference should be moved to May for more efficient implementation of the priorities.
* The SAG to closely follow on progress made by WG on a monthly basis and to review where the SAG is standing every 6 months.

**Discussion points:**

* Themes that have been left out so far but the SAG may come back to them by forming WG on these issues:
* Engaging with local governments
* Accountability

### 6. GSC sustainability

**Background:**

The aim of this session was:

* to follow up on the donor roadshow
* to give an update on Shelter Projects and identify possible similar initiatives that can be resourced using contributory mechanisms.
* to clarify on the GSC funding sources

GSC Contributory Resourcing, GSC Donor Roadshow, GSC Endorsement Framework and minutes of the SAG meeting on sustainability were shared as background documents for this session.

**Decisions:**

* The Donor Consultation Group will be formed and consulted on how to approach donors.
* The SAG agencies will start liaising with their donor relations departments to understand better constraints and interests of the donors they have been allocated. Cluster partners will report their findings to the SAG.

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| **Donor** | **SAG member** |
| ECHO | UNHCR, IFRC, NRC |
| DFID | CARE, HfH, UNHABITAT |
| USAID – OFDA | InterAction, HfH |
| AusAID | WVI (Australian RC) |
| Norway, Sweden | NRC, IOM |
| SDC | UNHCR, UNHABITAT |

* A briefing package can be used together with talking points.
  + [Glossy Paper](http://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/An%20introduction%20to%20the%20Global%20Shelter%20Cluster_0.pdf) + [GSC Today](https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/sheltercluster_october2015-v2.pdf)
  + Achievements [2013](http://sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/gsc-achievements_report.pdf), [2014](http://sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/gsc-achievements_2014.pdf), 2015
  + PowerPoint presentations
  + [Strategy 2013 - 2017](https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/GSC%20Strategy%202013-2017.pdf)
  + Plan 2015 – 2016
  + [Key advocacy messages](http://sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/gsc_donor_roadshow_key_talking_points_v3.docx)
* If any of the SAG agencies have ad hoc opportunities to meet with donors, they will inform the SAG.
* The GSC will organize a fundraising event in early 2016 by presenting the achievements of the GSC, some concrete country level issues and the State of Humanitarian Shelter publication.
* The SAG will continue advancing on the contributory mechanism to define how different SAG agencies can contribute. For example what NRC is doing by resourcing the technical focal point, or CARE is doing by resourcing the gender focal point.
* The SAG will be organizing a meeting on Shelter Projects to identify next steps. Once the Shelter Projects is under way the next contributory initiative, *The State of Humanitarian Shelter*, will be launched. P. Medina will draft a concept note explaining *The State of Humanitarian Shelter* initiative, and it will be discussed during the next SAG meeting.

### 7. Country level cluster coordination

This session focused on issues arising from country level clusters: activation, deactivation, support provided to country- level clusters and coordination mechanisms, preparedness and transition to early recovery.

J. Ashmore and T. Newby shared briefing notes with questions to guide the session.

**Decisions:**

* The SAG and the GSC will continue providing reactive support to those countries where discussion of possible cluster activation is taking place. In doing so national solutions will be encouraged. The aim is to support operational agencies.
* There is a need to define parameters for cluster activation and de-activation. Formal activation means more than it did in the past, it triggers accountability and responsibility. Cluster activation has a lot of implications and costs. The GSC should have tighter mechanisms to ensure that activated clusters are operating to a certain standard, and also some deactivation criteria. The SAG should consider activating a cluster if a) the situation is clearly beyond the capacity of the country level, b) there is a critical mass of agencies that need our support and coordination, c) there is a request from the government or the HCT.
* If agencies become aware of the discussion of possible cluster activation, it should be shared with the SAG for input without slowing down the process.
* Co-leadership at the country level requires more transparent discussion to include NGO partners. It should be better defined what co-lead/co-chair means and what it entails. UNHCR and IFRC will draft a document on this issue to be shared with SAG members in view of having a cluster position.
* Cluster Performance Monitoring Tool (CPMT) should be regularly conducted in activated country clusters. The results should be monitored and followed up.
* Complaints mechanisms should be established for partners to reach out to the GSC and raise issues arising from the country level. A GSC body should be identified to manage this mechanism.
* A common GSC methodology should be developed by reviewing the IFRC methodology, harmonizing conflict and disaster approaches, and making it more generic.
* Handing over to recovery will be addressed in the Recovery CoP. Maybe a consortium of agencies will take it forward.
* Contribution channels for NGOs and other partners should be better structured both at country and global levels. There should be a better acknowledgement of the contributions being made in terms of visibility and, for example, by means of letters of appreciation.
* The issue of double hatting to be further discussed but generally discouraged with two exceptions – when there is a security ceiling and where the coordination needs are not enough to warrant a 100% dedicated cluster coordinator.

**Key discussion points:**

* With limited resources the GSC can hardly keep up with the already active clusters, therefore it is difficult to support other shelter coordination mechanisms. In these cases we need to see how gaps can be filled by existing agencies in country.
* Clusters do not always need to be activated: in Niger, for instance, the decision was made to support and strengthen the government rather than to implement an official activation. A national solution should be encouraged whenever possible. At the same time, the GSC should monitor and assess the situation, and be prepared to deploy in case gaps prove to be insurmountable at the national level.
* Regarding the role of local NGOs, there are many opportunities to better include NGOs on both global and country levels. For instance, there is space to conduct a more inclusive discussion regarding co-chairing. In addition to co-chairing, cooperation with NGOs can take place in other ways such as technical support.

### Closing remarks

S. Scales has thanked all the participants for the fruitful and productive retreat that led to important decisions being taken.

### Annex 1

### GSC Statement on Cash Programming for Shelter

The Global Shelter Cluster welcomes the current focus on increasing the use of cash in humanitarian response. Cash is an important and valuable part of shelter programming. There is a long history of using cash in shelter programmes over many decades, and there is considerable learning about both the benefits and risks of using cash in shelter and housing.

There are many opportunities with the potential increase in the scale and reach of cash programming, but it is important to recognise that investment in shelter is typically a very significant one. It represents a high risk not only financially and economically but also in terms of the adequacy and safety of the shelter outcomes. While cash transfers can empower disaster-affected people, the use of cash transfers alone moves significant risk almost entirely onto beneficiaries. Without associated support to manage this risk, such as transfer of skills, knowledge, buying power or legal support to name but a few, beneficiaries can be left with unsafe or incomplete buildings, lack of tenure security, lasting debts and increased vulnerability. As is the case with providing goods in kind, cash programmes intended to have an impact in shelter without an associated understanding and management of the risks, and without appropriate expertise, will fail more often than not to achieve basic agreed humanitarian standards or offer the level of protection needed.

The materials, services, labour, land and rental markets that make up the construction and housing sectors are usually unique and highly complex and rarely have the elasticity of consumable commodity markets. It is critical that cash programming, especially multi-purpose cash grants, is well designed and coordinated to ensure that cash programming addressing shelter needs enables safe, secure shelter and tenure for those most in need, and that the humanitarian community can be held accountable for achieving the intended outcomes. The shelter cluster and its members are eager to collaborate with existing initiatives and actors in the development of cash transfer programming modalities to do this.