# Minutes CBC Work Stream SAIs in Fragile Situations – skype meeting 16 January

## Participants:

Liberia: Yusador Gaye, Micah-Tebah Belleh

Netherlands: Andrea Connell

Norway: Gry Midtbø, Øivind Berg Larsen

Sierra Leone: Adama Renner

Sweden: Oskar Karnebäck (chair), Camilla Lindståhl

Excuses:

Afghanistan: Hamidullah Faqairi

IDI: Jostein Tellnes

Sudan: Mohamed Elhafiz Nasr

## Opening remarks/reflections

The chair opened the meeting. Participants were invited to share any remarks and add any item they wished to discuss to the agenda. No additions were reported.

## Work plan. Discussion of priorities for the coming year

The work plan was circulated before the meeting with suggestions for lead-SAIs for the individual items.

* 1. *Finalise the discussion paper*

The paper was finalised by the consultants (David Goldsworthy/Silvia Stefanoni, Development Action) in the early days of January. We had not received explicit consent from all SAIs that were mentioned as examples in the paper. Those examples were anonymised in the version circulated to the work stream before the meeting.

It was suggested that we either try to get consent or remove those examples, as it seems somewhat odd and perhaps not so helpful to have examples out of context.

Sweden will communicate this feedback to the consultant who will give the paper a final touch. When that is done we put it in a nice lay-out and publish it on our website as a pdf-file.

* 1. *Short stories on best practice*

IDI has kindly taken on the role as lead for the collection and writing of short stories on best practice. Liberia had also volunteered, and it was decided that Liberia could assist IDI in the compilation of the short stories.

Jostein Tellnes (IDI) sent an e-mail to the chair before the meeting outlining the proposed way ahead. The activity plan will be circulated to the work stream with the draft minutes from this meeting. There is a need to define “short stories”, and make sure to include not only “best” practice but look for what could be “good” practice. A short story could really be about any challenge that a SAI has managed to overcome related to its fragile situation.

It was suggested that the first meeting of the forum of SAIs in situations of fragility (see below) could spend some time to contribute with good practice stories. This will be suggested to the consultants developing Terms of Reference for the forum.

It was decided that IDI, Liberia and Sweden could coordinate outside of the meeting in order to see how to best add value to the activity plan and find relevant stories to share.

There was a suggestion to start with stories from the discussion paper which has already outlined a few good cases. All members were encouraged to consider possible stories to share.

* 1. *Advocacy*

This topic is still important for many SAIs and kept in the work plan in order to allow us to jump on the opportunity if something arises.

* 1. *Arena for experience sharing*

Sweden reported the progress in the preparations for the first meeting to explore opportunities for a forum. There have been some ideas about venues elsewhere, but there is now an opportunity to liaise with IFAC and hold a first meeting in connection to their meeting for Professional Accountancy Organisations, to be held in Johannesburg 26-27 March. Since some of the African SAIs are invited to that meeting we could ask them to stay another two days and participate in this forum. The SAI of South Africa has kindly agreed to provide a venue in their Johannesburg regional office. The boardroom fits approximately 22 people so that will help to establish an atmosphere of trust. The following SAIs have been identified by the work stream members (apart from the members themselves):

Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Palestine

Work stream members were invited to ask the SAIs with whom they have contacts to save the date while waiting for the formal invitation from South Africa. We hope to be able to get participation from AG:s in addition to possibly one more staff from the SAI. From the SAIs of the work stream who find themselves in a non-fragile environment (IDI, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden) participation could be limited to one observer (and not AG).

The work stream had a few comments on the proposed Terms of Reference.

It would be good to make room available for discussions of challenges related to the daily operations of an SAI in a situation of fragility. State building and external relations are important parts but not the only challenges SAIs face. Recruiting and maintaining staff with the right competence and expertise is another area where AGs may want to discuss with each other.

The first theme (Modernising the SAI) appeared to be very imprecise as this could mean a lot of things. Most SAIs in situations in fragility are not into *modernising*, but more *fulfilling their mandate*. There was a suggestion to make the headline for the stakeholder theme more focused towards the content. The second theme (on state building) was also considered very broad. It was suggested to concentrate on the paper we are responsible for, and what would be useful in terms of guidance for the participants. It was further suggested to use the ISSAI 12 top triangle of the demonstration of the value and benefits SAIs bring to the lives of citizens to concretize the discussion.

The forum needs to be coordinated with other similar initiatives, such as the Tier 2 initiative. The forum is intended to be driven by the needs of the AGs to have an informal forum to discuss challenges in a setting of peers. The Tier 2 initiative also brings in donors and thus may have a different focus. It is valuable to have IDI in the work stream as this is a natural bridge to the Tier 2 initiative.

The Terms of Reference as a whole should be for a *meeting* and not for a formal structure. We need to keep this agile and not too formal. It is a meeting of a group of AGs and we should not talk about membership

It is important also to make room for exchanges between the AGs present, and not make the agenda too heavy. We need to include room for share experiences and take action, and add “expected results of the meeting” to the Terms of Reference. It was suggested that the forum spends some time in the beginning to get to know each other through presentations and ice-breakers that conduce a trustful atmosphere. We should early on try to find out what the key challenges are in each SAI.

* 1. *Reach out to the INTOSAI Professional Standards Committee*

Norway has kindly agreed to take the lead in this work, and IDI has volunteered as co-lead.

Norway will develop a plan for the coming months in order to allow the work stream to submit a project plan to he CBC chair in the meeting in September. We need to be sure what we ask of the PSC; we ask for guidance and not guidelines, as we do have the standards. This is guidance for the SAIs who want to comply with the standards but for some reasons are unable to do so, related the situation of fragility in which they operate.

It is important that this guidance really address the specific challenges SAIs in situations of fragility face.

* 1. *Read and update CBC Guide with fragility focus*

The final version of the guide has just been circulated to the wok stream leaders for exposure until 18 January. After that, we will have a final and updated version of the guide. This work plan item is therefore aimed at a revision at a later stage, probably in a couple of years. Our hope is that the work in the work stream will bring a lot of useful knowledge about the preconditions for SAIs in situations of fragility. This knowledge could hopefully contribute to an additional chapter or other additions to the guide. It is good to liaise with the second work plan item (short stories) as this is probably something that could be put into an updated version of the guide. It is therefore very good that Liberia and IDI will collaborate on that item.

## Conclusions and next meeting

The chair will circulate the draft minutes and allow for written input from all members. The comments on the discussion paper and the forum will be forwarded to the consultants. Next telephone meeting will be held in approximately two months’ time.