

# Minutes Skype meeting with the CBC workstream Auditing in Complex and Challenging Contexts

28 May 2020

## **Participants:**

Liberia: Yusador Gaye, Micah Tebah Belleh

Netherlands: Abdel Elabassi, Andrea Connell

IDI: Josten Furelid Telles

Sweden: Anna Jannesson (chair), Johanna Gårdmark

Development Action: David Goldsworthy

## **1. Opening remarks – approval of agenda**

The chair hoped that all participants are doing well considering the circumstances during the ongoing pandemic.

Yusador shared the experiences of SAI Liberia's efforts to maintain the office operational during the pandemic.

Abdel shared information about the connectivity challenges of the colleagues in Sudan.

Under AOB, Covid-19 related issues/audits was added.

## **2. Work plan**

### **a. Short stories (IDI/Liberia)**

Jostein provided a brief update. Three stories have been received – two from Afghanistan and one from Ghana. The stories are good, the topics are relevant, but they still require some additional work to make them relevant in a broader context. There is also a story under way from Somalia and Madagascar. The Somalia story is linked to the webinar they hosted in February. Madagascar is writing on the topic of donor engagements.

Yusador added that she has contacted AGs directly, and that is a more successful route than general calls for submission. As a result, Ghana has responded. Palestine has also responded.

We need to prioritize finalizing the five stories that are almost ready for publication and then continue to solicit more stories.

David will follow up with some of the participants from the ARABOSAI workshop last year. For example, SAI Yemen may be able to contribute. SAI Tuvalu may be another option as they have already written a paper.

#### **b. Advocacy**

Documentation was shared before the meeting, with a draft infographic relating to recruiting and retaining staff. The suggestion is to share this on the ACCC page on the CBC website. Participants were asked to consider whether the word document sent covers all relevant issues. The approach will also include case studies where three are already ready for publication.

Andrea appreciated the effort to experiment with a new format and it will be interesting to see how it will be received.

Another issue that is missing is the importance of funding, which is linked to the financial independence of the SAI. In Rwanda, the SAI linked the need for funding to the lack of staff and to the audit gap.

Yusador agreed that the SAI's independence is key to resolving a lot of these issues. Without the administrative independence and the appropriate funding there is very little you can do. The infographic is good, and it helps the AG structure the thinking around what you need to do – it is a starting point to help identify your problem.

Jostein mentioned that it is also important to include the challenge of court SAIs who struggle to recruit the appropriate financial audit skills. Jostein will get back on those issues and have another look at the structure of the questions to make sure it is clear and user friendly.

Members were encouraged to provide comments on the content or structure, and we will then launch the infographic. If we then think this is a good way to present a topic, we can consider using the same format for other issues.

The deadline for comments is Friday June 5.

### **c. Forum for experience sharing (Sweden)**

A new format for a webinar was tried in March when Jostein interviewed the AG of Somalia. It was a very successful format which can be used again and further developed. Jostein reflected on the experience and what could be done even better.

Another webinar was held with one of the Deputy AGs of Sierra Leone in April, with a focus on lessons learned from Ebola. It was record-breaking participation.

A lessons-learned session was held to learn from some of the challenges when hosting a webinar with a large participation.

Next session on 15 June will be led by Ms Dafina Dimitrova from IDI on their guidance note: COVID 19 implications for SAI strategic management.

Another session planned for later on in the year with Khalid Hamid from CIPFA leading a discussion on how SAIs can best support their governments as they seek to introduce IPSAS.

We are also considering webinars with Niger and Madagascar towards the end of the year.

A workshop was planned with SAIs in CREFIAF in April – most likely postponed until 2021 as travel is likely to be limited for the rest of the year.

### **d. Guidance for SAIs in fragile situations (Sweden)**

Briefing note for parliaments, similar to that prepared for donors, has been finalized. We now also have a version adjusted to SAIs with jurisdictional responsibilities.

David shared some thoughts on how it would be shared (i.e. sent to IPU, CPA and CPAC) and welcomed suggestions on how to further spread the information.

Andrea suggested an “elevator pitch” to be shared about different products in connection with webinars. We can circulate on linked-in and twitter, and it should be shared on the IDI website as well.

## **3. Any other business, and next meeting**

### **COVID-19 related issues/audits**

Jostein shared information about the paper developed with SAI Liberia and Sierra Leone. IDI also considers what type of support can and should be offered now and in the aftermath of the crisis. It is difficult to determine what some SAIs are doing in relation to the government initiatives launched and emergency funding being channeled to some countries.

A general challenge is to establish contact considering internet availability etc.

Yusador added that it is difficult for the SAI to have impact under these circumstances. SAI Liberia has contacted the government and relevant ministries about how to manage funding in the middle of a crisis, but everything depends on how willing the government is to be transparent and accountable and whether they are open to including the SAI from the outset. What role the SAI can take depends on how the SAI is considered. During the declaration of emergency in Liberia, SAI Liberia was not named as an essential institution so it can be assumed that they are not expected to work during the state of emergency.

David wonders whether the INTOSAI General Secretariat has addressed these issues with the major donors and encouraged them to take the SAI into consideration as both a recipient of funding and as an important partner.

The UK NAO has done a useful summary document of all the money flows to highlight where the priorities may be. The priorities may be in the grants to business, for example, rather than in the health sector.

An even bigger concern than what to do in relation to the COVID-19 efforts, is that SAIs are not being able to do any work due to their lock-down. Now is the time for an urgent appeal to be made to the PFAC task force on COVID 19.

Abdel agreed that the situation is similar in the Middle East and North Africa. For them it is not a question of what the role of the SAI is but they are in lock-down, unable to go to their offices, which limits their ability to carry out their work. Carrying on audit work is very difficult as many auditees are also closed, and data and people are not available. Working from home is next to impossible, and planning is very difficult under such uncertain circumstances. Many SAIs in doubt whether they will be able to fulfill their statutory requirements. In very fundamental terms it is an issue of whether they have access to the IT tools needed to carry out their work etc.

There are also a lot of initiatives. ARABOSAI will hold two meetings in June, where one agenda point will be how to work under these circumstances, how to stay in touch etc. Based on these different initiatives we may need to discern what we can do to help.

It is difficult to keep track of all initiatives, so we need to consider if there is a gap that we need to fill.

Andrea notes that donors are getting concerned themselves about the projects they are funding. They are not being implemented according to plan and run the risk of falling victim to governments' need to reprioritize how resources are used. Will SAI capacity development remain a priority or do we run the risk of "losing ground" in relation to donors?

Jostein will also bring the issue to the INTOSAI-Donor cooperation. Short-term there is some level of flexibility where we may welcome that funds are diverted to be used in emergency efforts. However, we have to make sure we do not lose the level of funding in the long-run.

David wonders if there is scope for on-line support from peers, a kind of electronic twinning set-up?

Jostein clarified that IDI is in dialogue with the IMF. The IMF cannot use IDI as an implementing partner in supporting SAIs so now we do not know how that will be managed. However, IDI still thinks there is a need to support SAIs in covid-19 related audits, but it is unclear how it will be done. Some SAIs are already getting support bilaterally but we have not yet decided whether a standardized audit approach would be useful. For some SAIs we just need to focus on basic needs in the short run.

Yusador: these are some of the issues discussed during the AFROSAI-E CBC meeting recently. This is one of the key problems – IMF will not work with the SAI but work through the UN bodies which we do not have a mandate to audit. It would be very helpful if INTOSAI brings up these issues.

Jostein – agree with the need for national coordination of covid-19 funds.

**Next meeting should take place in a month to continue to the discussion on Covid-19 related issues.**