

**Introductory Remarks of Steven Corliss
Director of the Division of Programme Support & Management**

**Technical integrity of UNHCR's programmes (EC/64/SC/CRP.16)
57th meeting of the Standing Committee**

26 June 2013

Thank you, Madame Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentleman,

I am pleased to appear once more before this 57th meeting of the Standing Committee to introduce Conference Room Paper 16 and discuss the technical integrity of UNHCR's programmes.

Together with me is Dr. Paul Spiegel, the Deputy Director of the Division of Programme Support & Management, who oversees most of the technical specialist areas that are anchored within the Division, including public health, HIV and AIDS, food security and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), shelter and settlements, in addition to the environment, livelihoods and solutions.

UNHCR's Global Management Accountability Framework – the GMAF – place an important accountability on DPSM to “ensure that UNHCR's programmes are technically sound.” While the GMAF also gives DPSM the authority to “enforce technical strategies and guidelines,” we can only be effective in this role if operation managers see us as source of sound, credible and competent expertise, guidance and new ideas.

Ensuring technical integrity and quality in UNHCR's dynamic and diverse operations requires long-term thinking, coherent approaches and continuing attention. New emergencies arise constantly and often in remote and inaccessible locations, just as we have seen over the past several weeks with the refugee flows from the Central African Republic to the northern Democratic Republic of the Congo and from Sudan to neighbouring Chad. New emergencies may require us to work with new government counterparts, new NGO partners and with technical specialists who are new to UNHCR. Rapid staff turnover is a common feature during the initial phase of these operations.

Such challenges are inherent in the nature of UNHCR's humanitarian work. To overcome them, DPSM strives to ensure that UNHCR's programmes have a common strategic orientation and implement harmonized standards and operational approaches. UNHCR's programmes must also be implemented with the support of technical specialists who have the necessary expertise and training. They must also have access to guidance and support by more experienced colleagues at the Headquarters and regional levels and should be linked to each other and their broader professional and partnership communities, allowing them to share good practices, learn lessons and avoid repeating the mistakes others have made.

To make this happen, we are working along three lines. First, DPSM sets the overall direction for technical areas through global strategic plans. Second, we develop operational guidance that establish standards, promotes harmonized approaches and provides practical tools. Third, we build our human capacity in technical areas within UNHCR and together with our partners.

Madam Chairperson,

Over the past five years, UNHCR's programmes and operational response have been guided by the *Public Health & HIV Strategic Plans 2008–2012*, covering the areas of HIV and AIDS, malaria, nutrition, reproductive health and WASH. An interim progress report on the strategic plans is available on the UNHCR website (<http://www.unhcr.org/4fc613a69.html>). We are now finalising updated strategic plans – through 2017 – for public health-related sectors. The new plans have benefited from stronger engagement and input from the field level – a key lesson learned from implementation of the first five-year plans.

We have expanded the same strategic planning approach to other technical sectors under the responsibility of DPSM. During 2013, we will be launching five-year strategic plans for shelter and settlements, domestic energy and livelihoods, all of which have fundamentally important implications for the protection and well-being of refugees. Each is also an area where we see a need to strengthen UNHCR's operational response and move the organization forward in a new direction.

Setting a clear strategic direction is essential, but this is only a first step. We also need to ensure that UNHCR's programmes are implementing the same technical standards, harmonized operational approaches and reflect global humanitarian good practices. DPSM develops and issues operational guidance and useful tools and continually updates and improves them. We also work through the subsidiary bodies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Global Clusters, as well as with strategic partners, including WFP and WHO, and consortia such as the Emergency Nutrition Network.

Within the coming days, UNHCR and WFP will issue updated guidelines for Joint Assessment Missions (JAM) that contain many important new features, including guidance on conducting a rapid JAM in emergencies. We have also recently collaborated with WHO on a new toolkit for *Assessing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and Resources* (<http://www.unhcr.org/509bb3229.html>) and will be bringing on board a mental health specialist to support the rollout and implementation. With a view to strengthening technical integrity and quality, DPSM issues focused guidance on specific topics. Here are examples relating to laboratory services and the use of special nutritional products.

During the last update to the Committee on technical integrity in June 2011, UNHCR reported on plans to develop new guidance adapted for urban programming in the areas of livelihoods, education and health care. These are now available to UNHCR colleagues in the field and to you at www.unhcr.org. We also issue guidance on new operational approaches, such as the promotion of refugee access to national health insurance programmes and the expanded use of cash-based programming.

We are also constantly developing practical new tools that build upon humanitarian best practices and draw in concepts and approaches from broader technical disciplines and even from the private sector. This openness to new ideas has allowed us to develop tools for assessment and information management that complement to UNHCR's corporate results-based management software, *Focus*, which continues to be the main repository of operational data.

During the presentation on UNHCR's Global Programmes at the March session of the Standing Committee, I introduced *Twine* – the new and upgraded version of UNHCR's Health Information System – and the Balanced Score Card tool for undertaking a 360 degree assessment of how a health facility is performing, including from the patient's perspective. Since the initial pilot in November 2011, UNHCR has conducted a total of 20 Balanced Score Card assessments in 8 different countries.

UNHCR also develops adapted and simplified operational guidance to make it more accessible and useful in emergency situations. Last month, DPSM's Field Information Coordination & Support Section (FICSS) launched the Emergency Information Management Toolkit (<http://data.unhcr.org/imtoolkit/>). The toolkit provides resources to support activities that are critical to an effective emergency response in the technical sectors. It will enable UNHCR to establish an effective capacity for information management rapidly in new refugee emergencies, which is a key to effective coordination.

Madam Chairperson,

It goes without saying that a clear strategy, comprehensive operational guidance and useful tools do not ensure impact. People ensure impact. Implementing programmes that have technical integrity is a "hands on" task accomplished by specialists serving in UNHCR operations worldwide, working together with our partners and guided by senior experts at Headquarters and in the Regional Offices.

Globally today, UNHCR has some 230 technical specialists working in the areas of public health, reproductive health and HIV and AIDS, nutrition and food security, WASH, and shelter and settlements. Over the past few years, we have been systematically building – or in some cases, rebuilding – our expertise and capacity in key technical areas, both internally and through partnership arrangements. During 2012, for example, UNHCR created twenty-three new international and national positions for WASH specialists globally.

DPSM's technical experts based at Headquarters must maintain a dual focus on developing strategies, operational guidance and tools and their analytical work, on the one hand, and providing direct support to field operations, on the other. Last year, DPSM deployed staff members on emergency response, technical support and training and capacity-building missions for more than 1,800 days – which works out to about seven years of working days in the field.

We have established global technical specialist networks to link the experts at Headquarters and those working at the regional and country levels. Just last week, DPSM brought together the shelter experts and site planners working in refugee operations around the world to introduce the new strategy and receive their input, discuss our research and development and innovation initiatives and – importantly – to develop the relationships and lines of communication that will make the network an effective community of practice.

During 2013, DPSM has been cooperating with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on an audit of our technical specialist networks – an assignment that OIOS undertook at our request. The audit recommendations will assist us in strengthening the networks, which are a key pathway for promoting global strategies and standards and effective knowledge management.

Today's humanitarian landscape calls for new and broader skills from technical specialists. UNHCR provides coordination and information management support in both refugee operations and within the interagency cluster approach in the areas where the organization has assumed specific responsibilities, including emergency shelter. Technical specialists must have not only "hard" technical skills and expertise but also the "soft" skills needed for effective leadership, coordination and communication.

UNHCR must build a core cadre of technical experts to maintain credible leadership and ensure technical integrity in our operations. At the same time, we cannot and should not seek to build an exclusive and independent capacity in all technical areas. We are fundamentally dedicated – and, in fact, are dependent upon – partnership. Through the recent challenging period, standby

partnerships and deployment schemes have been an essential component of our emergency response in technical areas, as has been the use of United Nations Volunteers.

Madam Chairperson,

Our concept of partnership in technical areas extends beyond the humanitarian arena to the private sector, philanthropic organizations and academia. Within the coming days, we will begin testing a new shelter concept in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, developed in cooperation with the Refugee Housing Unit, SA of Sweden and with the support of the IKEA Foundation. The Balanced Score-card assessment tool for health facilities benefited substantially from input by Johns Hopkins University, and our Shelter & Settlements Section is collaborating with Stanford University to elaborate a “master plan” concept for linking refugee settlements to surrounding communities and the local economy in a more organic way.

Madam Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that this overview has provided you with better understanding of our directions and our commitment to ensuring technical integrity in UNHCR’s programmes. I look forward to an interesting exchange and responding to your questions.

Thank you.