

The High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on NGOs – UNHCR Partnership

“Strengthening Capacity through UNHCR – NGO Partnerships to Assist Refugees and Other Persons of Concern”

Summary

In order to deliver high quality and effective protection and assistance to refugees and other persons of concern, there is a need to continuously strengthen the capacity of UNHCR, international NGOs and local NGOs. Therefore, while any NGO – UNHCR partnership arrangement has to ensure it focuses on achieving effective assistance; it needs to also build mutual capacity for ongoing effectiveness and sustainability.

There is therefore a need for UNHCR and its national and international NGO partners, to develop a more transparent, systematic and strategic approach for how this should be done. This needs to be developed recognizing the great deal of work on capacity building has already been done by NGOs¹, UNHCR, other UN-agencies and other stakeholders (such as donors etc.) over many years. It also needs to recognise that there are a number of ways of capacity can be strengthened. Most work on capacity strengthening focuses on two aspects: the skills needed to develop, manage and implement high quality programmes and the sustainability of the organisation itself. While recognising sustainability of the organisation itself is important, the suggested recommendations below lean more towards the first element of ensuring strengthening capacity to deliver effective assistance at this stage.

Suggested Recommendations

- I. **UNHCR should develop an institutional strategy for strengthening capacity in its work with NGOs** – Acknowledging the need for a more strategic, clear and transparent approach, it is recommended that UNHCR develops an institutional strategy to ensure mutual capacity strengthening between UNHCR and its NGO partners. In developing the strategy, it will be important to consider:
 - A review of what UNHCR and its NGO partners have done in the past and what is currently taking place, citing what has worked well and where lessons could be learnt.
 - While undertaking such review, UNHCR and its NGO partners should define and narrow the scope and focus of what capacity needs to be strengthened
 - Learning from the large amount of work that NGOs and other UN Agencies have already done on capacity strengthening, in order to capitalize and build on this.
 - A mechanism for monitoring progress of this strategy, possibly linking to some of the wider partnership mechanism reviews being proposed.

¹ NGOs in this paper refers to both local and international

II. **Country level Capacity Strengthening Plans** - In each country, UNHCR should work with its NGO partners and other UN agencies to develop capacity strengthening plans. While the specifics of this will, and should, depend on the local context, it will be important to ensure that these country plans:

- Focus on what capacities need to be strengthened in order to address the needs of refugees and other person of concern
- Consider what NGOs and other UN Agencies in country are already doing to strengthen capacity to look for where synergies can be built.
- Understand these plans should be based on mutual reinforcing strategies of what local, international NGOs and UNHCR can do to help each others capacity development
- Should build in means to enhance the longer term sustainability of local partners where possible. It should also ensure local NGO partnerships are based on the NGO's merit and not as a means of reducing costs or avoiding security risks in high security environments

III. **Capacity Strengthening plan and budget to be built into NGO UNHCR agreements** – It is essential that capacity strengthening plans form a clear and explicit part of UNHCR-NGO partnership agreement. These plans should have a clear and realistic budget allocation– either as part of UNHCR's or the partner's budget - providing to local/national NGOs a realistic provision to deliver on the agreement and not reduce or undermine the capacity of the organisation. These plans and budgets should be based on the country and operational needs and priorities. They should also consider the implications for the organisation's capacity to develop its medium to long-term sustainability.