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Reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Policy Development and Evaluation

Report of the High Commissioner

Summary

The present report has been prepared in conformity with the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to receive a report on evaluation at its annual plenary session (A/AC.96/1003, para. 25.1 (f) (vi)). The period covered by this report is from mid-2009 to mid 2010.

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I. Introduction

1. During the reporting period, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) pursued an integrated programme of policy development, evaluation, research and publications, focusing on those policy issues, programmes, projects, practices and partnerships that are of greatest concern to the High Commissioner.
2. PDES is located in the High Commissioner's Executive Office and is represented on UNHCR's Senior Management Committee. The Service establishes its work programme on the basis of regular consultations with members of the Executive Office, as well as other senior managers, and with external stakeholders, including Executive Committee members, United Nations other international organizations, and representation of the non-governmental organization (NGO) and academic communities.
3. The independence of PDES is assured by means of the UNHCR Evaluation Policy, as well as the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Norms, Standards and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the United Nations system, to which UNHCR subscribes. The Service strives to attain the highest possible level of transparency and places all of its reports in the public domain.
4. PDES does not use a standard methodology and makes regular use of independent evaluations, real-time evaluations, participatory evaluations, beneficiary-based evaluations, joint and inter-agency evaluations as well as lessons-learned and good practice reviews.
5. PDES pursues a utilization-focused approach to its work. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for each project undertaken by the Service specify how the findings and recommendations of that project will be utilized. Multi-stakeholder Steering Committees are established for each major evaluation, with responsibility for approving the ToR, monitoring project progress, reviewing draft reports, as well as overseeing the outcome, use and impact of PDES projects.
6. PDES strives to ensure that all evaluation teams are gender-balanced and involve staff members or consultants with appropriate language skills and local knowledge. PDES publishes its reports in languages in addition to English in order to contribute to the dissemination of its work. The Service also seeks to maximize impact by using its projects as a basis for magazine and journal articles, press releases, web stories, conference presentations and other outputs.
7. A more detailed report on the way that the findings and recommendations of PDES projects are used for the purposes of policymaking, programming, strategic planning and stakeholder consultation will be provided by the Head of PDES at the sixty-first session of the Executive Committee.

II. Capacity building

8. PDES currently has five core staff members (four professional and one general service) as well as one junior professional officer and one secondment from an Executive Committee member. An additional professional post has recently been created and will hopefully be filled by a suitably qualified candidate in the latter part of 2010. A major purpose of the new post will be to liaise between PDES and the Department of Programme Management and Support, and to assist the Deputy High Commissioner in relation to evaluation and results-based management issues.
9. All professional staff members in PDES have received external and on-the-job training in evaluation objectives, methods and utilization. One PDES staff member also took extended study leave in the course of the year to develop specialized expertise in the area of peacebuilding. The Service augments its regular capacity through the

engagement of consultants, interns and academic researchers working on a *pro bono* or expenses-only basis.

10. Since the last Executive Committee meeting, PDES has updated UNHCR's evaluation policy and has convened a three-day training workshop on the management of evaluation projects, attended by some 25 middle-level staff members from the Field and at Headquarters. It is anticipated that this workshop will contribute to the progressive devolution and expansion of evaluation activities in UNHCR.

11. The following sections of this paper identify the key themes of the PDES work programme during the reporting period and provide a summary of the specific activities undertaken in relation to each of them.

III. Urban areas

12. In mid-2009, PDES undertook a major review of UNHCR's response to the Iraqi refugee situation in urban areas of the Middle East. The findings and recommendations of that review assisted the Service to draft UNHCR's new Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas, which was released in September 2009 and which was one of the key background documents for the High Commissioner's 2009 Dialogue on Protection Challenges, held three months later.

13. In July 2010, PDES took part in an urban livelihoods workshop organized by the Operations Solutions and Transitions Section and provided comments to the draft Strategic Guide on Urban Livelihoods. In the same month, PDES participated in a workshop on the implementation of the new urban refugee policy, and subsequently plans to undertake participatory real-time evaluations of the roll-out process in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Nairobi (Kenya) and San Jose (Costa Rica). A global lessons-learned exercise is anticipated in early 2011.

14. Throughout the reporting period, PDES and other UNHCR entities have been active members of an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Humanitarian Action in Urban Areas, led by UN-HABITAT. PDES also completed a scoping study on urban displacement, in association with Cities Alliance.

IV. Protracted refugee situations

15. In fulfillment of a commitment made by the High Commissioner at his 2008 Dialogue on Protection Challenges, PDES has been undertaking evaluations of the implementation of his Special Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations. At the time of writing, field work had been completed in Croatia, Serbia and the United Republic of Tanzania (sponsored by an Executive Committee member). Evaluation missions to Bangladesh and eastern Sudan are anticipated later in the year. In addition, PDES has completed a review of use of microfinance programmes in protracted refugee situations.

V. Return and reintegration

16. PDES has continued to review UNHCR's role in the return and reintegration of refugees and displaced populations, with specific reference to the role of cash grants in facilitating this process. Evaluations were completed of the cash grant programme for returning refugees in Burundi and for returning displaced people in northern Sri Lanka. PDES also completed a global analysis of UNHCR's role in the return and reintegration of internally displaced people and a paper focusing on the role of refugees in peacebuilding processes in countries of origin.

VI. Humanitarian space

17. PDES has undertaken a variety of projects that are clustered around the theme of humanitarian space. These include a global review of UNHCR's experience in safeguarding humanitarian space, an analysis of UNHCR's engagement with Integrated United Nations Missions and a case study of humanitarian space challenges in Somalia. A preliminary paper was completed on the question of working in insecure environments, focusing on recent experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A more extensive review of this issue will be undertaken later in 2010.

VII. Mixed migration

18. Since the first High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2007, PDES has focused a significant amount of attention on the issue of "mixed migration". Most recently, the Service has completed reviews of UNHCR's role in Morocco and southern Africa, following similar and earlier reviews in the Spanish Canary Islands and southern Italy.

19. In addition to these projects, PDES has published reports on the profile, arrival and treatment of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe; on the issue of asylum and migration in Israel; and on the role of migration and mobility in the search for solutions to refugee situation.

20. The Service continued to represent UNHCR at the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the Global Migration Group (GMG) and prepared a discussion paper on "stranded and vulnerable migrants" for a GMG Practitioners' Symposium.

VIII. Age, gender and diversity

21. The first half of 2010 saw the completion of a major, global and independent evaluation of the implementation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy, complementing a series of earlier evaluations on closely related issues: UNHCR's work with refugee women and children and the community services function.

22. PDES also published a paper on the issue of sexual orientation and asylum, focusing on recent experience in Scandinavia. Another issue with important diversity implications is that of refugee education. At the time of writing, PDES was considering a global review of refugee education, focusing on the issues of access, quality and protection.

IX. Natural disasters

23. At the request of the Executive Office, PDES commissioned an independent evaluation of UNHCR's role in recent natural disasters. It is expected to be used as a basis for a discussion with the Executive Committee in the second half of 2010. The Service also published a paper that presented initial empirical evidence on the links between climate change, natural disasters and displacement in Africa.

X. Protection issues

24. While the Department of International Protection has primary responsibility for legal and protection analysis in UNHCR, a number of PDES projects during the reporting period have a significant protection dimension. They include an analysis of the relationship between the protection of refugees and internally displaced people and the "Responsibility

to Protect” concept; an examination of the relationship between UNHCR’s mandate and the “Protection of Civilians” initiative; a critique of the notion of “preventing” forced displacement, a review of UNHCR’s response to state border closures in situations of mass refugee influx; and a planned workshop on the issue of witchcraft accusations, refugee protection and asylum.

XI. Conclusion

25. Since its establishment at the end of 2006, PDES has grown in capacity and output. A key challenge is now to ensure that the utilization and impact of the Service’s work is similarly strengthened. In this respect, particular attention could usefully be given to the issues of staff rotation, the limited number of UNHCR personnel with evaluation expertise, and the growing requests made for PDES to participate in inter-agency evaluation initiatives.
