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Age, gender and diversity

Summary

This paper updates on the Office's progress implementing the age, gender and diversity (AGD) policy since the last update provided during the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2012 (EC/63/SC/CRP.14). It includes a review of those elements that are essential for a systematic application of the policy, including direct engagement with persons of concern through participatory assessments; staff accountability at all levels; and strengthened organizational capacity to ensure effective implementation.

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I. Introduction

1. UNHCR's age, gender and diversity (AGD) policy seeks to ensure that all persons of concern are able to enjoy their rights on an equal footing. It recognizes that age, gender and diversity – including ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and other personal attributes – play a central role in shaping and influencing individual needs and protection risks. In its implementation, the AGD policy is fundamentally linked to UNHCR's rights-based and community-based approach, which places people of concern at the centre of assessment, planning and monitoring processes and seeks to facilitate their full participation in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. After briefly reviewing the evolution of UNHCR's AGD policy, this paper presents recent developments in its implementation and highlights examples of how UNHCR is delivering on its AGD commitments in the field.

II. Background

2. The origins of the AGD policy date back a decade, when UNHCR developed a five-year mainstreaming strategy and action plan to integrate age, gender and diversity analysis into all organizational practices, policies and programmes.¹ Not only did mainstreaming aim at equity in the delivery of protection and assistance, but it also sought to deepen the Organization's contact with communities, ensure representative participation, improve coordination and strengthen staff accountability to populations of concern. Two key initiatives were undertaken to reach these objectives. First, UNHCR developed a "participatory assessment" tool to systematize interaction with persons of concern, in particular with vulnerable or marginalized groups.² Second, an accountability framework was developed as a tool for senior managers to report on progress achieved toward AGD objectives in their operations.³

3. These mainstreaming efforts culminated in the 2011 launch of UNHCR's AGD policy,⁴ which formalized the rationale for pursuing an AGD approach, clarified its objectives, and defined age, gender and diversity elements. This was followed by the development of a five-year plan,⁵ now being implemented. The plan identifies a number of strategic results to be achieved by 2016, including: (1) protection and programme planning are based on sound AGD analysis, reflecting the results of participatory assessments; (2) staff and partners are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver on UNHCR's commitments; and (3) strong internal leadership and accountability for AGD are embedded in the organizational structure. The developments described in the next section should be reviewed in light of these objectives.

III. Key developments

A. Participatory assessments

4. UNHCR recommends that all operations ensure the active and meaningful participation of people of concern in identifying their protection problems and determining their protection needs and capacities to address them. The participatory

¹ *Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Action Plan, 2007 to 2009.*

² *The UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, available at: www.unhcr.org/pages/4a2698b86.html

³ *Global Analysis 2012-2013, UNHCR Accountability Frameworks for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming and Targeted Actions*, available at: www.unhcr.org/51e4569f9.pdf

⁴ *Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Working with people and communities for equality and protection*, available at: www.unhcr.org/4e7757449.html

⁵ *Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Forward Plan 2011-2016*, available at: www.unhcr.org/4e7762f19.html

assessment is a tool designed to facilitate structured dialogue between UNHCR and persons of concern. These assessments often involve holding separate discussions by age and/or gender, when appropriate to ensure candor. Critically, they also facilitate the inclusion of groups that may be under-represented in formal leadership structures – including women, children, ethnic or religious minorities, for example – who are otherwise at risk of being overlooked in standard assessment processes. The information obtained provides the basis for the implementation of a rights-based and community-based approach.

5. Last year UNHCR undertook a review of participatory assessments in more than 40 operations around the world. The review analysed the process and content of the operations' participatory assessments and how effectively the findings were translated into country-level plans. The review confirmed that the assessments provide a high level of detail about the problems people of concern face, their capacities to address them, and their preferred solutions. The extent to which the participatory assessments actually informed multi-year protection strategies and operational planning, however, varied considerably across operations.⁶ Based on this finding, UNHCR is working to strengthen the linkage between assessments and long-term strategy development and operational planning.

B. Staff capacity

6. Accountability to persons of concern requires that the priorities identified during participatory assessments are reflected in the planning process and that feedback is sought from communities on programme implementation. When this does not happen, it can have serious consequences for the protection and safety of the people of concern. In one IDP operation, for example, failure to adequately consult the community during the planning of sanitation facilities led to their construction near a place where the men gathered to socialize. As a result, women chose instead to go into the forest, with negative implications for their safety and dignity, as well as for the public health of the entire community. In another operation working with a high number of persons with physical disabilities, the new health facilities were built with narrow doors and stairs; remodelling was required to make the facilities accessible to people in wheelchairs. These examples highlight the importance of ensuring that all staff have the necessary skills, attitudes and commitment to fully apply the AGD policy.

7. Last year UNHCR conducted a staff survey to measure understanding of the AGD policy, which more than 1,200 staff completed. Despite the inherent complexities involved in consulting communities in the planning and prioritizing of protection interventions, UNHCR field staff demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring that persons of concern are fully engaged in decisions that affect them and their families. The vast majority of respondents – 94 per cent – expressed the belief that the AGD policy is relevant to the work of all staff, and 86 per cent believed that they had the full support of their supervisor in its implementation. Almost all respondents agreed that reflecting gender equality, age and diversity in protection programming is a priority.⁷

8. Both the AGD survey and the review of participatory assessments found important areas for improvement. In particular, they found that for many staff members, implementation of the AGD policy is limited to the facilitation of the participatory assessments. In general, staff acknowledged the need to further integrate the results of participatory assessments into planning, programming and resource allocation, in close cooperation with all partners. The inclusion of the new 2013 AGD Accountability Report into UNHCR's planning and reporting platform, Focus, will improve operations' ability to better link participatory assessments and planning processes.

⁶ *A Review of UNHCR Participatory Assessments in 2012*, available at: www.refworld.org/docid/530c4aa74.html

⁷ *The 2013 Age, Gender and Diversity Survey Report*, available at: www.refworld.org/docid/539016514.html

9. To ensure a full understanding of the AGD policy among staff and partners, UNHCR has updated its training materials and developed a series of learning tools. These include UNHCR's AGD and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) e-learning programmes, which were launched in 2013, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) e-learning course "Different Needs - Equal Opportunities," on integrating gender equality into humanitarian programmes. In 2014, the SGBV e-learning programme will become mandatory for all UNHCR staff, and all these learning tools will soon be an integral part of the induction programme for newly recruited staff.

C. Organizational accountability

10. Until 2012, UNHCR employed a stand-alone AGD accountability framework for annual reporting. While useful, the reporting framework had several limitations: (1) it assessed only the senior managers' accountability, rather than that of the entire operation; (2) based on a checklist of minimum standards, it failed to capture the full scope of actions taken to implement the AGD policy; and (3) the results reported were not easily comparable with data reported in other institutional tools. In an effort to address these shortcomings, the AGD Accountability Framework was transformed into a new AGD Accountability Report and incorporated into Focus last year. This new reporting structure requires staff in the field and at Headquarters to highlight both progress and challenges in implementing the ADG policy. An additional section of the report captures quantitative and qualitative results from participatory assessments – a new aspect which has been welcomed by operations as UNHCR's first standardized reporting tool to capture the systematic consultations they hold with persons of concern.

11. The new report format maintains the crucial element of senior management accountability. Senior managers remain ultimately responsible for ensuring that the policy is translated into action through all phases of the operations cycle. It is for this reason that senior managers are personally responsible for drafting the first section on "Accountability and Leadership." They are also responsible for reviewing other sections of the report reflecting how the AGD policy has been incorporated into the work of their teams. Finally, the inclusion of the new AGD Accountability Report in Focus provides an important link to the overall year-end reporting exercise. In turn, this allows comparison and validation with data reported in other parts of Focus, as well as with the Global Strategic Priority (GSP) indicators selected by the operations.

12. A global analysis of the 2013 AGD Accountability Reports filed by all operations and Headquarters divisions is being finalized. The Office has begun following up with senior managers on the main findings and actions to be taken. The picture emerging from this analysis is consistent with past reviews. It describes an organization that takes its commitment to the AGD policy very seriously and finds that the AGD policy has become a critical, practical reference to inform the design and implementation of strategies and programmes at all levels. In most cases, shortcomings appear to be due to practical constraints, rather than a lack of knowledge or commitment.

13. Some remaining structural challenges have emerged from the first year using the AGD Accountability Report in Focus. Notably, gender disaggregated data cannot presently be generated through Focus, limiting comparison of protection and services provided to men and women. Moreover, the new format includes open-ended questions and narrative answers, which provide useful information, yet also increase the complexity of the analysis. The adoption of the revised impact indicators in 2014, including more than 50 AGD-sensitive impact indicators, will facilitate better organization-wide analysis of the AGD data.

14. Despite these issues, the new AGD Accountability Report provides considerably deeper insight on the broad range of age-, gender- and diversity-related problems faced by persons of concern and on the actions the Organization is taking at all levels to address them. Ultimately, the AGD Accountability Report serves as both a key accountability

reporting tool and a mechanism for operations to document their achievements and share good practices.

IV. Delivering on AGD commitments

15. This section draws examples from 2013 year-end reporting by country operations as well as from the implementation of the child protection and SGBV strategies in targeted countries. It also reflects experiences in which findings of participatory assessments informed protection-based strategies and operational planning.

16. Senior managers demonstrated their commitment to the AGD policy in a number of ways. In several operations, representatives ensured a gender balance in their staffing at all functional levels and field offices, and encouraged partners to do the same. An increase in the number of female staff members, particularly in field locations, supported accessibility to SGBV services, as female survivors are often more comfortable reporting incidents to female staff. Other operations reported positive results from awareness-raising efforts: in Bangladesh, for example, authorities deployed female police officers in refugee camps to support the prevention of and response to SGBV.

17. Reporting by the operation in Dadaab, Kenya – where mobile courts adjudicate cases and legal aid clinics provide advice in the refugee camps – reflected how the AGD policy can have a concrete impact on programming. In 2013, the Office supported impoverished women and girls who could not otherwise afford court filing fees, which led to increased conviction of SGBV perpetrators. Moreover, participatory assessments on Dadaab found widespread awareness of the existence of these legal services, revealing how participatory assessments may also be used as a monitoring tool.

18. While ensuring civil documentation for all persons of concern is a protection priority, it is generally acknowledged that the lack of documentation may affect individuals differently depending on their age, gender and other aspects of diversity. The 2013 AGD Accountability Report shows that UNHCR, in collaboration with partners, implemented a variety of solutions to address this problem. In the Republic of the Congo, Montenegro and Mozambique, as well as Kosovo,⁹ 100 per cent of refugee women were individually registered and issued identification documents. Individual documentation helped women access employment, housing, healthcare and social services.

19. In Tajikistan, challenges identified in the participatory assessments led UNHCR and partners to help women obtain safe accommodation by signing tripartite lease agreements with landlords, protecting the women from evictions. Participatory assessments conducted in Chad found that many elderly persons of concern could not afford the cost of water. In response to this and another protection problem, UNHCR implemented a conditional cash transfer to those elderly refugees who guaranteed attendance of children in their care or their grand-children in school and vaccination campaigns.

20. Feedback from the participatory assessments in Somalia resulted in UNHCR establishing a recovery centre in Mogadishu to provide medical care to SGBV survivors. UNHCR and partners assisted several hundred survivors from different IDP camps through a comprehensive set of interventions, including medical assistance, psychological counselling, legal assistance and provision of sanitary materials. A community-based referral mechanism was also established. In Panama, UNHCR used the findings from a joint participatory assessment to support the Government to strengthen SGBV prevention and response mechanisms.

⁹ References to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

V. Conclusion

21. In 2014 UNHCR will continue to improve the AGD Accountability Report in Focus in order to make gender-disaggregated data available and to enhance the comparison capability between information presented in different parts of Focus. Given the importance of participatory assessments to achieving a community- and rights-based approach, UNHCR will continue to revise the participatory assessment tool based on feedback. With these actions, UNHCR will advance the integration of the AGD Policy into all levels and processes of the Organization. Meanwhile, UNHCR is sharing its experiences with the AGD policy and participatory assessments with a wide range of partners in inter-agency fora. Participatory approaches, similar to those of UNHCR, are being incorporated in the work of the IASC and initiatives such as the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP), as part of global efforts to advance equality.
