

**UNHCR**

**STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING NATIONAL NGO PARTNER**

**EFFECTIVENESS**

**I. Introduction**

1. UNHCR has a general policy to work with national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) whenever possible. It is, however, without a clear framework and strategy on when, why and how national NGOs should become involved in refugee, and refugee type, operations, or for the training and capacity building. In 1997 UNHCR had project agreements with **322** national NGOs, in over 130 countries, i.e. seven out of ten NGOs with whom UNHCR works are national NGOs, who implement two-thirds of the projects funded by UNHCR.

2. The 1994 UNHCR-NGO Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action had 26 recommendations directly concerned with the needs and interests of national Non-Governmental Organisations, i.e. those working with UNHCR within their own country (in most cases, a developing country). Many of these recommendations required joint action by UNHCR and international NGOs with, and in support of, national NGOs.

3. For its purposes, UNHCR can define a national non-governmental organisation as:

- any organisation registered as a non-governmental organisation under the laws of its country and working in that country;
- national branches of international organisations (Red Cross Societies, Caritas, Christian Councils, etc.);
- indigenous, social, religious and local organisations with a structure and a clear purpose;
- organisations such as local self-help associations and cooperatives.

In deciding with which NGOs UNHCR wishes to work, there must be a careful assessment of national NGOs prior to entering into agreements.

4. Capacity and effectiveness can be seen as the ability to achieve a goal in an appropriate, timely and cost-effective manner. However, there is no common definition of capacity building, and it can be defined most effectively at the local level, in the context of the legal status and stage of development of national NGOs in a specific country. “Mechanically inspired *ad hocism* is probably the best way of describing how the aid system presently understands and deals with the concept of capacity building”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Striking a Balance, Alan Fowler, 1997](#)

5. This document deals with enhancing the effectiveness of national non-Governmental Organisations primarily in developing countries and in those countries where there has been a limited development of civil society organisation, and who have, or could have, a partnership with UNHCR.

## **II Objectives of a Strategy**

6. The primary objective of a UNHCR strategy in support of national NGOs must be to ensure that we can adequately meet the international protection and humanitarian assistance needs of refugee and related operations using wherever possible local skills and resources. A secondary aim is to build national NGO capacity to work beyond the needs of a UNHCR operation and to contribute to longer term rehabilitation and development, including the development of civil society and disseminating basic human rights principles as part of a prevention strategy. This requires UNHCR to place a high priority in its programme planning and country operations plans on identifying, developing the skills and capacity of, and working with, national NGOs.

## **III. National Non Governmental Organisations as Partners**

7. In *the short term* many national NGOs will not have the experience and/or capacity to take a prominent operational role during the first weeks of a complex emergency. However, national NGOs have a vast amount of local knowledge and expertise, which can be invaluable to UNHCR, other UN agencies and international NGOs. Their advice could avoid serious mistakes being made in the early days of an emergency. It should be possible for UNHCR and international NGOs to identify national NGOs with whom they can build partnerships during the first three months of an emergency operation. National NGOs should, however, be involved from the start of any refugee operation to assess the impact on, and the needs of, the local population and environment resulting from an influx of needy people from elsewhere, particularly where the local population could suffer food and material shortages as a result of their initial assistance. Furthermore, measures to include national NGOs in an operation should be a mandatory part of longer term operations planning.

8. *The long-term* value of national NGOs within humanitarian assistance programmes, with proper support and training, is likely to be high, not only because of their local knowledge, but also in view of their potential to provide effective implementation in refugee relief, care and maintenance, and durable solutions programmes, as well as some assistance in the area of protection. If this potential is developed in a systematic and planned way, national NGOs will benefit not only refugee and refugee related operations, but in the long term, through other UN and bilateral programmes, their local communities.

## **IV Elements of a Strategy**

9. There can be no detailed universal strategy applicable to every region and every country in which UNHCR works. Each UNHCR country office must define its own strategy, based on a detailed assessment, together with NGO partners, of the situation and the needs of national non-governmental organisations. There are however a number of elements which may apply more or less globally, and, when applicable, will require refinement at the regional and country level.

### **A. Global**

#### **i. UNHCR**

UNHCR offices should familiarise themselves with national NGO legislation and administrative procedures. Where none exist, UNHCR should initiate dialogue with the Government in favour of proper procedures for the setting up and registration of NGOs.

#### **ii. Coordination and Collaboration**

Coordination with NGO partners must be ensured in **all** offices and guidelines drawn up to assist UNHCR to take full responsibility for its coordination function. Coordination must include a clearly defined UNHCR focal point for NGOs in every office. Equally, UNHCR must foster local self-sustaining coordination mechanisms, whereby national NGOs understand their role and are willing to assume responsibility.

#### **iii. NGO Fora**

In many countries there are NGO fora, sometimes for all NGOs, sometimes for international NGOs and sometimes for national NGOs. Where no forum exists in countries with a large programme and involvement of NGOs, UNHCR country offices should assist and support the setting up and management of an NGO forum, with or without international NGOs, as part of its support to national NGOs. This may need to include financial assistance. Guidelines must be drawn up for UNHCR offices on assisting and supporting NGO fora at the national level.

#### **iv. PARinAC NGO Focal Points and NGO Fora**

The PARinAC NGO focal point system must be reviewed and then strengthened. It is a potentially invaluable network for information sharing and support between national NGOs within a country and between countries.

## **v. Training**

Training is an important component of capacity building, and whilst it cannot be considered in isolation of other capacity building inputs, consideration must be given to identifying 'core competencies' for national NGO implementing partners, and to ensuring informal and formal training through:

- a) UNHCR
- b) Other NGOs
- c) External sources
- d) Placement/Internships/OJT
- e) Distance learning and self-study

## **vi. International NGOs**

In the early stages of most operations there tends to be many large international NGOs, a number of them with wide experience and ability to muster resources rapidly. As funding for an operation decreases, often due to other emergencies arising, so the international NGOs tend to leave, and national NGOs take over their programmes. Many international NGOs have a policy of identifying and working with a national NGO to whom they can hand over. However, there are often constraints to real capacity building due to both workload and limited funding for staff and training. UNHCR should introduce a new clause into project agreements with international NGOs to the effect that the NGO agrees, during the first six months of a project agreement, that it will attempt to identify a national/local/indigenous NGO with whom it can work and with whom it will plan a handover strategy, including ensuring the training and capacity building of the organisation. NGOs will have to include progress on identification, planning or implementation of a handover strategy in regular reports under the project. Implementation of such a plan will be dependent on additional funding being available for this purpose.

It is recognised that in a number of countries this will not be feasible, at least in the short term. Where it is not possible, an explanation should be provided.

## **vii. Operational Partnership Agreement**

The Operational Partnership Agreement, between UNHCR and individual NGOs on coordination and cooperation, including standards to which we will aim both operationally and in our personal and agency conduct, will be a useful tool. The text refers to the relationship between national and international NGOs, including the identification of national NGOs with whom they can work closely, as well as calling on international NGOs with local affiliates to support their activities and enhance capacity.

## **viii. Administrative Support**

If support to the activities of national NGOs and enhancement of their capacity is to be a reality, there will need to be, in many instances, increased financial support to national NGOs, who do not have a constituency through which they

can raise funds, and who do not come from 'donor' countries, which can be approached for financial support.

#### **ix. Links with other UN and Bilateral Agencies and their capacity building initiatives**

UNHCR's support to national NGOs must not be done in isolation of other activities in this field. UNHCR offices will assess the activities of bilateral and UN agencies undertaking capacity building activities and wherever possible our activities must complement or support the activities of others.

### **B. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES**

10. In each region common activities and training needs should be identified, which can be carried out at the regional level, including workshops/meetings that enable national NGOs both to improve their skills and to link up with other NGOs in the region on common issues of interest.

#### **11. Regional PARinAC meetings**

UNHCR will continue to focus on follow-up to the PARinAC process, including regional meetings. These will be refocused to involve the senior operational managers from national implementing partners in a region, who together with UNHCR country focal points will prepare country reports focusing on the achievements and the needs of national NGOs working with UNHCR, the setting up and functioning of national and regional coordination mechanisms, and will, to the extent possible, include a relevant training programme immediately on completion of the meeting. The overall objective of future PARinAC meetings will be to formulate and review national NGO strategy and activities.

### **C. COUNTRY LEVEL**

12. A Plan of Action to work with, support and enhance the capacity of national NGO implementing, and potential implementing, partners should be drawn up in each UNHCR country office, based on a detailed assessment. It is this local assessment and planning which is the key to successfully enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of national NGOs, and thus our partnership.

13. Activities with, and on behalf of, national NGOs will be a part of Country Operations Plans, and progress will be reported in regular reports from both NGOs and UNHCR.

#### **IV Other Issues**

14. **National NGOs with international links.** There are a number of international agencies (including Caritas Internationalis, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) who act as an international secretariat or parent body to national societies throughout the world. These already existing channels should serve to enable the international body to become involved in a capacity building partnership with national NGOs for refugees.

15. **Regional NGOs.** There are a number of small regional organisations, working in more than one country within a region, without a secure funding base and reliant on international support and assistance. In order to improve regional capacity these NGOs need to be supported, frequently with similar assistance to national NGOs. They should also be seen as a resource to be used for the capacity building of national NGOs from the same region.

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