HC Structured Dialogue in DRC – January 2014

Reflections on DRC UNHCR-NGO Dialogues in Kinshasa and Goma

There was clearly an interest and willingness – both among UNHCR and NGO staff - to discuss partnership and an appreciation of the stated objectives – including better information-sharing and transparency.

Content:

- HCR's IPs, OPs and others definitely have an appetite to better understand HCR's **country-specific as well as organizational partnership strategies**.
- The goal of **complementarity** was emphasised by both UNHCR and NGOs, with partners keen to understand how complementarities would be identified and achieved with operational partners (including how they can be involved in joint situation analysis and joint planning and advocacy). The complementary expertise of implementing partners was also underlined.
- More **inclusivity** in the formal planning processes of UNHCR, such as the Country Operations Plan (COP) was discussed and agreed.
- In Eastern DRC, there are several **well developed and functioning fora** for coordination and discussion which include UNHCR, NGOs and other relevant actors. While opportunities for more specific and time-sensitive situation analysis and planning with UNHCR would be welcomed, there was caution about establishing additional mechanisms for dialogue or planning with UNHCR in locations where clusters and inter-cluster meetings should serve that purpose.
- There was particular **interest in national capacity-development** and discussions included an interesting range of ideas from NGOs on how they could best maximise their own opportunities, skills and resources without necessarily calling on UNHCR to support all aspects of capacity development. Clusters and OCHA can also play a useful role.
- Opportunities to **better advocate together** and leverage the unique comparative advantage of each partner were discussed, with potential areas of collaboration including the plight of CAR refugees in Equateur, and the concerns of a shrinking humanitarian space in the context of planned stabilization activities conducted by MONUSCO.
- UNHCR-funded NGO partners would welcome further clarity on aspects of **the Implementing Framework** (selection, etc.) as conducted in DRC.
- There was an impression that **information-sharing** among UNHCR staff and between offices (Kinshasa –Goma) relating to key decisions and their rationale was not optimal; and more coordination among UNHCR staff on key messages would support discussions with partners. Similar communication gaps in NGOs might also contribute to perceived communication weaknesses.

Process:

The value of the meeting was primarily in gathering a mixed audience (NNGO, INGO, UNHCR staff) and discussing issues openly; group work produced the better conversations and allowed all to constructively participate.

Facilitation:
The symbolic value of having UNHCR GVA, ICVA and INTERACTION present conveyed the importance of the effort and clearly set the country-level dialogue within a formal framework prioritised by the High Commissioner. Going forward we agreed that out-of-country facilitators from all 3 parties do not necessarily have to be in the mission, particularly once some examples of methodologies have been developed (DRC and Pakistan).

Outcomes:
The event itself provided an opening and marked a willingness by both UNHCR and NGOs to collaborate more effectively. The event demonstrated institutional commitment by UNHCR to improve dialogue with NGOs.

Follow-up to this mission is however now important:

a) from the relevant HCR offices (both proactive initiatives as well as general openness to NGO requests for discussion/ joint advocacy, including on a bilateral basis) and
b) NGOs (better organising themselves to seek discussion with UNHCR of particular topics or concerns when needed; sharing relevant information with UNHCR, and not seeking to duplicate discussions or processes handled by other fora).

Recommendations:

- UNHCR / NGOs could organise groups interested in a particular topic (refugee response in Equateur) and UNHCR would provide a forum for such discussions in Kinshasa
- UNHCR could better include more and relevant NGOs, including Operational Partners) in the COP planning process in both Kinshasa and Goma
- When the NGO Consortium in Kinshasa is functioning again, the UNHCR Representative can/will regularly brief on UNHCR strategies and programmes.
- NGOs and UNHCR could hold informal and ad hoc consultations with interested NGOs on refugee and IDP return areas in the East, including multisector response, protection and related advocacy, seeking synergies and complementarities. This should complement not duplicate cluster-based and inter-cluster discussions.
- The UNHCR Representative in Goma could hold a less formal and shorter dialogue event in April or May to check in on progress and take the temperature of partnership, relating back to some of the themes addressed in January.

Looking Forward:
UNHCR, ICVA and InterAction at HQs are interested in any specific steps taken to strengthen different aspects of partnership, any good examples to share, and any general observations on the partnership climate between UNHCR and NGOs. They will check in with their respective colleagues a couple of times during the year to enquire and will seek to encourage further steps by both sides. Some highlights from the joint efforts in DRC will be included in an oral report on partnership at the Annual NGO Consultations.