

FOLLOW-UP TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S STRUCTURED DIALOGUE ON NGO-IFRC-UNHCR PARTNERSHIP

August 2013

The High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue with NGOs served as a platform to develop a series of recommendations (see the [Partnership Recommendations Paper, the outcome document](#)) on translating into action the five Principles of Partnership (PoP), to which UNHCR and partners are committed. UNHCR, ICVA, InterAction and their members and the IFRC committed to take these recommendations forward in the field as well as in various fora in 2013, including at the Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations. Subsequent to the 11 December 2012 HC's Dialogue, UNHCR and NGOs followed up together in various ways. They also ensured that the agenda of the 2013 Annual Consultations was shaped to carry forward follow-up work to the recommendations and to offer an opportunity to discuss more broadly cross-cutting partnership issues. The following summarises the state of play to date.

Taking the Dialogue to the Field

1) **Taking the Dialogue to the field** is key to ensuring better partnership. UNHCR and NGO colleagues in the field should take the time for joint reflection on the quality of partnership and their mutual expectations of collaboration, consultation, information-sharing and generally, transparency and mutual respect.

→ Various initiatives have been undertaken that illustrate additional efforts made by UNHCR and NGOs to strengthen strategic partnerships at field and regional level. For example, UNHCR invited ICVA and InterAction to participate in a [Real Time Evaluation of the Syrian refugee response](#) (May-June 2013), which involved a thorough and frank joint assessment and analysis of the operational response and joint identification of areas requiring further attention.

→ UNHCR and NGOs will encourage field operations and regional bureaux (UNHCR) / regional networks (NGOs) to expand on partnership opportunities especially in the areas highlighted by the Dialogue (e.g. advocacy). A guidance note was developed to facilitate reflection and review of NGO-UNHCR partnerships at field level. The intention is to roll out field level dialogue in 2013- 2014 and to offer support to a select number of operations.

Improving Joint Planning and Information-sharing (Dialogue Recommendations 1 & 2)

2) Programme instructions and guidelines over the years have always required UNHCR offices to carry out **joint assessments and planning with partners** and other stakeholders. Sectoral-level policies, strategies and assessments have also been increasingly developed in partnership. It is acknowledged, however, that in practice, some partners in certain operations may not feel truly engaged in strategic discussions where their views, expertise and priorities are properly considered. Key partners may not always be invited to participate in each other's strategic planning discussions and decisions that affect the operations in which they jointly work.

→ Further efforts are needed at field level to ensure that UNHCR and NGO partners engage in policy and strategy discussions and decision-making, especially where decisions affect their joint collaboration. UNHCR will continue to underscore the importance of this in all relevant

guidance and training, via support missions from HQs, engagement with Representatives. ICVA will disseminate information on the Dialogue outcomes and initiatives via monthly bulletins, targeted messaging, webinars and in some cases, field support missions.

→ A very [simple note on information-sharing](#) among partners was jointly developed and distributed to help discussions on mutual expectations at the field level.

Collaboration in the field of advocacy (Dialogue Recommendations 3, 4 &5)

3) At the Structured Dialogue, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs agreed to strengthen collaboration in the area of **advocacy**, acknowledging differences and the complementarities in roles, mandate and relationship to other stakeholders in any joint operation for refugees or stateless persons.

→ A [guidance note](#) was jointly developed to maximize the impact of advocacy through partnership at various levels (field, regional, global).

→ The theme of the June 2013 UNHCR-NGO Consultations was '*Advocating together for Protection.*' The Consultation included an [additional half-day session](#) dedicated to examining joint approaches, strategies and tools. The session was very well received and participants particularly highlighted opportunities for more concerted collaboration at the regional level. This will be pursued during the year and revisited at the 2014 Annual Consultations. The special advocacy session will become a recurring agenda item at the Consultations.

4) Participants in the Structured Dialogue agreed that they could partner strongly to **bring more attention to the rights and needs of IDPs**, and to raise IDPs on the international agenda.

→ The High Commissioner has decided to make the protection of IDPs the theme of his [Protection Dialogue in December 2013](#). These annual dialogues are informal discussions with a diverse array of stakeholders including governments, academics, community leaders and NGOs. NGO partners are contributing to both the preparations for and follow-up of the Dialogue.

→ Global advocacy for IDP protection is being strongly pursued by Global Protection Cluster (UNHCR and all participating agencies).

→ A session at the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Consultations was dedicated to the theme of achieving durable solutions for IDPs. The situation of IDPs living in urban areas and in transitional contexts were particularly highlighted in discussions and will be taken forward at the HC's December Dialogue. It was agreed that independent voices were crucial for holding authorities and organisations accountable to their respective roles and commitments with regard to IDPs.

5) Participants agreed an important platform on which to launch or build advocacy initiatives aimed at state responsibility in all regions is the set of **government pledges** made at the December 2011 commemoration of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Statelessness Convention.

→ UNHCR is strengthening the use of government pledges as a platform to launch or build advocacy initiatives. For example, the Statelessness Unit hosted a retreat with NGOs June 9-10 to look at opportunities to advocate together on statelessness issues, including in relation to [pledges made](#) by states to accede to both Statelessness Conventions.

Capacity development for national/ local NGOs (Dialogue Recommendation 6)

6) One of the recommendations from the Structured Dialogue was to strengthen UNHCR's institutional strategy for **capacity development of national/ local NGOs** on the basis of a trilateral partnership between UNHCR, international NGOs, and national NGOs. This will build on complementary capacities and roles as well as lessons learned from existing initiatives.

→ [Terms of reference](#) were jointly developed for an expert to conduct a review in two phases. The first phase will involve a mapping of existing trilateral initiatives undertaken by UNHCR and NGOs to strengthen the capacity of national/local NGO partners. The second phase will articulate the strategy going forward. Recruitment is on-going for an expert to carry out phase one.

Partnership in Urban Settings (Dialogue Recommendation 7)

7) UNHCR and partners agreed to strengthen their engagement and collaboration in **urban refugee settings**, taking forward together the implementation of UNHCR's Urban Refugee Policy, exploring innovative partnership approaches and identifying and promoting good practice. The goal is to support urban refugees to be active agents in meeting their needs and building upon their own coping strategies and demonstrated resilience.

→ A [joint task team on urban partnership](#) complements UNHCR's internal Steering Group on the implementation of UNHCR's urban refugee policy and is focusing on ways to [identify and promote the adoption of good practices](#). The task team developed [guidance on what constitutes best practice](#), and encouraged NGOs participating in the Annual Consultations to submit examples to the new [website](#), which will serve as a living tool for urban practitioners. The task team is exploring opportunities to support selected operations in urban settings.

→ During the Annual Consultation with NGOs, UNHCR and NGOs discussed collaboration in urban settings in several of the regional sessions led by UNHCR's Regional Bureaux with a view to expanding good practice. The best practice website was displayed during the Consultations, and feedback requested from NGO partners.

Strengthening Dialogue at Regional and Global levels (Dialogue Recommendation 8)

8) UNHCR and NGOs agreed to review the **current fora for dialogue** at various levels (field, regional and global, including the Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultation themselves), and to identify opportunities for strengthening strategic consultation, including identifying opportunities to broaden / deepen regional initiatives.

→ A [desk review](#) was conducted and the discussions at various sessions of the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Consultations identified the need to take further advantage of existing partnership fora at regional level. There may also be ways to strengthen regional preparation and participation in the Geneva-based Annual Consultations, which will be further explored.

→ A regional consultation on UNHCR-IFRC-NGO Partnership will be held in Bangkok on 20 September 2013 to explain the Structured Dialogue process to actors in the Asia Pacific region and explore opportunities for strengthened partnership, advocacy, capacity building.

Addressing partnership problems in the field (Dialogue Recommendation 9)

9) During the Structured Dialogue, NGOs called for a more transparent and agreed process for **handling issues of concern** that needed to be raised above and beyond field level. There is a need for frank and constructive handling of difficult issues and disagreements without fear of repercussion. When issues have not been solved at the field level or have broader ramifications beyond the operation concerned, these issues can be escalated to the HQs of the NGO / UNHCR, in a flexible manner, involving a number of relevant counterparts. UNHCR and NGO senior leadership are all committed to an open door policy, and are willing to address significant concerns of NGO partners that cannot be resolved otherwise.

→ To this end, a simple [flow-chart and description](#) of the possible escalation of an issue from field level to HQs, indicating both supervisory lines as well as more neutral, facilitating actors to support problem resolution.

→ The [special session on partnership at the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Consultations](#) focused on difficulties around problem solving and conflict resolution, recognizing that these may often be linked to personalities. While HQs level support and intervention may be helpful and is often solicited, participants agreed that frank and direct discussions at the field level remain the first and main entry point for problem resolution. As the Structured Dialogue is rolled out at field level, this issue will be further explored.

UNHCR-NGO Partnership: Marking progress (Dialogue Recommendation 10)

10) A simple yearly **progress report on partnership** was recommended as an outcome of the Structured Dialogue.

→ At the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Consultations, an oral update was provided to NGOs attending the [special session on partnership](#).

→ In future, this will be repeated and/or an update will be provided through the various plenaries, thematic and regional sessions depending on the theme. Feedback from selected field-level dialogues may also provide content to the reporting, as feasible. A written note such as this one could highlight specific initiatives relating to the Dialogue recommendations and could be made available on ICVA, Interaction and UNHCR websites.