



International
Council of
Voluntary
Agencies



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Structured Dialogue on UNHCR-NGO Partnership
West Africa Mission Report
Dakar, 9-10 December 2014**

Introduction

In Dakar on 10-11 December 2014 ICVA supported two interactive events to advance UNHCR-NGO partnership in West Africa: the first an NGO-only workshop on partnership, and the second was a UNHCR-NGO consultation. They came as part of the follow-up to the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on partnership with NGOs and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, which was initiated in 2011 to review and strengthen collaboration in the field. The workshop goals were to facilitate discussion among partners on their experiences working together, to disseminate the Dialogue in the region, and to develop an action plan for further strengthening partnership in West Africa.

The West African workshop comes in the wake of two successful country-specific missions to Pakistan and the DRC, and an Asia-Pacific regional consultation in Bangkok. It is a first step towards rolling out the Dialogue at the regional level in West Africa.

The workshop with NGOs on the first day was conducted by Liliane Bitong, Louisa Shea, and Malick Ndiaye from the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). On the second day, ICVA was joined in leading discussions by representatives from UNHCR's Regional Office based in Dakar: Mathijs Le Rutte, the UNHCR Country Representative, Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, senior regional protection officer, and Nicolas Sanchez, program officer from. 23 participants from 16 NGOs, both national and international, and two young refugees living in Dakar joined the discussions.

Organisation

The dialogues were held over two days. The first, which was reserved for partners only, allowed partners to meet and share their experiences in the field. The second facilitated a discussion between NGOs and UNHCR staff on the Principles of Partnership and their application in day-to-day operations.

The first day's NGO discussion was divided into three sections: 1) an NGO discussion leading to the creation of a "partnership tree" listing positive and challenging experiences working with UNHCR and identifying key areas for action; 2) an ICVA-led introduction to the Principles of Partnership and to the Structured Dialogue's ten recommendations; and 3) a brainstorming session to identify concrete strategies to improve partnership in joint planning, coordination, and procedures.

The second day included UNHCR in a consultations divided into two parts. The morning consisted of three presentations: a report on the first day's work; an introduction to UNHCR's work in West Africa; and a presentation of the Principles of Partnership and the Structured Dialogue. The afternoon was dedicated to small NGO-UNHCR working groups tasked with coming up with action plans in three key areas identified by the NGOs: information sharing, joint advocacy and capacity strengthening.

General Observations

- The NGO-only discussion proved extremely valuable as it allowed INGO and national NGO partners to share their experiences openly and to deepen their own relationships. More importantly, it enabled the NGOs to set the agenda for the following day, by identifying those partnership issues they deemed most pertinent for further action.
- The key partnership areas identified as most pressing by the participants were: joint planning, information sharing, joint advocacy, and capacity strengthening. The latter three were taken up with UNHCR on the second day.
- It is important to stress that neither UNHCR nor the NGO partners were particularly familiar with the Structured Dialogue. This was true also of the missions conducted in Bangkok, Pakistan and the DRC, and underlines the importance of actively rolling out the Dialogue, and ensuring that regional and national UNHCR offices are informed of the ten recommendations and the need to actively work to improve partnerships.
- The workshop initiative was warmly welcomed by the participants who expressed a keen interest in meeting fellow partners in the region, sharing their experiences, frustrations and ideas, and in the opportunity to dialogue with UNHCR representatives. For national NGOs in particular, the opportunity to meet other NGOs from the region, and to speak directly with UNHCR, is rare and valued. A number of partners expressed the feeling that they were not treated with respect by UNHCR (examples given were of UNHCR representatives showing up unannounced and demanding to visit the premises, of materials being whisked away at the end of the implementing period 'down to the last place mat'). This seems to be a question of poor communication more than anything else, and the workshop provided an important opportunity to clarify expectations and to help partners better understand UNHCR procedures, capacities, and limitations.
- It is also worth noting that several of the recommendations that emerged from the workshop echo suggestions made in the guidance notes that accompanied the Dialogue (the note on improving information-sharing, for instance), or in the recommendations that emerged from the Dialogue's Review of Consultation Fora. In other words, a lot of good practices and suggestions are already in existence, but partners have either not heard about them, or the suggestions have not been implemented.

Recommendations from Day One:

NGOs worked together to formulate, and answer, three questions on partnership:

1. 'How can we ensure that NGOs actively participate, with UNHCR, in establishing a regional strategy for the protection of refugees?'
2. How could one improve coordination between UNHCR and its partners on the ground?
3. How could implementing procedures (contracts, logistics, etc.) be improved?

The following suggestions emerged. ICVA will consult with UNHCR West Africa and participating NGOs to decide which of the following recommendations will be taken up, how (and by whom).

Joint Planning:

1. **NGOs must be kept informed of upcoming planning fora (ExCom, COP) and make every effort to participate in them.** UNHCR should publicize the fora and actively invite members to take part. ICVA can serve as an important platform for enabling NGO voices to be heard in Geneva (e.g. the NGO Statement at ExCom).
2. NGOs must be kept informed of existing regional and national strategies: a mapping of existing strategies, by theme, could be created and posted online for easy access.
3. A mapping of existing coordination mechanisms (following the OCHA' 'Who does What Where' model) would allow NGOs to better situate themselves.
4. In addition to these mapping exercises, some partners raised the possibility of working on a five-year regional plan for better coordination.

Improving Coordination

1. **Better coordination requires clarification of the chains of command within UNHCR, so that NGO partners can know to whom they should address their queries.** The Guidance Note on Problem Resolutions is problematic here, as it suggests that problems encountered in the field should first be dealt with at the local level, between the Head of NGO Field Operations and the UNHCR Head of Field/Head of Sub-Field Office, this despite the fact that the UNHCR Head of Field is very often not in a position to respond to the problem.
2. Joint advocacy campaigns are key to better coordination, and would have the added advantage of giving rise to joint fundraising efforts.
3. In cases in which the cluster system is not activated, coordination mechanisms must be put in place, and all efforts made to ensure that such mechanism are inclusive (i.e. not limited to UNHCR implementing partners)
4. When resources are cut, it is imperative that UNHCR share responsibility with the partners for what this means in the field. UNHCR cannot cut funds and expect partners to "to the same with less." (The example of Liberia was

given, where funds were slashed, and the partners were left to bear responsibility for the shortfall on their own.)

Improving Procedures for UNHCR-Funded Project Implementation

1. UNHCR should **allow NGOs greater autonomy in terms of logistics** (in choosing a mechanic for instance) so as to simplify and accelerate work on the ground.
2. Simplify reporting procedures by harmonising volume and recipient.
3. Ensure that UNHCR gives feedback on submitted reports.
4. **Financial procedures (the evaluation of requests) must be sped up**, so that NGOs can begin their work on time, and without risk.
5. “We don’t know whom we are supposed to talk with to have our questions answered”: it would be important to clarify decision-making chains within UNHCR so that partners know where to go for answers.
6. **When resources are cut, it is imperative that UNHCR share responsibility with the partners** for what this means in the field. UNHCR cannot cut funds and expect partners to “to the same with less” (as was the case in Liberia, where funds were slashed, and the partners were left to bear all responsibility on their own.)

Recommendations and Way Forward: Workshop Day Two

Discussions on the second day led to an action plan focused on three key areas proposed by the partners: information sharing, joint advocacy, and capacity strengthening. ICVA will consult with UNHCR West Africa and participating NGOs to decide which of the following recommendations will be taken up, how (and by whom).

Information Sharing

1. Mapping existing information fora is crucial as many such fora exist, but most NGOs do not know about them. A centralised information-sharing site would be useful. Identify gaps and address the question of accessibility (who has access to information channels, and who does not) to ensure that all are included.
2. Strengthen existing tools, such as email groups, to facilitate information exchange. UNHCR could use email groups more effectively to communicate with partners in the region.
3. At the regional level, UNHCR and ICVA will work together to come up with a mechanism to better include partners in policy and protection discussions. A first step would be for UNHCR to systematically share policy notes with partners at the regional level through email lists. Another idea is to have a ICVA-led working group at the regional level, where partners could meet (in person or by phone/skype) to discuss issues related to UNHCR policies and

practices on a monthly basis.

4. Exchange good practices.
5. Evaluate the possibility of creating a regional community of practice.
6. Invite all partners to take an active role on UNHCR's regional blog, Kora @ www.kora.unhcr.org

Capacity Strengthening

1. ICVA's regional representative, Liliane Bitong, is leading an initiative to move tripartite capacity strengthening forward. NGOs are strongly encouraged to contact her if they are interested in participating in an ICVA-led working group on capacity strengthening.
2. Collect "Good Practices" and disseminate them.

Advocacy

1. Prepare an inventory of priority themes for each organisation, to allow NGOs with similar advocacy interests to connect with one another.
2. Consider creating a Task Team on Statelessness, modelled on the Urban Refugees Task Team (<http://www.urbangoodpractices.org>)
3. The refugee coordinator at UNHCR should consult with partners at the onset of a crisis for better collective action.

Annex

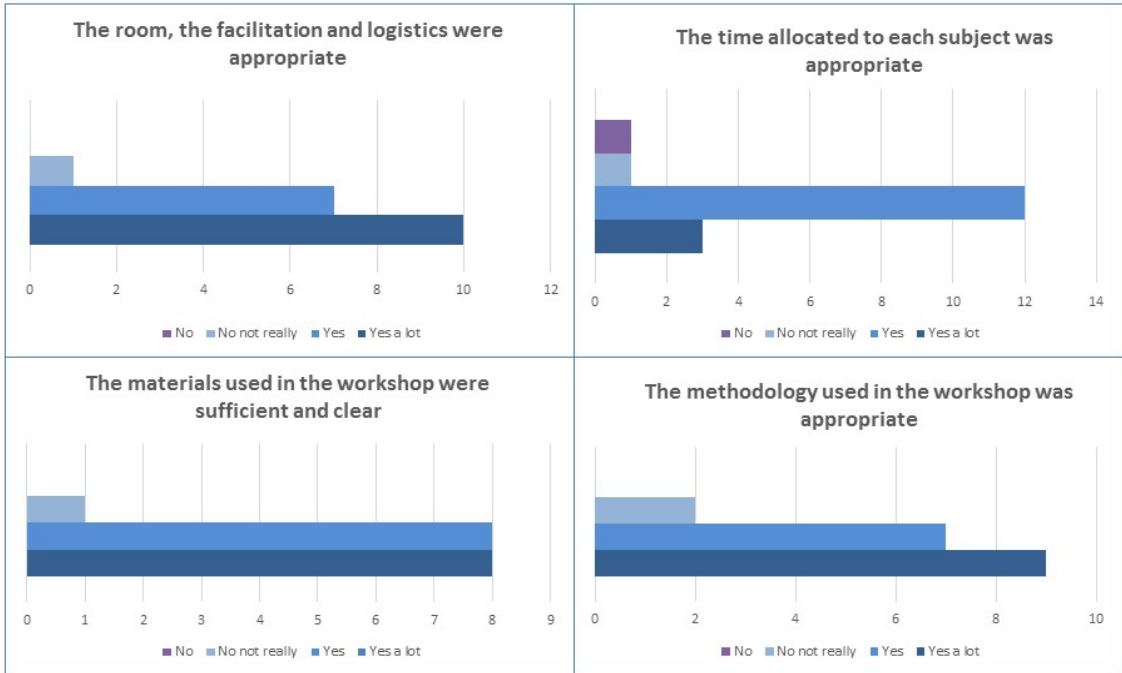
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Dialogue sur le partenariat entre le HCR et les ONG

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Evaluation



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