

The Pre-eminence of Cultural Competence in Programme Design and Implementation

The New York Declaration of 2016 well and truly represents one of the mile stone pieces in the global search for effective and durable solutions for the complex challenges humanity is facing with increasing displacement and large scale human mobility. The novelty of the Declaration can and should also be appreciated from the point of view of the fact that it calls for a more comprehensive approach that focuses not only on humanitarian but also on development efforts with a vision to move the needle from encampment to entitlement and empowerment of refugees with a trajectory towards resilience and self-reliance .

The very fact that the world community of nations stood together, with a renewed commitment to ensuring more effective and comprehensive response to the complex challenges besetting refugees and migrants, uniquely signifies the strong sense of solidarity that facilitated the endorsement of the New York Declaration.

What is even more refreshing, in a practical sense, is the very massive and extensive effort with which the UNHCR has been shepherding the development of the necessary policy and operational frameworks to transform the Declaration into action with broad-based participation of the critical stakeholders including representatives of Member States, civil societies, the private sector, academia, youth, refugees, etc., The fact that the process, leading to the Global Compact on Refugees, which consists of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Programme of Action, is successfully nearing its completion should also be considered a feat of paramount achievement.

The sustained focus on the development of the Global Compact, the CRRF and the Programme of Action, based on a series of consultations and thematic discussions, has served its purpose not only in terms of mobilization of ideas and recommendations from a wide range of important stakeholders but also in terms of popularization of the effort with an increasing commitment and mind set change. Indeed, the immense diversity of views and recommendations, generated in the series of consultations and thematic discussion, has a solid building block for the development of a strong Global Compact on Refugees to ensure effective implementation of the vision enshrined in the New York Declaration with broad-based engagement of the critical stakeholders.

However, as much as the deliberations were very thorough and almost all the relevant issues are very well captured in the discussions and recommendations, we are of the view that a few things around the issue of cultural competence and relevance still need to be considered in the finalization of the content and the approach that facilitates the implementation of the Programme of Action. While lots of issues are covered in the recommendations made to be included in the Programme of Action, none of them seem to speak to the importance of cultural competence and relevance in programme design and implementation.

Addressing this omission in time helps to add some balance before all the 'I's are dotted and all the 'T's are crossed to finalize the Programme of Action. It is important to recognize the fact that cultural competence and relevance is what, more than the quality of programme design and the amount of funding, determines the degree to which programme implementation succeeds in a given context.

More specifically, we would like to suggest the following to be considered to increase the likelihood of success in the implementation of the Programme of Action in each and every context.

1. It will be useful to clarify the approach as to how the Programme of Action can be designed and implemented in each context, i.e., the process as to how to ensure a better fit for each programme within a given context defined by a set of cultural beliefs and practices
2. It will be better if the Programme of Action is considered as a living document, rather than a finished product, in order to allow flexibility at all levels to ensure further development and possible adjustment, in terms of cultural competence, in each context.
3. The pre-eminence of cultural competence and relevance needs to be mainstreamed organizationally at all levels including at the level of human resource training and development policies and practices with a commitment to a comprehensive code of conduct based not only on rules but also on relationships.