APRRN – ICVA – Mercy Malaysia Workshop on Capacity Strengthening

Follow-Up to the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on UNHCR-IFRC-NGO Partnership

With the support of PRM
Monday 19 September 2016, The Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok

Summary: This workshop brought participants up-to-date on the status of draft UNHCR operational guidelines for capacity strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO partners. Participants learned about existing capacity strengthening initiatives like Urban Refugees and the African NGO Platform. They tested out a new project idea called the NGO-2-NGO staff exchange. Although more time is needed to flesh out a detailed plan of action, several practical next steps could be taken in the near future to advance this important theme identified by the Structured Dialogue on UNHCR-IFRC-NGO partnership and underscored in the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain commitments.

1. Background

There is general recognition that UNHCR partnerships and collaboration with NGOs and community-based organizations are vitally important, and increasingly so. In 2015, national NGOs (NNGOs) comprised 584 of the 937 UNHCR implementing partners with Project Partnership Agreements (2015 figures are provisional). Another 168 were international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). All three parties – UNHCR, INGOs and NNGOs – have unique capacities, characteristics and qualities which, if complemented by each another, can contribute to more effectively serving refugees and other persons of concern.

The need for a complementary NGO capacity strengthening, focused especially on NNGOs, has long been recognized by UNHCR and was highlighted during the UNHCR-IFRC-NGO High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on Partnership. In 2012, one of the key recommendations was to develop a more comprehensive, strategic, and systematic approach to bolstering one another's capacities, to collectively respond to operational requirements. Based on this assessment, UNHCR and ICVA worked together on the delivery of a 2014 survey that identified numerous gaps among partners, capacities felt most important for NNGOs to achieve, and mechanisms suggested to strengthen capacity. Based on this survey, draft Operational Guidelines for Capacity Strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO Partners have been developed (yet to be published).

More recently, at the World Humanitarian Summit, UNHCR committed to:

- Expand its investment in the institutional capacity building of national partners
- Engage with first responders at the local level as equal partners in emergency response and fostering their participation in coordination mechanisms
- Transfer at least 25% of its programme expenditures to national first responders by 2020

In the Operational Guidelines, the following strategies for institutional and complementary capacity strengthening were identified[1]:

- Establish a global Advisory Group with focal points (UNHCR, INGO, NNGO).
- Agree on countries for possible pilot projects on capacity strengthening.
- Develop a step-by-step approach in the agreed country (name in-country focal points, hold discussions with UNHCR and interested INGOs and NNGOs, develop pilot projects).
- In the projects, identify gaps, then mechanisms to address the gaps and improve capacities
- Access available resources, and benefit from the work already done by others – including UNHCR Malaysia, the Africa NGO Platform, and Save the Children and CaLP capacity strengthening tools.

2. Aim of the workshop

The aim of this interactive forum was to collectively: 1) take stock of and learn lessons from existing capacity strengthening initiatives; 2) identify current gaps and opportunities for organizations to contribute; 3) generate feedback on the proposed NGO-2-NGO staff exchange programme; and 4) brainstorm inputs into a strategic way forward.

Methodology

In order best frame the workshop and assess its success based on the participants' expectations, facilitators developed a pre-workshop questionnaire as well as an evaluation form, both looking at awareness on the capacity strengthening discussion at global level, the level of engagement on capacity strengthening initiatives, and expectations for the half-day workshop. Analysis of both documents revealed a strong interest from participants in learning more about capacity strengthening initiatives and see how new partnerships could be developed around them.

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[1] pages 8 – 11 of the Operational Guidelines

After some welcoming remarks by Lara O'Neill, Deputy Refugee Coordinator from PRM, the workshop started with a session to bring participants up-to-date on where things stand with regard to the draft "Operational Guidelines for Capacity Strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO partners". This update was given from Geneva by Melissa Pitotti, Head of Policy (ICVA), Bob White (UNHCR), and Fatima Sherif-Nor, Head of the Implementing Partnership Management Service at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The rest of the consultation proceeded by presentation of two existing initiatives on capacity strengthening, Urban Refugees and the Africa NGO Platform. It brought us in the last part of the workshop to reflect in breakout groups on remaining gaps and opportunities based on those existing initiatives and a project idea called the NGO-2-NGO Staff Exchange.

3. Food for Thought and Background Information

The information below reflects key themes that emerged from the plenary discussion following ICVA and UNHCR's update on the Capacity Strengthening discussion at global level.

A) On UNHCR's challenges of consulting and involving affected populations:

As one of the nine commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability states, "[c]ommunities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them."[2] The importance of engaging with PoCs was once more demonstrated during the last UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations on Youth. UNHCR is currently working towards this standard of engagement, involving its country offices' performance to indicate how much they include persons of concerns in their programmes and operations. It helps enhancing community participation, and ensures UNHCR's closer and more direct contact with refugees.

When looking at questions of partnership more specifically, the Structured Dialogue is taking several years. We need to take a long-term view, especially when looking at transforming capacities. It is through concrete and specific suggestions (sometimes as simple as creating inclusive mailing lists) that we can improve information sharing and therefore, start transforming capacities.

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[2] Core Humanitarian Standard: Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, 2014, CHS Alliance, Groupe URD and the Sphere Project

B) *On targeting community-based networks without a legal status and the challenge of funding projects partnering with such kind of entities:*

Community-based networks are already organizing themselves with their own limited capacities. This community-led process needs to be maintained and supported, given their high-level knowledge of the context and the already established connections with other networks. Yet, challenges remain around supporting community-based/frontline responders on three different aspects.

First, it is always challenging to demonstrate the impacts of the work being down at the community level, and therefore, prove that it is worth investing locally. Second, donors are being under increasing pressure, which impacts their level of requirements. It therefore becomes more and more challenging for local actors to meet these requirements. This brings us to the question of risk analysis and management strategies imposed by donors to their implementing partners: How can we collectively look at risk, share it, and tolerate a certain amount of it? Could it be mitigated through better analysis[3], information sharing[4], and peer-to-peer learning[5]?

While funding stays one of the biggest challenges (especially with one-year funded project), the current Grand Bargain discussion could be supportive of these kinds of initiatives through:
- ➢ A shift to a multi-year funding approach
- ➢ Increasing and supporting multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, by incorporating capacity strengthening in partnership agreements.
- ➢ Having a better understanding and tracking of how funding flows to frontline responders and implement UNHCR's WHS commitments on transferring at least 25 % of its programme expenditures to national first responders by 2020.

By addressing the question of capacity strengthening, we would better be able to adopt a bottom-up approach, and engage all actors in a long-term process, to ensure a "as local as possible and as international as necessary" approach.

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[3] As part of ICVA's Less Paper More Aid Initiative

[4] Through for example ICVA's Humanitarian Learning Stream

[5] The NGO-2-NGO Exchange Programme could be one way to do peer-to-peer learning (more details below)

4. Existing initiatives on Capacity-Strengthening:

A) *Urban Refugees:*

Urban Refugees was created in 2012, based on the observation that 58% of refugees live in urban areas and not in camps, and that there is therefore the need to shift the approach to better address the needs.
Urban Refugees work around 3 programs:
- ➤ **supporting** community-based organizations (piloting this project in Malaysia);
- ➤ **advocating** for policy change
- ➤ **connecting** (NGOs, to work with Urban refugees in different countries so to enhance the existing knowledge around how to create successful urban refugee programs)

The organization believes in the power of peer-to-peer learning. NGOs face the same kind of challenges when supporting urban refugees. Yet, when we look on the ground, there are many successful programs on urban refugees. **A need to develop a systematic approach to facilitate peer-to-peer learning was therefore identified**.

Urban Refugees developed a platform where good practices identified by UNHCR and NGOs are featured. These good practices relate to different areas (education, housing, livelihoods and security). A Replication Toolbox, along with the possibility to request help to replicate is available for good practices to be shared, accompanied by more information on the level of difficulties, the objectives, challenges, impacts and tips for success. If help to replicate is requested, Urban Refugees facilitates a 6-month mentoring period, supporting the NGO to develop and adapt the good practice to its own context.
This online platform is also a space for affected populations as well as community-based organizations to share their own good practices, and allows mutual capacity strengthening through the available tools, guidance and the mentoring programme.

B) *African NGO Platform (Via Skype):*

The African NGO Platform is a group of 60 national NGOs, supported by the Africa Regional Bureau, which works on three topics:
- ➤ **Lobbying**;
- ➤ Looking at **localization**;
- ➤ **Capacity strengthening**

Once needs and problems were identified, agencies such as UNHCR were asked to support the development of those capacities. Results quickly demonstrated how successful and useful the project was. As an example, in the West Africa region, 100% of UNHCR partners

have good audit since skills were strengthened in terms of programme management and partnership.

Recommendations:
- ➢ **Sense of ownership**: It is important for members of the platform to get a sense of ownership around the initiative, in order to ensure sustainability and avoid competition. This sense of ownership can be ensured by:
  - o Giving responsibility to members in the management of the platform, using innovative tools and technology
  - o Work in rotation: In the case of the African NGO Platform, sub-regions would lead the platform from one period to another.
- ➢ **Build on the members' strengths**:
  - o <u>Finance</u>: 80% of the African NGO Platform's capacity depends on its own resources. Members have to pay small fees as a small contribution.
  - o <u>Use the experience of the members</u>: NGOs have a lot of experience that can be built on to reinforce capacities, but also to influence what is happening at the regional and global levels. In this way, skills can be strengthened inter-regionally.

The Africa NGO Platform is a <u>good example of south-south learning exchange</u>.

On the localization of capacity building strategy:
- o Once members of a capacity strengthening exchange have expressed their needs, it is possible to prioritize them and therefore, firstly build on local knowledge. In the case of the Africa NGO Platform, human rights lawyers from South Africa were mobilized for their legal knowledge, which was shared with other members of the task force.
- o While resources are always a challenge, the example of the African NGO Task Force shows that it can work with good management and limited resources. An initial mapping exercise of the existing resources (not only in terms of finance, but also in terms of skills) on UNHCR and NGOs' side is very useful in order to prioritize and ensure good management.
- o Usually, the problem of NGOs is not necessarily capacities.
  - o Are there discrepancies in the payment between INGOs and NNGOs?
  - o Is NNGOs' problem accountability rather than capacity?
  - o While more and more INGOs are going local, we should rather see localization through a complementary approach, supporting the right NGO (being international or national) that has the capacity.

C) Introduction to proposal for NGO-2-NGO Exchange Programme:

Next the proposal for a NGO-2-NGO Exchange Programme was discussed. A mapping survey (as part of the Guidelines) conducted in 2014 revealed that "inter-agency exchange", "twinning and mentoring" as well as "sharing experiences" are top priorities among potential mechanisms to strengthen NNGO capacities. The Operational Guidelines also discussed several recommendations, among them the proposal to establish pilot projects in a few locations.

The Exchange Program would provide an opportunity for NGO staff to learn directly from other NGOs (both NNGOs and INGOs) who may have skills and expertise in specific areas. The approach recognizes the wide expertise that exists within the NGO sector and is a space for direct peer-to-peer learning. It also offers the opportunity for stronger and better understanding as well as networking within the NGO community.[6]

5. Roundtable discussions

A) Information-sharing and consulting as first steps towards strengthening capacities:

Discussions converged on the point that **capacity strengthening starts with ensuring that information on procedures and programmatic issues is made available to all and shared with relevant actors**. Knowledge has to come first, and capacity second, as a way to know why we do something before actually doing it. Also, prioritizing knowledge and information-sharing ensure an ethical and thoughtful rather than mechanic humanitarian response. Sharing information is more specifically important when actors are partnering in their programmes and operations (in the case of UNHCR and its NGO partners for example). By sharing information, the entities are informed of any changes, and can improve their own knowledge and understanding of the system and different policies in place. A second step identified towards capacity strengthening would be an **institutionalized consultation among partners** (through ToRs or MoUs for example, or regular fora bringing stakeholders together). Indeed, participants at the workshop realized that if they were properly consulted when their partners are willing to make a change in their operations and programmes, they would be able to get a better understanding of the overarching humanitarian response and its challenges. Better understanding the humanitarian response would also ensure that actors are in a better capacity to guarantee aid delivery to persons of concern as the guiding principle. Knowledge and awareness were indeed identified as positive factors in maintaining an overarching principled goal. Finally, **information-sharing** (and if possible consulting process) **should not happen in silos** but across sectors working in

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[6] *For further information, you can find the concept note in annex*

the same context and where operations and projects can affect one another. For example, academia as well as development work are the kind of sectors humanitarian workers should exchange information with.

B) *On the NGO-2-NGO Staff Exchange Programme:*

The concept of the NGO-2-NGO staff exchange programme was well received, but several challenges were identified:

- ➢ **Transparency:** The programme would require commitments from NGOs to be fully transparent and share all documents, which might be challenging for some.
- ➢ **Competition:** Lack of trust between organizations (ability or willingness). Because NGOs often compete for the same resources, they might not be willing to share information and/or take on some of the administrative and logistics aspects of the project.
- ➢ **Resources:** It might be challenging for small entities to find the appropriate resources to get involved in such kind of exchange in terms of:
  - o Staff: It is challenging for a small entity to let one staff go for an exchange in another organization, and to get an extra staff from an organization around for a certain amount of time.
  - o Security: A NGO with less resources might not be able to ensure the security and protection of workers during an exchange.
  - o Language: If the exchange takes place across countries or regions, language might a challenge. Also, a NGO with limited resources would find the provision of interpretation difficult.
- ➢ **Leadership:** Successful initiatives are usually initially taken forward by a strong actor with capacities, like the UNHCR Africa Bureau for the Africa NGO Platform. Incentives are needed to encourage other strong actors to engage.

Aspects to consider:

- ➢ **Ensure ownership**: To avoid some of the above-mentioned challenges identified, it is important that actors involved in the exchange feel ownership. This can be done through small financial and/or administrative contributions from each actor involved[7].
- ➢ **On timeline and steps**: The NGO-2-NGO Staff Exchange Programme could happen in 2 phases: First, a portal could be created where people develop tools, share practices (through online sessions on specific topics), and carry out peer-to-peer mentoring. A second phase would allow the actual exchange of people, based on a specific timeline and a specific ToR.

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[7] As already experienced in the ICVA's Less Paper More Aid Initiative, and the Africa NGO Platform

➢ **On actors involved:**
   o By broadening the scope of the exchange, it could allow other relevant actors to get involved, such as the non NGO local actors and the academia.
   o A suggestion was also made to refer to it as a "Civil society mutual learning programme"
   o The exchange could get support from a broader range of actors in order to balance the scope of the project with limited resources. Potential actors included a network of former NGO workers who would be willing to share their skills with others, an informal support group for exchanging ideas, large voluntary networks such as UN volunteers.

➢ **On capacities:**
   o **Strengthening capacities of people or of an organization?** Experience demonstrates that capacity strengthening projects tend to focus on strengthening capacities of individuals within organizations rather than the organization itself. Once capacitated, the person may look for opportunities in a new organization, which allow him/her to develop and apply new skills.
      ⇨ The exchange must ensure that the new capacities are retained in organizations (through a NGO management framework, ensuring strengthened capacities are directly structurally integrated into organization, for example) and that it does not repeat the issue of strengthening NNGOs to serve INGOs.
   o There was also a mention that the capacities and understanding of donors also have to be strengthened.

6. Ways forward

Participants agreed that they could not design a detailed plan of action during the workshop given the number of challenges that still need to be addressed, but they could expand from three NGOs to others who want to be involved in the way forward.

Components of the NGO-2-NGO Exchange concept could taken forward in existing initiatives, such as existing APRRN's working groups, Urban Refugees' Mentoring Programme and other capacity strengthening initiatives that are already working well. In the meantime, practical actions could be taken already e.g. webinars, making available a webpage referencing all existing capacity strengthening initiaitves and establishing mailing lists for UNHCR Partners to exchange on different matters. These steps will be discussed in consultation with participants of the workshop.

7. Annexes

Annex 1: List of participants

First name	Last name	Organisation	Country	E-Mail
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The pre-workshop questionnaire was done online by the participants. It is accessible HERE.

Annex 3: Evaluation Form

Capacity Strengthening Workshop
Post-Evaluation Form
19.09.16.

Understanding & Awareness

1) On a scale from 0 to 5, how would you rate your level of awareness & understanding of the discussion on capacity strengthening happening at the global level, through:

    a. The Operational Guidelines for Capacity Strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO partners: *0 = not aware at all ; 5 = fully aware*

        0   1   2   3   4   5

    b. The UNHCR-IFRC-NGO High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on Partnership: *0 = not aware at all ; 5 = fully aware*

        0   1   2   3   4   5

Level of engagement

1) Is your organization involved in any **new** capacity strengthening initiatives **since the workshop**? *Please note that your involvement can be at various levels (strategic ; planning ; financial ; implementation etc)*
Yes   No

    a. If yes, which **new** initiative is your organization now involved in? (Title, Country/Region, partners)
    _____

2) Has your commitment/engagement towards capacity strengthening project implementation increased with this workshop?
Yes   A little   Not really   Not at all

On the workshop

3) Tick the box if your expectations for this workshop were met in terms of:

Learn about capacity strengthening initiatives
Develop new partnerships around (existing or not) capacity strengthening
Share the work your organization does on the topic
Join discussions to take concrete actions and implement pilot projects
Other – please explain:
_____
_____

4) From 0 to 5, how would you rate the quality of this workshop in terms of:
   0 = Very bad ; 5 = Excellent

   a. Content
      0   1   2   3   4   5

   b. Facilitation/Running of the half-day
      0   1   2   3   4   5

   c. Venue
      0   1   2   3   4   5

5) Would you have any recommendations (content ; structure ; agenda ; others)
   _____
   _____

Capacity Strengthening Workshop
Roundtable discussions
19.09.16.
15:30 – 17:00
Guiding questions for facilitators

1/ On existing capacity-strengthening initiatives:

a) Based on the existing initiatives on capacity-strengthening discussed in the previous sessions, what are the **remaining gaps** that prevent to take the work on capacity strengthening to the next level?

b) How can we avoid some of the common **pitfalls** experienced in previous capacity strengthening initiatives?

c) Based on the existing initiatives on capacity-strengthening discussed in the previous sessions, what are **the opportunities** to take the work on capacity-strenghtning to another level?

2/ Steps towards the next level:

a) **What can your organization do** to enhance its own capacity in partnership with others and/or support others in strengthening their capacity?

b) What needs to happen to take further **the NGO-2-NGO Staff Exchange Programme**? (Feedback on the project welcome)

c) What **skills/capacities/people** need to be exchanged?

d) From today's workshop, any other **ideas on capacity strengthening** that need to explored?

NGO-2-NGO:
Staff Exchange to Boost Organizational Capacity
Concept Note

1. Background

In October 2015, ICVA called for a meeting to advance planning towards the Structured Dialogue's recommendation regarding a strategy promoting capacity strengthening.

When presiding over the December 2012 meeting of the UNHCR-IFRC-NGO Structured Dialogue on Partnership, the UNHCR High Commissioner António Guterres reiterated that UNHCR cannot meet the needs of its persons of concern alone: it requires strong partnership with the NGO community and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. Structured Dialogue participants recognized the need for a more comprehensive, strategic, and systematic approach to bolstering one another's capacities to collectively respond to operational requirements. One of the major recommendations of the Structured Dialogue focused on capacity strengthening of national NGOs (NNGOs), and reinforcing and building on capacities of UNHCR, international NGOs (INGOs) and NNGOs to optimal effect on the basis of a trilateral partnership.

Against this background, UNHCR initiated the development of "Operational Guidelines for Capacity Strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO partners". The purpose of these Operational Guidelines is to provide guidance and suggestions for complementary and mutual capacity strengthening. These Guidelines are intended for UNHCR country offices and international and national NGO partners. It provides ideas on mechanisms and approaches which can be used to build and strengthen mutual capacity, ultimately for more effective support to refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, returnees, and other persons of concern.

A mapping survey (as part of the Guidelines) conducted in 2014 revealed that "inter-agency exchange", "twinning and mentoring" as well as "sharing experiences" are top priorities among potential mechanisms to strengthen NNGO capacities. The Operational Guidelines also discussed several recommendations, among them the proposal to establish pilot projects in a few locations.

2. The idea

In the first quarter of 2016 several ICVA members got together to further advance the discussions and brainstorm ideas. It was during these meetings where the idea of a NGO Exchange Program was born.

The Exchange Program would provide an opportunity for NGO staff to learn directly from other NGOs (both NNGOs and INGOs) who may have skills and expertise in

specific areas. The approach recognizes the wide expertise that exists within the NGO sector and is a space for direct peer-to-peer learning. It also offers the opportunity for stronger and better understanding as well as networking within the NGO community.

3. Details

List of skills required:
The mapping survey highlighted several capacities required by NNGOs:
- Resource mobilization and self-financing (including diversification of funding approaches)
- Strategic planning
- Effective management
- Advocacy
- Leadership and management
- Human Resources (including staff recruitment and staff retention)
- Staff competency and development
- Programme Management
- Financial Management, internal systems and infrastructure
- Specialized expertise (protection and technical sectors)
- Adherence to principles of accountability
- Effective external networking

This may not be an exhaustive list as priorities may vary however it does provide an overall picture of skills required.

Identification of Expertise (supply and demand):

Interested participants shall be identified through a detailed expression of interest form in which they can list: 1) skills/ topics they want to learn; and 2) skills/ topics they could share with others. This form would also be a mechanism to explore how high/low the level of interest on specific areas. Depending on the level of interest, a selection committee may be formed to ensure a fair and transparent process.

Given their wide geographic coverage, regional networks would be best placed to lead the identification of NGO staff that would be willing to participate in this program.

Flexible Approach:
1. NNGO staff join Partner NGOs for a certain period to directly learn from them
2. Partner NGO staff join NNGO for a certain period of time to exchange knowledge, expertise and provide

The exchange would be regional at first and could be expanded to a global level later. The approach and duration of stay needs to stay flexible accommodating participants' availability and interests as well as partner NGO's capacity.

Possible coordination:
Regional networks would lead the coordination. Regional leads identified could include:
- Asia-Pacific: Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network
- Middle East: Civil Society Network in the Middle East
- Africa: SNGO Network

Coordination would include the identification of Partner NGOs, NNGOs that are interested to join and capacities required. It would also include the selection, placement, financial support, monitoring and other support required. It would also include collaborating with UNHCR offices that are interested to participate in this (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia and Korea).

Sustainability:
Regional leads could take on this role by providing on-going support to participating NNGOs. The program also builds networks and such would be a self-sustaining one.