

GLOBAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Responding fully to the needs of people of concern to UNHCR has always been a major challenge, due to resource constraints, the difficulty of capturing and projecting needs, and the many complexities inherent in the dynamics of forced displacement. Yet, the presentation of a comprehensive response to the needs of all persons of concern is both a moral imperative and a planning and budgeting necessity. UNHCR has to plan for the needs of the populations for whom it is responsible, and also to communicate clearly what those needs are. The Office should also point out the very serious consequences when these needs are not met. It must demonstrate to the international community that their support for UNHCR's operations will enable the Office to deliver the anticipated added benefits in concrete ways.

2. The Global Needs Assessment (GNA), is designed to map overall needs more comprehensively, and to present the plans, activities, and level of resources required to meet these needs. It was piloted in several countries in 2008 and introduced globally in the first quarter of 2009. As the GNA has moved from a pilot to a mainstreamed initiative, it has generated significant interest, particularly among UNHCR's partners. This paper describes the background to the GNA, its methodology, as well as the results it intends to achieve.

II. BACKGROUND

3. Over the years, UNHCR has developed a range of tools to improve assessments,¹ participatory planning,² strategic thinking, age, gender and diversity analysis,³ and capacity-building,⁴ as well as to enhance resource mobilization mechanisms. These have all helped to increase UNHCR's ability to respond better to needs identified.

¹ See UNHCR's *Practical Guide to the Systematic Use for Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations* (February 2006); *Protection Gaps: Framework for Analysis: Enhancing Protection for Refugees*, 2nd edition (2008); *Statelessness: An Analytical Framework for Prevention, Reduction and Protection* (2008). See also Protection and Early Recovery Cluster Working Groups, *Protection of Conflict-induced IDPS; Assessment for Action* (2008)

² See UNHCR's *Tool for Participatory Assessments in Operations* (May 2006); *A Community-Based Approach in UNHCR Operations* (January 2008)

³ See *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls* (January 2008)

⁴ See the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project at www.unhcr.org/spcp

4. The GNA builds upon and consolidates these tools aligning needs assessments, planned responses and resource mobilization mechanism. This alignment has been made possible through the use of the new Results Framework, the principal organizing framework for UNHCR.

5. The Results Framework is a standard framework that describes comprehensively the results the organization is working to achieve. It now forms the basis for UNHCR's assessments, plans, reports and budgets. The Results Framework underpins the new budget structure⁵ and is embedded in the recently launched software planning application, *Focus*.

6. As part of the GNA, all operations record the findings of their respective needs assessment and design their plans in *Focus* using the common Results Framework. They also plan for the populations represented in the budget structure. The fact that assessments, plans and budgets are structured in a common manner and accessible in *Focus*, makes it possible to consolidate information provided at a country and regional level to present a global view in the GNA.

III. METHODOLOGY

7. All regional and country offices have based their operation plans for the 2010-11 biennium on comprehensive needs assessments. Planned activities aim to address all needs of people for whom UNHCR is responsible and which could reasonably be addressed in the planning year: either directly, or indirectly through implementing partners. All operations indicate the expected impact for the activities they plan, specifying the extent to which those activities will address needs and remedy gaps for their populations of concern.

8. Operation plans based on needs assessments are not new to UNHCR, nor is the setting of impact and performance targets. What is new is how the assessments, plans and setting of targets have been brought more firmly together in the planning process, as well as the commitment to present the full budgetary requirements of the Office based on this work.

9. As in previous years, all planning starts with an assessment of the needs that must be addressed in the planning year. These assessments are drawn from participatory consultations held with refugees and others of concern; protection-related and sector reports; inter-agency assessments; and other relevant material. Assessment methodologies are designed to ensure that age, gender and diversity considerations are part of the analysis.⁶

10. The results of these assessments are entered into *Focus* and are directly linked to the design of the plan, as follows:

- assessment information is reflected in a problem analysis in *Focus*.
- problems are identified and substantiated with narrative analysis and indicator data, establishing a baseline (or current state of affairs).
- there is an objective in the Results Framework to address each problem.

⁵ See *Proposal for the redesign of UNHCR's budget structure* (EC/58/SC/CRP.25) and its addendum (EC/58/SC/CRP.25/Add.1)

⁶ See footnotes 1-3.

- once a problem is identified in *Focus*, the corresponding objective appears in the plan design, as well as a range of possible activities to choose from to reach that objective. This ensures that every need identified in the assessment is addressed in the plan design.
- to help plan for results, impact targets (results to be achieved) are selected for each objective, and performance indicators (to measure the extent to which outputs are achieved) are specified for each planned activity: this provides a means of showing the planned outcome for all budgeted activities, as well as measuring and determining the results of the plan.

11. Because all plans use a common Results Framework and the same *Focus* software, information can be more readily accessed, analysed and consolidated. For example, the situation of a particular population group revealed in the assessments in *Focus* can be reviewed. The extent to which the group's situation falls below acceptable standards and the measures planned to meet the corresponding needs can be viewed and compared across operations. In this way, UNHCR is able to see where critical needs are present around the world and what is being planned to address these needs in different countries and across regions. This enhances the ability of the Office to promote more consistent approaches based on best practices.

12. Persistent challenges faced by operations can also be viewed, as well as the severity of the consequences when they are only partially addressed or left unaddressed for too long. For example, it is possible to see in *Focus* where needs are greatest in terms of access to education, free movement and self-reliance. The extent to which sexual and gender-based violence affects different communities can be viewed, as well as the measures proposed to prevent and respond to these risks. Similarly, it is possible to review situations where legislative and administrative frameworks do not protect people of concern sufficiently against the risks of *refoulement*, arbitrary detention, lack of documentation, non-recognition of protected status, or loss or lack of nationality.

13. Only by comprehensively presenting the needs of those of concern to the Office, and by planning fully to meet these needs, is this kind of analysis made possible. The *Focus* software is a powerful and dynamic means of reviewing, comparing, and contrasting the well-being of all whom UNHCR seeks to protect. Over time, it will enable the Office to assess different needs, adjust its priorities and, ultimately, reach a more informed basis for allocating resources.

IV. PARTNERSHIP AND PARAMETERS

14. Governments, implementing and operational partners and persons of concern have traditionally been involved in UNHCR's planning process, and this remains unchanged under the GNA. Indeed, the focus on more comprehensive planning makes the input of other stakeholders particularly important, both in seeking a common understanding of the extent of needs to be addressed, as well as in reaching agreement as to where responsibilities for meeting different needs lie.

15. In contexts of internally displaced people, the Office will plan to meet needs within UNHCR's agreed responsibilities. In cluster situations, where UNHCR is a cluster lead, UNHCR's plans will also include those measures necessary to fulfil its operational and lead responsibilities, including as provider of last resort.

16. For reintegration situations, comprehensive plans will cover the needs that UNHCR expects to address within the framework of United Nations and government recovery and reintegration programmes; but they will not endeavour to cover the entire range of development activities needed for full reintegration. Their focus will be on activities for which UNHCR brings value added initially. For example, this may include seed money to support sustainable reintegration or activities designed to ensure that the country of return and development partners mainstream reintegration activities within national development efforts.

17. When part of a Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), or other inter-agency appeal process, UNHCR will present its assessments and plans for discussion and agreement with the partners involved in each particular appeal process context.

V. PRIORITIES AND PRIORITIZATION

18. UNHCR is committed to presenting the full range of its budgetary needs as determined in the GNA. However, as in previous years, it is unlikely that, at the beginning of 2010, the Office will know the precise level of voluntary contributions that will be received for the year. This means that when the detailed implementation strategy is developed in 2009, all offices will be obliged to plan for what they will implement first, and then expand progressively as more funds are committed.

19. This involves prioritizing some activities over others – a necessary yet difficult task. General guidance has been provided to the Field to prioritize interventions that are central to UNHCR's mandate; raise the current situation to acceptable standards (focusing on critical needs first); and yield high protection dividends, such as registration, education and livelihoods. Other priorities are activities that prevent a weakening of the international protection regime; strengthen State and community protection capacities; and provide solutions to persons of concern. In addition, current challenges of particular relevance to each region have been highlighted to be addressed on a priority basis by the respective country and regional offices.

20. The guidance shared with the Field on setting priorities has been consolidated into a common set of Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs). The GSPs are specific objectives in the Results Framework that are to be prioritized in 2010/2011 worldwide. They include baseline information (from the assessments that make up the GNA) as well as impact targets. The latter represent the intended improvements the Office will seek to achieve in these key areas over the next two years.

VI. PLANNING AND REVIEW

21. The roll-out of the GNA initiative and the *Focus* software has been challenging. In the first few months of 2009, over 1,200 staff at Headquarters and in the Field were introduced to the GNA and trained on how to use the new software for the recording of their assessments and the design of their operation plans. The software is intuitive. Over thirty workshops held around the world were designed to provide sufficient time for users to become comfortable with the software, and familiar with the orientation of the GNA, notably the need to plan comprehensively yet in a reasonable manner (credibly linked to needs and implementable in the planning year). Initial technical problems required adjustments. The software is still being improved, further refined and tested to enhance its functionality.

22. In April and May, all operations plans were thoroughly reviewed at Headquarters in the course of the Annual Programme Review. This provided an opportunity to ensure that UNHCR's comprehensive plans and budgets are a reasonable response to needs identified.

23. Specifically, the Annual Programme Review looked at how well the planned activities reflect the needs highlighted in the comprehensive assessments, and whether the proposed activities can be implemented as designed in the planning year. Budgets were reviewed to see how well they relate to priority needs and reflect a reasonable apportionment of costs across operations. Office and staffing proposals were reviewed to see whether they follow established design guidelines.

24. The Annual Programme Review also provided an opportunity to assess where more guidance was needed in the future. This is an introductory year and, like for any new initiative, at each step, UNHCR is learning what has worked well, what needs to be adjusted, and which areas will require further guidance before the next planning cycle begins.

VII. CONCLUSION

25. It is the Office's responsibility not only to assess fully the needs of people of concern, but also to translate these needs assessments into credible budget submissions. The year 2009 has seen the start of this process through the global roll-out of the GNA initiative, the use of the Results Framework and the *Focus* software. Through the GNA, there should be less uncertainty as to the scope of needs falling within UNHCR's responsibility and greater clarity as to what UNHCR plans to do to meet these needs. This remains a complex yet crucial endeavour, not least in the interest of bringing greater visibility to the needs of millions of people of concern. In the midst of the global economic crisis, it is all the more important to highlight the plight of those on the margins. The GNA aims to ensure that their needs are not forgotten and to offer an opportunity to generate the necessary support.

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