

NGO Unit

**Report on PARinAC
and
Plan of Action 2000**

Geneva, February 2000

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, we find ourselves in a world that has large numbers of refugees and displaced persons uprooted by more complex crisis situations. The challenges of such an environment can be met best through constructive partnerships that play to the strengths of those involved. In this spirit UNHCR and the NGO community laid the foundations for such collaboration with the Partnership in Action (PARinAC) process in Oslo, Norway in 1994. This partnership took a degree of trust and vision on the part of all those involved. It has proven to be a positive process enhancing the work of many of these organisations over the last five years. There was, however, a feeling that it was time to undertake a review of how PARinAC has developed over the period: How much has it been incorporated into the work of UNHCR and NGOs? What could make it work it better? What has worked well? This Review and subsequent Plan of Action for 2000 are key parts of this process and seek to take PARinAC forward to help all those involved face the coming challenges.

PARinAC's most important contribution has, beyond doubt, been the inclusion and increased awareness of the potential and responsibility of national NGOs (sometimes referred to as local NGOs). The number of concrete partnerships between UNHCR and national NGOs has tripled since 1994. The following summary of recommendations, coming as a result of this review, form the basis of the PARinAC Plan of Action 2000 and have particular relevance to the further strengthening of partnership at the national level.

Principal Recommendations

- ❖ Mainstream PARinAC activities
- ❖ Develop an NGO process to prepare for NGO-UNHCR Pre-EXCOM consultations and UNHCR EXCOM and Standing Committee meetings to strengthen NGO input
- ❖ Convene regional PARinAC meetings in the year 2000
- ❖ Train NGO coordinators
- ❖ Establish a PARinAC Monitoring Group
- ❖ Develop an interactive PARinAC website
- ❖ Develop briefing packages on NGO-UNHCR cooperation
- ❖ Produce an annual report on PARinAC achievements
- ❖ Organise joint NGO-UNHCR campaigns in connection with UNHCR's 50th anniversary

BACKGROUND

The Partnership in Action (PARinAC) Global Conference, held in June 1994 in Oslo, saw the Chairman of UNHCR's Executive Committee and the High Commissioner for Refugees come together with 200 NGO participants and key UNHCR staff to establish this initiative of cooperation and collaboration.

Through regional consultations in the previous months, more than 400 representatives from NGOs and hundreds of UNHCR's own staff had shared ideas, reflected on their respective roles, and formulated concrete suggestions on how the long-standing cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs could be further developed in the "new humanitarian environment."¹ A stronger partnership would enable them to meet increasing humanitarian and protection needs through more concerted efforts. Their suggestions were adopted in a Plan of Action of 134 recommendations.²

PARinAC has since set much of the tone and agenda for the NGO-UNHCR relationship and the term "PARinAC" now describes every activity in which UNHCR and NGOs are involved together, whether it is referred to explicitly or not. The PARinAC recommendations introduced new structures and mechanisms for cooperation and helped identify areas where existing partnerships could be further strengthened. The PARinAC spirit changed the tune to a different key for better mutual understanding of each other's mandates, working conditions, and cultures. In essence, PARinAC is about process and process ultimately affects outcome.

Various aspects of the PARinAC process and structure have been reported to the NGO community and international fora, such as the Pre-EXCOM Consultations and UNHCR's Executive Committee. Some of the reports have been very positive with regard to activities, structures, and spirit, while others show that more could be done in order to utilise the full potential of NGO-UNHCR partnerships to meet the ever more demanding need for refugee protection and assistance.

REVIEW PROCESS

In the autumn of 1998, UNHCR proposed to review the structures of PARinAC, together with its NGO partners, to re-focus the process through a Plan of Action for the year 2000 to coincide with UNHCR's 50th anniversary. This recommendation was endorsed by the participating NGOs at the NGO-UNHCR Pre-Executive Committee Consultations in September 1998. A consultant³ has since been employed for some months in UNHCR's NGO Unit to work in consultation with ICVA and other interlocutors on the review and to prepare a PARinAC Plan of Action 2000.

The following review is based on existing documentation and interviews with NGO representatives, active participants on different levels of the PARinAC structure, and government representatives. Feedback has been received on more than 250 questionnaires sent to UNHCR and NGO Focal Points at country, regional, and headquarters levels, as well to other local and international NGOs. The review proposed a Plan of Action for PARinAC for 2000 that was presented for discussion by NGOs attending the October 1999 NGO-UNHCR Pre-Executive

¹ Regional consultations were held in Caracas, Kathmandu, Tunis, Bangkok, Addis Ababa, and Budapest. Supplementary consultations were held in Canada, Japan, and the United States.

² *PARinAC, Partnership in Action: A Common NGO-UNHCR Challenge – Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action*, Oslo, 1994.

³ Mr. Arne Piel Christensen worked on this task until August 1999, but could not complete it due to other engagements. He was replaced by Mr. Trygve G. Nordby. ICVA facilitated the finalisation of the report.

Committee Consultations. Following input from Regional Focal Points, ICVA, and UNHCR, the report and Plan of Action for 2000 have been finalised.

NGO-UNHCR WORKING RELATIONS AND PARTNERSHIP

There are many reasons for the special role of NGOs in refugee work.⁴ The non-governmental sector facilitates acceptance and integration in society, provides closer access to refugee associations and individual refugees, and maybe most importantly, most national NGOs remain when the specialised international refugee and emergency agencies leave. Today, the majority of programmes are implemented by NGOs.

The High Commissioner stated when PARinAC was born and blessed in Oslo: "NGOs are the grassroots link for the international humanitarian structures. They are an important democratising factor in the UN and international spectrum. They were largely responsible for the appointment of the first League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen. They were instrumental in UNHCR's creation in 1950, and they are referred to in UNHCR's Statutes as "the proper channel for international assistance to refugees."⁵

In this context it is impossible to separate "assistance" from "protection." While UNHCR has the overall responsibility for the international protection of refugees, the organisation shall, in addition, oversee that assistance and counselling is provided, and solutions found, in such a way that protection is ensured in all programmes. It is the core mandate of UNHCR and the *raison d'être* of the organisation. The final responsibility for the international protection of refugees where UNHCR acts in the role as a substitute for a government that denies its citizens protection, in principle, cannot be delegated. It should eventually be taken over by the host state – in accordance with its obligations under international law. However, along with the implementation of programmes of assistance and other activities for the refugees, NGOs do also assist and support UNHCR in providing protection – through advocacy, as well as through more concrete programme work.⁶

The complexity of the many humanitarian emergencies of the 1990s and limited resources have forced NGOs, as well as intergovernmental organisations and donors, to rethink old formulas. New lessons are being learnt, as in the multi-donor evaluation on the Great Lakes and the evaluation of the Kosovo crisis. These show that in working for refugees and internally displaced persons there is a much bigger picture than just the NGO-UNHCR relationship, as many other players have become involved, such as the military. In humanitarian aid there is now a stronger focus on accountability, transparency, and ethics. A Code of Conduct has been developed and endorsed by many NGOs.⁷ Minimum standards on services, performance, and efficiency have been formulated.⁸ There has also been a growing awareness of the needs for sustainability, local ownership, and refugee involvement in the long-term perspective. The result of increased NGO-UNHCR cooperation and collaboration is a more coherent and comprehensive approach to working with refugees and internally displaced persons.

⁴ "The High Commissioner shall administer any funds, public or private, which he receives for assistance to refugees, and shall distribute them among the private and, as appropriate, public agencies which he deems best qualified to administer such assistance." *Statutes of the Office of the UNHCR*, Chapter 2, Article 10.

⁵ Keynote address by Mrs. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the opening ceremony of the PARinAC Global Conference, Oslo 6 June 1994.

⁶ See *Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs*, produced jointly by UNHCR and its NGO partners, Geneva, 1999.

⁷ *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*, Geneva, 1994.

⁸ *The Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, Geneva, 1998.

THE PARinAC PROCESS

PARinAC brought together a multitude of organisations with a great variety of mandates, expertise, and levels of cooperation, and hundreds of individuals representing different cultures, styles, experiences, expectations, and ambitions – on the NGO side, as well as on the UNHCR side. To have all these different actors meet and define a common agenda in working with refugees was an end in itself. Many stressed from the very beginning that PARinAC is a process rather than a campaign or a project.

The outcome of the initial PARinAC process is, therefore, a strengthened spirit of cooperation as much as the building up of partnership structures and the formulation of recommendations. However, all of these three elements have to be institutionalised to some extent in order to make the most positive impact. Recommendation 115 states that: "NGO-UNHCR partnership must be transparent and should not depend on the good will of individual representatives".

The PARinAC process has been innovative, in many ways, within the UN system. There is presently a broad consensus within the UN to further enhance ties with civil society. In this respect, PARinAC could offer valuable experience to other UN institutions following UNHCR's lead.

It is nevertheless important to note that there always will be cultural, as well as organisational differences, inside bigger organisations. There are many different attitudes to NGOs within UNHCR, although the PARinAC process has been initiated and actively supported by the top level of the organisation. This difference in attitudes is also seen on the NGO side where many individuals find it difficult to deal with the formal mandates and structures they meet in the UN system, and therefore are sceptical of PARinAC. For PARinAC to work well, it must be part of the cultures of UNHCR and the NGO community, rather than an afterthought.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that PARinAC is not an end in itself. An overall goal for PARinAC and other NGO-UN initiatives of this kind must be to forge sound relationships, built on trust, responsibility, and accountability between the respective governments and civil society representatives.

STRUCTURE

At UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, one PARinAC Focal Point has been identified in each department and regional bureau. UNHCR Focal Points have also been identified at the country level. The Secretariat for the coordination of the PARinAC process is in the NGO Unit of UNHCR headquarters. On the NGO side, Focal Points have been elected or appointed⁹ at the regional level in 13 regions¹⁰. There is an intention to set up PARinAC Focal Points in all countries where UNHCR has programme activities. So far, there are Focal Points in more than 50 countries.

ICVA has played the role of PARinAC NGO coordinator in Geneva, as well as at the global level. For three years ICVA had funding dedicated to PARinAC follow-up activities. This funding ceased in 1997. Stable funding of PARinAC on the NGO side at the international level is still an

⁹ NGO Focal Points should ideally be elected by the UNHCR partners in the respective areas.

¹⁰ Regional Focal Points are located, for the time being, in the following countries: Swaziland, Ethiopia, Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Costa Rica, Colombia, USA, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Japan, Philippines, and the United Kingdom.

unresolved matter. The recommendations and Plan of Action for 2000 envisage a key ongoing role for ICVA in PARinAC.

RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The large number of recommendations in the 1994 Plan of Action resulted from the inclusion of input from six regional conferences that led up to the Oslo Conference. The result was a very ambitious plan that was difficult to prioritise and operationalise.¹¹ The Plan created high expectations, but with very few extra resources made available for PARinAC follow-up as such, the result has been impatience and reservations on the part of some. In this regard it is important to note that the implementation does not only rely on UNHCR initiatives and funding, but that NGOs are also proactive and carry their share of the responsibility for the implementation of the PARinAC Plan of Action.

Several PARinAC recommendations from the Oslo Conference have, nevertheless, materialised into concrete structures or projects, such as the proposal for a Framework Agreement for Operational Partnership; the Strategy for Enhancing National NGO Partner Effectiveness; the Programme Management Handbook for UNHCR's Partners; and the Field Guide for NGOs on Protection. Joint NGO-UNHCR efforts on issues like refugee women and children have also brought forward the PARinAC spirit and implemented concrete recommendations.

The general observation since the latest internal UNHCR review in 1997 is that where regional PARinAC conferences have been held (in developing countries), the process seems to thrive, while less PARinAC activity has been observed without such incentives. PARinAC activities take different forms in industrialised countries and developing countries. It may be felt that while the cooperation seems to be more driven by UNHCR programme needs in developing countries, it is in fact more driven by NGOs in general in industrialised countries. However, it should be noted that NGOs from both developing and industrialised countries are involved in a great variety of activities, including advocacy and programme implementation.

¹¹ For a large number of the 134 recommendations it is difficult to identify concrete activities or impact. One problem is obviously the lack of funding even where the recommendations are concrete. Nearly all resources for the process go along with programme activities and are therefore not visible as "PARinAC". Another difficulty in assessing the results is the very nature of many of the recommendations as PARinAC relates more to how things ought to be done, than to additional programme activities. The majority of the recommendations are more committing in spirit and approach, than in action and concrete implementation. There are only a few specific recommendations of the type one can tick off with a "done".

DEVELOPMENTS, FEEDBACK, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following description of trends with regard to PARinAC developments since 1994 is based on existing documentation and interviews with NGO representatives, active participants on different levels of the PARinAC structure, and government representatives. Feedback was also received on more than 250 questionnaires sent to UNHCR and NGO Focal Points at country, regional, and headquarters levels, as well as to other local and international NGOs.

The recommendations on PARinAC structures and follow-up in this chapter present ideas and suggestions for the revision of the PARinAC process. Some of the recommendations may be picked up and implemented quickly; others will need more time for consideration, further assessment, and planning. Some of the recommendations should be implemented in the PARinAC Plan of Action 2000, which forms the final chapter of this report.

FEEDBACK

The many responses to the fairly detailed questionnaires sent out constitute a substantial information resource for further development of the PARinAC structures and mechanisms. The main trends in the responses are listed below.

UNHCR HQ Focal Points

The seven UNHCR headquarters PARinAC Focal Points reported that NGO relations are given attention in their respective departments and bureaux, but they see their role with regard to PARinAC follow-up very differently. Systematic NGO focus is also given very different priorities by different departments and people. There is definitely a need for clarification of roles, resources, and priorities as there is presently no common "terms of reference" for this responsibility. One suggestion is to 'mainstream' the Focal Point functions in headquarters and make it part of the responsibility of each desk instead of having one person appointed at the level of departments and regional bureaux.

While as much concrete communication as possible should be between the respective NGO and the relevant desk or contact person in UNHCR, the NGO Unit should have an overview of the overall follow-up of the PARinAC process for general external relations with NGOs and for general coordination with UNHCR's NGO policy.

UNHCR National and Regional Focal Points

A large number of the UNHCR Focal Points responded to the questionnaires. In sum, they show an impressive range of NGO-UNHCR relations and activities. Regular, periodic meetings with NGOs, mostly to share information, are held in most countries. In many countries, the NGOs participate in UNHCR policy considerations, planning, and strategies. Capacity-building activities occur in most countries. Relatively few NGOs are seen as entirely dependent on UNHCR funding. The large majority of UNHCR's partner NGOs has activities far beyond refugee work in areas such as sustainable development, human rights, and civil society development.

While most of the UNHCR Focal Points in the Field say they have a good working relationship with the NGO National Focal Point, very few say they have a working relationship with the NGO Regional Focal Point when s/he is located outside of "their" country.

Most of UNHCR National Focal Points describe NGO-UNHCR relations as important and feel that these relations play an important role in their work. There was no clear consensus as to the positive or negative direction of the general development of PARinAC relations. Many pointed to the fact that more resources are needed for PARinAC follow-up activities.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Organise effective hand-overs from outgoing to incoming UNHCR Focal Points to ensure continuity.*
- ❖ *Organise information workshops on the concept of PARinAC for the benefit of UNHCR staff at the country level.*

NGO Regional Focal Points

The NGO Regional Focal Points are the group that most explicitly, actively, and regularly are involved in the PARinAC process through their participation in the Pre-EXCOM Consultations with NGOs and the Executive and Standing Committee meetings, in addition to the more sporadic PARinAC meetings at the regional level.

Most of the NGO Regional Focal Points also say that they see the PARinAC process as very useful and important; not least due to the dialogue it ensures between UNHCR and national and international NGOs. Much of the role some Regional Focal Points perform through PARinAC, overlaps with their natural role as umbrella organisations.

Some note very positive developments in NGO-UNHCR relations. Difficulties with regard to communication on the one hand between the Regional Focal Point and NGO National Focal Points and on the other between UNHCR and NGOs Focal Points within the region are seen as the biggest problem.

Although the level of activity and ambitions vary, most of the Regional Focal Points seem to take their functions very seriously by collecting and disseminating information, following events, and reporting on results. The estimated time spent serving as a PARinAC Regional Focal Point is approximately one week per month. Several of the Regional Focal Points stated that they would like to see the PARinAC process further developed. The convening of regional meetings is seen as PARinAC's great opportunity to strengthen local capacities. There is a clear call for a stronger facilitating role by ICVA at the Geneva level.

NGO National Focal Points

The feedback from the NGO National Focal Points has been limited and very mixed – probably reflecting the reality of too many challenges and too few resources. Their role in the PARinAC context varies from very active to non-existent. Some say they hope the UNHCR Country Offices could do more to help facilitate their work. Full support is expressed of UNHCR's leading role in refugee emergencies.

The majority see themselves as responsible for information sharing and some as coordinators. Very few used the word "consortia" to describe the nature of the collaboration among UNHCR's NGO partners in their respective countries. The view varies as to what degree national and international

NGOs could work together at the local level on an equal footing to promote better cooperation and collaboration.

There is a perception amongst some of a different approach to NGO-UNHCR cooperation between national NGOs in developing countries and NGOs in industrialised countries. While the focus of the first group is mainly on programmes, the focus of the second group is more on advocacy. However, many disagree with this perception and indicate that national NGOs also carry out advocacy, but just may not have the same impact on UNHCR or its policies.

While PARinAC has proved to constitute a useful framework for national NGOs, international NGOs do not necessarily see "what is in it for them." Many international NGOs have ongoing relations with UNHCR, which they do not perceive of as being a part of the PARinAC process, and which is a privilege that many national NGOs do not enjoy. In a revitalisation of PARinAC, there must be a clearer indication of where international NGOs fit into the PARinAC process. While quite rightly the emphasis in PARinAC is on partnerships with national NGOs, it would be wrong to overlook the role that international NGOs can play in the process. Many have, as part of a longer-term development strategy, partnerships with national NGOs based on capacity-building and advocacy. These partnerships should be harnessed within PARinAC. PARinAC can also be used to forge links between international and national NGOs. Perhaps the international NGOs should have observer status at regional PARinAC meetings.

Another related challenge has been bringing the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements into the process. However, there has now been a clear endorsement of PARinAC by the IFRC, thus bringing the process more formally into the practice of National Societies.

All respondents want more information from the international level and many argue for more resources to be provided for ICVA's facilitating role.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Elections for NGO National Focal Points should be held once every two years or appointed NGO National Focal Points should be endorsed by an assembly of NGOs. UNHCR's support should be provided.*

Governments

Substantial input for this review has been received from Denmark, Canada, and Norway.

The donor countries that have been key sponsors of the PARinAC process from the very beginning are still very keen for there to be a continued special focus on NGO-UNHCR relations through PARinAC. The PARinAC concept is seen as important for, inter alia, confidence building between key actors in refugee work, the development of civil society, maintaining the multinational approach, bridging the relief-development gap, and for efficient coordination in emergencies.

An interest was expressed in sending government observers to some of the PARinAC meetings. NGO participation, as facilitated by ICVA, in UNHCR's EXCOM and Standing Committee meetings is generally considered positive. NGOs can make one joint statement per agenda item at the Standing Committee Meetings. Some governments are open to giving the NGOs the opportunity to make two statements on specific items if the issue, for example, has a human rights side as well as an operational side. Governments do not want to open up the closed drafting

sessions to NGOs, but see the need for the NGOs to be better informed by UNHCR ahead of time about the agenda and background documentation. NGOs could then, for example, present written inputs to the drafting process. For this to be pursued most effectively there needs to be a 'structured input' by NGOs into this process that fully utilises consultation mechanisms and opportunities around a timetable based on the Pre-EXCOM and EXCOM schedule.

The idea of presenting to the Standing Committee each year a short version of a report prepared by a PARinAC Monitoring Group for NGO Pre-EXCOM Consultations is supported. Regular reports should also contain information on the scope and level of NGO contributions in assisting UNHCR to carry out its mandate.

The need to support a global network, such as ICVA, to maintain a balanced and equal PARinAC partnership is appreciated, but most governments still find it difficult to fund NGO networks directly for their core budgets.

Recommendations

- ❖ *The NGO input to the Standing Committee and EXCOM needs to be enhanced. Funds must be made available to ICVA to bring in NGOs from the South and East and to facilitate an ongoing dialogue among and between NGOs, UNHCR, and governments.*

REFUGEE PROTECTION

Protection is the most important and also the most sensitive area for NGO-UNHCR partnership. Sometimes the NGO role is to be "watchdogs," also vis-à-vis UN agencies.

Several ideas from the initial PARinAC recommendations have been brought forward, for example, the issuing of a field guide for NGOs called "Protecting Refugees."¹² Many of the partnership efforts by UNHCR on protection have been performed lately under the "Reach Out" initiative, inter alia, through consultations and dialogues with governments, as well as with the non-governmental sector. A joint NGO-UNHCR "Reach Out" Steering Committee has been formed and held its first meeting in May 1999 and regional meetings will be held on the issue of international protection in the coming months and years.¹³

It is difficult to assess to what extent PARinAC as such helped this very positive development of the NGO-UNHCR partnership on protection issues. The "Reach Out" initiative is very much in the spirit of PARinAC and should in the future, to the extent possible, be closely coordinated with other partnership initiatives to ensure that protection is kept as an integral part of all joint NGO-UNHCR efforts.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Establish regular information channels to keep all NGOs abreast of ongoing PARinAC and similar activities linked to UNHCR programmes and to combine the Reach Out initiative and the CIS Conference in the wider concept of PARinAC. There should be a mechanism to ensure that PARinAC meetings, meetings of the protection Reach Out, and the CIS Conference are informed by one another. The bolstering of the UNHCR*

¹² *Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs*, Geneva, 1999.

¹³ An Asia meeting in Bangkok was held in November 1999. Other meetings will be held in Nairobi and Latin America.

- ❖ *NGO Unit's role within the process (the 'mainstreaming') and the 'structured input' from NGOs will enhance the possibility of this increased information flow happening successfully.*

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Many of the distinctions UNHCR must follow, according to its mandate and statutes, are considered of less relevance to most NGOs, as their own mandates are much wider and usually linked to humanitarian needs in general. Helped by the PARinAC process, UNHCR and NGOs have managed to come closer to a common approach on IDP issues, where the wider mandate of NGOs can be complementary to that of UNHCR, other UN organisations and institutions, and the Representative of the Secretary-General for IDPs. However, many NGOs would find it helpful to have an updated position from UNHCR regarding IDPs with which they can then work and to have an ongoing dialogue to explore areas of joint cooperation.¹⁴

After recent UN inter-agency consultations, a training module on IDP issues is being developed in the framework of the IASC reference group on IDPs.

Recommendations

- ❖ *UNHCR should play an active role in improving the UN system's response to IDP situations, in particular to strengthen the process whereby operational responsibilities are allocated in such situations. NGOs can then complement the designated UN agencies in their work.*
- ❖ *Use the training modules on IDP issues together with the existing guidelines actively in joint training sessions involving NGOs, UNHCR and other concerned UN agencies. There is a constant need to sensitise NGO and UN agency staff about the particular protection, as well as assistance, needs of IDPs.*

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

The Kosovo crisis showed that there still are obvious shortcomings when it comes to the coordination of preparedness mechanisms between UNHCR and NGOs and among NGOs themselves. Lessons learnt do not seem to be carried sufficiently from one emergency to the next. Efficient coordination mechanisms have to be created from scratch seemingly without regard for past examples of good practice. There is also an obvious lack of coordinating capacity among NGOs at the very outset of a crisis: while coordination seems to work better in the next phases, for example, in the return phase, it is not sufficient.

Positive development in this area is obviously hampered by the increased narrowly focused bilateral approach at the expense of a multilateral, more inclusive approach. It is hoped that the PARinAC concept and structure can help some NGOs and donor governments confirm their support for the coordinating role of UNHCR in refugee crises. An understanding of the special mandate and role of the UNHCR may in itself contribute to collaboration and coordination.

¹⁴ See the chapter "Protecting Internally Displaced Persons" in the NGO-UNHCR *Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs*, Geneva, 1999 and the Norwegian Refugee Council's Global IDP Training Project <www.idpproject.org/global_idp_training_project.htm>.

Emergency response is not only a question of preparedness and coordination. The many complex emergencies during the 1990s have led to a strong and critical focus on the quality of humanitarian aid. This focus has also been a central issue in many PARinAC discussions: What are the minimum criteria and standards for participation in humanitarian relief work?

Several research and evaluation projects have been presented and more are under way. One of the most far-reaching proposals in the context of PARinAC is the idea of setting up a new Ombudsman function for the beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance.¹⁵ Others have proposed a system of licensing NGOs according to their profiles.

Recommendations

- ❖ *A number of NGO coordinators should be trained in a joint effort by NGOs, UNHCR, and OCHA. These coordinators should be on standby to be brought in on very short notice when major emergencies occur. These "experts in NGO coordination" could be financed and included in already existing emergency rosters. Donors need to be convinced that NGO coordination is as important as any other component and is necessary to make emergency relief efforts work efficiently and that national NGOs need to be included in the coordination process from the start.*

COORDINATION

In spite of policy decisions by many NGOs to be loyal to coordination mechanisms, coordination is still the most difficult task of any field operation. Interviews with, and reports from, NGOs active in the relief efforts in Kosovo give a negative assessment of NGO coordination in this most recent crisis – both from UNHCR's side and among the NGOs themselves. Lessons do not seem to be easily learnt in the field of coordination.

Many models exist, such as lead agency, NGO fora, consortia, information sharing, etc. But whatever model is chosen, some of the same difficulties always seem to hamper the efforts: lack of funding; lack of loyalty to the multilateral institutions; lack of common goals; different interests and capacities between national and international NGOs, etc. While joint action eventually means to give and take when it comes to collaboration and autonomy, it seems that many NGOs, by definition, feel they have a mandate, or are driven by a humanitarian imperative, to act with full independence. An ever stronger inclinations towards bilateral programmes gives this tendency additional negative spin. Very often the situation boils down to the least common denominator of "self-guided coordination through information sharing" – which often means a "free for all" in practical terms.

There is also a need to look at situations where other UN agencies are involved and OCHA has a key coordinating role. There is a need to examine how PARinAC and the practices and principles involved could be applied in such instances.

Proper coordination demands at least the following elements:

- A body taking on the role of coordination independent from other responsibilities;
- Sufficient funding beyond what may be included in the overhead costs of programme activities;
- Strong cooperative consciousness and culture among the various organisations;

¹⁵ "An Ombudsman for Humanitarian Assistance?," London, June 1998, <www.oneworld.org/ombudsman>.

- Establishment of coordination from the outset of the emergency situation;
- The willingness of the UN and governments to share comprehensive plans with their NGO partners.
- The United Nations and Civil Society Millenium Forum in New York in the Spring of Year 2000 represents an important opportunity to discuss partnership issues between UNHCR, UN agencies and NGOs.

The holding of regional PARinAC consultations seems to have had a positive effect with regard to the consciousness about coordination, but more concrete steps need to be taken.

Recommendations

- ❖ *UNHCR and NGOs need to establish mechanisms to ensure a strong coordinating for NGO activities in refugee or IDP situations (where relevant) in which they are involved. Donors can help ensure proper coordination by allocating resources accordingly.*
- ❖ *In the context of emergency preparedness, workshops and/or consultative fora should be organised to develop a more cooperative culture, particularly in relation to including national NGOs from the beginning. These workshops should also aim to increase NGO awareness and commitment to principles of coordination and the adherence to agreed mechanisms and bodies.*

FROM RELIEF TO REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT

UNHCR, its operational partners, and other NGOs engaged in refugee issues will often have a time-limited scope of activities. Many of the responses to this review of the PARinAC process have nevertheless expressed a need to find more adequate ways to bridge this infamous gap, as most NGOs have an aim far beyond emergency and refugee work

It is important to transmit an understanding of the PARinAC process as a common resource for the international community. The whole purpose of PARinAC is to strengthen the joint capacity of intergovernmental and non-governmental actors. As all refugee situations need a follow-up of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation it should be seen as a PARinAC priority to bring some of these other actors, such as UNDP, the World Bank, and regional organisations like the OAU, ECA and OSCE, on board as soon as possible.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Where the situation changes from relief to rehabilitation and development, regional and local PARinAC processes should seek to include other UN agencies on the intergovernmental side and more development organisations on the NGO side in order to make a smooth transition between different sets of actors. Pilot schemes, where organisations like UNDP and the World Bank are invited to the PARinAC process, should be launched.*

LOCAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

One of PARinAC's most important contributions has been, beyond doubt, the inclusion and increased awareness of the potential and responsibility of national and local NGOs. The number of concrete partnerships between UNHCR and national NGOs has tripled since 1994.

Local capacity-building, nevertheless, still faces many problems. While many international NGOs and inter-governmental organisations seek to work with national NGOs and locally established structures, there are many different understandings and perceptions of capacity-building. PARinAC should be used to bring together different parties, for example national and international NGOs, to share good practices in order to enhance the position of national NGOs and local structures.

However, there is an inherent contradiction in having external actors define needs and concepts for local capacity-building. This contradiction can be solved by having capacity-building driven from the grassroots structures themselves. Yet at the same time, the local initiatives will very often rely on external resources in the building-up phase. UNHCR has a central role to play in ensuring that expertise and skills related to assisting refugees is transferred to local NGOs. The capacity-building process should be used to transfer more responsibility and programme activities to local agencies as their capacities increase.

A sensitive issue in this regard is that UNHCR has a tendency to limit its capacity-building efforts to train national NGOs to serve UNHCR's immediate need to have implementing agencies in that particular situation, rather than to build sustainable civil society structures. Capacity-building initiatives, therefore, should always be taken with the national NGOs. UNHCR is at the moment planning to evaluate their experiences from capacity-building activities with the aim of producing guidelines for activities in this field.

It is important to reiterate that it is the respective governments that eventually have to take responsibility and provide space for community development in partnership with civil society. In this context, UNHCR should play a role by introducing the results of their partnerships with NGOs to government authorities, as has been done in the CIS process.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Creativity and learning from good practices should be applied to capacity-building. The priorities for this capacity-building should be set as much as possible by the NGOs on the ground. Capacity-building should take into account the value of interaction and exchange between NGOs themselves, as well as the role of international NGOs.*
- ❖ *There is a need to devise ways to empower national NGOs and ensure their active participation from the onset of emergency situations. Clear modalities for capacity-building and institutional development should be done in a way that increases greater national NGO autonomy.*

REGIONAL PARINAC MEETINGS

Experience has shown that it is necessary to convene regional PARinAC meetings in order for the NGO-UNHCR partnership to maintain its focus and momentum. Regional meetings need to be held – preferably, every year. These are not conferences for the sake of holding conferences. The regional meetings will focus on needs and actions at the local level and formulate work plans with concrete recommendations for that region. To profit from the synergy effects of the 50th anniversary of UNHCR, one meeting should be held in each region in the year 2000.

The purpose of these meetings should be to reinforce the spirit and structure of PARinAC with the aim of stimulating national and regional actions. All national NGO and UNHCR Focal Points should therefore be invited together with key operational and advocacy partners in the region. The

criteria for invitation should be NGOs who play a key role with refugees or internally displaced (where relevant). These NGOs may or may not be implementing UNHCR projects and they may be national and international NGOs. Their involvement should benefit the whole process and outcome. The main themes will have to vary according to possible thematic issues and national and regional needs.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Regional PARinAC meetings should be held in all regions throughout the world. Where thematic NGO-UNHCR meetings already are planned (for example Reach Out or CIS) they should take advantage of the PARinAC process. These meetings should be informed by other such meetings to have a situation of making the best use of consultation mechanisms and avoiding duplication.*
- ❖ *Each regional meeting, whether it is a thematic meeting or a more general PARinAC meeting, should use the opportunity of UNHCR's 50th anniversary to strengthen public awareness and funding for the refugee cause, in particular for the Refugee Education Trust Fund. Up to five PARinAC regions should be covered before the end of November to get the maximum possible benefit from the expected international media focus on refugees in December 2000.*

INTERACTIVE PARINAC WEBSITE

PARinAC is about communication – between NGOs and UNHCR and other relevant partners in refugee related activities. As more and more organisations gain access to the Internet, this strong tool should also be used to empower national and regional partners in the PARinAC process. Reliefweb and other Internet sites have already proven the usefulness of this technology in critical situations. There should be a mechanism for information sharing on any relevant issue within PARinAC, such as coordination in humanitarian crises. This information sharing could involve the creation of an interactive PARinAC website that links to other relevant websites and processes, such as Reach Out initiatives.

There should be a joint NGO-UNHCR responsibility for the funding of an interactive PARinAC website. ICVA, which plays a central role in PARinAC communication and already has experience in running a similar website, could be given operational responsibility under a joint NGO-UNHCR steering group (or PARinAC Monitoring Group). As the website should be seen as an independent project outside ICVA's core budget, not least serving southern agencies, funding could be sought from governments, foundations, or the information technology sector.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Establish and maintain a PARinAC website that complements the content of other websites without duplication. Consideration should be given to the allocation of a very small fund that will contribute to national NGOs' efforts to maintain regular communication through the electronic media.*

BRIEFINGS ON NGO-UNHCR COOPERATION

An interesting observation from the PARinAC process is that cooperation and mutual understanding seem to work best when the different actors have common experiences, for example, from a major humanitarian action, or common challenges in dealing with other actors, such as

warring factions. Nevertheless, a repeated and common feature in PARinAC meetings, including at the Oslo Conference, is the mutual realisation of the lack of knowledge about "the other side of the table." Another, related, problem is the lack of knowledge about the local situation and other key actors, such as local government.

It is imperative that key UN staff receives, at minimum, an introduction to NGOs before field posting – and vice-versa. Briefing packages should therefore be developed on the local situation and NGO-UNHCR cooperation. Briefings should be offered to and, in some cases, even considered to be made mandatory for relevant UNHCR and NGO staff. The briefing packages could be either general or situation-specific.

The briefing packages could have themes such as: respective mandates; human and other resources; networks and alliances; reporting; codes of conduct; existing coordination structures; funding patterns; administrative culture; and other key actors, such as the host government, local governments, military components, etc.

This initiative could also be further developed into exchange programmes between NGOs and UNHCR. More systematic training in this important area could also lead to discussions on whether one should include in staff appraisals the ability to work with partners.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Briefing packages should be developed on local partner and NGO-UNHCR cooperation. Briefings should systematically be offered to and, in some cases, be made mandatory for relevant UNHCR and NGO staff.*
- ❖ *Relevant training should more frequently be offered to NGO and UNHCR staff in joint sessions.*

FUNDRAISING

The Oslo document's clear call for consultations and cooperation between NGOs and UNHCR on the issue of fundraising has been followed up.¹⁶ A tacit agreement exists on a cautious policy from both sides when it comes to possible areas of unhealthy competition. There is however, a recognised need to review matters related to fund raising from the private sector, between UNHCR and NGOs.

The 50th anniversary of UNHCR should provide some good opportunities to bring input from regional conferences to each country. NGOs and UNHCR, together, could prepare local events with a focus on the refugee cause and the refugee work partnership – and include elements of joint fundraising – based on centrally produced material.

Recommendations

- ❖ *There should be a commitment to a permanent dialogue between UNHCR and NGOs on private sector funding.*

¹⁶ Recommendation 131 in the *PARinAC Partnership in Action: A Common NGO-UNHCR Challenge – Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action*, Oslo, 1994.

REPORTING

Recommendation 134 in the Oslo document suggests a clear structure on reporting and follow-up. This recommendation has only partly been implemented. PARinAC follow-up has been discussed every year since 1994 in the annual Pre-EXCOM Consultations between UNHCR and NGOs. There have also been random reports on PARinAC produced for EXCOM and reference was made to PARinAC in UNHCR's 1998 Global Report. The intentions are good, but in reality it is not practised in a unified way and, therefore, does not tell much about the state of PARinAC's development, for example, compared with previous years. This practice may easily be improved if the reporting could be done in a more systematic way. It is also important that UNHCR report more systematically on NGOs as implementing partners in projects, to make the role of NGOs and NGO-UNHCR relations more visible.

The lack of systematised reporting on the NGO side is partly a matter of limited resources at national, regional, and international levels, and partly a matter of the already mentioned unresolved situation for funding of the international coordination of the process.

To ensure the integrity of the respective partners in this kind of reporting a structure for bringing the different viewpoints together needs to be brought to a central meeting point where, for example, discrepancies in reports from the same geographical or thematic area may be discussed. Such a group could also fill the role as a monitoring group on the whole PARinAC process and be a reference point for discussions of NGO-UNHCR cooperation at regional or national levels. A PARinAC monitoring group could consist of three persons from each side and be co-chaired by UNHCR and ICVA.

Recommendations

- ❖ *A PARinAC Monitoring Group should be appointed and an annual written report on PARinAC progress and developments should be presented to the NGO-UNHCR Pre-EXCOM and to the Standing Committee, when appropriate. The report should also present a short and concrete work plan for the coming year and define a limited number of benchmarks in a common format for next year's reporting.*
- ❖ *UNHCR should list their implementing and other partners in a country or project in the same way as they list their cash-contributors.*

PARINAC STRUCTURE AND NGO COORDINATION AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

This review has not identified any need or call for changing the basic structure of NGO and UNHCR National Focal Points and NGO Regional Focal Points. The value of Regional Focal Points at UNHCR headquarters level is more in question. The weakest point of the PARinAC structure is NGO coordination at the global level.

A coordinating NGO entity at the global level with independence from UNHCR is important for the partnership to be balanced. ICVA's role in facilitating the NGOs as partners vis-à-vis UNHCR at the central level has been difficult, due to periods with serious funding shortages. However, most of the responses received for this review of the PARinAC process have expressed satisfaction with ICVA as a facilitator in serving the process and argued for a strengthening of its role.

ICVA should develop an ongoing dialogue among NGOs and between NGOs, UNHCR, and governments to ensure more structured NGO input to Pre-EXCOM, EXCOM, the Standing Committee, and the drafting of the EXCOM Conclusions. A process also should be developed to bring together NGOs to allow for an improved and structured means in which NGO statements to EXCOM and the Standing Committee are formulated. This process could also serve as a means to ensure linkages between these fora and as a way of organising the Pre-EXCOM Consultations with more NGO ownership.

Recommendations

- ❖ *UNHCR shall ensure the overall PARinAC coordination through its NGO Unit, which shall rely on the relevant desks, bureaux, and contact persons within UNHCR.*
- ❖ *ICVA's role and position in relation to PARinAC as a facilitator in global PARinAC coordination must be clearly defined.*
- ❖ *The relationship between Regional and National Focal Points needs to be more clearly defined to avoid confusion over roles and responsibilities of the different actors within the PARinAC process. New Terms of Reference should be drafted.*
- ❖ *A mechanism to facilitate networking between and among Regional Focal Points needs to be found. The interactive PARinAC website could serve as this mechanism.*
- ❖ *ICVA must be given a clear role and must search for funding to maintain the global PARinAC coordination on the NGO side. There is no need to create new structures.*
- ❖ *ICVA and UNHCR should further develop an ongoing dialogue among NGOs and between NGOs, UNHCR, and governments and develop a process to bring together NGOs to ensure a structured means of formulating NGO statements to Excom and the Standing Committee. ICVA should also ensure increased NGO input into the organisation of the Pre-EXCOM Consultations.*

MAINSTREAMING PARINAC RELATED ACTIVITIES

Due to the fact that many NGOs play different roles vis-à-vis UNHCR and with the scarce resources at hand, it is important to mainstream as much of the NGO-UNHCR activities as possible. Several NGO-UNHCR initiatives are taking place simultaneously. The protection Reach Out project is described above; others are, for example, the NGO component of the CIS Conference and the NGO-UNHCR cooperation on resettlement.

Each of these processes carries forward the very idea of Partnership in Action. The NGO part of the CIS Conference has, for example, included and capacitated large numbers of local and national NGOs and other intergovernmental actors, such as the ILO and UNDP, have also been involved. It is, therefore, important that these initiatives are mainstreamed into the general PARinAC mechanisms when they move to new stages so that they also can contribute to, and benefit from, the synergies of PARinAC. The substantive inputs to these processes must still come from the respective departments and bureaux.

Recommendations

- ❖ *Within UNHCR, the NGO Unit should coordinate different NGO-UNHCR follow-up mechanisms and related issues under the PARinAC umbrella. More specialised NGO-UNHCR meetings should also provide, to the extent possible, space for general PARinAC consultations in order to utilise scarce resources optimally.*

PARinAC PLAN OF ACTION 2000

The following actions, tasks, and activities are recommended to be given priority in the year 2000 – to enhance NGO-UNHCR partnership at national and local levels. Dates given are only indicative.

ACTIONS, TASKS, AND ACTIVITIES	TIMING	RESPONSIBILITY	Estimated Cost in US\$
Within UNHCR, the NGO Unit should coordinate and mainstream the different NGO-UNHCR follow up mechanisms and related issues under PARinAC.	From January	UNHCR	
Develop an NGO process to prepare (Pre-)EXCOM, which will ensure a stronger focus on links between Pre-EXCOM, EXCOM and Standing Committee meetings (the structured input) and will strengthen NGO input to EXCOM	March - September	UNHCR, ICVA, PARinAC Monitoring Group	
Convene regular regional NGO-UNHCR meetings in all regions. These meetings will, among other tasks: establish regional PARinAC plans of action, feed into the structured input and two Reach Out meetings in collaboration with DIP.	January - December	UNHCR, NGO Regional Focal Points, ICVA	Additional meetings to be held in North Africa (including Reach Out), South America (including Reach Out) approximately 60.000.
Train a number of NGO coordinators to be on stand-by to be brought in on very short notice when major emergencies appear.	February - July	Operational NGOs, UNHCR	15,000.00
Establish a PARinAC Monitoring Group	January -February	UNHCR, NGO Regional Focal Points, ICVA	
Develop an interactive PARinAC website	March	UNHCR, ICVA, PARinAC Monitoring Group	90,000.00
Develop briefing packages on NGO-UNHCR cooperation	September	UNHCR, NGO Regional Focal Points, ICVA	15,000.00
Produce an annual written report on PARinAC progress and developments to be presented to the NGO-UNHCR Pre Excom and to the Standing Committee by the PARinAC Monitoring Group	September	UNHCR, ICVA, NGO Regional Focal Points, PARinAC Monitoring Group	
Organize joint NGO-UNHCR campaigns in connection with 50 th anniversary	From January	UNHCR, national NGOs	
			180,000.00

It should be noted that “traditional” activities such as Pre-Excom, NGO participation in Excom/Standing Committee meetings and four Regional PARinAC Workshops, are in addition to the above.