

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
IASC WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

26 September 2007
Geneva

I Debriefing on OCHA/DPSS Workshop in Nairobi, August 2007

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham (Chief of OCHA/DPSS) briefed participants on the regional workshop on OCHA's policy instruction in support of protection conducted in Nairobi 29-31 August 2007. This first regional workshop was organized by OCHA's Regional Office in Nairobi and DPSS, with the purpose of supporting field offices in implementing OCHA's Protection Policy Instruction (PPI) by defining a practical framework for their work and contributing to protection activities at the country and regional level.

The content of the workshop focused on defining key concepts of protection (keeping in mind that OCHA's concepts should be congruent with IASC's concepts), understanding the mandates and approaches of key protection agencies, raising awareness of the protection cluster at the global and field levels, and building the capacity to incorporate protection into the key analysis and advocacy functions that OCHA plays in the field.

Twenty-four field staff members from 11 offices, as well as OCHA/NY, UNHCR, and ICRC participated in the 2.5-day workshop. Although primarily designed as an internal OCHA capacity building activity, the inter-agency nature of the workshop led to a much better understanding of protection coordination in the field. It is clear that the diverse range of implementation mechanisms and means of interpreting guidance on the cluster roll-out has led to rich experience and adaptations. In particular, support to the protection cluster has been substantially different and more complex than support to other clusters/sectors due to the nine areas of responsibility ('sub-clusters') and the need to ensure that protection is included in all cross-sectoral work as well.

Participants noted the need to build cross-border or regional inter-agency approaches to protection problems, streamlining regional protection advocacy and programming such as in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan. Appreciation was expressed with regard to the workshop's design aimed at 'de-mystifying' protection in inter-agency settings by clarifying basic terminology, approaches, and tools, just as all participants noted a desire to engage in more field-based expanded country team workshops on protection and technical support to build capacities in this area.

II Safety of Journalists in Humanitarian Settings

Mr. Mogens Schmidt (Deputy Assistant Director-General, Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace, UNESCO) briefed participants on the challenges faced by the media today and outlined the efforts made by UNESCO to promote freedom of expression in an increasingly dangerous climate for journalists. Over 1200 journalists and media staff have been killed in the last 12 years. Already this year, 137 have been killed and an additional 127 imprisoned. Only one out of eight killings is taken to court, which shows a great need for combating the ex-

isting quasi impunity. According to the 4th Geneva Convention journalists enjoy the same protection as civilians in situations of armed conflict, but they are increasingly perceived less as being neutral and independent and hence become targets.

With the exception of Iraq, Mr. Schmidt pointed out that even more journalists are killed in peace zones than in conflict situations. States have a responsibility to protect the journalists from such attacks, but it was also noted that journalists equally are responsible for ensuring that their reporting does not make them part of the conflict.

UNESCO fulfils its mandate of promoting the right to freedom of expression by creating a normative legal framework (e.g. UNESCO Resolution 29C/29, Security Council Resolution 1738 and the UNESCO Medellín Declaration), raising awareness (e.g. through IFEX – www.ifex.org) and collaborating with other UN and non-UN agencies on projects aiming at strengthening the media and support journalists working towards self-empowerment. In this regard, Mr. Schmidt stressed the need for an inter-agency approach to promoting the freedom of expression, as the latter is an essential element of good governance, which in turn is necessary for development.

As pointed out by participants, it is also essential to provide protection for journalists regarding their mental health in order to mitigate the traumatic experiences that are frequently made in conflict and other humanitarian situations.

III Africa - Joint IFRC/OCHA Briefing on the African Floods

In a joint presentation, Ms. Ute Kollies (OCHA), Mr. Alfred Nabeta (OCHA) and Mr. Niels Scott (IFRC) briefed participants on the recent floods in West, Central and East Africa. In many of the 17 countries affected (see the map that has been uploaded to the IASC website), the floods have been the worst in decades. Over 1 million people have been affected, 650,000 having lost their homes along with extensive destruction of crops, food stocks and infrastructure.

The presenters focussed especially on the situation in Uganda, Rwanda and Ghana. A Flash Appeal was launched for Uganda on 21 September 2007 (USD 41 million) and the IFRC has launched Emergency Appeals for Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and West Africa (regional appeal for Ghana and Togo to which Burkina Faso will be added soon). While other funding instruments, such as the CERF and the CHF, have also been activated to address the needs, these, however, remain insufficient.

Besides general insecurity in certain regions and differing capacities to respond, access to the populations in need remains a major issue due to the ruined infrastructure. There is widespread fear of outbreaks of infectious (waterborne) diseases and of the development of a critical food security situation caused by the widespread destruction of grain stores and crops.

As the rains are predicted to continue during the next weeks or months, the situation is projected to get worse, making longer-term humanitarian interventions and survival strategies necessary.

Participants

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