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**IDPs: Improving Implementation of the Collaborative Approach at the Field
Level**

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As part of its role to improve the international response to internal displacement, the IDP Unit, in cooperation with the IASC-WG and key partners, has spent significant time assessing the collaborative approach and discussing ways to improve its impact and success.

In their assessment, the conclusions of the Protection Survey, IDP Response Matrix and IDP Unit Evaluation are remarkably similar. They all observe that one of the principle shortcomings of the international response to internal displacement is not necessarily the collaborative approach itself but a failure and lack of commitment to implement it. In addition to a lack of commitment at some levels, the second largest reason for failure to implement the approach was a lack of awareness and misunderstanding among some key actors over its basic tenets. That being said, as a policy framework for managing the international response there are areas where the collaborative approach can and should be improved.

Field Implementation of the Collaborative Approach - Role of the HC/RCs and IASC Policy

The role of HCs in coordinating the response to internal displacement is the central pillar of the Collaborative Approach at the field level. Indeed the core of current IASC policy on IDPs revolves around the role and responsibilities of the Coordinators in assigning roles of operational agencies, developing strategy, supporting resource mobilization and undertaking advocacy with authorities on IDP protection issues.

The results of the Protection Survey and IDP Response Matrix revealed that many Coordinators were unaware of the responsibilities in terms of IDP response. Notwithstanding a lack of awareness, many observers also question whether Coordinators are able to fulfill all the demands placed upon them. IASC policy, especially on IDPs also assumes a 'collaborative attitude' and response among agencies and members of the country team- something that many Coordinators say should not be taken for granted.

Is IASC policy with regards to the role of HC/RCs in responding to IDP crises realistic? What can be done to support the field role of Coordinators vis-à-vis other agencies. What changes to IASC policy and procedures are required to strengthen its implementation. How can the role of HCs in protection be strengthened. Below are some issues for consideration.

Procedural Transparency And Predictability

Illustrated by recent experience in Iraq, Sudan and Liberia, the results from both the Survey and Matrix reveal problems in the process by which the roles of agencies in the response to internal displacement are determined. Results from the Matrix in particular also show the strong unilateral and mandate-driven character of the humanitarian system in the decision-making process. Many organizations in the field said their role with IDPs had not been specifically

agreed upon with other actors of the country team but was based on a 'common understanding' of the situation and an autonomous decision based on their own assessment of the needs. The lack of open consultation on roles among agencies often contributes to inter-agency competition and misunderstandings which later negatively affect response. Faced with a predetermined array of agency roles it is questionable how much flexibility and authority HC/RCs have to really address gaps in response.

In terms of process, the Senior Network agrees that the procedures on how agency responsibility is assigned at the field level – especially in regards to IDP protection – needs to be clarified and strengthened. Ensuring a consistent set of procedures in the way HC/RCs and country teams, including NGOs, determine agency responsibility, identify gaps and develop strategy is critical. Equally important is ensuring that the IASC-WG and the ERC, as stipulated in current IASC policy, are informed and consulted on the assignment of responsibilities.

Strengthening the procedures of the collaborative approach, in addition to improving predictability and transparency and reducing inter-agency misunderstanding would also assist Coordinators and country teams to address gaps more effectively. By ensuring that HC/RCs and country teams communicate strategies and corresponding organizational responsibilities to the IASC-WG and ERC, may allow for agency resources and donor support to be more easily mobilized.

Accountability

Closely related to procedural transparency is accountability both among Coordinators and agency representatives at the field level. The Senior Network has made some progress in developing proposals on this issue as far as it relates to HCs and RCs, such as the establishment of a "protection peer support programme". It is recognised that concurrent with the need to establish an accountability framework for Coordinators is the need to develop a meaningful accountability framework for agencies and country teams. Current IASC policy, for example, encourages the use of field-based MOUs to outline roles and responsibilities regarding IDPs which could form the basis for such frameworks. Other options to encourage country team accountability, including through more transparent procedures, need to be explored.

Strategy building

Despite significant effort by the IASC-WG in promoting mechanisms such as the Common Humanitarian Action Plan, strategy formulation to identify and address the needs of the internally displaced proved to be among the weakest indicators in both the Survey and Matrix. The weakness of strategy formulation tends to exacerbate misunderstanding on agency roles. How integrated planning and strategy formulation within the collaborative approach can be improved is another area requiring further examination.

Protection Monitoring, Advocacy and Promotion of Rights

Generally the results of the Survey and Matrix indicate a growing involvement and awareness by various members of the humanitarian community, especially NGOs, in protection concerns. Notwithstanding efforts such as in Iraq, which attempted to build a monitoring framework based on the capacity of NGOs, the lack of systematic monitoring and reporting on protection concerns within the UN family continues to severely undermine an effective protection response.

With regard to protection strategies, the survey team reported limited attention to strategising on protection issues, in part because of a failure to consider protection as a sector of the humanitarian response and to establish appropriate coordination and strategy development forums.

Among Resident Coordinators, the lack of established mechanisms through which members of the country team can discuss IDP issues, especially protection issues, with the national authorities was of equal concern. UN and NGO field staff reported that advocacy efforts which

were pursued by the HC/RC or headquarters officials were not sufficiently transparent, leading to the perception that the UN was not raising protection issues. The impact was to deter UN and NGO staff from reporting protection problems.

The Survey Team also noted that despite their assertions to the contrary and their interest in seeing UN agencies do more in protection, donors were not sufficiently committed to funding protection projects and that in some countries this meant that some projects were not fully implemented or not implemented at all.

Although protection has gained a great deal of currency in the humanitarian response, there still exists a huge gap between expectations and reality. One weakness in the system consistently raised by the Survey, Matrix and Coordinators is the frequent absence of UN protection capacity at the field level. Traditional protection actors, such as UNHCR, OHCHR, ICRC and UNICEF must be encouraged to do more. However when they are unable or unwilling to provide the resources, a viable alternative must exist if Coordinators can be expected to fulfil their protection role. One option that needs to be explored, as a last resort, is some form of IDP protection surge capacity or standby force that can support Coordinators in both developing protection strategies as well as monitoring protection conditions facing the displaced.

Issues for Discussion

1. What can be done to improve field implementation of the IASC policy towards IDPs? Where does the policy itself need to be strengthened? Is there agreement to strengthen procedures?
2. What resources, support and capacity are required to strengthen the role of Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators? What do agencies need to do to ensure Coordinators are able to fulfill their terms of reference? How can protection capacity be strengthened?

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