

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
56th MEETING**

**11-12 February 2004
Auditorium
WFP Headquarters, Rome**

IDPs: Internal Advocacy: The Role of the IDP Unit and the Senior Network

Circulated: 30 January 2004

The Unit's activities have since its creation been based on a two-track approach: providing support at country level through technical missions, IDP Advisors and training while also focusing on system-wide changes to improve the way the system, as a whole, responds to internal displacement.

Among the most significant recommendations of the Evaluation is that the IDP Unit focus more on internal advocacy and increasing its impact on the UN system: "advocacy, within the UN to improve the system's response, both overall and case by case, making the collaborative approach work is the single greatest contribution the Unit can make to the well being of internally displaced populations."

Before looking at concrete elements of how to improve the collaborative approach, it is helpful to examine the Unit's role within the system, the strategy of the Senior Network to follow up on the results of the Survey and Matrix and some of the questions that will arise if the Unit assumes a more forceful internal advocacy role. It would also be helpful to agree on what is meant by 'advocacy'.

From the Unit's perspective, advocacy is seen in a broad sense of using a variety of instruments and activities to promote improvements in how the international system responds to internal displacement. Using the results of the Survey and Matrix, the Unit has already embarked on an advocacy process focusing on operational response. It has identified four key areas where the collaborative approach requires improvement namely: Confidence and Leadership, Accountability, Procedural Transparency and Predictability and finally Protection. Based on a 'ground-up' approach, current discussions among agencies at the Senior Network presume, rightly or wrongly, that recommendations to improve the system in these four key areas can be made at the technical level, reviewed and approved at the IASC-WG level and ultimately endorsed and supported by heads of agencies.

In order to play an effective advocacy role and maintain credibility, the Unit must go beyond identifying weaknesses in the system and suggesting improvements: it must also assist country teams and Coordinators in implementing change. By providing training programs, IDP advisors and guidance, the Unit attempts to maintain a balance between advocacy and technical support. It is true that the scope of activities is by sheer nature of the problem quite broad, but they are mutually supportive. To exclude one activity may have consequences on the rest.

Before reviewing specific mechanisms and instruments of the Unit, it is important to realize that the size and capacity of the Unit requires that it act as a catalyst; it must both rely on and support the work of others. This is especially true in its relationships with the Representative of the Secretary General on IDPs and NRC's Global IDP Project. Along with the Unit and the ERC, each of these actors is also working to promote change in the international response to internal displacement. All use similar terminology to describe their activities such as training, advocacy and field support, but each has different target audiences, different methodologies and significantly different areas of added value. In order to cope with the vast and diverse needs within the system, all have developed formal and informal ways of working together in a complementary fashion.

Role of the Senior Network

As much as the Unit 'embodies' the collaborative approach, the Senior Network is the 'barometer' of the collaborative approach. In the last six months interest and discussion at the Senior Network has become more substantive and progress has been achieved in discussing sensitive and perplexing issues. The use of the Senior Network as an IDP-specific, technical forum to make recommendations to the IASC-WG has also brought greater clarity, coherence and purpose.

Continuing to involve the Senior Network effectively is a challenge. Like the Collaborative Approach itself, a fine line must be found, however, between maintaining the engagement of agencies in a consultative and transparent manner, while avoiding the pitfalls of inter-agency turf battles, decision-making by committee or the creation of never-ending processes. On the Senior Network's side, finding the balance between inter-agency consultation on issues of internal displacement and providing advice to the Unit, while not indulging in micro-management or over-scrutinisation of the Unit, is equally challenging.

IDP Advisors, Training and Field Support

Since last year, the Unit has begun to focus more on advocacy within the system than on technical support. There are important reasons to ensure that the Unit continue to do both. In order to maintain the confidence and support of field teams the Unit must be able to combine critical assessment with tangible support and guidance. The role of the Unit's training program as a tool to expand awareness and improve understanding of IASC policy on IDPs has been critical in this regard.

What should be the Unit's role in training? The Evaluation makes positive reference to the use of training by the Unit. From the Unit's perspective, it is important to continue to deliver field-based workshops on the Guiding Principles and IASC policy with country teams and national authorities or non-state actors. This is especially true in emerging or breaking crises. Furthermore being a UN program, the Unit has a level of access to authorities and UN staff not necessarily accorded to the NRC. Windows of opportunity to support awareness among national authorities should not be overlooked.

Based on the results of the Survey and Matrix the Unit would like to focus more on intra-organizational training. Increased attention must also be given to improving protection awareness among Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators.

The evaluation calls for the Unit to concentrate more on identifying the 'egregious failures' of agencies or country teams. This raises several questions. How critical can the Unit be while maintaining the support of agencies? What is the role of the Senior Network in calling attention to and responding to these failures? After identifying the problem at what point does the Unit's responsibility to follow up with recommendations or support end?

Follow-up field visits by the Unit can continue the work begun by the Matrix and Survey. Based on the Matrix questionnaire structure, which identified gaps in the response and mapped activities of organizations, the Unit can work with country teams, the Senior Network and the ERC to seek solutions to those gaps by requesting agencies to adjust their priorities or expand their activities to fill gaps.

Furthermore using the Matrix framework and Survey, the Unit can continue to assess the existence and effectiveness of IDP coordination mechanisms, forums and strategies at the field level to meet protection and assistance needs of the displaced.

Relations with the RSG on IDPs and NRC

What then of the Unit's relations with its two key partners, the Office of the RSG and NRC? The former, created in 1992 by the UN Commission on Human Rights, is involved with the development of the normative framework for IDPs, advocacy efforts within intergovernmental forums and with individual governments, support to civil society, and research and publications on new and emerging

issues. As indicated above, NRC established the Global IDP database in 1998, and in addition to running the database also provides in-country training on the Guiding Principles to a range of actors and undertakes awareness-raising efforts through press statements and publications.

The Evaluation notes that the Unit must improve its collaboration with NRC and the Office of the RSG on follow-up on training and workshops. It also states that the Unit should consult with partners, including the Office of the RSG and NRC, “to jettison activities in a specific sector or a specific country that others can do just as well (or better, or cheaper).” Based on established complementarities is it a question of jettisoning activities or rather continuing to improve communication and coordination of activities among the Unit, the Office of the RSG and NRC? What is required to ensure that better coordination happens?

Issues for Discussion

1. Is there agreement on the Unit’s interpretation of ‘advocacy’? Is there agreement on the Unit’s balance between technical support (ie training, IDP advisors etc) and internal advocacy activities (ie follow-up to the Matrix and Survey)? Are there activities that can be jettisoned without compromising the ability of the Unit to fulfill its role?
2. Is the division of tasks among the Unit, the RSG on IDPs and NRC clear, complementary and sustainable?
3. Is the proposed follow-up process for the Matrix and Survey, involving the Senior Network and IASC-WG, appropriate for addressing the different key areas in the system? Is the current ground-up approach likely to be effective? What other alternatives exist?

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