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IDPs: Roles and Responsibilities in the Collaborative Approach

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Although intended to focus on the role of the Unit, it is generally acknowledged that the Evaluation is effectively an assessment of the collaborative approach *per se*. As such, its scope extends beyond the Unit to refer also to the roles of the ERC and OCHA, the Office of the RSG, NRC, the operational agencies and the donors and their different relationships with the Unit. The purpose of this paper is to flag for discussion issues raised in the Evaluation concerning these different roles, responsibilities and relationships.

Providing Leadership - The Role of the ERC

Among the significant points to emerge from the Evaluation is the importance of the ERC in ensuring the effective implementation of the collaborative approach, that is to say in providing leadership and guidance as the UN focal point on IDPs, with the support of the Unit. Indeed, the Evaluation's first recommendation concerns precisely this, expressly calling upon the ERC to "activate and empower the Unit as a critical tool in fulfilling his mandate as the [SG's] focal point for IDPs."

As the SG's focal point, the ERC has a number of responsibilities, including global advocacy on assistance and protection requirements; resource mobilisation and the identification of resource gaps for IDPs; the establishment of a global IDP information database (outsourced to and run by NRC since 1998); and support to the field on related humanitarian issues such as access. Finally, as chair of the IASC, the ERC ensures that appropriate field-level arrangements are established for IDP protection and assistance. What, however, in practical terms is involved in activating and empowering the Unit to support the ERC in fulfilling these responsibilities?

According to the Evaluation, as a first step the ERC should emphasize that he perceives his role as the lead on IDPs within the UN system. He should also use the Unit as his "eyes and ears" in the field, request that it undertake specific missions and indicate to the Unit director how the direct link between the two will be handled. This includes taking the management measures required to make the Unit a more effective, more proactive advocate for IDPs. The ERC should also articulate his determination to follow through on the Unit's recommendations and to engage with agency heads on the results of the Protection Survey and Matrix and subsequent missions of the Unit. Where necessary he could enlist the SG's support to implement improvements to the collaborative approach. At the field level, he should also use his authority to ensure HCs/RCs implement their responsibilities as laid down in the IASC Protection Policy Paper and the revised HC Terms of Reference. Following missions of the Unit, where conclusions and recommendations have been discussed with the HC/RC and the country team, the ERC should use his authority to ensure follow-up by the HC/RC.

As the head of OCHA, the ERC also has an important role to play with regard to relations between OCHA and the Unit. The Evaluation recommends that OCHA recognize and support the Unit's efforts to improve the collaborative approach, including ensuring that it is not integrated into OCHA and continues to report directly to the ERC. The Evaluation also notes the need for OCHA to "empower the Unit" (recommendation 7) by recognising its inter-agency nature and ceasing to see it as a threat. Relations between OCHA and the Unit are also considered in terms of follow-up on the Unit's initiatives, the Evaluation calling for a pro-active and open debate within OCHA on how to

follow-up on missions, training, etc, noting that such follow-up is “part of the ERC’s effort to coax greater collaboration from the operational agencies.”

Beyond the Evaluation, the leadership role of the ERC was also underscored by the Protection Survey which emphasised the need for more assertive and effective advocacy on the part of the ERC and other headquarters officials. This includes providing consistent and sustained support for advocacy efforts at the field level by HCs/RCs – a key requirement in encouraging HCs/RCs to undertake such efforts in the first place. The ERC’s advocacy role was considered to be particularly crucial given his access to the SG as well as the Security Council.

And what of the respective roles of the ERC and the RSG in terms of advocacy? The Evaluation notes a lack of coordination on public statements. As with the ERC, the Protection Survey also comes down firmly on the side of increased advocacy efforts on the part of the RSG. How should their advocacy roles be balanced?

Agency Commitment and Accountability

As the findings of the Protection Survey and Matrix revealed, key to the effective implementation of the collaborative approach is the confidence and commitment of the operational agencies. Indeed, the Unit has recommended that a clear and tangible message should be sent from the highest levels restating what the collaborative approach is, expressing confidence that it can be made to work and calling for widespread commitment to implement its provisions.

While recent meetings of the IASC-WG and the IASC Principals witnessed a renewed commitment to the collaborative approach, this will be meaningless if it is not translated into practical action. Pursuant to the Evaluation, this would include the operational agencies demonstrating a real commitment to the Unit as the inter-agency embodiment of the collaborative approach (recommendation 8). This, in turn, would mean that agencies act upon the ERC’s recommendations on IDP issues at headquarters and especially in the field; send to Network meetings staff who have the experience and seniority to represent their agencies and provide the Unit with guidance; send highly qualified and senior secondees to the Unit, and maintain regular, positive contact with their secondees; and fully fund their secondees. Where do we stand?

And what other steps can be taken to ensure agency accountability and support for implementing the collaborative approach at the Headquarters and Principals level? A key finding of the Protection Survey and the Matrix was the need to establish a framework or mechanism for ensuring that individuals and organisations at all levels, field and headquarters, are held accountable in a transparent and fair fashion for the implementation of their terms of reference and responsibilities as they relate to IDP response. As a first step headquarters staff and Principals can ensure that an ‘enabling environment’ exists for implementation of the collaborative approach and that commitment to the collaborative approach is consistent at all levels.

Donor Support

The Evaluation also calls for enhanced political support from the donor community for the Unit’s efforts to enhance the collaborative approach at both the Headquarters and field level. The Protection Survey was quite upfront about the need for donors to adopt a more proactive and consistent approach to supporting the UN’s efforts – such as those of the HC/RC, ERC and RSG – to advocate for the rights of IDPs. Clearly the role of donors in promoting change and continued attention to the plight of internally displaced at the Security Council and General Assembly is critical. Is there more that could be done?

A suggestion from the Evaluation was that donors could consider forming a “Friends of the Unit” group to better mobilize their action in support of the Unit’s recommendations to improve the UN

response to the internally displaced. How a 'Friends of the Unit' would actually work and be useful could be discussed both by donors and other stakeholders.

On a similar track, reference should also be made regarding the role of donors in advocacy and funding at the field level. This is related to good humanitarian donorship, as discussed at the Stockholm Conference and accountability of donors to do their part in improving the response for IDPs. Key issues to address include how to ensure sustained, predictable and equitable funding for IDP crises (including the forgotten crises), how to engage donors not just financially but also politically to take action on behalf of IDPs at the field level and how to promote accountability among donors.

Issues for Discussion

1. **Leadership:** How does the ERC see his role as the SG's focal point on IDPs? What is the role of the ERC in advocacy, in particular in support of advocacy efforts undertaken at the field level? How can the Unit support the advocacy role of the ERC? How can the ERC maintain the interagency character of the Unit yet strengthen its role within OCHA?
2. **Commitment and Accountability:** How can agencies more fully demonstrate their commitment to the Collaborative Approach *per se*? What steps need to be taken to hold agencies accountable to expressions of commitment?
3. **Donor Support:** What kind of political and financial support should be provided by the donor community to strengthening the collaborative approach? How can donors support the operational agencies in improving response to IDPs at the field and headquarters level?

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