

Consultations at the Global Protection Cluster retreat

Geneva, 30 September 2015

1. The Senior Protection Coordinator in the GPC Support Cell held a wide-ranging discussion with cluster coordinators in the field during the annual GPC retreat. The following cluster coordinators shared the needs of the field clusters: Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa and Goma), Sudan, Central African Republic, Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Chad, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Palestine, Ethiopia, Nepal and Niger, as well as participants from NGO headquarters.
2. While a long list of requirements in terms of specific support from the GPC was raised, several common themes emerged, including a desire for the GPC to facilitate the sharing of good practices across operations and to facilitate the exchange of experience in problematic areas of work, such as remote management, working with older persons, working with government in clusters and disengagement of protection clusters. It was recommended that the GPC finds human resources dedicated to establishing a community of practice and ensuring that operations talk to and learn from each other.
3. At the same time, several coordinators expressed appreciation of GPC missions to the field, which promote dialogue and reflection on the direction of operations. It was recommended that the GPC undertakes annual missions to operations.
4. By far the strongest common request to the GPC concerned guidance on the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. Coordinators feel overwhelmed by the heaviness of the process and by repeated changes to what is needed. The GPC was asked to use its network power to advocate for better planning processes; it was felt that outside influence is often needed to support country level planning because it is sometimes not supported by the collective or at HQs.
5. The GPC was asked to provide tip sheets on what in concrete terms has to be done, including help on indicators, global guidance on how to calculate populations and numbers of beneficiaries, developing a strategy within a results-based management framework and generic costing of activities. It was suggested that the GPC needs to defend field staff from excessive processes and a review of how coordinators spend their time would be helpful in order to show how much time was spent on processes rather than engaging with persons of concern, gathering information or undertaking analysis.
6. The GPC was asked for advice about how to match agency planning with collective planning and to set minimum standards for good programming.

7. In terms of guidance, there was a general feeling that there is enough written material but that it needs to be made simpler, translated and disseminated properly. The *de haut en bas* approach to guidance was felt to be less useful than sharing experience between operations. The GPC was asked to use its network power to exchange practices: particular areas on which such exchanges would be useful include good examples of working through local partners, how to work with AORs, the coordination of cash interventions; working in a protracted situation with emergency characteristics; strengthening the link on protection to the RC/HC; making the cluster coordinator a member of the HCT; how to make protection services palatable to host governments; capacity building of state officials; working with integrated missions; how in practice the link between relief and development will be constructed.
8. The GPC was also asked to deploy experts to provide punctual help on specific issues for a couple of months, e.g. on mainstreaming, to build capacity, to provide advice on the approach to urban displacement and host families as first responders and the erosion of the solidarity system by humanitarian response. The help desk function of the GPC is seen as useful but a GPC depository of advice, which can be easily accessed, was also called for.
9. There was a question about whether the GPC strategic objectives will be that different from the existing framework. It was suggested that ensuring a collective response would be a strategic objective, balancing specialisation with an holistic approach; Protection Information Management as the starting point of an analysis and programme building would be a key priority.
10. Several participants said that ensuring the centrality of protection in humanitarian action should be a strategic objective of the GPC. A clear indication was given that coordinators expect to be consulted on the development of the IASC Protection Policy.

Conclusions

11. The existing support of the GPC to the field is felt to be helpful, including through missions, guidance and the help desk. However, there is a clear need to step up the level of support, particularly around the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. The support requested on the HPC includes both protection field staff from constantly changing and heavy processes as well as guidance on particular issues.
12. The focus of the discussion on the practical support the GPC can provide to field clusters was not unexpected. Nonetheless, the dissonance between the issues picked up in the independent Whole of System Review and those expressed by cluster coordinators in the field is notable. In particular, the lack of a desire for further guidance in written form from HQs and, rather, for exchanges between operations, should be remarked.