

GLOBAL PROTECTION CLUSTER | STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2016-19

CONSULTATIONS WITH THE HUMANITARIAN LIAISON WORKING GROUP (at the invitation of the Permanent Mission of Norway)

Salle VIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 2 November 2015

1. The Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations Organisations at Geneva convened a meeting of the HLWG to discuss the GPC strategic framework going forward. A panel composed of the Global Protection Cluster Coordinator, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children introduced the discussion by speaking to the following questions posed by Norway:
 - a. What protection outcomes can we realistically expect to be achieved from humanitarian action?
 - b. What is holding humanitarian protection actors back, e.g. is operational capacity being held back by other demands?
 - c. How we can achieve some level of prioritisation within protection as well as of protection?
2. It was suggested that there is much discussion of protection, protection is recognised as being central to humanitarian action and there are agencies dedicated to working on protection. But there are still gaps. It was suggested that it would be interesting to look not at cluster as such but how to leverage complementary protection mandates and responsibilities to advance protection.
3. The response to protection needs of IDPs is much better than it was five years ago. But the resounding message from colleagues in the field is that they are grappling with processes, e.g. Humanitarian Programme Cycle. This is weighing down their ability to be present with communities and to be operational.
4. We need to leverage complementarities much better than we do. And we need to do more within the narrow window we have with humanitarian action, e.g. by working on preventive action and linking relief to development much earlier on.
5. Our ability to adjust has been limited but the GPC needs to reset its strategic framework five years down the road of the visioning exercise that took place in 2011. It should be noted that the GPC has become a global platform to identify and advocate for global protection issues. It has demonstrated its added value to the field but it still needs to support field colleagues in making protection truly central to their operations. One effort will be to ensure that a HCT has an overarching protection strategy to line up the mandates, experiences and expertise of the various actors in the field. An overarching strategy will ensure that we have joined up analysis so we can respond better.

6. Communication of messages is key, field clusters and the GPC need to explain better what protection means in any given context and the intended impact of our work.
7. NGOs are being seen less and less as impartial actors and more as affecting the sovereignty of nations, there is more fragmentation between actors and we are often far from communities because of lack of access. There is competition for funds between agencies and sectors.
8. There is a need to localise and contextualise responses and there is a growing trend in citizen-led aid. This is the setting in which we work today.
9. Children make up the majority of the affected populations we see today, up to 75% in some cases. Boys and girls face increasing risk of exploitation and physical and sexual abuse: their specific needs are not necessarily met by other sectors. Child protection is now recognised as a sphere of stand-alone programming but it has the second lowest level of funding after education, which runs counter to stated donor priorities. Attacks on education facilities are also becoming a priority. A cross-sector approach is needed to response to the needs of children and youth, as well as promoting resilience.
10. With 50% of affected people being children we need to put children at the centre of our actions, both in conflict and natural disaster settings.
11. There have been many efforts in the past 10 years in professionalising protection, within organisations in terms of recruitment, training and guidance and also between organisations, e.g. the cluster, development of standards (e.g. professional standards). All of this has created an understanding that we need improved programming as well as capacity to operate, evaluate impact, learn lessons etc.
12. At the same time, affected people are not more protected than they were 10 years ago. So, there is a gap between intention and outcome. Programmes are better in terms of quality but overall the protection architecture did not move. We need to better link the reality we see in the field to policy discussions at headquarters. This is not just about early warning but is also about advocacy to duty bearers, connecting the dots between what happens in crisis and the responsibility of governments. How can we mobilise capacity?
13. There is a tendency to put protection on the back burner, including also at mandated agencies, because we want to gain access and we begin with assistance. The next step- protection- is often missing. We need to be clear with interlocutors about our intention to work on protection issues.
14. We need to bring humanitarian actors closer to human rights but also to development. There is a tendency to separate humanitarian action from development action but early recovery is part and parcel of humanitarian action, e.g. by attacking infrastructure then the middle class will leave and these are precisely the people a crisis-affected country needs to reconstruct.
15. How is protection understood beyond the humanitarian community, especially in a protracted situation? There is a more sophisticated understanding at the HQ level but how is the agenda going to be pushed forward?

16. It was suggested that the consultations on the strategic framework should lead to recommendations for the WHS, especially on the under-funding of child protection. But at the same time it was suggested that we need to look at foundational issues before thinking about funding.
17. Humanitarian actors have short-term memories and the focus of our attention keeps shifting. There is an over-emphasis on certain issues rather than looking at the entire system, in which there are now more and more actors working on protection. The next step is to leverage the potential to work together because no one owns protection and this sometimes depends on quite basic problems, e.g. referral pathways from non-protection actors to relevant entities. We need to be alert to the potential for action in the field.
18. We have to be alert to the risk of highlighting the problems of one group over another, e.g. IDPs over host communities, or children over families.
19. In terms of funding, a protection framework is a helpful tool in order to explain what the programmatic priorities are. The lens to be used should be protection and to gauge the response.
20. There is a negative perception of protection by many states, including crisis-affected states. We need to change this perception because protection is about reinforcing the capacity of states to go through crisis and to recover. Key to changing this perception is emphasising the long-term focus of interventions and the link from relief to development through early recovery. Part of the challenge is to change the dynamic from negative to positive.
21. The majority of child protection sub-clusters have between 20-30 agencies, mostly local, and there is a focus on building capacity of national institutions. Government agencies are increasingly leading sub-clusters. However, the understanding of what protection is needs improvement. Systematic data gathering on protection is limited, especially on child protection. Therefore, there is a struggle to have the evidence to support protection advocacy.
22. The recent joint statement of the head of the ICRC and the UN Secretary-General on protection signifies we are at a critical moment.
23. The GPC has a role in advocating for protection where country level actors would be compromised.
24. There needs to be a behaviour change within the humanitarian community in order to listen to and respond to what affected people are telling us, e.g. why are child protection issues not being prioritised? There is a role for the GPC in instilling this behaviour change, an accountability to do the right thing.
25. Child protection issues like forced/early marriage, statelessness etc. are creeping into emergency situations. The number of issues are increasing and this is a challenge.
26. There is a lot of experience and lessons learned about putting protection into practice and we know how things will turn out. This should help us in predicting what will happen and preparing in advance. We can play a greater role in exchanging experience between agencies and states and between states. We have a long experience in building capacity of states, e.g. in treatment of detainees.

27. Communication should be less conceptual and more concrete about what it means to make a person better protected. But we must emphasise the need to be concrete what that means and the more we elevate our language then the less clear it becomes what protection means. If we want to be convincing in communicating protection then we need to focus less at the policy level and connect the dots more at the field level.
28. The IASC statement on centrality of protection makes clear that it is unacceptable for humanitarian leadership to ignore protection issues or to ignore the link between assistance and protection outcomes. The Humanitarian Coordinator is not the sole responsible person for protection but she needs to use her convening and authority power to ensure that everyone is focussed on protection. In that sense we need to be clear that whereas some sectors, e.g. child protection, may appear under-funded, we need to be cognisant of the fact that funding for nutrition is also a child protection activity.
29. The GPC can guide and coach country teams and we could step further to audit –for want of a better word- how country teams are making protection central to their operation. It is less about auditing but guiding and ensuring that things are done. Checking that the GPC has offered necessary support would be an element of that audit.
30. Neutrality is not a necessity but a choice in humanitarian action. ICRC chooses neutrality and is key to its operations. An organisation can choose not to be neutral and align itself with certain issues and this has nothing to do with the quality of programming. On other humanitarian principles there can be no compromise, e.g. by saying some violations are more justified than others (affecting impartiality).

Conclusions

31. A protection strategy at the country level is an important tool to ensure complementarities are leveraged and coherence of response. A strategic and programmatic approach to protection is also key to convincing states, including donors, that country teams have clear protection outcomes in mind when designing sector approaches. The GPC has a clear role to play in supporting the field to develop protection strategies.
32. Communication about protection needs to be clearer and simpler; this is not simply about funding but about convincing crisis-affected states that protection actors are not a threat but have a key role to play in responding to crisis and rebuilding societies. It is also important to ensure that protection is not merely theoretical but a dynamic and action-oriented concept. The GPC has a clear role to play in providing messages to states about protection and ensuring voices from the field are heard at headquarters.