UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation

THINK PIECE ON RESEARCH PHASE 1
(NOVEMBER 2018 – JUNE 2019)

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Evaluation information at a glance	
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Executive Summary

Think Piece

This **Think Piece is part of an ongoing learning and strategic evaluation exploring UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation.** The evaluation began in 2018 and will conclude in 2021. It investigates the scope of cooperation, the factors and measures influencing cooperation, and the effects on persons of concern, UNHCR, and its partners.

Scope of Cooperation

Evidence, collected primarily through four country case studies, suggests that UNHCR has **considerably increased its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation**. Not only is there a shift in mind-set, with UNHCR staff across hierarchies and locations buying into the agenda; there are also diverse examples of practice. With host governments defining how much space there is for cooperation, UNHCR mainly engages in humanitarian-development cooperation in four ways: by providing different kinds of support to development actors in order to catalyze their engagement on forced displacement (type 1); by leveraging the influence of development actors for advocacy on host government policies (type 2); by gradually linking services to national or local systems (type 3); and by mobilizing development resources to expand UNHCR's work on self-reliance (type 4).

While existing practice in the case-study countries shows diverse engagement across these types, **the predominant narrative within UNHCR centers on being a "facilitator" and a "catalyst"** for other actors. Accordingly, organizational investments have also focused on UNHCR's role as a catalyst and facilitator. There are, however, examples of important other forms of cooperation and widespread perceptions that additional opportunities for cooperation exist, particularly with regard to linking services to national systems. Opinions are diverging on whether UNHCR should seek funds from development actors to increasingly deliver on self-reliance itself.

In its role as a "catalyst", UNHCR is **not always able to meet the demands of development actors – for instance, for data and operational protection advice**. In particular, UNHCR should continue its efforts to expand its collection and analysis of data on the socio-economic situations of refugees and provide more practical advice on how to integrate protection into programming.

Effects

The effects of this increasing engagement are still emerging. In the vast majority of cases, the evidence is positive – not only for refugees and other people of concern, but also for UNHCR and its partners. Successful cases regarding advocacy cooperation, for example the new Ethiopian Refugee Proclamation, are expected to have positive effects on the protection of refugees and on their socio-economic situations. Cooperation with

development actors to link refugee services with local systems is possible across a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from aligning standards to building capacity and transferring services to public providers. Service integration appears to reduce the cost of providing services, despite existing concerns that it may lead to a decline in service quality and reliability. When it comes to expanding work on self-reliance with funds from development actors, the evaluation found only a small number of programs which, however, have high visibility within UNHCR as well as among its partners and host governments.

Despite these indications of positive effects, current experience also suggests that the **potential of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation is less transformational than may have been expected**. First, UNHCR's leverage in influencing the strategic orientation of key development actors towards forced displacement may be limited or dependent on the broader operational and policy context. Second, even where development actors engage, refugees and other persons of concern will require continued operational support from UNHCR for many areas. Thus, in cases in which service integration has been achieved, handing over implementation to development actors has not meant handing over financial responsibilities. Third, some of UNHCR's internal obstacles to maximizing cooperation with development actors are difficult to address and/or entail trade-offs. In particular, this concerns the internal system for allocating resources as well as the effects of short planning cycles on effective alignment with longer-term planning processes. Finally, there are open questions as to the level of advocacy commitment of international development actors, as well as on whether their early engagement represents a fundamental shift in their ways of working.

Adaptations

As a protection and solutions agency, UNHCR has invested significantly over recent years in its ability to cooperate with development actors. Many of these investments - for example in data and analysis, as well as development expertise among staff - have focused on UNHCR's role as a catalyst. Evidence collected to date for this evaluation suggests that **further adaptations, which would also support other types of cooperation, may be necessary**. These include, among others:

- Strengthen UNHCR's capacity to provide data on the socio-economic and de-facto protection situation of refugees. This would also enable UNHCR to contribute to monitoring the impacts of government policy changes and of the potential increase in activities by development actors.
- Clarify the spectrum of activities in service integration in various sectors and define multi-year objectives for service integration in important countries of operation.
- Adopt a more relevant operational approach to multi-year planning and budgeting.
- Encourage a debate to arrive at a more explicit institutional position on acceptable quality standards when integrating refugee services with national or local systems.
- Engage in joint debates on how a given refugee-response architecture could be transitioned to government-owned fundraising frameworks based on national development plans.
- Clarify UNHCR's unwritten position on not expanding support for further components of self-reliance programs with dedicated funding from development actors, in particular where UNHCR would fill important gaps or contribute to interim and transitional measures.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GIZ	*Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*
IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. Introduction

Think Piece Approach

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has commissioned an independent, developmental, longitudinal strategic evaluation to take stock of the agency's cooperation with development actors and assess the effects of this cooperation. The evaluation is implemented over three years, from 2018 to 2021, and aims to support UNHCR in refining its strategy and operational approach to humanitarian-development cooperation. **This report is a think piece intended to highlight key issues identified by the evaluation team, trigger joint discussion, and facilitate reflection on how to shape continued cooperation as well as the course of the evaluation going forward**. It is based on the evaluation's first round of qualitative research and draws on country visits to Jordan, Niger, and Ethiopia; a desk review of Bangladesh and a short mission to UNHCR's headquarters. In total, the evaluators conducted semi-structured interviews with 206 key informants. The think piece reflects findings until the first Quarter of 2019.

Understanding Humanitarian-Development Cooperation

Governments and international actors, including UNHCR, have long debated and worked towards linking different forms of assistance and achieving complementarity for their respective contributions to humanitarian and development challenges. Recently, efforts to strengthen the "humanitarian-development nexus" were recognized as important aspects of achieving the pledge to "leave no one behind", which was made as part of Agenda 2030. Such efforts, among others, found concrete expression in the "new way of working". In addressing forced displacement, they have gained new momentum in the context of the **Global Compact on Refugees and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework** (GCR, CRRF), which seeks to establish a "multi-stakeholder and partnership approach".

The GCR pursues four objectives: to expand access to solutions in third-countries; to support conditions in countries of origin to enable refugee return in safety and dignity; to **ease pressures on host countries;** and to **enhance refugee self-reliance.** While humanitarian-development cooperation also happens in countries of origin, both the evaluation and this think piece focus on the cooperation between humanitarian and development actors in the latter two contexts. In the evaluation, we use the term "engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation" to capture different forms of cooperation with development actors which aim to achieve these objectives of the GCR. "Development actors" is broadly defined to include all actors who work directly on or support the government and local authorities in improving the human development of host communities and displaced populations. These include development banks; bilateral donors and their development agencies; NGOs, civil society organizations, and private foundations; private sector organizations; and UN agencies with a mandate for development. Cooperation means that interaction goes beyond coordination or working in parallel, requiring a certain level of commitment, time, resources, and formality.

Four Types of Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation

Cooperation to ease pressures on host countries and enhance refugee self-reliance can take different forms. Host governments play a crucial role in setting the conditions for this cooperation by defining relevant policies and determining development priorities. In the case-study countries, four types of engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation are apparent (Figure 1):

1. **Acting as a catalyst for development engagement on forced displacement:** UNHCR provides various forms of support to development actors with the aim of increasing or improving their activities in support of refugees or in refugee-hosting areas. This includes logistical facilitation, data and analysis, protection advice, support for government policies and capacities, coordination support, and global engagement. In doing so, the catalyst role also seeks to prepare the ground for other types of cooperation.

2. **Leveraging the influence of development actors for protection and policy advocacy with governments:** UNHCR advocates for policy changes together with one or several development actors, or encourages development actors to include issues related to forced displacement in their advocacy and negotiations with governments. Policy objectives can include refugee access to national or local services (e.g., health, education, social safety), enabling conditions for self-reliance (e.g., the right to employment, mobility, recognition of qualifications), or other protection and rights issues (e.g., non-discrimination between refugees of different nationalities, *non-refoulement*, no involuntary repatriation).

3. **Gradually linking services for refugees with national systems:** UNHCR, with the support of development partners, makes efforts to link services for refugees to national and local systems. These efforts can be gradual, ranging from adapting refugee services to national standards and building water, electricity, or protection services that supply both refugees and host communities, to building capacity and transferring these integrated systems to local service providers.

4. **Expanding the support of UNHCR and its partners for self-reliance**: Using funding provided by development actors, UNHCR and its partners provide self-reliance programs either solely for refugees or for refugees and members of the host community. Such programs can include livelihoods programs, programs to strengthen local markets, and programs to enhance the preconditions for self-reliance, such as mobility, education, employment skills, or financial inclusion.

Figure 1: Types of engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation
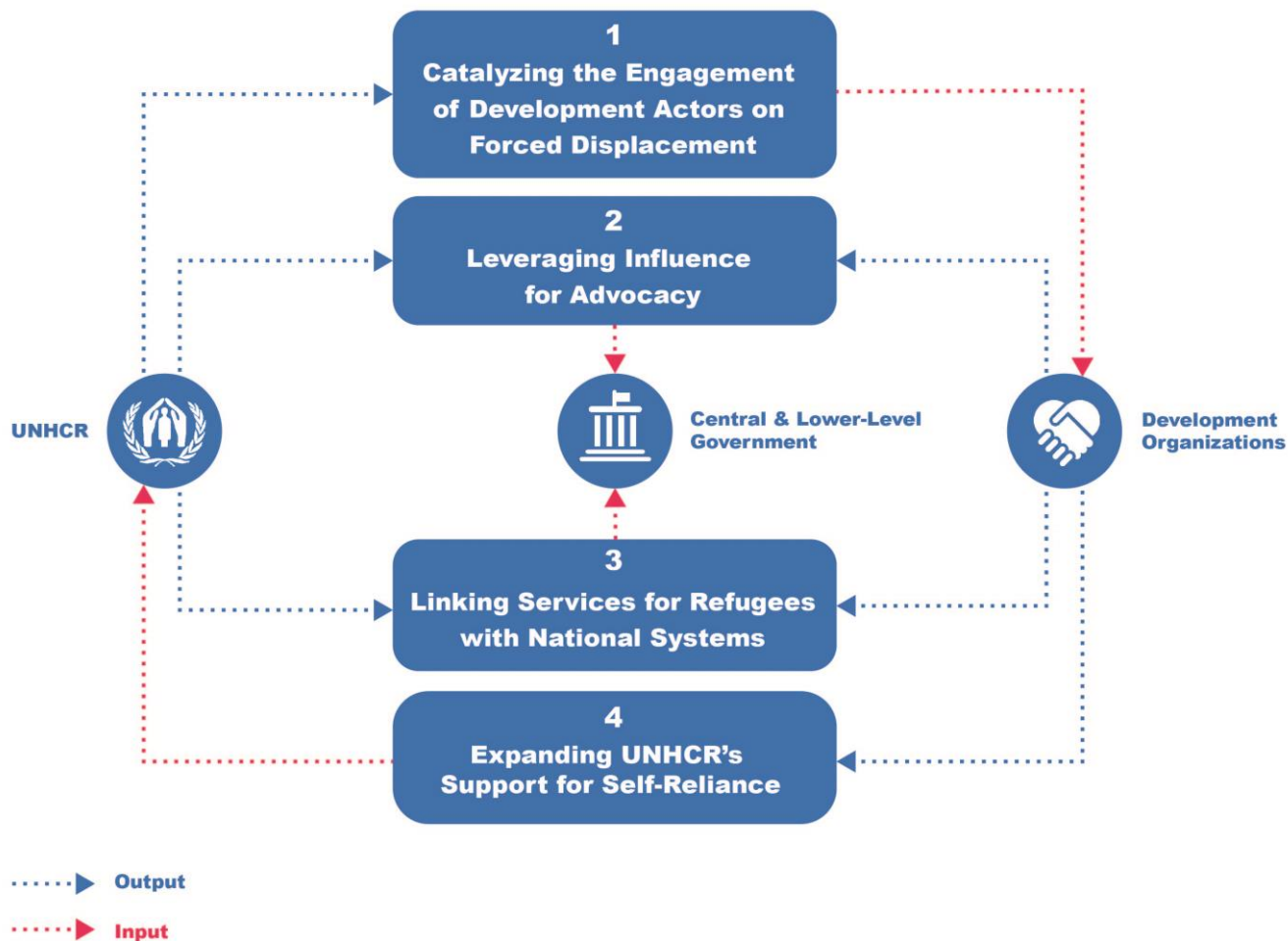
2. Catalyzing the Engagement of Development Actors on Forced Displacement

UNHCR's catalyst role dominates the narrative.

UNHCR's predominant vision for its future role in humanitarian-development cooperation is that it will be a "facilitator" or "catalyst", helping development actors engage more actively on issues of forced displacement, as reflected, for example, in the wording of the CRRF. However, many UNHCR staff appear unclear on what exactly this role entails. Across the case-study countries, the evaluation found a broad variety of activities intended to facilitate and/or catalyze the work of development actors. Often these, as well as other, global efforts focus on cooperation with the World Bank, which UNHCR has prioritized because of its extensive expertise on data and analysis, large-scale and predictable funding to developing countries, and thought leadership in the development system. Efforts to involve other partners are also visible, but less advanced and less systematic. **Greater cooperation with other UN agencies was often felt to be an additional opportunity.** This relates particularly to collaboration with the Resident Coordinator and a stronger commitment to contribute to existing cooperation frameworks for joint planning, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (formerly the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, UNDAF).

Activities undertaken to facilitate and catalyze the engagement of development actors on forced displacement include (see Figure 2):

Figure 2: Elements of UNHCR's facilitation and catalyst role
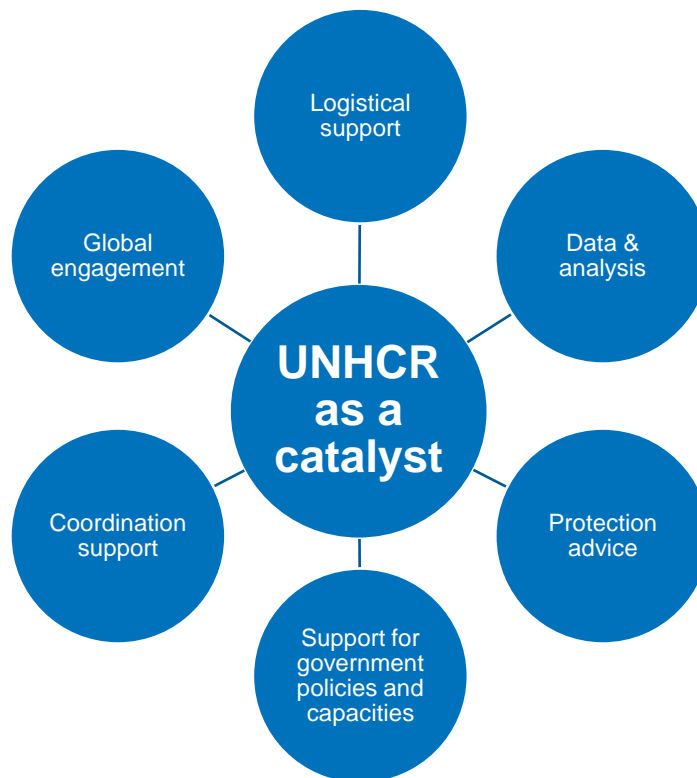
- **Logistical support:** At a very basic level, UNHCR frequently facilitates the field missions of development actors or conducts these missions jointly. This can involve the provision of transport or office space as well as arranging meetings with relevant counterparts, providing information on the security situation, and arranging necessary permits and clearances (see Box 1).

> **Box 1: Support for the early engagement of development actors in Bangladesh**: Bangladesh saw an unusually early engagement of international development actors in the refugee response, in particular of the World Bank under the IDA18 refugee window (500 million USD) and of the Asian Development Bank (ADB; 200 million USD). UNHCR acted as a facilitator, supporting and advising development actors during the programme-planning phase. UNHCR staff accompanied World Bank and ADB staff on joint assessments and provided logistical and administrative support as early as late 2017, a few months into the emergency response.

- **Data and analysis on needs and situations:** UNHCR supports – or intends to support – the strategic decisions as well as the operational planning of development actors by sharing relevant data and analysis on refugees and their situations. When UNHCR is the only UN agency present, it may attempt to direct attention of other agencies to needs in particular areas or situations. In respect of data, development actors have shown particular interest in socio-economic indicators and information about the skill profiles of refugees.

- **Protection advice**: UNHCR also advises development actors on protection issues. This includes assessments of countries' refugee protection frameworks ("protection notes"). The notes play an important role in the International Development Association's (IDA) sub-window for refugees, since adequate protection frameworks are a condition for programs under that window coming into effect (see the section on advocacy cooperation for more information). UNHCR also delivers protection trainings, for example to World Bank staff. In addition, development actors request advice on the potential protection implications of programming, and on how programming can be made more sensitive to protection concerns. In most of the examples observed, UNHCR provided this kind of advice during the planning and design phase of development projects. Its potential or continued role during project implementation is less clear and more nascent. An example of this nascent engagement is Niger, where UNHCR agreed to support the government implementing partners of a World Bank-funded project (see Box 2).

> **Box 2: Support for World Bank project design and implementing partners, Niger:** Since 2018, the World Bank has been financing the government of Niger to rehabilitate infrastructure in areas affected by displacement through an allocation of 80 million USD (of which 40 million is a loan). UNHCR is part of the Steering Committee of this project. It has cooperated with the government implementing agency SDS Sahel-Niger and the World Bank on project design in the following ways: (i) jointly developing project interventions, infrastructure investment, and sites, with a view to supporting the out-of-camp policy; (ii) co-targeting beneficiaries in relevant project components; and (iii) jointly assessing Niger's national protection framework and giving confirmation/"the green light" for the project to take effect, as well as jointly assessing the protection framework going forward.

- **Support for government policies and capacities:** Especially in countries where the CRRF has been formally activated, UNHCR supports governments in establishing the framework conditions enabling more engagement of development actors and stronger humanitarian-development cooperation. Examples include UNHCR's advisory work supporting the development of policies in Ethiopia (Box 3); capacity-building activities for local authorities drawing on development funding, for example in the Somali region of Ethiopia; and advocacy with government offices to address bureaucratic bottlenecks faced by development actors.

> **Box 3: Advice supporting government-led policy development on the CRRF in Ethiopia:** In recent years, the Government of Ethiopia developed a suite of commitments and policies related to the comprehensive refugee management, which create important enabling conditions for the engagement and cooperation with development actors. They include the nine pledges made at the 2016 Leader's Summit on Refugees in New York; a 2018 roadmap for the implementation of the CRRF; the 2019 adoption of a new Refugee Proclamation; and ongoing work on a 10-year strategy for refugees and an accompanying action plan. UNHCR has supported these processes by providing advice on relevant legal and protection issues.

- **Coordination support**: Similarly, UNHCR supports governments in coordinating the rollout of the CRRF as well as the contributions of different partners. In Ethiopia, for example, UNHCR has been working with the government to set up steering committees at national and regional levels as well as a National Coordination Office and some sub-regional coordination bodies.

- **Global engagement:** An important part of UNHCR's work as a facilitator and a catalyst takes place at the global level. This includes the processes surrounding the GCR, the CRRF, and the Global Refugee Forum. It also includes discussions with key development actors, which have resulted in a number of bilateral agreements, for example with the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). However, given this evaluation's focus on the country rather than the global level, the evaluation team has not examined these efforts or their results in detail.

Overall, the current narrative on UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation focuses almost exclusively on UNHCR's role as a catalyst. Both at global and country level, the role is most consistently and frequently named or described as UNHCR's contribution to humanitarian-development cooperation. The "catalyst" form of cooperation pursues important objectives of its own, namely encouraging development actors to focus more on forced displacement and/or to improve their programs in this area. At the same time, the catalyst role is intended to prepare the ground for other forms of cooperation. Yet these other forms of cooperation are distinct, and the narrative's focus on the catalyst role risks obscuring these other forms. This becomes evident when looking at their scope in sections 3-5 below.

UNHCR's support is appreciated by development actors, but frustrations are emerging.

Development actors with whom UNHCR collaborates **greatly appreciate UNHCR's support**. **UNHCR's practical facilitation** makes critical processes faster and easier to handle. Missions can be a key component in the planning process for development organizations, but can be impeded by their lack of presence on the ground and the logistical challenges this engenders. Organizing logistics, identifying relevant contacts in government institutions or with other partners, and facilitating access to refugee camps are all part of UNHCR's routine work, enabling UNHCR to provide effective support with relatively little effort. This kind of practical support can be a first step in building a broader relationship that can later include other forms of cooperation.

However, frustrations have emerged over other components of support. UNHCR is well aware that development actors – primarily the World Bank but also others, such as the ILO – would like to have easier **access to data** held by UNHCR. They would also be interested in further analysis of available data as well as more data, particularly on socio-economic indicators and refugees' professional skills. UNHCR's capacity to support development agencies seems to have been reduced in several cases, either because relevant data were lacking or because UNHCR was not able to share the data in a timely way. UNHCR may be less aware that there are also frustrations regarding its capacity to provide **operational protection advice**. The organization is credited for its competence on the legal dimensions of refugee protection. Its analyses of countries' protection frameworks and gaps are highly appreciated and recognized. Yet development organizations are also interested in receiving other data on protection trends, such as patterns of violence or access to essential services. Moreover, development partners mentioned the need for more practical advice on how to integrate protection issues into specific projects. UNHCR has been less able to deliver on this expectation in a timely way. It also remains unclear to what extent

UNHCR's refugee protection concerns relate to or exceed the standards of development actors, such as the World Bank's safeguard policies.

UNHCR's influence on development actors' strategic decisions is limited.

Equally important – but much more difficult to reflect on in an evaluation focused on country-level cooperation – is the question of **the extent to which UNHCR has been able to influence the strategic orientation of development actors**. Centralized global processes are providing an increasing number of entry points for UNHCR to discuss the orientation of development actors to forced displacement. This ranges from the commitments to leave no one behind and to eradicate poverty, made as part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, to the Global Compact on Refugees, with its progress indicators on poverty and labor market inclusion. In addition, UNHCR is becoming more versatile in using language relevant to development actors – for example, linking more to their concerns about risks, rather than focusing mainly on rights. However, both development partners and UNHCR staff plausibly argue that other factors beyond UNHCR's control have a greater effect on the strategic orientation of development actors than UNHCR's engagement and facilitation. This includes for example the positioning and openness of host governments on this agenda; the political prominence of the so-called migration crises in Europe and North America; the level of attention given to other priorities, such as climate change prevention and mitigation; and the role of "value for money" and "return on investment" considerations in decisions on where to invest. For the World Bank Group, for instance, there was a realization that development goals could not be achieved without working on forced displacement. Cooperation with UNHCR intensified *after* a strategic decision was taken to create an IDA sub-window on refugees.

From the perspective of UNHCR, **its emerging role as a facilitator and a catalyst is a positive but ambiguous experience overall**. The support it provides – typically without any financial compensation – enhances UNHCR's reputation as an honest broker. It also creates a lot of goodwill among development partners and thereby increases the chances for other forms of cooperation. However, facilitation can require a significant effort from UNHCR, particularly in areas where development partners' expectations extend beyond the resources UNHCR already has available (i.e., data and operational protection advice). In the absence of additional funding for these activities, they may divert resources away from other priorities. Whether this investment is worthwhile depends on whether it leads to additional investments from development actors which benefit refugees and refugee-hosting areas. Yet, evidence on the extent to which UNHCR's engagement leads to such additional investments is difficult to come by, as argued above. Among donors and in several parts of UNHCR, there is also an expectation that this investment will enable UNHCR to scale back its own engagement over the longer term, as governments – with the support of development actors – provide more services to refugees. The next chapters argue that these expectations may be unrealistic, as least in the short- to medium-term. In cases such as Bangladesh, for example, political decisions hamper greater emphasis on self-reliance. Development actors in this case face the same constraints as humanitarians in articulating and pursuing a longer-term vision. In other examples, continued support from UNHCR, as well as funding to cover the costs of services provided by other parties, remain necessary.

UNHCR's presence, honest broker reputation and capacity investments enable its role as a facilitator and a catalyst.

Being a facilitator and a catalyst is central to UNHCR's vision of humanitarian-development cooperation. The efforts the organization has made to ensure that the necessary conditions enabling this form of cooperation are in place are clearly visible, as potential areas for improvement also emerge:

- UNHCR's **strong operational presence, logistical capability, and typically close relationship with relevant authorities** in areas hosting refugees are crucial factors enabling its role as a facilitator and a catalyst.
- To date, UNHCR has consciously chosen **not to seek financial gain from humanitarian-development cooperation**. This position enhances its credibility. In Niger, for example, this was a key factor in securing UNHCR's role in accompanying the government's implementing partner for a major World Bank project.
- UNHCR made a significant **investment in enhancing its staff capacity** to strengthen the organization's capability as an effective facilitator and catalyst. Senior Development Officers with development and often World Bank backgrounds were hired for key operations. Across the board, this is seen as an effective measure. However, it has been a challenge to integrate these officers into the hierarchies and for them to find "common language" with UNHCR senior management. Staff members see greater potential for Senior Development Officers to support capacity building and development orientation throughout the organization.
- Investments in **enhanced data collection, analysis, and sharing** have begun. This includes level-3 refugee registration processes incorporating skill profiles in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, as well as smaller-scale data collection, such as household-level surveys in Jordan. At the global level, UNHCR and the World Bank are establishing a Joint Data Center. While it is too early to observe the effects of these measures, the creation of a dedicated data collection and analysis capacity in Copenhagen is seen as a potential opportunity to make socio-economic and protection-related data collected by UNHCR, including on violence, access to justice, and education, more useful to partners. Another opportunity that has not been tracked in the first phase of the evaluation is UNHCR's role in building the capacity of host country entities on refugee data.

Implications / For Further Consideration

- UNHCR's role as a facilitator and a catalyst dominates the narrative among UNHCR staff on the agency's contribution to humanitarian-development cooperation. This can obscure the view on several other, important forms of cooperation that are discussed below. UNHCR should therefore review how it presents its engagement and how internal investments can support other types of humanitarian-development cooperation as well. Going forward, this evaluation will track perceptions on changes in cooperation types and their scope.
- Expectations for what the catalyst role can achieve need to be adjusted. This concerns UNHCR's ability to influence the strategic orientation of development actors on forced displacement issues, as well as the

extent to which the engagement of development actors will enable UNHCR to scale back its own activities. This evaluation will explore the positions of development actors on these issues in greater depth.

- Effective facilitation depends on UNHCR's operational presence and practical experience in supporting refugees. Adopting a strategy in which UNHCR plays a "purely" facilitation and catalyst role without providing services itself would limit the utility of UNHCR for other actors. Providing direct services to forcibly displaced people in appropriate situations should remain a central part of UNHCR's vision and future role.

- As part of its catalyst role, UNHCR should give more credit to the benefits of the practical facilitation it provides and enhance its capacity to provide operational protection advice (in addition to its ongoing investments in data, analysis, and staff capacity). The evaluation will track UNHCR's progress in addressing these issues.

3. Leveraging the Influence of Development Actors for Advocacy

Cooperation on advocacy focuses on development banks and their conditions for disbursing funds.

In all case-study countries, there are examples of cooperation – or attempts at cooperation – between UNHCR and development actors in advocating with governments for improved protection and policy changes. Most examples involve international financial institutions and larger bilateral donors. In many cases, development actors make the government's progress on certain policy issues a condition for the disbursement of funds (see examples in Boxes 4 and 5).

Box 4: The Ethiopian Refugee Proclamation: In January 2019, the Ethiopian Parliament adopted a new Refugee Proclamation which, among other things, accords refugees the same treatment as Ethiopian nationals regarding access to pre-primary and primary education; access to available health and other services; and access to justice and vital events registration. Funders of the *Ethiopia Job Compact* – the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, and others – made the adoption of the Refugee Proclamation a precondition for starting the program.

Box 5: Syrian refugees' access to healthcare in Jordan: Access to public health services for Syrian refugees worsened significantly in Jordan after the government's February 2018 decision to scrap subsidized healthcare rates. The Jordan Health Development Partner Forum was founded to bring together donors and humanitarian and development actors, including UNHCR, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Danish, and the US government. The forum coordinated advocacy aimed at the Jordanian Higher Health Council and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. A multi-donor account was created within the Ministry of Health to cover the additional costs of subsidized rates for Syrians, based on UNHCR data on the health needs of Syrian refugees. Following approval by the Government of Jordan and the Jordanian Parliament, a subsidy has been reintroduced that covers 80 percent of costs.

UNHCR's role in the allocation of funds under the IDA18 sub-window for refugees is the most systematic example of joint policy advocacy. At request of the World Bank, UNHCR has been providing assessments of the refugee protection framework in countries receiving funds under the sub-window for refugees (commonly referred to as "protection notes" within UNHCR). These assessments are aimed at facilitating policy dialogues with the respective governments on critical protection issues. According to the World Bank's "effectiveness condition", an adequate refugee protection framework is a condition for disbursing allocations. UNHCR regularly updates its assessments and has introduced improvements to the methodology of the assessment in cooperation with the World Bank. Initially, UNHCR protection notes did not include an explicit confirmation on whether or not the requirements of the "effectiveness condition" had been met. In the future, protection notes will include such a statement, as well as elements that should be monitored as IDA programs are being implemented. The new methodology is also intended to achieve greater consistency regarding the form and content of the notes.

The evaluation also found instances of cooperation on policy advocacy with other development actors – for example, the International Labour Organization (a UN agency) or the development institutions associated with bilateral donors. However, these instances appeared to be more sporadic and in several cases were linked to projects these agencies were implementing jointly with the World Bank.

Cooperation on advocacy is largely uncontroversial and has produced some positive effects.

Many (but not all) UNHCR staff and development partners see this type of cooperation as uncontroversial. Focusing on UNHCR's core goals relating to the status and rights of refugees, such cooperation builds on existing advocacy efforts and predates the reinvigorated international agenda on humanitarian-development cooperation. Host governments in Ethiopia, Jordan, and Niger also demonstrate understanding of, and sympathy for, UNHCR's role in this type of cooperation, even if they may reject specific advocacy demands. By contrast, government authorities in Bangladesh were, according to UNHCR and development partner interviewees, much more critical of UNHCR's attempts to use development actors as a channel for dialogue to address politically sensitive issues, such as refugee access to the national justice system and education. UNHCR staff and development partners are also more skeptical about this form of cooperation in Bangladesh.

Since most examples of cooperation on advocacy are recent, evidence on their full effects will only become available over time. **UNHCR currently does not have adequate monitoring systems to trace the impact of this**

kind of engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation, so it risks under- or overestimating its contribution. The IDA18 process also does not foresee a formal monitoring role for UNHCR. Despite this, where advocacy cooperation has been successful, the first **positive effects on the protection of refugees and their socio-economic situations are emerging,** and more are expected. In Jordan, work permits issued to refugees as a result of successful policy advocacy offer improved legal protection (less risk of deportation, exploitation, and abuse; more mobility for those living in camps) and socio-economic benefits (higher earnings, even though there are no indications that new work opportunities have become available). The new Ethiopian Refugee Proclamation prepares the ground for more local integration and self-reliance. Despite operational challenges and economic constraints, the proclamation is perceived as an important milestone, and has enabled the implementation of several programs supporting economic opportunities for refugees that had been on hold.

Success depends on Development Actors' strategic orientation and on the political context.

The most successful examples of UNHCR cooperation on advocacy involve organizations with a strong focus on reaching those left furthest behind and addressing forced displacement, such as the World Bank. There is also a growing number of (primarily European) donors and other development banks who are prioritizing similar objectives. However, the extent to which UNHCR has driven or influenced this strategic orientation is unclear, and hence **UNHCR's ability to leverage the influence of institutions that do not demonstrate the same interest in refugee-related issues is untested, and may be limited.**

In addition, **development actors are not willing to back all the advocacy issues identified by UNHCR** in the timespan hoped by UNHCR, particularly when it comes to using them as conditions for disbursing funds. So far, the evaluation has not been able to establish clear evidence on what determines the issues development actors will endorse. A likely factor is that development organizations choose advocacy issues that have a realistic chance of success. They have an interest in disbursing available financial resources and seeing related programs implemented. In theory, UNHCR shares this interest, as persons of concern would not benefit if development funds remain undisbursed and as UNHCR's relationship with the government might suffer from disruptions to development programs. In practice, the evaluation found little explicit articulation of this relationship in UNHCR's internal debates. Two recent examples illustrate this puzzle: In Cameroon, the World Bank demonstrated its commitment to addressing protection issues (in addition to advocacy issues more narrowly related to the economic development of refugees) when it made clear that disbursements were conditional on the government stopping the *refoulement* of refugees, based on the IDA18 implementation requirement of an adequate refugee protection framework. In doing so, the World Bank relied on data provided by UNHCR. In Bangladesh, by contrast, UNHCR, other UN organizations, and several donors had high expectations in late 2017/early 2018 that the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank would link their financial pledges to government policy changes. These expectations were not met, however, and there was a general perception that UNHCR's reliance on development actors to advocate for protection issues did not lead to the expected outcome of changing government positions on key policy issues.
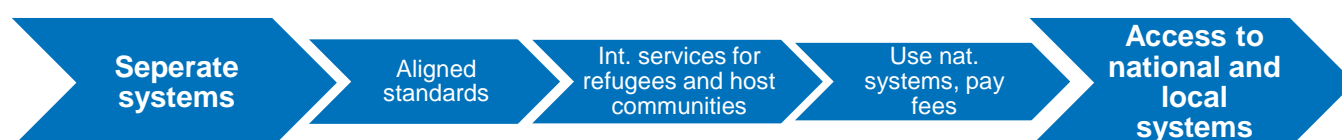
Implications / For Further Consideration

- This type of UNHCR cooperation centers on the World Bank, which is the most advanced among international financial institutions in focusing its own programs on reaching those left furthest behind and the forcibly displaced. UNHCR is seeking to expand similar relationships with other donors and development banks. In doing so, it should support its country offices in focusing on "low-hanging fruit" by mapping development actors that offer promising entry points for advocacy cooperation, such as a declared focus on forced displacement or reaching those left furthest behind.

- Decision-making processes around the advocacy priorities of development actors remain unclear. UNHCR may want to review experiences across country operations in order to set realistic expectations regarding which development actors are likely to take up which advocacy causes, in addition to collecting data on factors and inputs affecting results. Going forward, this evaluation will further collect and analyze development actor perspectives on this issue.

- In conjunction with ongoing efforts to strengthen its data collection and analysis capability, UNHCR should explore how it could design its data collection to enable more systematic and ongoing monitoring of the socio-economic and practical protection situations of refugees. Without assuming a formal monitoring role in World Bank projects, this would enable UNHCR to monitor the impact of policy changes as well as of potential overall increases in development activities in refugee-hosting areas. The results of these monitoring efforts would help establish the effects of global efforts like the GCR and create an important basis for future advocacy efforts with host governments as well as development actors. This evaluation will attempt to trace the effects of some specific examples of policy changes achieved through joint advocacy.

4. Linking Services for Refugees with Local Systems

Opportunities for linking services with local systems exist across the spectrum of UNHCR's activities and partners.

In the various case-study countries, UNHCR has been found to work in cooperation with development partners to gradually link services for refugees with national and local systems. These activities can complement ongoing advocacy efforts. Whereas successful advocacy implies a policy shift of the government, **the activities discussed here seek gradual, often local and small-scale improvements** (see Figure 3). Since related measures are therefore often less at the center of political attention, they also have a chance of success in contexts in which there are political reservations against full inclusion. At the same time, they can help prepare the ground for the full inclusion of refugees in national services by harmonizing approaches and putting additional capacities in place. Examples of this type of cooperation cover a broad spectrum: They span various sectors, in particular education, energy, WASH, shelter, and protection; include contexts both in and outside of camps; and involve private and public service providers, development finance institutions, UN organizations, and sometimes NGOs.

Figure 3: Gradual steps in service integration

| Seperate systems | Aligned standards | Int. services for refugees and host communities | Use nat. systems, pay fees | Access to national and local systems |

A first step is to align standards. In Ethiopia, for example, the curriculum in schools for refugee children was adjusted to align with the national curriculum. In Bangladesh, by contrast, the government is resisting the same kind of alignment. A second step could be for international actors to create additional services and build capacities that serve both refugees and members of the host community. In Niger, for example, refugee camp schools were opened to children from the host community, and integrated health centers staffed by locals received financial support (Box 6). In Jordan, UNHCR refers patients to public rather than private hospitals to support the capacity of the public system, and it cooperated on the construction of photovoltaic power plants serving refugee camps and host communities (Box 7). Integrated water systems in Ethiopia (Box 8) also serve both camps and the surrounding villages, and integrated secondary schools are open to children of both the host community and refugees. In a third step, these systems could be localized by handing over infrastructure and management responsibility to local service providers, as happened with both the water management system in Ethiopia and the power plants in Jordan. In these cases, UNHCR continued to cover the costs of the services provided to refugees by paying service fees. In a similar way, discussions on potentially integrating cash assistance for refugees into national social safety systems are underway in Ethiopia, Jordan, and Niger. In Uganda, UNHCR supported the drafting of

governmental sectoral plans on, among others, education, health, and water, and supports the government's planning processes so as to facilitate extension of national services to refugees.

> **Box 6: Healthcare in Tillabéry, Niger:** UNHCR engages in the construction of integrated communal health centres in several municipalities near camps, with a view to phasing out in-camp health service provision by UNHCR humanitarian partners. UNHCR has also covered the consultation fees for refugees and employed additional staff in these health centres on the same conditions as those in state-run health centres.

> **Box 7: Photovoltaic power plant in Zaatari, Jordan:** The German Development Finance Institution KfW cooperated with UNHCR to construct a photovoltaic power plant near the Zaatari refugee camp, which is now owned and operated by the local utility IDCO. Connected to the national electrical grid, the plant furnishes electricity for both the camp (on a fee basis) and other consumers. Selected refugees received cash for work during construction or training as solar engineers.

> **Box 8: Integrated water management in Itang, Ethiopia:** Since 2014, UNHCR has cooperated with UNICEF to replace the costly transport of water to refugee camps with a permanent water system serving both the camps and the host communities. It was initially operated by an international NGO and was handed over to a local water utility at the end of 2018. It now operates on a fee/cost-recovery basis.

The country case studies offer many examples of cooperation on linking refugee services to national and local systems. However, there was also a perception that **there are missed or additional opportunities for this type of cooperation**. This includes, for example, a more coordinated effort to link to social protection systems, more systematic efforts to use and strengthen national systems addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and more concerted efforts to support capacity building for decentralized public service providers.

Linking services can reduce costs, but requires continued financial commitment by UNHCR.

Traditionally, UNHCR has consistently been seeking to ensure that refugees receive services quickly and in accordance with international standards. This often leads to the establishment of separate service systems for refugees. Many UNHCR staff view efforts at service integration with some scepticism, fearing this might lead to a decline in service quality and reliability. For instance, refugees may have particular health needs linked to their flight, and the level of available public services may not be sufficient. For many examples of efforts to link services, no data on the effects on service quality was available. However, in two prominent cases there were indications that **service integration can also improve service quality**. In Ethiopia, there are indications that creating an integrated water management system led to more water being available for refugees as well as for host communities. In Jordan, the number of hours of electricity available in the camps increased with the building of the power plant, and this had positive effects on health and protection.

A major advantage of linking service systems can be reduced costs. Cost savings appear to arise especially where linking results in the handover of ownership and/or management responsibility for service provision to local service providers. Cost savings are particularly significant and well documented for the integrated water

management systems in Ethiopia and the power systems in Jordan. Where systems use a fee-for-service model calculated to recover operating and maintenance costs, the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation also expect them to be more sustainable and less vulnerable to the uncertainties of raising additional funds for the maintenance or upgrading of systems.

In the two cases referenced above, while costs were reduced, **handing over implementation did *not* mean handing over financial responsibilities**. UNHCR remains responsible for paying the fees for services delivered to refugees, including for power in Jordan and water in Ethiopia. This is in contrast to some of the examples of cooperation on advocacy. In Jordan, for example, some efforts to advocate for including refugees in existing national services were accompanied by financial commitments from development donors to cover the government's expected additional costs. However, in many other areas/countries hosting refugees, service systems either do not exist or are not able to absorb a significant additional caseload. Gradually expanding, linking, and eventually handing over service capacities is a more realistic strategy in these contexts. UNHCR therefore needs to manage donor expectations regarding its ability to scale down its own operations and support in these areas.

Not all UNHCR processes and relationships support the gradual linking and integration of services.

A crucial factor enabling cooperation on service integration is the versatility of the approach. **Even in cases where the host government opposes the integration of refugees, small steps towards linking services may be possible.** Depending on what steps are taken, this type of cooperation may therefore depend less on political context than cooperation in policy advocacy.

While many different sectors of UNHCR engage in gradually linking refugee services with local systems, **there are internal processes and established relationships that can hinder this form of cooperation:**

- UNHCR works with annual planning cycles. Efforts to link refugee services to local systems often require an upfront investment. **Short planning cycles** focus attention on these required investments rather than on longer-term efficiency gains, and this makes it difficult to pursue a longer-term vision of service integration. To address this concern, UNHCR has put multi-year, multi-partner planning processes in place in several case-study countries. However, these strategy documents remain detached from actual planning processes and play a limited role in the day-to-day work of the organization.
- In many contexts, UNHCR has a strong **relationship with national refugee agencies**. Strengthening these agencies and creating a separate service system for refugees was often instrumental in delivering services quickly and to standard. However, these relationships can also create path dependencies. Refugee agencies often provide services directly and draw financial benefits from doing so. They therefore have vested interests that may lead them to obstruct efforts aimed at linking or integrating services. Conversely, one case-study country shows that where UNHCR was newly established, it was able to innovate without such path dependencies.
- Finally, there is a lack of clarity on acceptable service standards in contexts where local standards are lower than those offered by UNHCR. As discussed above, there were indications that efforts to link

services can also increase standards. Yet prevailing concerns that linking could lower standards and might not be in line with UNHCR's institutional position may prevent staff members from exploring opportunities.

Implications / For Further Consideration

- Cooperation with development actors to link refugee services with local systems is possible in many different contexts and has been found to produce positive effects. To explore opportunities more systematically, UNHCR could identify the spectrum of possible steps in each sector. Multi-year planning processes at the country level would then determine the objectives for progress across the sectors.

- A more operationally relevant approach to multi-year planning and budgeting would facilitate more engagement in this form of cooperation. As service integration is expected to lead to reduced costs, there is potentially also a financial argument for multi-year budgeting. However, this would require more multi-year funding from UNHCR's donors.

- While cost-savings are likely, UNHCR should not expect this form of cooperation to result in significantly reduced financial responsibilities for the organization.

- Field staff would benefit from a debate and a more explicit institutional position on whether and to what degree compromises on quality and standards are acceptable when linking or integrating refugee services with national or local systems. Going forward, this evaluation will analyze available data on service standards and track UNHCR's progress in addressing this issue.

- Where state capacity allows UNHCR to use public institutions as primary service providers, it should engage in joint debates on how fundraising mechanisms could be transitioned to receive more funds from development actors, such as by including sectoral plans based on refugee inclusion in national development plans.

5. Expanding UNHCR Support for Self-Reliance

There is consistent rhetoric against drawing on development funds to expand UNHCR's support for self-reliance projects, but examples of such cooperation are positive.

UNHCR staff consistently argue that **strengthening humanitarian-development cooperation is *not* about mobilizing development resources to expand UNHCR's own portfolio and budget for refugee self-reliance programs**. The argument is that different partners should draw on complementary competencies, with UNHCR focusing on enabling conditions for self-reliance, such as ensuring that refugees have the right to work and supporting their mobility within the host country. Development actors, in turn, would focus more on education and building job-related skills, as well as creating job opportunities and more general, area-based development. In particular, at the beginning of its cooperation with the World Bank, UNHCR decided that it would not seek funds from the Bank. As discussed above, this decision has strengthened UNHCR's credibility and helped to enable its role as facilitator and catalyst. While there is no formal institutional position that would also apply to other actors, staff members in leading positions at headquarters, in country, and in field offices in different countries consistently shared this narrative with respect to development actors generally. This is exceptional in the international aid system, where many humanitarian organizations are expanding their activities into resilience and development activities, and several key development organizations are increasing their focus on humanitarian situations.

Despite this clear rhetoric, the evaluation found examples of UNHCR mobilizing funding from development actors to provide stronger support through livelihoods programs and the creation of job opportunities for refugees and host communities. While there are only a small number of examples, these programs are highly visible within UNHCR and among its partners and host governments. Examples include a partnership with ILO to provide job centers for refugees in Jordan, an emerging project on financial inclusion with Gramen Crédit Agricole in Jordan, a partnership with the IKEA foundation supporting agriculture projects in Ethiopia (Box 9), and a partnership with GIZ on an urbanization program in Niger (Box 10). The latter example overlaps with other types of cooperation but includes a component on self-reliance, given that they seek to lay the groundwork for development in urban areas, outside of camps.

Box 9: UNHCR implementing projects funded by the IKEA foundation, Ethiopia: In Melkadida, Ethiopia, the IKEA foundation funds livelihoods and self-reliance projects focused on irrigation and agriculture, implemented by UNHCR.

Box 10: Urbanization in Niger: UNHCR is cooperating with municipalities, local representatives, the traditional Chiefdoms, and decentralized public services in providing technical, administrative, legal, and financial support to municipalities to engage in urban planning, acquisition, and the allocation of building plots. Municipalities are acquiring land (non-building areas) from private owners, transforming these plots into building areas, and parcelling them out. These parcels/plots are designated for the municipality's public infrastructure, for the land owners, for individuals who buy them from the municipality, and for social housing for refugees and vulnerable members of the host community. UNHCR has subsequently supported constructing social housing as an economic activity for displaced and local populations, creating a "one-stop shop" bundle of available services for refugees, and drafting development plans that link priority development goals to the revenue generated from the sale of parcels/plots. In one region in Niger, these activities are funded by the German development implementer *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ).

Not expanding support for self-reliance can have negative consequences for UNHCR and for refugees.

In most cases, **UNHCR currently does *not* mobilize funds from development actors to expand its support for self-reliance programs**, let alone for other developmental activities. This is not always because of its (unwritten) policy position, but may also be caused by donor restrictions on their funding. Where it is due to UNHCR's position, it has helped UNHCR take a stance as an "honest broker" engaging in humanitarian-development cooperation not for its own financial benefit, but to catalyze the engagement of others. The position also shines a more generally positive light on UNHCR in a situation in which many other organizations are criticized for "mission creep".

However, the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation at country and field levels – including not only UNHCR staff members, but also some government officials and other partners – were more concerned with the potential **negative effects of this lack of engagement:**

- First, there is the issue of **expectations**. Where UNHCR directly implements programs supporting the creation of job opportunities or area-based development funded by development actors, government and NGO partners expect UNHCR to deliver more such programs and to extend the benefits to host communities. Would UNHCR decide not to accept related earmarked funds, it would risk disappointing donors, as well as local governments and communities.
- Second, not expanding support for self-reliance activities may make UNHCR **less attractive as a partner**. Technical expertise, data, and a strong field presence are some of UNHCR's key assets for other forms of cooperation as well. Without directly delivering support for certain components of self-reliance programming, UNHCR would not be able to build expertise and presence in these areas. This risks undermining its envisaged role as a facilitator and a catalyst. The lack of engagement would also limit UNHCR's ability to co-fund projects or deliver complementary activities, again making it less attractive for other organizations to partner with UNHCR.
- Finally, lack of engagement in this form of cooperation can also have **negative effects on refugees and host communities**. Development actors are often not present in refugee-hosting areas or take a long time to redirect their activities. There are therefore likely to be significant gaps in those components of self-

reliance programs deemed most suitable for development partners if UNHCR does not expand the support it provides directly. Transitional and capacity building measures might also be important in maintaining a positive dynamic in areas in which governments and host communities are waiting for larger development programs to begin.

Conversely, **experiences with existing programs that have dedicated funds from development actors for UNHCR self-reliance activities have been largely positive**. The Niger and the Ethiopia programs are praised both internally and externally, including by partners and government representatives at different levels, even if they may have involved significant teething problems. The evaluation could not detect any potential backlash against an expansion of UNHCR's role in this direction. There is also evidence – so far largely anecdotal – that the programs help to improve the economic situation and sense of well-being among refugees, as well as acceptance among host communities.

Internal obstacles stand in the way of expanding this type of cooperation.

In addition to UNHCR's clear narrative against mobilizing development resources to expand its support for self-reliance programs, there are strong internal obstacles to doing so, which are difficult to address:

- **UNHCR's internal system for allocating resources** helps to ensure that its operational priorities are not driven by donors. By the same token, it makes it difficult to mobilize and accept additional, dedicated resources for specific activities. Country operations have a designated "operational level", and mobilized funds must first be used to support activities prioritized within this level. Programs supporting self-reliance thus compete with other, often more immediately life-saving activities. Country operations also have few incentives to mobilize additional funding. Country offices can request exceptions allowing them to mark certain contributions as additional. However, this process is relatively cumbersome and (full) approval may not be granted.
- Despite efforts to harmonize and simplify the **reporting demands of donors**, development donors often request detailed reporting at the project level. UNHCR uses a unified, country-based reporting system. In line with efforts to reduce the reporting burden, this system significantly reduces the administrative effort. Yet, it is not well suited to fulfilling these demands of development donors.
- While UNHCR does have some staff members with experience in livelihoods and other aspects of self-reliance programming, this is **not UNHCR's core area of expertise**. In particular, along with many of its traditional partner organizations, it lacks technical competences on development, such as agricultural economics and area-based development. In case of expanded support for self-reliance in particular contexts, UNHCR would need to review how to build or acquire such competences, in particular whether to hire staff with more specific technical expertise in these areas. It would also need to invest in finding suitable partners to implement these projects.

Implications / For Further Consideration

- UNHCR will not and should not become primarily an implementing organization for funds from development actors, and neither should it compete with development actors on their core competencies. However, the policy on when UNHCR should accept dedicated funding by such actors to expand its support for further aspects of self-reliance programs would benefit from more clarity. In particular, as a protection and solutions agency, UNHCR may in some cases be the only actor with an operational presence and could thus fill important gaps. What is more, UNHCR may prepare the ground for development actors' area-based approaches by supporting interim measures. This could involve livelihoods programs linked to local market dynamics, skill-building activities relevant to areas in which investments are planned, or an increase in cash-based assistance to help stimulate local markets. Going forward, the evaluation will explore the perceptions of development actors in more detail to understand to what extent moving in this direction risks undermining UNHCR's facilitator and catalyst role. It will also enquire whether there is evidence on UNHCR's comparative ability in delivering such programs.

- UNHCR's current budgeting and reporting systems have many advantages. Rather than overhauling those systems, UNHCR should review how the requirements of this form of engagement might be accommodated within existing systems. Self-reliance activities could, for example, either be prioritized as part of the operational level or automatically counted as additional (and therefore not counted towards the operational level). Global discussions, backed by donors' Grand Bargain commitments, might convince development donors to accept UNHCR's standard reporting, particularly if UNHCR makes progress in focusing its standard reporting on outcomes more than outputs. This evaluation will collect lessons learned from existing examples on how internal obstacles to this form of cooperation can be addressed.

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UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation is positive, but less transformational than expected.

This think piece is part of an **ongoing developmental, longitudinal strategy evaluation, the final results of which are expected in 2021**. The evidence collected to date suggests that UNHCR has considerably increased its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation within the space availed by host governments. The evaluation team is unable to quantify this engagement beyond the examples collected or to make an assessment of the overall adequacy of engagement. However, it is clear that practice is diverse and growing. It is also accompanied by a remarkable shift in mind-set, resulting in internal buy-in to the cooperation agenda. The effects of this increasing cooperation are still emerging. In the vast majority of cases, this evidence is positive not only for refugees and other people of concern, but also for UNHCR and its partners. **UNHCR is therefore on the right track in expanding its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation**.

However, current experience also suggests that the **potential of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation is less transformational than may have been expected**. Crucial factors limiting the potential engagement of development actors are largely beyond UNHCR's sphere of control and not the direct focus of this evaluation. They include host governments' willingness to enable the inclusion and self-reliance of refugees, as well as the level of strategic focus development actors decide to dedicate to forced displacement or (more generally) to those left furthest behind. Even where development actors engage, refugees and other persons of concern will require continued operational support from UNHCR in many areas. In addition, some of UNHCR's internal obstacles to maximizing cooperation with development actors are difficult to address and/or entail trade-offs with other advantages. Finally, international development actors may face similar political obstacles as UNHCR, and there are open questions as to their level of advocacy commitment and whether their early engagement represents a fundamental change in their ways of working.

These challenges make it clear that humanitarian-development cooperation should not be about handing over implementation of the refugee response from a nominally "humanitarian" actor to an international development actor. Rather, its objective should be to streamline – in the medium-term, political conditions permitting – the response as much as possible, to link with public services, and to enable refugees to become self-reliant. Until this is possible, as this think piece has demonstrated, UNHCR has a menu of options far broader than the predominant narrative of UNHCR playing a catalyst role suggests. Moving beyond the focus on this catalyst role to distinguish between and cover all four types of engagement might also help the organization recalibrate its investments across these different types of engagement.

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