

EVENT REPORT

What is the role of refugees, host communities and civil society actors in a future Comprehensive Refugee Response?

On 4th December 2017, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN hosted an event in Geneva to reflect on the implications of the supposed 'system-change' emanating from the CRRF. The event was attended by 35 participants from NGOs, UNHCR, ICRC and Member State missions in Geneva.

DRC staff from East Africa, the Middle East, and global programmes shared experiences and thoughts on three key issues relevant for the Global Compact on Refugees and its Programme of Action, and for the continued roll-out of the CRRF: 1) What does it take to create a space for refugees and host communities in comprehensive, multi-stakeholder responses? 2) Will a multi-stakeholder response dilute or enforce accountability for refugee protection and solutions? 3) What new role will NGOs have in a reformed refugee response modality?

This report contains the essence of the presentations and debates.



00 Introduction

Denmark's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, Mr. Carsten Staur, opened the event with the message that the CRRF is the right approach for the future refugee response. He acknowledged the challenge of making a development approach work in hosting areas where poverty and poor governance are prevalent. Mr. Staur welcomed DRC's initiative to discuss how refugees and host communities can be better included in CRRF implementation.

Peter Klansoe, DRC's Global Head of Programme & Policy, welcomed participants and expressed gratitude for the time taken to discuss DRC's perspectives on the Global Compact on Refugees. He sketched the main reasons to believe in the change potential of the CRRF. High political attention to displacement issues, coupled with technological advancement and development actors' unprecedented engagement in displacement

challenges render a significant change in refugee response probable. A change that is welcome, but a change that also calls for critical analysis and reflection.

DRC has used the 2017 consultation year to support CRRF roll-outs and in parallel to analyse the presumed changes with two core interests in focus: First, participation – how can the CRRF facilitate a more profound inclusion of refugees and host communities? Second, the accountability implications of the CRRF and its multi-stakeholder / whole-of-society approach. Collective accountability must lead to better accountability, not diluted accountability – how to ensure this? The event provided field and global perspectives on those key questions, as well as reflections on INGO’s future role in refugee response.

01 Voice & participation of refugees and hosting communities

The first panel attended to the question on how to create a genuine space for refugees and host communities in durable solutions and CRRF processes.

Ms. Saskia Baas, who coordinates the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) which is led by DRC, NRC, and IRC in the Middle East, was the first speaker. In addition to research and advocacy on solutions options in the region, DSP works to mobilize and empower Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs) to influence durable solutions processes in the region. Ms. Baas presented DSP’s methodologies for collecting and amplifying refugee voices, and the lessons learnt on challenges and opportunities for doing it effectively.

Mr. Adrien Bory from DRC’s diaspora programme presented learnings from mobilizing and supporting diaspora communities in humanitarian response generally and in durable solutions processes more specifically.

Ms. Karin Sørensen, DRC’s Deputy Regional Director in East Africa and Yemen, presented the methodology and preliminary results from a series of broad, open-ended community consultations that has been planned and organized via the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) in East Africa – as a compensatory measure for the low degree of refugee and host community inclusion in the formal CRRF processes in the region.

Key points of relevance to the question of participation in the CRRF that emanated from the presentations and subsequent discussions:

CRRF roll-outs show that participation of refugees and host communities is not automatically prioritized – even if the intentions are there on paper. Formal accountability for securing the participation of these groups is necessary. The Programme of Action can promote participation by establishing it as a default practice in future comprehensive responses.

While instituting democratic representation is often not possible or feasible in refugee situations, the (diverse) voices of refugees and host communities can instead be captured via broad, systematic and regular consultations. There are many methods available, including the People First Impact Methodology applied in East Africa and regions. More traditional methodologies of Age-gender Diversity-sensitive focus group discussions

remain valid, while Information technologies offer immense opportunities for real-time participation.

Too often, consultations are one-off and do not generate the legitimacy and impact that feedback loops and continuous participation provide. Feedback loops can often be facilitated via local civil society organisations, including refugee organizations as seen in the Middle East. Local civil society organizations, more generally, are the best-suited medium to amplify and represent the diverse voices and views of refugees and host communities. These organizations are in need of targeted advocacy trainings and support in order to be able to fully exercise their potential.

Consultations should only be carried out if the results will be used. In order to use the results it requires a willingness to learn and adapt programming, which again requires flexibility on the part of both donors and responding actors. There are structural as well as cultural barriers to flexibility and adaptive programming, but they must be overcome before participation and inclusion of people of concern can move beyond tokenism.

Community-driven programme design and promotion of community empowerment and ownership are entrenched methods in development work. These approaches must also start to be an automatic feature of refugee response and solutions programming, including in early solutions interventions.

Diaspora organizations are resourceful and important actors in refugee response and their role should not be overlooked in the forthcoming Global Compact on Refugees. Diaspora groups are 'agents of change' that can provide humanitarian assistance, promote peace and development in their country of origin through financial and social remittances and the transfer of values, know-how, and skills. Regarding durable solutions, they play a key role in supporting the local integration of newly arrived refugees; when it comes to return, diaspora networks-/organizations play a vital role in and maintaining cultural and language ties to the country of origin.

The main challenges for capturing, verifying and amplifying refugee voices include first and foremost, sufficient time by the refugee and hosting communities to engage in bottom-up deliberate consultations. If such processes are replicated in an uncoordinated manner they create fatigue. In an often fragmented civil society landscape (also among diaspora groups), a second challenge relates to identifying the right local organizations: those with legitimacy and capacity to engage in and influence political-level discussions. Civil society networks are often good entry points. In contexts that are highly politicized, it is important that engagement with local organizations is conflict-sensitive.

02 Accountability in a multi-stakeholder response

The second panel addressed the question of accountability and the CRRF. Moving towards a (more) comprehensive multi-stakeholder response to refugee situations is the largest opportunity the CRRF brings to address immediate and longer-term protection needs and expand options for solutions. At the same time, a *whole-of-society* response also carries the risk of diluted accountability. Multiple actors with diverse interests do not necessarily produce protection and solutions outcomes.

The panel served to shed light on the opportunities and risks associated with a whole-of-society approach based on a global policy analysis as well as recent experiences with the 3RP in the Middle East and the IGAD process in East Africa. Marzia Montemurro from [HERE Geneva](#), Karin Sørensen (DRC's Deputy Regional Director for East Africa and Yemen) and Alice Anderson-Gough (DRC's Policy Officer in the Middle East) sat on the panel.

Key points of relevance to the question of accountability and the CRRF emerged from the presentations and subsequent discussions:

The 3RP experience from the Middle East and the IGAD process in East Africa both exemplify core opportunities and challenges of a multi-stakeholder approach to refugee response.

When it comes to opportunities, it is evident that the 3RP has broadened the scope of actors involved in refugee response. UNDP's central role has opened a constructive debate around what resilience is in a refugee situation and has thereby expanded the scope for strategic programming discussions. Albeit a very different process, as it is inter-governmental, the IGAD-led Nairobi Plan of Action has also altered programming directions towards more comprehensive and long-term responses with a focus on resilience and self-reliance. Both processes help to put displacement into a regional framework enabling more coherent responses that are important for refugees.

In addition to shifts in strategic visions, the two processes have also brought about better opportunities for NGOs to influence high-level strategic planning than they would otherwise have had: In East Africa via the technical advisory committee, and in the Middle East via NGO representation in the 3RP steering committee. Representation of the private sector falls short in both processes, however, illustrating the difficulty in getting beyond the usual array of actors.

A difference between the two processes is the degree of national ownership towards the regional structure. The intergovernmental process led by IGAD has secured national ownership from the outset although it remains to be seen how the country level action plans will be realized and with an emphasis on what in practice. In the Middle East, however, a disconnect remains between the regional architecture and the national response, although steps are being taken to strengthen this link.

Lessons learned from the 3RP process show how a regional framework will lead to limited programmatic impact if its structures are not replicated at the national level. Despite joint UNHCR-UNDP leadership at the regional level, what remains at the country level in the Middle East is still fundamentally a humanitarian response structure with a response overwhelmingly focused on meeting immediate needs. To date, the resilience component has been underfunded and under-prioritized. Moreover, and perhaps most worrying, the 2018 3RP reflects a decrease in almost all country protection envelopes. This bears the question of whether protection for refugees will be de-prioritized, and whether an approach such as the 3RP carries a risk, particularly when it comes to accountability for protection. Accountability is more convincingly assured in the IGAD process where the regional result framework is not only translated into national action plans, but also coupled with a regional monitoring mechanism.

Global policy perspectives were presented by HERE Geneva. Marzia Montemurro presented key findings from a [newly published report](#), commissioned by DRC, on accountability for refugee protection and solutions in a whole-of-society approach. The largest opportunities for increased accountability via the CRRF will be realized at the operational level. If actors can come together and negotiate roles, responsibilities and common objectives, guided by rights, in a transparent manner, then the response will deliver better and more far-reaching protection and solutions outcomes; and if the whole-of-society approach allows for deeper forms of participation of refugees and host communities, new avenues of accountability from below will be opened up. However, collective responsibility risks diluting accountability. Hence, there is an important role for UNHCR to convene and facilitate the development of solid, rights-based results frameworks at country and regional levels to which multiple actors can contribute.

From the floor, Daniel Endres highlighted the future priorities for UNHCR in ensuring accountability in a reformed system: an enhanced focus on protection at all stages of displacement, operational capacity to respond in the early phases of displacement, and a catalysing role for inclusion of refugees towards solutions in protracted situations. Partnership with the World Bank, country level action plans and leadership by regional organizations hold the potential to strengthen UNHCR's role as a convener and a guardian of refugee protection.

A question raised from the floor concluded the session on the most critical determinant of the process: political will. Observing that a change agenda similar to the CRRF was initiated 15 years ago with the Agenda for Protection with meagre results, Ed Schenkenberg questioned if this process can indeed generate the required political will.

03 **A new role for NGOs in a reformed system?**

The third panel raised the existential question for NGOs, in particular international NGOs, about their future role and added value in a refugee response that goes beyond 'the usual suspects'. Karin Sørensen, Alice Anderson-Gough and Peter Klansøe provided perspectives.

While the CRRF entails an appreciated vision of self-contained systems for refugee protection within hosting States, all three panellists argued for the continued need for neutral actors without vested interests in national contexts. In politicized conflict-settings, localization will have its limitations. International, (semi-)independent INGOs, it was argued, are able to maintain a mandate-based, protection-oriented focus than actors embedded in a local setting. Assuming that refugee issues will remain politicized and that the space for civil society will not expand dramatically in the years to come, INGOs will remain relevant as observers of refugee rights and as conveners for response 'on the ground'.

In addition, the panellists argued that INGOs will remain relevant and value-adding in their capacity to bring international and regional perspectives on a refugee situation. Alleviated from a national context, INGOs are able to devise regional strategic perspectives to programming and advocacy, based on cross- and inter-regional evidence. Further, international and operational organizations are able to transmit local voices to the global level and vice-versa – when it comes to influencing donor planning and prioritization as

well as when it comes to informing political deliberations. Building the bridge from the global and regional levels to the local context will remain a relevant function in the years to come – also when it comes to raising attention to forgotten crisis.

However, it is clear that operational and self-implementing INGOs, like DRC, do need to change in order to add value in the future's comprehensive refugee responses; to improve partnership approaches, prioritize further capacity-building of local partners, improve performance on inclusion of refugees and host communities and pair it with flexibility and adaptability in programming, embrace new technologies much better to enable real-time interaction with refugee and host communities and to refine methodologies for advocacy. As the representative from the US mission said, it is not just UNHCR who need to reform from an implementing role to a convener role. INGOs have to do the same.

With that mutual challenge, the event came to an end.