BACKGROUND:

UNHCR partnerships and collaboration with national NGOs are vitally important, and increasingly so. In 2013, some 567 of the 944 UNHCR partners were NNGOs. Another 166 were international NGOs.

One of the major recommendations from the UNHCR High Commissioner’s Structured Dialogue in 2012 focused on capacity strengthening of national NGOs, on the basis of tripartite partnerships – UNHCR, international NGOs and national NGOs.

From January – May 2014 a mapping of capacity strengthening initiatives was carried out, through a questionnaire sent to 146 NGOs (international and national) and 27 UNHCR offices and units. Replies were received from 40% of addressees. The Executive Summary of the “Phase 1: Mapping of Tripartite Initiatives - Questionnaire Replies – Summary and Conclusions” is found as ANNEX 1.

This summary document was then sent to the 50 NGOs which participated in the High Commissioner’s Structured Dialogue in 2012. Replies were received from 21 NGOs (again, about 40%).

On the one hand, interest was shown by numerous respondents on the development of a possible tripartite strategy, and in participating in further discussion at a possible workshop. On the other hand, not many examples of tripartite capacity strengthening were identified in the mapping survey.

So that raises two basic questions –

1. Does the group endorse the further development of a tripartite capacity strengthening strategy?
2. If so, would the group agree on the idea of a workshop (probably in early 2015), to discuss and come up with such a strategy?

This paper contains ideas, in the form of questions, coming from the mapping survey and from respondents, which may serve as discussion-starters on these questions, and as a basis for a UNHCR – NGO Webinar planned for November 2014.

QUESTIONS ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN RED BELOW.

NOTE: Some definitions are found in ANNEX 2, to provide a common frame of understanding of:

- a national NGO
- capacity
- capacity strengthening
- capacity strengthening support.
1. WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF A TRIPARTITE NATIONAL NGO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING STRATEGY?

From “A Strategy for Enhancing National NGO Partner Effectiveness”, 1998: “The primary objective of a UNHCR strategy in support of NNGOs must be to ensure that we can adequately meet the international protection and humanitarian assistance needs of refugee and related operations using whenever possible local skills and resources.”

- What lessons have we drawn from bipartite capacity strengthening, which could help and inform tripartite strengthening? Examples would include NNGOs/INGOs helping each other boost each other’s capacities, and NNGOs helping UNHCR and INGOs to better understand local contexts.
- From our bipartite experiences, is there a leveraging possible of the added value that a tripartite approach could bring?
- Essentially, should the strategy be a “binding commitment” of the three parties, or rather a “non-binding guide”?

2. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE “CORE COMPETENCIES” TO BE SOUGHT IN NNGOS, WHICH THE TRIPARTITE STRATEGY SHOULD ADDRESS?

In the Mapping Survey different questions were asked to determine what core competencies might be focused on, as the essential components of a self-sustainable NGO. ANNEX 3 lists some of the questions asked, and the answers received. A consolidation of the answers reveals the following list of core competencies:

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**CORE COMPETENCIES:**

- Effective management / overall leadership / strategic planning in place
- Staff development / staff competence and effectiveness
- Resource mobilization / financial stability / diversification of funding / self-financing
- Effective internal systems in financial, programme and human resources management
- Quality partnerships with populations and communities
- Systems for evaluation, learning and continuous improvement

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Are these the right areas of focus? Is anything missing? How can they be included in the strategy?
3. WHAT SHOULD THE TRIPARTITE STRATEGY DOCUMENT LOOK LIKE? WHAT SHOULD IT INCLUDE?

- **Multi-year or short-term?**: Should a strategy be multi-year, considering the time required for effective capacity strengthening? Is UNHCR willing to commit to a multi-year approach to NGO capacity strengthening? (given the one-year funding cycle, and funding unpredictability?) Are we looking for long-term strategy guidance or short-term commitment in the document?

- **Pilots?**: Should a strategy focus on certain countries as “pilots”, or focus globally?

- **NGO focal point?**: Should a strategy identify perhaps one (international or national) NGO in a country, to coordinate capacity strengthening efforts in that country?

- **Plan of Action?**: Should it include a Plan of Action, agreed by UNHCR, INGOs and NNGOs? – perhaps a concrete Plan of Action for a specific country and with specific NGOs engaged?

- **Good practice and lessons learned?**: Should it include “good practice” examples of what has worked well in tripartite initiatives, as well as “lessons learned” from past experience?

- **Assessment template?**: Should it include a capacity assessment template? (example: Search for Common Ground)

- **Indicators?**: Should we aim at “indicators” of sustainability? (example: Save the Children)

- **NGO Focus?**: On which NGOs should this strategy focus?
  - Should the priority be on civil society organizations? Or well established national NGOs?
  - Is there a particular type of capacity building needed for faith-based NGOs?
  - Were there any results that considered capacity building with communities?
  - What types of capacity strengthening considerations are most important in urban environments? Are they the same as camp-based?

- **Relation to UNHCR Partnership Framework?**:
  - How will a new strategy on capacity strengthening relate to the new policy on Selection and Retention?
  - Does the Selection and retention Policy allow for multi-year investments in strengthening capacity of “weaker” partners, when a “best fit” stronger (often INGO) partner might be selected?

- **Results/outcomes?**: What type of return on investment should UNHCR and INGOs expect from what sort of capacity building activities? What length of time is needed for what sort of outcomes?
Some respondent suggestions follow:

- On-line learning and a train-the-trainer approach are suggested as part of the strategy.
- Could build opportunities for capacity strengthening into grants.
- The constant turnover in personnel of NNGOs is the biggest obstacle to capacity strengthening. This should be addressed in the strategy.
- The strategy should include approaches to strengthen the capacity of all three parties – UNHCR, INGOs and NNGOs – but with greater attention to the latter. It should be a tripartite partnership.

### Elements of a capacity strengthening strategy:

**From the 1998 Strategy.** Global, regional, country-level, pages 3-6

- **Global:** NGO focal point in each office. NGO forum in each country. Identify core competencies for national NGOs and ensure training. Work with INGOs and NNGOs together, with a hand-over strategy, and training and capacity building components. Include capacity strengthening of NNGOs in international NGO partnership agreements. Give increased financial administrative support to NNGOs.
- **Regional:** identify common activities and training needs to be carried out regionally, including workshops for NNGOs to improve skills.
- **Country:** develop a Plan of Action in each UNHCR country office on NNGO capacity building.


- Compile good practice examples: NNGO access to forums such as the ExCom, advocacy for NNGO access to donors, developing strategies at Regional Bureaux.
- Change UNHCR’s working culture from direct implementation to guiding, sharing, and developing capacities.
- Develop criteria for selection of NNGOs.
- Develop criteria for evaluating UNHCR-NNGO mutual strengthening activities.
- Develop standards of accountability, to which UNHCR and NNGOs should be held.
- Strengthen NNGOs that are involved in UNHCR’s primary activities.
- Plan a phased approach to capacity strengthening.
- Identify potential INGO- NNGO partnerships.
- Identify regional resource centres and regional NGOs for information dissemination, training and technical support.
- Make increased funding available for strengthening activities. Establish a global (and Regional Bureau and Division) NNGO capacity building fund.
- Include NNGO capacity building activities in budgets.
- UNHCR partner training should be more focused.
- Encourage mentoring and on-the-job training in UNHCR offices for partner staff, and staff exchanges between UNHCR and NNGOs.
4. WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS? WHAT COMMITMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS ARE THE PARTIES WILLING TO MAKE TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY?

The Mapping Survey identified some possible mechanisms which could be used to help strengthen capacity:

- training and staff development, including sharing experience and peer training, inter-agency exchange, twinning and mentoring (top of the list)
- building partnerships and networking
- assistance in strategic planning
- engagement with refugees, populations and communities
- evaluation and organizational learning
- transfer of knowledge and skills

Which of the parties is best placed to contribute towards the above mechanisms, on the basis of organizational strengths, capacities and priorities?
UNHCR is highly committed to strengthening capacity of its national NGO (NNGO) partners through tripartite initiatives. Its importance is clear – in 2013, some 567 of the 944 UNHCR partners were NNGOs (another 166 were international NGOs), and some US$ 1.15 billion was allocated through joint partnerships (39% of UNHCR’s total annual expenditure of US$ 2.97 billion).

One of the major recommendations from the UNHCR High Commissioner’s Structured Dialogue held in 2012 focused on capacity strengthening of national NGOs, on the basis of a trilateral partnership – UNHCR, international NGOs and NNGOs. During the period January – May 2014, concrete action on this recommendation was undertaken, consisting of a mapping of tripartite initiatives on capacity strengthening. Questionnaires were developed and sent to 173 addressees - UNHCR field offices and international and NNGO partners – with the 40% response indicating high interest and enthusiasm in this initiative.

What did the mapping consist of? Information was gathered in a number of key areas relating to tripartite NNGO capacity strengthening. Respondents were asked:
- what was their definition of capacity development and sustainability?
- did they have a related policy or strategy?
- what were their benchmarks for progress in capacity development?
- what was the extent of tripartite or bipartite agreements on capacity strengthening?
- in which project areas did they focus efforts in capacity development?
- what lessons learned or good practice examples derived from their activities?
- what gaps or barriers existed?
- What were their suggestions for the future?

What were the key findings and conclusions from the mapping? Main findings are found in Section III. below, pages 7-14, with Conclusions and Recommendations on pages 15-17:

On tripartite cooperation:
- On the one hand, tripartite cooperation in capacity strengthening (among UNHCR, international NGOs and national NGOs) has been limited. On the other hand, respondents saw great scope in developing future complementary capacities through tripartite partnerships.

On definitions and strategies:
- Organizational definitions of capacity development and sustainability varied widely among UNHCR, international NGOs and national NGOs.
- Over half of the NGO respondents had a policy or strategy in place on NNGO capacity strengthening.
- International NGOs identified mechanisms they used to develop their own strategy, which will in turn be useful for national NGOs.
- Good practices examples addressing strategies and strengthening capacity were identified…. as were gaps and barriers which must be taken into account.

On areas of focus in the future:
- From the questionnaire replies some key benchmarks or indicators for success or progress in capacity development were highlighted.
- NNGOs themselves produced a similar list of their own organizational priorities in capacity strengthening.
- Questionnaire replies provided indications of where capacity strengthening of NNGOs could be focused, as summarized in the Trends Chart (ANNEX 1):

**Recommended areas of capacity strengthening focus:**
- resource mobilization and self-financing *(top of the list)*
- strategic planning and multi-year approach
- human resources (including staff competency and development)
- programme management
- overall leadership and management
- financial management, internal systems and infrastructure

**Recommended strategies and mechanisms to strengthen capacity:**
- training and staff development, including sharing experience and peer training, inter-agency exchange, twinning and mentoring *(top of the list)*
- building partnerships and networking
- strategic planning
- engagement with refugees, populations and communities
- evaluation and organizational learning
- transfer of knowledge and skills

- **The need is clear for a global strategy on capacity strengthening, developed jointly by UNHCR and NGO partners (international and national).** It is noted that the “Evaluation of UNHCR’s Role in Strengthening National NGOs” (by John Telford, EPAU/2001/011, January 2001) refers to a UNHCR “Strategy for Enhancing National NGO Partner Effectiveness” (October 1998). This strategy has some tripartite elements but is more focused on bipartite cooperation on increasing national NGO capacity.

- **A workshop, bringing together UNHCR staff and interested international and national NGO representatives, may be one of the possible next steps.** The workshop could discuss this mapping report and its conclusions in more detail and produce suggestions on how to develop and concretize more fully a strategy for strengthening complementary capacities.
### SOME DEFINITIONS IDENTIFIED DURING THE MAPPING SURVEY

The following definitions were identified during the Mapping Survey:

1. **National NGO:**

   From *“A Strategy for Enhancing National NGO Partner Effectiveness”*, 1998. UNHCR defines a national NGO as:
   - Any organization registered as a non-governmental organization under the laws of its country and working in that country;
   - National branches of international organizations (e.g., Red Cross Societies, Caritas, Christian Councils);
   - Indigenous, social, religious and local organizations with a structure and a clear purpose; and
   - Self-help associations and cooperatives.

2. **Capacity, capacity strengthening, and capacity strengthening support:**

   From the mapping survey (provided by Save the Children):

   - **Capacity:** Building on a UNDP definition, “the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner” that leads to improvements in the lives of children and their families (last part added by SC).

   - **Capacity strengthening:** The process through which individuals, institutions and societies obtain, strengthen and sustain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. Capacity strengthening is now recognized as an internally owned and driven process, taking place from within by the people in the organization. It is not something that an international NGO can do for a partner. Through this perspective, our role is one of facilitating the process.

   - **Capacity strengthening support:** Purposeful interventions that support partners to increase their ability to successfully act on behalf of children and their families.

3. **Capacity building:**

   From *“Evaluation of UNHCR’s Role in Strengthening National NGOs”*, by John Telford, 2001. Capacity building implies the reinforcement of human, institutional or community performance, skills, knowledge and attitudes on a sustainable basis. It should be between organizations that share common commitments and objectives. It should be a two-way process, a partnership. It should be based on mutual respect. It should be rooted in long-term commitments, and sharing of roles, responsibilities and resources. It should be more than just training, or financial transfers. It should be equitable, transparent, flexible, and integrated into normal programme design and budgeting systems.
In the Mapping Survey different questions were asked to determine what core competencies might be focused on, as the essential components of a self-sustainable NNGO. Some of the questions asked, and the answers received, are summarized below:

- **What are some elements of sustainability?**
  - organizational effectiveness
  - autonomy/independence
  - financial stability (including related adequacy of resources
    - and diversification of funding sources)
  - strategic planning
  - change and innovation
  - resilience
  - training and capacity assessment

- **What are benchmarks for sustainability?**
  - quality of projects
  - effective capacity to deliver outputs
  - effective staffing
  - quality of training and staff development systems
  - institutional capacity
  - extent of sustainability
  - independence
  - use of capacity-development indicators
  - diversification of funding/resource mobilization
  - results of an evaluation

- **What are organizational priorities, to strengthen capacity?**
  - strategic planning
  - resource mobilization, and transition to self-financing (listed as a high priority)
  - diversification and building of partnerships and donor relationships
  - capacity strengthening and development of staff
  - strengthening of internal systems, including finance
  - enhancing evaluation capacity, to improve accountability and learning
  - continuous improvement of management in all areas
  - training and staff development (high priority for many)
  - partnerships with populations and communities
- Where are the identified gaps?
  ✓ training
  ✓ staff retention
  ✓ resources
  ✓ organizational visibility, linked to resource mobilization
  ✓ qualified staff to lead capacity strengthening activities
  ✓ human resources for the development of the organization (managers), as well as for projects
  ✓ effective systems, procedures and manuals (HR, finance, procurement)
  ✓ lack of capacity of NNGOs, with capacity often defined as ad hoc, short-term, and not a priority
  ✓ need to strengthen the tripartite approach
  ✓ need for increased tripartite cooperation and coordination among the three partners
  ✓ lack of indicators to measure capacity strengthening

- What are the recommended areas of capacity strengthening focus?
  ✓ resource mobilization and self-financing
  ✓ strategic planning and multi-year approach
  ✓ human resources (including staff competency and development)
  ✓ programme management
  ✓ overall leadership and management
  ✓ financial management, internal systems and infrastructure