2017 UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

GENERAL REPORT

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A Survey by InterAction and HIAS in partnership with the UNHCR Implementing Partnership Management Service (IPMS)

With gratitude to ICVA for its guidance and its assistance with the survey, and to the 337 NGO and UNHCR respondents

September 15, 2017
**Executive Summary**

In order to better understand partnership dynamics and develop a body of evidence on perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership, since 2014 UNHCR’s Implementing Partner Management Service (IPMS) alongside HIAS, and, in 2017, InterAction, have been systematically soliciting UNHCR and partner feedback via an annual survey on the state of UNHCR-NGO partnership working together for refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers whom, collectively, we refer to as “persons of concern.”

Separate and nearly identical surveys were sent to UNHCR Country offices and to NGOs, via prior year respondents and two global NGO consortia, InterAction and ICVA. Respondents were asked a series of questions related to different aspects of the UNHCR-NGO project partnership relationships: basic information, overall relationship, planning, selection, and implementation. The data received was analyzed jointly by HIAS and InterAction in consultation with UNHCR-IPMS. HIAS and InterAction received 277 complete and valid responses to the NGO survey from 73 countries. UNHCR Country Offices provided approximately 60 complete and valid responses spanning 45 countries.

**Overall Relationship and Key Findings**

Generally, both UNHCR and NGO Partners report a favorable and positive overall relationship in our work together for persons of concern, with NGO Partners reporting a more positive assessment about the state of partnerships than UNHCR. Results this year continue a four-year trend of increasingly favorable assessments of the UNCHR-NGO partnership by NGOs. Although UNHCR reported similar levels of satisfaction with their partnership with local NGO/CBOs and INGOs, INGOs were less positive about their partnership with UNHCR than National NGOs.

Most NGO Partners and UNHCR respondents report that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has improved over the last 12 months, continuing a three-year trend of increasingly positive assessments of how the UNHCR-NGO relationship is trending. NGOs also report improved communication between UNHCR and their office, with a greater proportion of respondents rating communication as ‘excellent’ than ‘good’ for the first time in three years.

The survey findings reveal positive trends that should be maintained by UNHCR and NGOs, as well as opportunities for improvement to better partner in serving persons of concern. For that reason, the authors of this report strongly recommend that, in addition to reporting on the survey results to the NGO Consultations, they also be presented and discussed at the annual UNHCR country representatives meeting in Geneva.

**Planning**

Engagement by NGOs in UNHCR’s formal COP stakeholder meetings was higher than in previous years and feedback from these meetings was generally positive, with most NGOs reporting that their feedback had been somewhat or very well reflected in the County Operations Plan. Engagement by UNHCR in NGO Partners annual planning meetings, however, was lower than in previous years.

**Selection**

UNHCR respondents reported an increase in the number of offices that had issued a call for expression of interest to partners for 2017; however, similar proportions of respondents were selected for the projects for which they applied. Feedback for non-selection of partners remains an area in need of improvement as approximately a quarter of NGO respondents stated that they did not receive a satisfactory reason for their non-selection. UNHCR and NGO respondents generally agreed that a sufficient time between a call for expression of interest and the deadline for concept notes should be two weeks in emergency environments and one month in stable environments. Regarding the Partner Portal, both UNHCR and NGO respondents agreed that more training by UNHCR on how to use the Partner Portal are needed. However, NGO respondents were significantly more likely than UNHCR to assert that all aspects of grant management should be stored on the Partner Portal.
Implementation

Both NGO Partners and UNHCR agree that training, coaching or/and transfer of knowledge and experience is needed to strengthen local capacity, as well as providing local NGOs/CBOs training materials. However, UNHCR respondents were more likely to view providing financial resources and assisting local NGOs/CBOs in fundraising strategy as means of strengthening local capacity than NGOs were. With regard to how UNHCR is working towards its WHS commitment to transfer 25% of its program expenditures to national partners by 2020, UNHCR respondents report that they would primarily achieving this goal by either reducing funds provided to international partners or reducing direct UNHCR implementation of programs. Most UNHCR and NGO partners report that they had conducted a satisfactory formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation with each other. This marked a significant increase over results from last year. Most NGO Partners reported that their Agreement had been delayed, with over half of NGO Partners attributing this delay in part to negotiations over the project budget. In order to expedite the signing of the agreement on time, both UNHCR and NGO respondents agree that the project proposal should be prepared earlier (in October) and that UNHCR should provide NGO partners with a timeline for preparation and agreement signature as well as proactive and clear guidance on expected realistic budget and terms of negotiation. Most respondents agreed that persons of concern were involved in the design and implementation of projects but a significant percentage cited time constraints as the reason for why persons of concern were insufficiently involved in the design phase.

As UNHCR continues to create new partnerships and build upon the existing relationships with NGOs in service to refugees, we hope that the results of this survey will help improve the communication, productively, efficiency, and overall impact of UNHCR-NGO networks.

Key recommended actions for further improvement taken by the very rich written comments offered by UNHCR and NGO offices surveyed, and supported by survey data:

Global

• UNHCR should continue its progress in taking multi-faceted approach to systems improvement (Framework for Implementing with Partners) and culture/behavior change.
• As UNHCR/WFP/UNICEF procedures are harmonized, NGOs would appreciate more consistent use of the partner portal by UNHCR, and incorporating more aspects of grant management into the Partner Portal.
• UNHCR’s Field Resources Group (including UNCHR Bureau Representation and NGOs) should facilitate more trainings/learning opportunities for NGO and UNHCR staff alike on the Partner Portal.

Country Level

• Local Capacity Building should no longer be left to chance – UNHCR, international and national NGOs must be more deliberative, planned, and proactive in incentivizing and building sustainable local capacity building to better serve persons of concern.
• UNHCR and NGOs should make a more systematic effort to actively consult and engage persons of concern in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects.
• Senior UNHCR staff should work with senior NGO leadership to develop a contextually appropriate strategy and plan for their country program based on the most relevant modalities, and share their experience and learning on an ongoing basis through next year’s consultation. NGO Partners should introduce UNHCR into their annual planning meetings.
• UNHCR Country Offices and Sub-Offices should have a meeting with Partners (funded and operational) to discuss the response envelope priorities for fundraising and discuss general.
• Finalizing agreements at the very end of the year when many staff are on leave results in less than optimal agreements. Both UNHCR and NGO Respondents agreed that project proposals should be prepared in October, with clear guidance and a timeline for preparation and signing the PPA.
Section 1: Basic Information: Respondent Demographics

Type of Office Represented by Respondents

Respondents to the NGO Partners were almost equally divided between those who represented National NGO Offices and those who represented INGO Offices, with slightly more respondents representing National NGO Offices. Of the 291 respondents to the NGO Partners survey, 41% represent INGO Country or Field Offices, 7% represent INGO HQ Offices, 52% represent National NGO Offices, and 1% represent ‘Other’. Of the 69 respondents to the UNHCR survey, 86% represent a UNHCR Country Office, 4% represent a UNHCR Sub Office, 2% represent a UNHCR Field Office, 6% represent a UNHCR Regional Office, and 3% represent ‘Other’.

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1 The two respondents who responded ‘Other’ to the question of what kind of office do you represent indicated that they represented a “Regional office of Semi-Government” and a “Research Unit”.

2 The two respondents who responded ‘Other’ did not indicate what office they represented.
Primary Function of Respondent or Job Title of Respondent
The majority of respondents to the UNHCR survey were Sectoral Program Staff, which comprised 65% of all respondents. 19% of other respondents were Representative or Head of Office, 6% were Deputy Director, Deputy Head of Office, Deputy Representative, 4% were Project Control, and 6% were ‘Other’. 3

The majority of respondents to the NGO survey indicated that they held an executive position in an organization that manages partnerships with UNHCR (55%) and that their primary function was to manage the partnership with UNHCR (51%). A further 38% reported that they signed the Project Partnership Agreement with UNCHR while 9% reported that they assisted with the implementation of UNHCR-NGO individual projects.

Regional Distribution of Respondents
The regional distribution of respondents was mostly proportional between NGO Partners respondents and UNHCR respondents. Asia comprised a greater proportion of the NGO Partners responses than UNHCR (25% to 17%) whereas Europe comprised a greater proportion of UNHCR responses (23% to 13%). Africa was the region with the highest representation for both UNHCR and NGO respondents, comprising one third of all respondents (32% and 34% respectively).

Regional Breakdown of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Americas</th>
<th>MENA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Of the four respondents who responded ‘Other’, 1 indicated that they were a Communications Office, another indicated that they were a Senior Legal Office, and 2 did not indicate what job title they had.
Section 2: Overall Relationship between NGOs and UNHCR

Assessment of Overall UNHCR-NGO Partnership

Partner relationships were assessed by asking NGO respondents to rate their office’s partnership with UNHCR in the field and by asking UNHCR respondents to rate the state of local NGO/CBO and INGO partnerships with UNHCR in the respondent’s country of operation.

Generally, both UNHCR and NGO Partners report a favorable and positive overall relationship, with NGO Partners reporting a more positive assessment about the state of partnerships than UNHCR. NGO partners were much more likely to report an ‘excellent’ UNHCR-NGO partnership in the field (41%) than UNHCR (18% and 16%) and less likely to report a ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ partnership (13%) than UNHCR (21% and 22%). Although UNHCR reported similar levels of satisfaction with their partnership with local NGO/CBOs and INGOs, INGOs were less positive about their partnership with UNHCR than National NGOs. INGOs were less likely to report an ‘excellent’ UNHCR-NGO partnership in the field than National NGOs (32% to 47%) and more likely to report a ‘fair’ or poor’ UNHCR-NGO partnership (16% to 10%).

UNHCR: Do you have the right partners to meet the needs of Persons of Concern in your country?

![Chart showing UNHCR's assessment of partnerships with local NGOs and INGOs.]

**Additional Comments**

“We have very good/cordial working relationships because we consult with each other at any time and most of the time take decisions together.”

“Reciprocal feedback between UNHCR and my organization is effective and allows for the effective implementation of projects.”

“Both parties ensure that projects for the welfare of refugees are designed and implemented in a more coordinated manner.”

4 13 UNHCR respondents (24%) did not have international NGOs in their operation.
Assessment of Overall Partnership – Regional Breakdown

NGO and UNHCR respondents from the Asia region reported the most positive assessment of UNHCR-NGO partnerships, whereas respondents from the MENA region reported the most negative assessments of UNHCR-NGO partnerships. Amongst NGO respondents, Asia was the only region in which more respondents view the UNHCR-NGO partnership as ‘excellent’ (52%) than ‘good’ (37%) whereas respondents from the MENA region reported the highest proportion of respondents who view the UNHCR-NGO partnership in the field as ‘fair’ or poor’ (21%). Amongst UNHCR respondents, respondents from the MENA region were most negative in assessing their NGO partnership, with over 50% of respondents reporting that their partnership with local NGOs/CBOs and INGOS as ‘fair’ (56%).
Assessment of Overall Partnership – Comparison Over Time

NGO respondents reported a slightly more positive assessment of the UNHCR-NGO partnership over last year, which continues the trend of increasingly favorable assessments of the UNHCR-NGO partnership over the past four years. Respondents from this year reported the highest proportion of respondents who viewed the NGO-UNHCR partnership as excellent (41%, a 2% increase over the last two years) and the lowest proportion of respondents who view the NGO-UNHCR partnership as fair or poor (13%, a 2% decrease from last year and an 11% decrease from four years ago).

UNHCR respondents reported a similar assessment of the UNHCR-NGO partnership as last year. However, a greater proportion of respondents who view the UNHCR partnership with local NGOs/CBOs and INGOs as ‘excellent’ (18% and 16% this year compared to 14% last year) and as fair (19% and 18% this year compared to 13% year).
Assessment of Overall NGO-UNHCR Partnership Trends
UNHCR respondents were also asked to rate the state of relationship between international NGOs and national NGOs. The majority of respondents view the NNGO-INGO relationship as ‘good’ (56%) with a further 19% of respondents viewing the relationship as ‘fair’, 5% as ‘poor’, and 3% as ‘excellent’.

Assessment of NGO-UNHCR Partnership Trends Over the Last Year
NGO Partners and UNHCR were asked whether they felt that the UNHCR-NGO relationship had improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the last 12 months. Most NGO Partners and UNHCR respondents report that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has improved over the last 12 months, with a slightly higher proportion of UNHCR respondents (70%) reporting that the relationship is improving compared to NGOs (65%). No UNHCR respondent reported that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has gotten worse over the past year whereas 5% of NGO reported that the relationship had worsened. Both INGOs and National NGOs reported similar views on the trends in NGO-UNHCR relationships over the past year.

Additional Comments
“IT has always been good, but it is getting better every year.”

“We value UNHCR HQ efforts to improve the relations between partners.”

“There is no clear process between UNHCR and my NGO, resulting in unclear approaches to issues such as SGBV and exhausting our staff.”
Regional breakdown – NGO-UNHCR Partnership Trends Over the Last Year

There were significant regional differences in response to the question of how much the NGO-UNHCR relationship has changed over the past year, with responses between UNHCR and NGO Partners differing most strongly in the MENA region.

Amongst NGO Partners, respondents from the Africa region were most positive, with 72% reporting that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has improved over the past year. Europe and MENA were less positive, with 44% of respondents from the Europe region reporting that the NGO-UNHCR relationship had stayed the same and 11% of respondents from the MENA region reporting that the relationship had gotten worse. UNHCR respondents in Europe and Asia both were more likely to report that the UNHCR-NGO relationship had stayed the same (67% and 80%) than that the relationship had improved (20% and 33%).

NGO Respondents: Over the last year, NGO-UNHCR relationship has:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Americas</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>MENA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the Same</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotten Worse</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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UNHCR Respondents: Over the last year, NGO-UNHCR relationship has:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Americas</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>MENA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the Same</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotten Worse</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assessment of NGO-UNHCR Partnership Trends Over the Last Year - Comparison Over Time

Both NGO Partner respondents and UNHCR report a more positive assessment of the how NGO-UNHCR relationship are trending in 2017, when compared to previous years. A greater proportion of respondents report that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has improved over the past 12 months and a smaller proportion of respondents report that the UNHCR relationship has stayed the same or gotten worse. For NGOs, this continues a three year-trend in which an increasing proportion of NGOs report that the NGO-UNHCR relationship is improving (61% in 2017 compared to 51% in 2015).

Assessment of Communication between UNHCR and NGOs

NGO Partners were asked to rate the communication between UNHCR and their office. NGOs were generally positive in their assessments, with a greater proportion of respondents reporting that the communication was ‘excellent’ (42%) than good (40%). National NGOs generally reported a more favorable assessment of the communication between UNHCR and their office, with 46% rating their communication as ‘excellent’ (compared to 39% for INGOs) and 14% rating their communication as fair or poor (compared to 22% for INGOs).

Additional Comments

“Sometimes different individuals make similar or overlapping request that seem poorly coordinated within UNHCR”

“We prefer that a specific focal person be assigned from UNHCR to lead the communications with our office, especially operational issues and concerns.”

“Often at the last minute, with little anticipation.”

“There are multiple discussions and exchanges before making decisions.”

“Better than previous year.”
Assessment of Communication between UNHCR and NGOs – Regional Breakdown

NGO assessments of the communication between UNHCR and NGOs was generally consistent across the five regions. However, the Europe region reported significantly worse assessments of communication between UNHCR and their office with 9% rating their communication as ‘poor’ (5 percentage points higher than any other region) and 34% rating their communication as ‘excellent’ (7 percentage points less than any other region). In addition, the Americas region reported a significantly lower proportion of respondents who rated their communication as ‘fair’ (3%, 11 percentage points less than any other region) and a significantly higher proportion of respondents who rated their communication as ‘good’ (52%, 12 percentage points more than any other region).

Assessment of Communication between UNHCR and NGOs – Comparison Over Time

NGO Partners this year report a more positive assessment of the communication between UNHCR and NGOs than last year, with a 10% increase in the proportion of respondents who view communication between UNHCR and their office as excellent. For the first time in three years, a greater proportion of respondents rate communication as excellent (42%) than they rate communication as good (40%). Similar proportions of respondents this year rated communication as fair or poor (18%) than last year (19%).

Desired Areas of Improvement

NGO Partners and UNHCR were asked to select and propose different solutions to improve UNHCR-NGO communication and partnership. The solution identified by the highest proportion of both NGO Partners and
UNHCR respondents was to invite and motivate one another for areas of improvement (34% for NGOs and 52% for UNHCR). A significantly higher percentage of NGO respondents view the current state of partnership as optimal (49%) than do UNHCR respondents (37%). NGO respondents were also more likely to respond that improving partnership and communication was solely incumbent upon UNHCR to change their approach (10%) than UNHCR respondents were to respond that improvement was solely incumbent upon partners.

Additional Comments

“Internal communication between UNHCR’s capital office and the field must be improved.”

“Individually, most of the people we work with at UNHCR are well-meaning, hard-working, and smart. But dealing with UNHCR as an organization has been a nightmare. The process of approving our PPA and sending us funds to get started on an 11-month contract has taken 5 months. If we had to do this again, we might not apply for funding from them at all.”

“Although we appreciate the close partnership with UNHCR, we prefer that some staff of UNHCR be more mindful that partners have its own procedures and policies, and decision making processes.”

“UNHCR sometimes asks us to redo things we already have done, simply because they have changed the format. UNHCR sometimes asks us to re-send documents that we have already signed. UNHCR modified our final budget (by adding activities) without prior discussion with us. UNHCR organizes meetings and informs us of them in the last minute or cancels them at the last minute.”
Overall assessment of NGO-UNHCR consultative opportunities

NGO Partners and UNHCR respondents were asked to identify the forms of UNHCR-NGO consultation they had engaged in to better help people of concern in 2016-2017 and asked to rate how useful those consultative opportunities were.

Almost all NGO respondents (97%) reported engaging in coordination meetings with UNHCR, and the vast majority also engage with UNHCR via one-on-one consultations (90%), joint monitoring (83%), and formal operations planning (82%). A smaller percentage of UNHCR respondents reported engaged with NGO partners (6-9% less for each of the four consultative opportunities).

The four consultative opportunities discussed in this survey were viewed positively overall by NGOs and UNHCR, with approx. 5% of respondents rating each of the four consultative opportunity as ‘not helpful’. Formal Operations Planning was viewed less positively than other consultative opportunities by both NGOs and UNCHR, as it received a lower proportion of respondents rating it as ‘very helpful’ instead of ‘helpful’. UNHCR and NGO Partner ratings were for the most part proportional to each other, although NGOs were significantly less likely to rate joint monitoring as ‘very helpful’ (52%) than UNHCR was (65%).

Additional Comments

“Mostly the meetings/discussions are dominated by UNHCR staff and the partners are asked to follow the directions of UNHCR staff.”

“Sometimes, UNHCR takes our staff to have a joint follow-up of activities in the field but our staff is not allowed to be part of the discussion with beneficiaries.”

“Individual consultations were most useful because they allowed us to address specific program issues.”

“We could do more by engaging partners at early stages and involving senior management, not only the project managers at the field level.”

Dependence on UNHCR funding

NGO Partners were asked if programming would change if funding from UNHCR were unavailable. Only 21% of respondents reported that nothing would change and
that they would be able to fundraise from other sources. Of the 72% of respondents whose programming would be impacted, 10% of respondents reported that all of their programming would cease while 26% of respondents reported that more than half of their programming would cease.

**Desired partnership trainings/initiatives**

NGO Partners expressed a wide range of suggestions and initiatives regarding trainings related to partnership, including several respondents who argued that trainings should be de-emphasized such as one respondent who said, “It’s more about habits and dynamics in the institution than about trainings.” Topics for which trainings were requested include stress management, security, the Partner Portal, finance, UNHCR reporting templates, report writing, child protection, and monitoring and evaluation.

**Additional Comments**

“I would rather have refresher trainings or staff capacity building be made part of partners budgets.”

“Often Partners are provided with UNHCR observations on various areas of improvements. However, there is no proper training or initiatives are taken against the findings of UNHCR. There is a need to place the continued capacity building initiatives from UNHCR including Trainings, Exposure visits, country/regional level exchange of ideas/co-ordination and or sharing of lessons learned.”

“UNHCR could look into making available to NGOs at least part of the trainings from their Budapest center and Online platform (learn and connect). UNHCR should develop a training on partnership for its staff, including/especially senior staff”

“Refresher training on the PPA is needed.”

“Training workshops on procurement, goods and properties management; Staff training workshops on PPA and UNHCR principles and guidelines; Training on energy, environmental management and climate change.”

“Learning from other projects supported by UNCHR would be useful.”

“UNHCR internal procedures.”

“Grant management and compliance to UNHCR rules and regulations.”

“Trainings not useful – UNHCR should instead be more open to working collaboratively.”

“There are many training courses which we are invited to by UNHCR. Sometimes we do not have enough time and staff to follow them.”

“Training about narrative reporting.”

**Section 3: Planning**

The questions relating to planning assess how NGOs and UNHCR engage one another when preparing for the upcoming year. This section includes questions related to UNHCR’s formal Country Operations Planning (COP) stakeholder meeting as well as NGO planning meetings.

**UNHCR Formal Country Operational Planning**
Engagement by NGOs in UNHCR’s formal COP stakeholder meetings was high, with 73% of respondents reporting that they had been invited to the meeting, 5% of which did not provide input. This is a 7% increase from what NGO Partners reported last year (66%). In addition, 88% of UNHCR respondents reported that they had invited NGOs to engage in the COP, a 9% increase over last year (79%). The feedback from these meetings was generally positive, with 27% of NGO Partners reporting that their input was very well reflected in the COP and a further 33% reporting that their input was somewhat well reflected and 5% reporting that their input was not evident. In comparison, 52% of last year’s respondents said that their participation in UNHCR COP meetings were helpful or meaningful whereas 5% reported that their participation was not helpful or meaningful.

**Additional Comments**

“All implementing partners in the area have been invited to participate in planning workshops. However, the general feeling is that opinions of partners are not really listened to and that those kind of workshops are more a ‘confirmation’ of the UNHCR office plan than a real consultation.

“We have been attending country operations planning meetings for a long time but we feel that the last decision is made by professionals who are not fully aware of the needs of the operation area.”

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**Were you consulted by UNHCR to engage in annual operation planning for 2017?**

- Yes, and we provided input: 68%
- Yes, but we did not provide input: 20%
- No, we were not invited: 5%
- I do not know: 7%

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**Were your contributions reflected in the annual UNHCR Country Operations Plan?**

- Our input was very well reflected: 27%
- Our input was somewhat reflected: 33%
- Our input was not evident: 5%
- The COP was not shared with my office: 18%
- The COP was shared but not reviewed: 2%
- I don’t know: 15%
NGO Planning Process

UNHCR was less engaged in their NGO Partners annual planning meetings than NGO partners were in the UNHCR COP, as 39% of UNHCR respondents reported that they participated and provided input into their NGO partner’s planning processes (with 17% participating in more than two). This is a slightly lower level of engagement than last year, when 41% of respondents reporting participating in their NGO partner’s planning exercise (with 25% participating in more than two). Almost half (44%) of NGO Partners reported that they consulted or met with UNHCR representatives during their 2017 planning process.

**Did your office consult or meet with UNHCR representatives during your own 2017 planning process?**

- Yes, we invited and UNHCR participated in our planning process: 44%
- Yes, we invited UNHCR but they did not participate: 2%
- No, we did not invite UNHCR to participate in our planning process: 37%
- No, we did not conduct a planning process for 2017: 10%
- I don't know: 7%

**Was your office invited by NGO partners to participate or provide input during their annual planning sessions for 2017?**

- Yes, we were invited by more than half of our partners: 15%
- Yes, we were invited by 10% - half of all partners: 7%
- Yes, we were invited by between 10% - half of all partners: 4%
- Yes, we were invited by just one partner to participate: 13%
- No, we were not invited by an NGO partner to participate: 51%
- I don’t know: 10%

**UNHCR: Did your office participate or provide input into partner NGOs' annual planning sessions for 2017?**

- Yes, we participated in more than two partner’s planning exercises: 17%
- Yes, we participated in two partner’s planning exercises: 8%
- Yes, we participated in one partner’s planning exercises: 14%
- No, we were invited but did not participate: 0%
- No, we were not invited by an NGO partner to participate: 31%
- I don’t know/not applicable: 30%
**Overall Planning and Recommendations for Improvement**

Almost half of all UNHCR and NGO respondents report that consultation in joint annual operation planning should be initiated by formally inviting partners to the annual operation meeting. Only 29% of UNHCR respondents report that consultation in joint annual operation planning should be initiated by raising awareness on the added-value of joint partners, whereas 51% of NGO respondents report that consultation should be initiated by demonstrating the added value of their organization in joint-planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO: What can you do to initiate consultation in joint annual operation planning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invite UNHCR to my organization planning meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally request UNHCR to include you in the annual operational plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate added value of your organization participation in joint planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternate suggestion</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNHCR: What can you do to initiate consultation in joint annual operation planning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invite partners to UNHCR annual operation planning meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raise awareness on added-value of joint planning amongst...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of the above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We already engage our partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Comments**

“National NGOs are rarely involved in UNHCR annual operational plan.”

“Would be great to have the UNHCR calendar of key events early in the year for Implementing Partners and Operational Partners to plan their active engagements in them.”

“Long-term partnership agreements should be signed without considering if there is a project or not. We should share expertise and experiences at any time. [Otherwise we are just contractors, not partners.]”

“More openness and dialogue on funding and operational realities would help all parties to plan better together.”

“Formally they have invited us but there is no change.”

“We have and we can offer out of the box ideas and support to UNHCR’s operational planning.”

“Although we are no longer an IP of UNHCR since we handed over our project to another local organization, we would still like to be part of planning in order to better understand the ground realities and respond with funding.”

“UNHCR holds a preeminent position to identify the added value of NGOs in the planning procedure...The planning of the NGOs could be improved with a more comprehensive information of the needs in the countries where we are intervening, and in this way contribute to a better, less fragmented national strategy.”

“The participation of UNHCR in my organization planning has helped to enrich our planned programs earmarked to benefit refugees and other PoCs.”
“UNHCR is not consulted directly during national planning, but makes decisions that impact planning nonetheless, interfering with donor relations and exercising a degree of control over partners often without direct knowledge of conditions/realities on the ground.”

Section 4: Project Selection
The questions in this section ask respondents about how the selection process outlined in the PPA works in the field. Both UNHCR and NGOs were asked to evaluate different aspects of the PPA selection process including the issuing of “Call for Expression of Interest” EoIs and notification of non-selection.

2017 Project Partnership Selection
Most of the UNHCR respondents to this survey reported that they had issued a call for expression of interest to partners for 2017 (70%), with 35% issuing a call for EoI for every project. This is a 17% increase from 2016, when 53% of respondents reported issuing a call for EoI. For those offices that did issue a call of expression, the number of projects per office ranged from 1 to 16, with a median number of projects of 2. 

For NGOs, 68% of respondents reported being selected for which they applied, the same as last year’s survey. Similar proportions of respondents were selected for all the projects for which they applied as last year (46% this year, and 43% last year) and not selected for the projects for which they applied. (8% this year compared to 6% last year). An additional 10% of respondents did not participate in the selection process because their project was retained from the previous year.

Feedback for Non-selection
NGO Partners who participated in a UNHCR call for Expression of Interest were asked if UNHCR provided a satisfactory reason for non-selection. Exactly half of all respondents reported that UNHCR had provided a satisfactory reason for the non-selection, with 33% reporting that they had provided this reasoning without an NGO request. Of the remaining 50% of respondents, 19% receiving an unsatisfactory explanation for non-selection, 7% did not receive a response to their request for more information and 23% did not ask UNHCR for more information.

Additional Comments
“There was some frustrations that we did not get clear and accurate reasons for proposal rejections; we feel that more detailed feedback can allow us to improve our implementation and understand UNHCR’s requirements when we have on paper met expression of interests.

Appropriate Selection Timeline

33% Yes, UNHCR provided general reasons for the decision without us needing to ask.
17% Yes, we requested and received a satisfactory explanation
19% No, we requested for more information but the response was unsatisfactory
7% No, we requested for more information but UNHCR did not respond
23% No, we did not ask UNHCR for more information

5 The first quartile number of projects is 1 and the third quartile number of projects is 4.
NGO Partners and UNHCR were asked what a sufficient time between a call for expression of interest and the deadline for concept notes should be in emergency environments and in stable environments. The consensus timeframe for both UNHCR and NGO partners was two weeks in emergency environments (56% for UNHCR and 46% for NGOs) and one month in stable environments (64% for UNHCR and 50% for NGOs). In general, NGO Partners proposed longer timeframes than UNHCR, as a significant percentage of NGO respondents reported that a sufficient timeframe should be one month in an emergency environment (38%) and two months in a stable environment (41%).
UNHCR Partner Portal

NGO Partners and UNHCR were asked several questions regarding their experience with the UNHCR Partner Portal. Most NGO Partners are registered on the Partner Portal (86%) with a further 5% of respondents intending to do so in the future. The majority of UNHCR offices are using the Partner Portal to announce calls for Expressions of Interest (54%), with a further 28% of respondents reporting that they plan to use the Partner Portal next year. Most NGO respondents found the Partner Portal useful in supporting grant management processes with UNHCR (57%), with 12% reporting that the Partner Portal was not useful and 31% reporting that they did not know if it was useful.

UNHCR and NGO Partners agreed that more trainings by UNHCR for NGO Partners on how to use the Partner Portal are needed (49% for NGOs and 32% for UNHCR). There was significant disagreement, however, over whether all aspects of grant management should be stored on the Partner Portal, as 45% of NGOs feel this would improve the Partner Portal compared to 13% of UNHCR respondents.

Additional Comments

“In countries with poor and very expensive Internet, we need alternatives to the portal. How are local partners supposed to access it?”

“[Desired improvements are] wider language adaptation of the portal, its implementation in local Internet environments, such as popular social networks, with the introduction of feedback mechanism and the evaluation of projects by direct beneficiaries.”
Section 5 Implementation

This survey asked NGO Partners and UNHCR several questions regarding the Project Partnership Agreement, including several questions on capacity building and localization, the involvement of persons of concern in the project, and monitoring of project implementation.

Capacity Building, Localization

NGO Partners and UNHCR were asked several questions regarding their efforts to develop local NGO/CBO capacity to assist Persons of Concern (PoC). Amongst NGOs, capacity building efforts exclusively by UNCHR (36%) occur more often capacity building efforts solely by INGOs (19%) or joint efforts with UNHCR and INGOs (25%). Most UNHCR respondents (82%) have been part of a joint effort to develop local NGO/CBO capacity to assist PoC, with 34% of those efforts joint efforts conducted with INGOs.

Both NGO Partners and UNHCR agree that training, coaching or/and transfer of knowledge and experience is needed to strengthen local capacity (84% of NGO Partners and 95% of UNHCR respondents), as well as providing local NGOs/CBOs training materials (50% of NGO Partners and 64% of UNHCR respondents).

However, UNHCR respondents were more likely to view providing financial resources and assisting local NGOs/CBOs in fundraising strategy as means of strengthening local capacity than NGOs were (66% to 26% for providing financial resources and 50% to 23% for assisting in fundraising strategy).
Implementation of UNHCR World Humanitarian Summit Commitment

UNHCR respondents were asked how its office is working towards UNHCR’s WHS commitment to transfer 25% of its program expenditures to national first responders by 2020. The primary means by which UNHCR respondents reported that they are transferring these expenditures is by reducing funds provided to international partners (31%) and by reducing UNCHR direct implementation of programs (28%), with a further 13% reporting that funding for direct UNHCR implementation of programs and funding for international partners will be reduced equally. In addition, 13% of respondents do not believe that NGO can take on a greater proportion of the response portfolio without additional capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily by reducing funds provided to international partners</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily by reducing direct UNCHR implementation of programs</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily by reducing UNCHR administrative costs</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily by reducing funding equally for international partners and direct UNCHR implementation of programs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily by looking for other ways to increase the role of local partners</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not believe NGOs can take on a greater proportion without additional capacity</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Comments

“By playing catalytic role to ensure that other agencies take over the roles of assisting PoCs”

“We also encourage and support local NGOs to seek non-UNHCR funding for their operations.”

“By linking them with development actors and other donors.”

“Providing increased collaboration between International and National NGO, capacity building and knowledge transfer. Also supporting the resources mobilization efforts of local NGOs.”

“By helping local partners develop a long-term strategic approach to their work and other partners and donors.”

“Involving national partners in UNHCR advocacy efforts and strategic national forums.”
Joint Project Monitoring, Review or Evaluation

Both UNHCR and NGO Partners respondents were asked whether they had conducted a formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation with one another and, if not, how they can ensure that this takes place in the future. Most UNHCR and NGO Partners report that they had conducted a formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation and that this was a positive experience (75% of NGO respondents and 85% of UNHCR respondents) with an additional 8% of NGO respondents and 7% of UNHCR respondents reporting that they had engaged in an informal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation. This is a significant increase from last year, when only 57% of NGO respondents had conducted a formal joint monitoring or project evaluation with UNHCR that was satisfactory with an addition 12% engage in informal joint monitoring. Only 6% of respondents did not know joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation was part of the PPA, also a significant decrease from last year (12%). In addition, both UNHCR and NGO Partner respondents agree that initiating and inviting each other to participate in formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation will ensure that this takes place in the future.

### Has your office conducted a formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation with NGOs/UNHCR for one or more of your projects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>UNHCR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and it was a satisfactory experience</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but it was not a satisfactory experience</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but my office engaged in an informal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, my office did not engage in formal or informal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, we did not know joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation was part of the PPA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, we knew joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation was part of the PPA but did not engage</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know/not applicable</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How can you ensure that formal joint monitoring, review, or project evaluation takes place in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>UNHCR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiate and invite partners to participate</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate and invite UNHCR to participate</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise the awareness of my colleagues to conduct such reviews</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion it is not important to have such meetings</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Project Delays, Letters of Intent**

Most NGO Partners reported that their partnership agreement had been delayed, as only 20% reported that all of their agreements were signed prior to January 1. Over half (52%) of NGO Partners for whom the partnership agreement had been delayed reported that negotiations over the budget was one of the reasons for the delay. Negotiations over the project narrative delayed 39% of respondents and a further 18% were delayed solely by UNHCR. The proportion of projects delayed solely by UNHCR increased by 6% compared to last year, when 12% of projects were delayed solely by UNHCR.

**Additional Comments**

“The delay in agreement over the budget/narrative and to sign the PPA was a major issue in our office. We have sometimes worked more than one month without any approval, which represents a major financial risk.”

“UNHCR were incredibly, maddeningly slow to get our PPA signed after approving our project proposal. The project was initially supposed to start in October 2016. Then it was pushed back to January 2017. Eventually it was pushed to February 2017. Our PPA was signed at the end of April 2017. We still haven’t received all of the funds, and it’s mid-May 2017.”

“I really don’t understand the reason behind the delay to sign the PPA but also UNHCR was not willing to sign a letter of intent so that funds can be released to respond to the operational needs.”

“UNHCR insistence on certain parts of the budget not increasing year on year (e.g salaries) meant that we had to advocate with other INGOs with the HCR country office for a more sensible approach to be adopted – and this was delayed by UNHCR and therefore the PPAs were signed very late.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delays in agreement signing</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of our agreements were signed prior to January 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR delayed the submission or consideration of project proposals</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My office submitted at least one month prior to the start of the project but UNHCR and my office required more time</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiations over the project narrative delayed the agreement</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiations over the budget delayed the agreement</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The agreement was tripartite and the government had to countersign</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My office or organization was responsible for the delay</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My office requires headquarters review and signature which caused the delay</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NGO partners were also asked if they had signed a Letter of Intent with UNHCR if no PPA was signed prior to the start of the project. Most NGO Partner respondents (45%) reported that they had signed a Letter of intent, although 9% did so after the project began, with a further 20% of respondents reporting that they had retroactively signed an agreement with UNHCR and 13% of respondents reporting that a delay in the project was caused by not having a Letter of Intent signed.

### Expediting PPA signings

When asked how to expedite the signing of the PPA on time, both UNHCR and NGO Respondents agreed that project proposals should be prepared in October, that UNHCR should provide proactive and clear guidance on expected realistic budget and terms of negotiation and that NGOs should seek clarity regarding the terms of the agreement and prepare a clear and realistic budget. Over half of all respondents also agreed that UNHCR should provide a timeline for preparation and signing the PPA agreement.

### NGOs: What can your office do to ensure PPAs are signed on time?

- Prepare the project proposal in October: 36%
- Prepare a clear and realistic budget for easy negotiation: 52%
- Demand from UNHCR a timeline for preparation and agreement signature: 46%
- Seek clarity regarding the terms of agreement: 50%
- Prepare my HQ to expedite their review and signature: 22%
- Other suggestions: 8%

### UNHCR: What can your office do to ensure PPAs are signed on time?

- Formally request that partners submit project proposals in October: 75%
- Provide proactive and clear guidance on expected realistic budget and terms of negotiation: 73%
- Agree with partner that UNHCR will provide a timeline for preparation and signing agreement: 58%
- Other suggestions: 14%
Additional Comments

“There is honestly not so many things we can do to ease the process. We have always tried to be as prepared as possible, but it is not enough.”

“Radical suggestion: change the implementation period to March - February. (I realize this would affect HCR’s financial system.) The idea that project documents will be finalized and PPAs issued in December is simply unrealistic. Too many UNHCR and partner staff both in the field and HQ are on leave. Additionally, completing projects in December is always challenging. A new implementation period would be the solution, allowing for the proposal finalization process to happen in Jan with signature in Feb to start in March.”

“It will be helpful in UNHCR can provide an average budget for each partner to save our time.”

“Most importantly, UNHCR has to commit to the deadlines they set up which has never happened in my four years of experience.”

“While we often have our proposals done in an expedited manner, it is often dependent on UNHCR to give us budget allocations and to send finalized documents for review/signature, which is not always done expeditiously. What takes UNHCR several months to perform, they expect turnaround from us within days.”

“Unfortunately, UNHCR in our region does not provide clear funding/budget guidelines in time, and timelines are not respected...There was a lot of disorganization and confusion. Partners were asked to prepare proposals and budgets but were not given budget limits until after submitting their proposals.”

Involving Persons of Concern in Project Design and Implementation

NGO Partners were asked several questions regarding the degree to which persons of concern were involved in the design and implementation of projects. Most respondents reported that PoCs were sufficiently involved in the design (59%) and the implementation (73%) of projects. Time constraints were cited as reason for insufficient involvement by 21% of respondents in the design of projects and 11% in the implementation of projects whereas 7% of respondents cited access constraints as the reason for insufficient involvement of PoCs in the design of projects (and 6% for the implementation).
In order to involve PoCs in the future, 18% of NGO Partner respondents said that their organization should commit to involving PoC and 16% said that they should create awareness in their organization of the importance of involving PoC.

**Additional Comments**

“If the people of concern are not involved in the process how should we judge if their needs and problems were addressed?”

“It is important to make sure PoCs are included but the onus for this should not be on NGOs only. There should be a joint discussion and effort between NGOs and UNCHR to reflect on how to do this better together.”

“Both UNHCR and Partner NGOs need to involve PoC more, especially right from the planning process by going (immersing) to the community instead of inviting a few representatives.”

“Closer interactions between UNHCR, Partners and PoCs will improve partnerships.”

“Persons of concern should be involved in planning and implementing process – to create a sense of ownership for making positive impact.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We sufficiently included POC in the planning and implementation</th>
<th>45%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create awareness in my organization of the importance of involving POC</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit to involving POC</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know/not applicable</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other suggestions</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</table>
Section 6: Conclusion
Suggestions for next year’s survey

NGO and UNHCR respondents were also asked to offer suggestions for next year’s survey. There was a wide range of responses and no single consistent theme emerged.

- Several respondents requested and emphasized that they should receive some feedback on what the survey results were and that the survey report be sent to them.
- Regarding the length of the survey, several respondents requested that the length of the survey be shorter, with one respondents stating that there should be no more than 25 questions in the survey.
- Regarding the timing of the survey, several respondents requested that the survey be distributed earlier in the year (January or February) while a few requested that it be distributed after the mid-term review in June.
- Regarding the format of the survey, several respondents requested that the question format be revised and made less restrictive, that responses for some questions allow for a distinction to be made between national and international staff, that questions are more detailed and precise, that the targeted audience be made more clear (field or HQs, NGOs with or without projects in 2017).
- Regarding additional areas of content to cover, respondent suggested fields such as: UNHCR reporting requirements, finance, partnerships between development agencies and UNHCR, logistics, salaries, budget constraints, accountability and transparency mechanisms, fundraising, external factors that affect UNHCR-NGO partnership.
- Specific questions that were proposed include: “Do you think UNHCR staff are sufficiently trained to carry out their work?” “How do you perceive relations between UNHCR and the government?”

Final Comments

Finally, NGO and UNHCR respondents were asked to provide final comments about how to improve partnership and the development and implementation of projects. Several common themes emerged from these final comments. The first theme was the desire of NGO Partners to be treated and approached as equal partners instead of as sub-contractors or “service providers” or “small UN units” over which they can “impose their working method.” The second theme that emerged was the need for UNHCR and NGOs to involve People of Concern in the design and implementation of projects to a larger extent than they are currently. The third theme that emerged was the importance of the positive role that UNHCR can play in capacity building and taking a more decentralized approach to decision-making and decreasing their level of micro-management.