



WEBINAR SUMMARY

Humanitarian Leadership on Protection: Why it Matters and How to do it

13 December 2016

Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) are responsible for ensuring that protection is at the heart of humanitarian response. This is reflected in the IASC Principals Statement on the centrality of protection from December 2013. However, many Humanitarian Country Teams still do not have a protection strategy. Additionally, there is still confusion over how the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator differs from the Humanitarian Country Team and the Protection Cluster, and what actions are expected of each of them to enhance protection practices. Based on their experiences, the speakers outline practical steps that senior humanitarian leaders in field operations can take to take forward the key leadership responsibilities on protection, capitalise on the complementary roles of Humanitarian Country Team members, the Protection Cluster, and Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, and advocate with different stakeholders in-country to maximise protection outcomes.

Panellists

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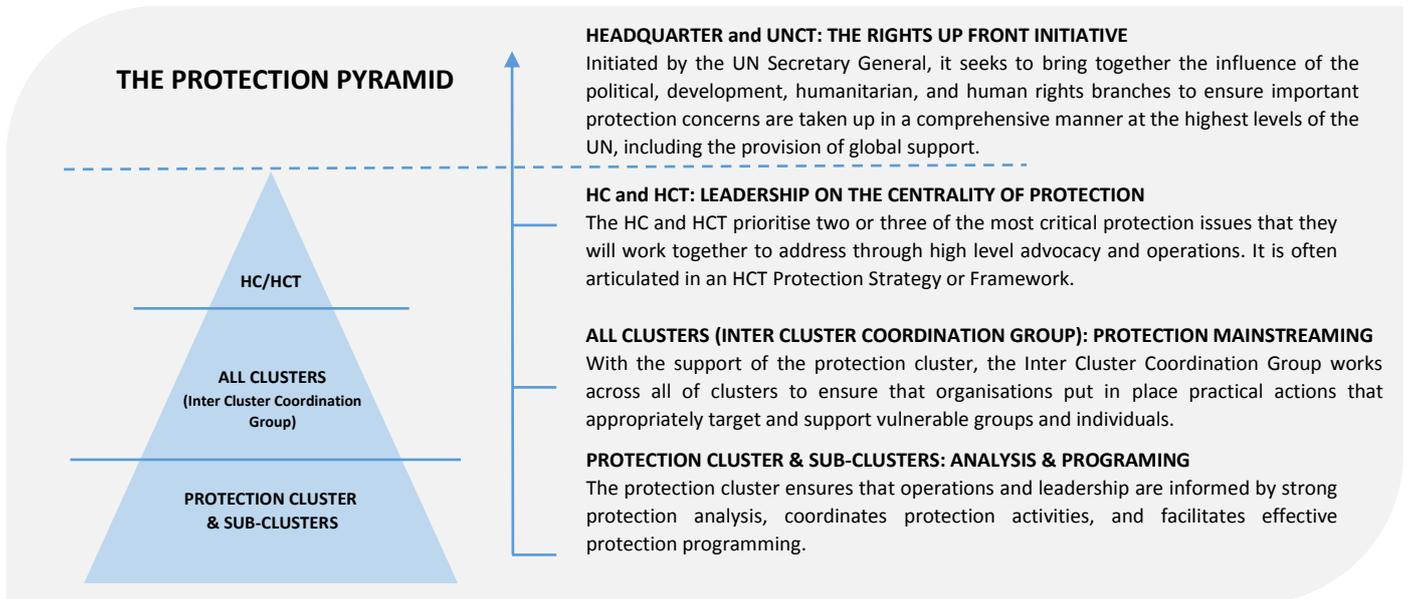
Assistant High Commissioner on Protection, UNHCR

Protection is the very essence of humanitarian action and therefore must be at the centre of humanitarian response. In order to do this effectively, Humanitarian Coordinators should exercise leadership to ensure that protection is at the centre of humanitarian planning, preparedness, and response. While the Protection Cluster is tasked with raising protection issues, providing analysis, and coming up with options, and the ICCG/HCT is in charge of mainstreaming protection in all the activities of the operation, it is the Humanitarian Coordinator's responsibility to provide direction to ensure a coordinated response to protection issues.

Why is collective leadership by Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams important for ensuring that the centrality of protection is put into practice in field operations?

The **Humanitarian Country Team** has responsibilities that cannot be delegated to the cluster or a single agency. With the help of the Protection Cluster, the Humanitarian Country Team helps in identifying and addressing the 2 or 3 most critical protection concerns in a systematic and strategic manner. Additionally, within the Humanitarian Country Team, there should be a small team (consisting of agency representatives for the Protection Cluster and sub-cluster, as well as at least one NGO representatives) to lead the drafting of a protection strategy. The protection strategy should be short, flexible, and realistic. It should ensure that key protection activities are taken forward in the advocacy and operations of all Humanitarian Country Team members. The Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team should make protection a standing item on the Humanitarian Country Team agenda, as it is in Iraq where the agency lead for Protection (UNHCR) presents a short Critical Protection Issues note every fortnight prepared by the Protection Cluster Coordinators with recommended actions for Humanitarian Country Team members.

The **Humanitarian Coordinator** is responsible for ensuring that protection is prioritised in operations, mainstreamed across the clusters, and that decisions are informed by strong protection analysis. The Humanitarian Coordinator has a particularly important role to provide clear direction across the response when faced with protection dilemmas. For example, in Iraq, humanitarians had to decide how to engage in centres set up to screen civilians fleeing areas of armed conflict, even though human rights violations were alleged to be occurring in these centres. Humanitarians needed to strike a fine balance between upholding the humanitarian imperative whilst not compromising fundamental human rights norms. Such situations involve compromises and require clear direction from the Humanitarian Coordinator on what positions should be taken across the



Protection is often perceived as being too sensitive to take up with Governments and non-state armed actors. It can be seen as a choice between protection and access. What are the practical steps that Humanitarian Coordinators can take in-country to show leadership on sensitive protection concerns despite the challenges?

1. The Humanitarian Coordinator should advocate for space and political backing within the UN system and by partners, NGOs, and donors, to raise and advocate for difficult protection issues.
2. The Humanitarian Coordinator should strive to have a sustained engagement with governments and other stakeholders as this will increase confidence in the UN/HCT as a reliable partner. In many cases, UNHCR's engagement extends over decades and the Office's protection and assistance activities are understood.
3. Humanitarian Coordinators are often also Resident Coordinators. In this case the Humanitarian Coordinator should use experience and resources gained elsewhere, including political and development, to a critical situation before it creates humanitarian need.
4. The Humanitarian Coordinator is in a unique position to increase advocacy efforts with government members, placing emphasis on the responsibility of States to uphold and comply with international laws that protect people in armed conflict.
5. The Humanitarian Coordinator should establish or engage with existing networks of influential stakeholders for advocacy (e.g. influential ambassadors). As the leader of the operation, the Humanitarian Coordinator should build on the complementarities across his/her Humanitarian Country Team members who have access to different levels and types of stakeholders.



Eugene Owusu

DSRSG and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, South Sudan

South Sudan is one of the most challenging protection contexts in the world. Since 2013, the population has been exposed to repeated attacks and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. This includes widespread sexual violence, forced recruitment of children and deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure. While some IDPs have found refuge in UN Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites, they represent a small proportion of the millions of people affected by the crisis and in need of assistance and protection. Even those who have reached the PoC sites face risks. Women and girls continue to be exposed to significant levels of sexual violence inside the PoC sites and when collecting firewood and food outside. Civilians have also been attacked after receiving humanitarian assistance, making conflict sensitive programming imperative in the South Sudan context.

What concrete steps can Humanitarian Coordinators take to ensure protection is at the heart of the operation and advocacy?

1. Strategic reflections and joint action:

- **The Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Coordination Team should create a protection strategy** to anchor the activities of the Humanitarian Coordination Team and place protection as a key component of Humanitarian Response Plans. For example, South Sudan is first and foremost a protection crisis. The Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team decided to have both a specific Strategic Objective on protection and mainstream protection throughout the HRP. This will be complemented by a revamped Protection Strategy, which is under development.
- As the leader of the operation, **the Humanitarian Coordinator should ensure the implementation of the protection strategy**. The development of a strategy or formulation of a Strategic Objective is meaningful only if it translates into meaningful action. To this end, the Humanitarian Coordination Team in South Sudan dedicated time to discuss specific contexts and specific protection risks in order to identify steps to take to address them. In 2015, the Humanitarian Coordinator made the situation in Central and Southern Unity – where horrific atrocities were taking place – a standing agenda item in the Humanitarian Coordination Team. Under that agenda item, building on information and analysis compiled by the Protection Cluster, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team discussed how to influence UNMISS' decision-making regarding deployment of troops and assets to the area.

2. Advocacy:

- **The Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordination Team should use a combination of public and private advocacy to address issues related to protection of civilians**. For example, in July 2016, when conflict erupted in Juba, civilians bore the brunt of the fighting. At the time, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team engaged on multiple levels with multiple actors in an endeavour to protect civilians and ensure that the team could reach them with assistance. Both public statement condemning the fighting and a written demarche to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was used. The Humanitarian Coordinator also held conversations with all parties and urged them to uphold their obligations under IHL. The Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team is also in charge of engaging proactively with various high-level mandate-holders in the United Nations to raise the profile of protection issues in South Sudan, such as the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

3. Funding:

- **Ensure that protection partners are equipped with the necessary resources**. Protection is often one of the lowest-funded clusters in a Humanitarian Response Plan. In South Sudan, the Humanitarian Coordinator worked with the Advisory Board to allocate funding to protection partners at critical moments in the response. They funded a partner to work on clinical management of rape in Wau following the fighting in February and June. Dignity kits and child friendly spaces for the response in the Greater Equatoria region were also funded.

How can the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team address sensitive protection issues such as sexual and gender based violence (SGBV)?

Rape can be used as a weapon of war throughout the conflict. Women and girls are exposed to the risk of violence when carrying out their most basic daily activities, including collecting firewood and fuel. In responding to GBV, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team in South Sudan faced a range of challenges, including: difficulties accessing locations where survivors are, as rape often occurs in remote and

- **Include SGBV as a standing item on the Humanitarian Coordination Team agenda**, and engage with UNFPA, as the GBV Sub-Cluster Lead, to identify concrete actions to take forward.
- **Work with the Protection Cluster to produce and distribute referral cards**, so that survivors know where they could access services, both in the PoC sites and Juba town.
- When possible, **encourage UN missions on the group to undertake patrols in areas where women are at risk**.
- **Conduct advocacy activities to call for an end to the violations**. This includes engagement at the highest levels of government, leveraging the donor community to bolster pressure, and behind the scenes discussions with armed actors to urge compliance with IHL.