



The Centrality of Protection
 Practical steps for Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams
 November 2016

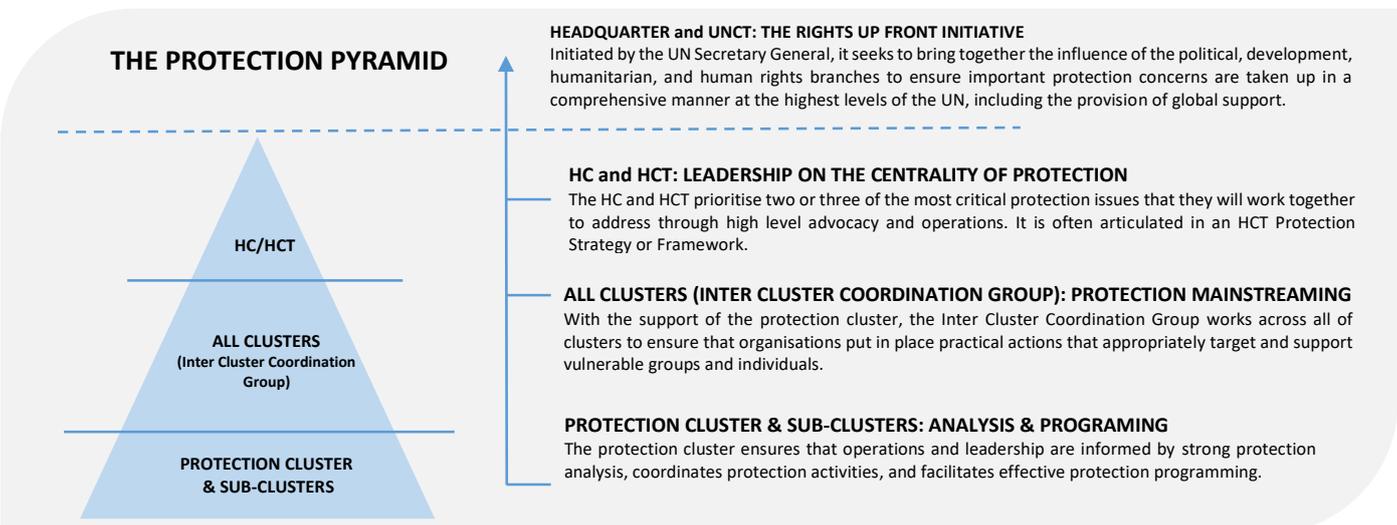
This Note sets out practical steps that Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) can take to ensure that protection is at the centre of humanitarian response. It builds on the concrete example of how the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team took in Iraq up their protection responsibilities, captured during a P2P Support and Global Protection Cluster mission in August 2016. It also builds on elements from Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Note reflects expectations in the IASC Principals Statement on the centrality of protection in humanitarian action from December 2013ⁱ, the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action 2016ⁱⁱ, and other Global Protection Clusterⁱⁱⁱ guidance and policies. It has three sections:

- A. Put in place HCT Protection Strategies and advocate on protection
- B. Ensure protection is prioritised in operations and mainstreamed
- C. Work together to enhance the Protection of Civilians.

What are the protection responsibilities of Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams?

The HC/HCT is responsible for collective leadership and advocacy on protection in all crisis, including natural disasters. Whilst the HC/HCT should be guided by the analysis of the Protection Cluster, as the top strategic body within an interagency response they have responsibilities that cannot be delegated to the cluster or a single agency. The importance of HCTs fulfilling their responsibilities on protection was highlighted during the Sri Lanka crisis which led to the Secretary General’s 2012 Internal Review Panel and the UN Human Rights up Front (HRuF) Action Plan^{iv}.

The HC/HCT has a particularly important role in providing clear direction across the response when faced with protection dilemmas. For example, in the Central African Republic humanitarian responders faced the dilemma of whether to support relocation of a group that was being attacked by another group. If humanitarian responders supported evacuations, they risked inadvertently incentivising further attacks and creating longer term challenges. If they did not support relocation, the group would likely face escalating attacks and atrocities. In such situations an agreed HC/HCT position is required.



A. PUT IN PLACE AN HCT PROTECTION STRATEGY AND ADVOCATE ON PROTECTION

Based on the IASC Principals Statement, HCs and members of HCTs are expected to work together as senior leaders to address the 2 or 3 most critical protection concerns in-country. Simple and flexible HCT Protection Strategies can facilitate this process by clearly articulating the main priorities and responsibilities of HCT members. Regular engagement by the HCT in the implementation of the strategy is required to bring it to life. As the HC and HCT members often have access to influential stakeholders they are also well placed to engage in public and private advocacy on the critical protection issues.

- i) **Develop an HCT protection strategy with 2 or 3 clear protection priorities.** Reflecting the Global Protection Cluster Provisional Guidance for HCT Protection Strategies^v and examples from field operations:
 - **Convene a dedicated meeting or workshop with HCT members to draft the strategy.** It is important to have HC leadership and ownership of all HCT members. Use the analysis and advice of the Protection Cluster as a basis for the strategy.
 - **Constitute a small temporary group with the Protection Cluster and sub-cluster lead agencies, as well as some NGO representatives** to prepare the workshop and lead the drafting the strategy. Or, if necessary, request the support of a ProCap as was done in Yemen.
 - **Prioritise 2 or 3 critical protection concerns that the HCT will work together to address through high-level advocacy and operations.** Use the analysis of the Protection Cluster to inform the selection of the priorities and be realistic regarding the capacity in country to deliver. Ensure that the priorities are sufficiently tangible to engage all of the senior leadership, not just the protection mandated agencies and that they complement, rather than duplicate the work of the Protection Cluster and Inter-Cluster Coordinating Group (ICCG). For example, in South Sudan, the HC/HCT agreed to prioritise: 1) strengthening SGBV programming and joint HCT advocacy, and 2) the protection of civilians with focus on boys and girls.
 - **Ensure that the strategy is short (2-4 pages), not overly technical so that it makes sense for non- protection experts in the HCT and sufficiently flexible to adapt to changes in the operational context.** Based on experience from Syria, detailed matrixes should be avoided as they become the focus of long sign-off negotiations which delay implementation.
- ii) **Include protection as a standing item on the HCT agenda and link to Human Rights up Front (HRuF).** Regular engagement by the HC/HCT in the implementation of protection priorities captured in the strategy can be facilitated by:
 - **Include protection as a standing item on the HCT agenda and have the Agency Lead for Protection present a Critical Protection issues (CPI) Note.** The Note can be prepared by the Protection Cluster Coordinators, link to the HCT protection strategy priorities, and include recommended actions.
 - **Where applicable, have regular updates at HCT meetings on the implementation of the UN Country Team Human Rights Up Front (HRuF) work** and vice-versa with the UN Country Team on the HCT protection strategy implementation.
- iii) **Advocate on protection together as the HCT.** Using the HCT Protection Strategy and CPI Note, HCs and HCTs can take forward advocacy together by:
 - **Convene a small core group of HCT members** led by the HC to coordinate advocacy and representation. At a minimum, the group should include the Agency Lead for the Protection Cluster, one NGO and a UN agency. Consider tasking advocacy staff to produce short messages based on the CPI Note.
 - **Establish or engage existing networks of influential stakeholders for advocacy.** For example, influential Ambassadors. Build on the complementarities across HCT members who have access to different levels and types of stakeholders. Advocate with them using the CPI Note and other relevant information.

“Protection is the foundation of all humanitarian work, and humanitarians have a duty to do all they can to protect civilians whenever and wherever they are at risk...no matter how difficult the task, protection should be a central concern in all humanitarian operations”.

Lise Grande, DSRSG, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Iraq^{vi}

B. ENSURE THAT PROTECTION IS PRIORITISED IN OPERATIONS AND MAINSTREAMED

The HC/HCT is responsible for ensuring that protection is prioritised in operations, mainstreamed across the clusters, and that decisions are informed by strong protection analysis. Whilst it is not the role of the HCT to directly undertake these activities, it is responsible for ensuring that they happen. Some key actions that the HC and HCT should request from the ICWG, cluster, and Protection Cluster, include:

- **Task the ICCG to ensure that protection mainstreaming is implemented across clusters**, including by insertion of clear protection objectives and outcomes in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) that each sector must respond to, and encourage cross cluster validation of projects. For example, the Iraq HRP has clear protection objectives and indicators in each sector. An HC review panel, vets each sector plan to ensure they prioritise tangible actions that target and support vulnerable groups.
- **Encourage NGO co-cluster coordinators and sufficient seniority of national protection cluster coordinators for Level 3 emergencies and integrated mission contexts.** In Iraq and South Sudan the seniority of the Protection Cluster Coordinators, as well as the NGO co-cluster arrangement is credited with generating high performing clusters.
- **Ensure that concrete protection projects are funded**, rather than just protection trainings and sharing of guidance. For example, the Syria Protection Cluster Strategy prioritised concrete protection activities in the areas of civil documentation, SGBV, and child protection.
- **Ensure that the voice of affected people is heard and guides protection analysis, programming and HCT decisions.** Integrate an accountability to affected people approach consistent with the IASC Guidance^{vii}.
- **Ensure that the Protection Cluster compiles comprehensive protection analysis** that details the main protection threats, risks, vulnerabilities to inform decisions and programming. The Rapid Protection

C. WORK TOGETHER TO ENHANCE THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

How to address concerns relating to the protection of civilians can be challenging for humanitarians. Proactive leadership and advocacy by HCs/HCTs is required with influential stakeholders, including the parties to the conflict. Humanitarians will also face dilemmas that can undermine the protection of civilians and fundamental principles. It is the responsibility of the HC/HCT to provide clear direction on how to address these issues. Building on HRuF and practical examples from OPT, Iraq, and Afghanistan, Key steps for the HC and HCT are:

- **Use an International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights framework in public and private advocacy, including with the parties to the conflict.** Utilise Humanitarian Civil Military Coordination experts in support of information collection, networking and advocacy.
- **As necessary, seek deployment of a senior advisor, such as a senior Human Rights officer, to support the HC/HCT's use of IHL and human rights law.** The adviser should work with all relevant actors, especially the Protection Cluster and OCHA CMCoord officers.
- **Task the Human Rights officer or a body to prepare short, factual reports on how civilians are being affected by the conduct of hostilities using an IHL and human rights framework.** Use data from various sources, including HRuF (where applicable) and package the information in short and factual updates. An excellent example is the weekly Protection of Civilians oPt update^{viii}. Consider making the updates public if possible.
- **Task the ICCG to develop an operational framework to guide front-line humanitarian workers on how to deal with dilemmas involving protection and the humanitarian principles.** It should be agreed in the ICCG, endorsed by the HCT and disseminated widely to front line staff. For example, the draft Iraq framework.
- **Ensure basic awareness raising and training on IHL and the humanitarian principles is conducted** for humanitarian workers, especially those engaging with the parties to the conflict.

From 31 July to 5 August 2016, representatives from the Peer 2 Peer Support team, the Global Protection Cluster, World Vision International, and AMEL sought to capture good practice on how leadership had supported the centrality of protection and Accountability to Affected People (AAP) in Iraq's humanitarian response. The team travelled to Erbil and Baghdad, as well as undertook field visits. Over one hundred people were interviewed, including the Humanitarian Coordinator and Heads of relevant UN agencies, NGOs, and clusters. Light desk reviews focused on Yemen and oPt for the centrality of protection and Burundi, Darfur, and Nepal for AAP.

REFERENCES

- IASC Statement on the centrality of protection in humanitarian action, 17 December 2013
- GPC Provision Guidance on HCT Protection Strategy September 2016
- IASC Policy on protection in humanitarian action 2016
- IASC EDG Protection and Accountability to Affected People in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, 2016^{ix}
- Rights Up Front: A Plan of Action to Strengthen the UN's role in Protecting People in Crisis, 2013^x
- P2P Support, Iraq Centrality of Protection Case Studies, September 2016^{xi}

P2P Support – The Centrality of Protection

The Peer 2 Peer Support team (formerly known as the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team - STAIT) was created by, and reports to, the Emergency Directors' Group (EDG). It provides direct peer support to Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams to deliver effective, principled, quality, timely, and predictable collective humanitarian response in field operations. For more information, please visit: <http://www.deliveraidbetter.org/>

ⁱ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/principals/content/centrality-protection-humanitarian-action>

ⁱⁱ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_policy_on_protection_in_humanitarian_action_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/>

^{iv} <https://undg.org/home/guidance-policies/country-programming-principles/human-rights/rights-up-front-initiative/> and <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fundg.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F02%2FDetailed-Plan-of-Action-Rights-up-Front.doc>

^v http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/news_and_publications/hct-protection-strategies-provisional-guidance-final-september-2016.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.deliveraidbetter.org/pages/webinars/accountability-to-affected-people/protecting-civilians-mission-impossible-humanitarian-leadership-in-action>

^{vii} https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/edg_-_aap_protection_guidance_note_2016.pdf

^{viii} <http://www.ochaopt.org/reports/protection-of-civilians>

^{ix} https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/edg_-_aap_protection_guidance_note_2016.pdf

^x <https://undg.org/home/guidance-policies/country-programming-principles/human-rights/rights-up-front-initiative/>

^{xi} www.deliveraidbetter.org