A PARTNERSHIP AT RISK?

THE UN-NGO RELATIONSHIP IN LIGHT OF UN INTEGRATION

An NRC discussion paper

NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

MAIN FINDINGS

- Structural integration is seen to politicise humanitarian action as it can lead to the sub-ordination of humanitarian concerns to political and military objectives.
- UN integration and the perceived politicisation of the UN family have strained the UN-NGO working relationship – threatening effective coordination between the humanitarian UN and NGOs.
- There is growing hesitancy within parts of the NGO community to engage with the UN - including sharing of information, joint assessments and joint field visits.
- NGOs are re-assessing their participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. Some have already withdrawn, because it entails a risk of association with the UN. With closer UN integration, being associated with the UN – even the humanitarian UN – is sometimes seen as undermining NGOs' perceived independence from the political and military objectives of the UN mission.
- Parts of the NGO community are increasingly uncomfortable with OCHA or the Humanitarian Coordinator facilitating humanitarian access. They are perceived as lacking the necessary independence of the UN political/peacekeeping mission adequately to perform the role of neutral broker in complex security contexts. However, many would welcome increased advocacy by the HC and OCHA for humanitarian space with host governments.
- The UN's extensive use of armed escorts and armed security on compounds, road blocks and barriers, high fences and tight security controls places additional barriers to coordination between NGOs and the UN agencies, especially with national NGO staff.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTEGRATION MODALITIES

1 Structural integration should not be undertaken in contexts where the UN mission, through the implementation of its mandate, can be considered party to an ongoing, armed conflict. Integrated missions established in such contexts should be unstructured. Policies and clear indicators informing decision making on integration modalities should be developed and implemented by the end of 2012.

ACCESS FACILITATION

2 In integrated mission contexts, the HC and OCHA should consult with the humanitarian community – UN and non-UN – before embarking on access facilitation. If no consensus is reached with the NGO community, the HC and OCHA should not engage in community-wide access facilitation beyond host government liaison and providing contact information to relevant actors.

3 OCHA and the HC should strengthen access advocacy with host-governments in relation to administrative procedures for humanitarian staff and customs clearance of relief items.

INFORMATION SHARING

4 Clear and transparent systems for information sharing within the UN family in integrated mission contexts should be developed and respected.

THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

5 The reporting line between the Humanitarian Coordinators and the Emergency Relief Coordinator should be fully exploited in order to provide adequate leadership in the protection of humanitarian space within an integrated mission.

6 Candidates for DSRSG/RC/HC positions should only be considered if they have received appropriate humanitarian leadership training and after their suitability for the HC position has been confirmed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

COMMUNICATION

7 External communication by the UN integrated mission should always distinguish between the political or military elements of a mission and humanitarian actors.

8 Humanitarian Coordinators should be tasked to develop and implement clear communication strategies to promote the independence of humanitarian action and actors.

SECURITY MANAGEMENT

9 UN integrated security management has a clear, detrimental impact on the UN-NGO relationship, hence on humanitarian coordination and response. This should inform the practical implementation of the new UNDSS security management framework and security level system, and the implementation of an enabling approach to security should be accelerated significantly.

NEXT STEPS

10 "Best practices" of UN integration in relation to humanitarian response should be identified jointly between UN and non-UN humanitarian actors. Militarized solutions to access should always be a last resort and never be promoted as generic best practice.

11 The UN Integration Steering Group, working with IASC and Humanitarian Coordinators, should agree concrete measures to address the negative impacts of UN integration on humanitarian space by the summer of 2012. Priority actions, identified in close collaboration with UN and non-UN humanitarian actors, should be implemented before the end of 2012 and progress reports should be provided by the IASC, HCs and HCTs by January 2013.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of United Nations (UN) Integrated Missions – whereby humanitarian coordination and leadership are placed under the umbrella of political and peacekeeping missions – has raised serious concerns within the humanitarian community. The main assertions have been that UN integration undermines the independence of humanitarian action; silences the humanitarian voice and reporting of the UN; and distorts local power holders' perception of humanitarian action and actors, risking the safety of both humanitarian workers and the people who benefit from humanitarian action.

This discussion paper aims to provide a different perspective on the ongoing integration debate. It explores an area that has received little attention to date: how integration has impacted cooperation between UN and NGO humanitarian actors. The paper also touches upon integrated UN security management. While security management is not directly linked to UN integration, it is seen as one of the greatest impediments to UN-NGO coordination.

Due to the heterogeneous character of the NGO community, it is difficult to get one common NGO perspective on UN integration. However, the paper gives a snapshot of some of the considerations and concerns raised by parts of the NGO community that have traditionally taken part in UN-led humanitarian coordination structures – by partnering with UN agencies, participating in cluster coordination and receiving common humanitarian funds.

The analysis is based on interviews with staff from UN missions, UN agencies, donor governments and NGOs working in Afghanistan, DRC and Somalia conducted in 2011 by the Norwegian Refugee Council. It also draws on succesive consultations with other NGOs both at field and headquarters levels. Doubtlessly, Afghanistan, DRC and Somalia all present fairly extreme operating contexts, where humanitarian principles are tested to the limits. That makes it particularly important that the UN considers very carefully the implications of structural integration here. It is however recognised that these cases are not necessarily representative of other humanitarian contexts in many respects.

1. WHY UN INTEGRATION BECOMES RELEVANT TO NGOS

1.1 HUMANITARIAN REFORM MECHANISMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

When the humanitarian reform process began in 2005, a key objective was to strengthen coordination between UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement and the NGO community taking part in humanitarian response. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a few NGOs chose to remain outside these mechanisms and limit their participation to 'observers' in clusters and other coordination fora. Yet, most humanitarian NGOs supported enhanced coordination as a means of improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Most international NGOs now participate actively in the cluster system and in the humanitarian financing mechanisms, they have invested significant resources in the humanitarian reform process, and many NGOs work closely with UN agencies in the field, including as implementing partners.

Through the current humanitarian coordination system, UN and non-UN humanitarian actors engage in joint planning and prioritization of humanitarian response (such as the Humanitarian Action Plan), and access common funding mechanisms (such as country-based pooled funds).

Moreover, the Humanitarian Coordinator represents the entire humanitarian community, including non-UN humanitarian actors. Humanitarian Coordinators engage in public advocacy on behalf of the humanitarian community. Consequently, the way the HC is perceived may have an impact on the entire humanitarian effort and the way it is perceived.

Given this interaction between the UN system and NGOs, UN integration – which brings the humanitarian UN closer to the political or peacekeeping mission – affects the broader humanitarian community. UN integration thereby has the potential to affect the quality and depth of humanitarian coordination. When UN integration impedes effective coordination between UN and non-UN humanitarian actors, this is a cause for concern. Arguably, it weakens the effectiveness, quality and timeliness of aid.

WHAT IS INTEGRATION?

According to the 2006 UN Secretary General's Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions, 'integration' is "the guiding principle for the design and implementation of complex UN operations in post-conflict situations and for linking the different dimensions of peace-building (political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security aspects) into a coherent support strategy".

An Integrated UN Presence: "refers to any context in which the United Nations has a multidimensional peacekeeping operation or a political mission in addition to a United Nations Country Team." (Policy Instruction: OCHA's Structural Relationships within an Integrated UN Presence, 2009).

In countries where there is an integrated UN presence, an **Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF)** should be developed to ensure a shared vision of the UN's strategic objectives and integrated planning; including agreed results and timelines for both the UN mission and the UN Country Team (SG Decision 2008).

Integration at the strategic level has also been complemented by structural integration, mainly through the establishment of **Integrated Missions**. "Integrated missions" are "structurally integrated field missions, for example, UN peacekeeping or political missions that have a double or tripled-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC who reports to the SRSG/Head of Mission" (UN Integrated Mission Planning Process Guidelines, 2009).

1.2 PERCEPTION AND ACCEPTANCE – THE BASIS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Attacks on humanitarian workers have tripled over the past decade and working on both sides of "the frontline" is increasingly difficult. The reasons for attacks are many, and the various actors motivate their attacks differently; from criminals engaging in kidnapping and looting for pure profit, personal conflicts involving humanitarian staff, to armed opposition groups deliberately targeting humanitarians because of their affiliation with the "West". It is impossible to eliminate risk to staff, as humanitarians work in some of the world's most complicated and violent contexts. Each organisation nonetheless has an obligation to limit the risk to their staff to the extent possible.

In order to gain acceptance, humanitarian organisations must carefully manage how they are perceived by the various actors and limit risks of attacks.

To minimize risk of attacks and increase effectiveness of delivery, humanitarians must be perceived only as providers of goods and services required by crisis-affected populations without any ulterior agenda. Humanitarian actors have traditionally sought to achieve this by providing assistance to those who need it most, with the sole purpose of addressing needs and fulfilling people's rights, without discrimination, independently of political interference or religious/ideological convictions. In other words: through adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

UN peacekeeping and political missions in the three country cases considered here – Afghanistan, DRC and Somalia - are all deployed in support of governments that face significant, long-term armed opposition. Armed opposition groups in these contexts often consider the UN a party to the conflict.

Association with the UN mission is considered a risk by many NGOs, who fear it will damage their image as neutral, independent and impartial actors. If NGOs are seen to support UN and government political or military objectives, they may lose access to crisis-affected people living in areas under the control of armed opposition groups.

With the same rationale, many humanitarian actors oppose what is termed politicisation and militarisation of aid; where relief activities are undertaken for political and military purposes. The humanitarian critique of UN integration should be seen against this background: as a prosess that risks politicising humanitarian action and actors; increasing exposure to attacks and limiting access to crisis affected populations.

1.3 ASSESSING CHANGES IN PERCEPTION

Little is known about how local communities, local leaders and armed opposition groups actually perceive humanitarian action and actors. Enhanced knowledge would require the conduct of proper perception surveys. Yet, more NGOs increasingly perceive the UN family as politicized and are therefore reassessing their relationship with the UN.

In discussing UN integration and analysing how it impacts on humanitarian space, it is worth noting that few people outside (and even inside) the UN, academia and the NGO community understand what integration means, let alone its implications. Interviews and consultations with NGOs demonstrate that they interpret UN integration largely as a process that politicises the UN family – including OCHA and the UN agencies.

One of the key criticisms of integration is that it has changed the way humanitarian action and actors are perceived. Being perceived as independent and impartial actors is crucial to the local acceptance that humanitarian actors rely on in conflict settings for several reasons: getting access; enabling operation across frontlines and ensuring adequate programming and safety of staff.

To understand how perceptions of humanitarian action and actors have changed, it would be necessary to find out how beneficiaries and local leaders perceive humanitarians and what could change – or have changed – their perception of humanitarian actors and action. Similarly, enquiries into why members of armed opposition groups target humanitarians and what factors or behaviour make humanitarian actors legitimate targets in their eyes would be needed.

Perception surveys are demanding and resource intensive as they require extensive field research and direct engagement with actors who are difficult to access. In light of this, the existing information on how various actors are perceived is limited. Consequently, establishing a baseline against which new information can be compared (necessary to establish trends or changes in perceptions) is a challenge in itself.

In the absence of this type of information, academic reports and studies largely rely on humanitarian actors' own understanding of how they are perceived. When asked about the relationship with the political/peacekeeping mission, UN agency staff in both DRC and Afghanistan considered it problematic to be seen as too closely linked with the mission, as this would alter how they were perceived, limit their acceptance and thus limit access and increase insecurity for their staff. Similarly, representatives from UN agencies in Afghanistan stated clearly that being linked to the upcoming transition (from international to national military control and military to civilian control) would be a risk to their acceptance.

STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION

Two feet in: The suggested model in "stable post-conflict settings where the peacekeeping/ political mission is widely accepted". This model sees OCHA and the DSRSG/RC/HC inside the mission.

One foot in – one foot out: the HC/RC is also the DSRSG but with a clearly identifiable OCHA presence outside the mission. Yet OCHA reports to the HC. This intermediate position is intended in cases where the "political/security context is still in flux".

Two feet out: the HC and OCHA are de-linked from the mission. This is recommended in situations of "persistent widespread conflict or a lack of a credible peace process".

(Policy Instruction: OCHA's Structural Relationships within an Integrated UN Presence, 2009).

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS IN STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION POLICIES

Many NGOs argue that there are inherent contradictions in integration policies.

Many NGO representatives claim that there are inherent contradictions in UN integration policies. They argue that it is impossible for the same individuals or structure to protect humanitarian space while also retaining responsibilities related to promotion of the overall political agenda of a UN mission. Mandates involving support to the government or leading political processes, for example, while simultaneously defending humanitarian principles, is one of these contradictions. Similarly, some respondents found it problematic for an SRSG to uphold humanitarian neutrality and operational independence, while simultaneously leading on political and/or military objectives. For instance, is it possible to reconcile a lead role in an election process – in which key armed opposition groups are not represented politically – with upholding humanitarian principles? This was the case in Afghanistan in 2010. Likewise, professing humanitarian principles while leading a UN mission assisting the Congolese government in military operations against one armed opposition group might be seen as incompatible.

2.2 THE STRAIN ON THE NGO-UN RELATIONSHIP

Many NGOs are concerned by the risk of being perceived as too closely associated with the UN. As a consequence, some are distancing themselves from the UN.

A direct consequence of UN integration is growing concern amongst NGOs of being linked to a UN mission by association through the Humanitarian Coordinator, the humanitarian coordination structures and the relationship with UN agencies. Some NGOs in Afghanistan, DRC and Somalia deliberately distance themselves from the UN in order to ensure acceptance for their own actions, access and safety of staff. Several NGOs are also reconsidering how to manage their relationship with OCHA, the Humanitarian Coordinator, the UN agencies and pooled fund mechanisms. To various extents in Afghanistan, DRC and Somalia, NGOs have withdrawn from joint assessments with UN agencies, implementing projects funded through the UN (through agencies or pooled fund mechanisms), information sharing mechanisms and joint communication initiatives.

In Somalia, the humanitarian community (through the Humanitarian Country Team) has been vocally opposed to structural integration. First, it has been argued that the situation is inappropriate for structural integration – as there is no credible peace process to build on. Second, structural integration in the context of Somalia is believed to further reduce the ability of humanitarians to access South-Central Somalia – as humanitarian action risks being interpreted by the parties on the ground as more politicised. A letter of concern regarding structural integration outlined how the NGO community sees integration as a threat to humanitarian coordination. According to the letter, NGOs might have to distance themselves further from their UN partners if structural integration becomes a reality (Somalia NGO Consortium, letter to UNSG 23 September, 2010). Several of the international NGOs operational in southern Somalia consider that structural integration would make it difficult to participate in UN coordination and to support UN humanitarian leadership.

Evidence gathered in support of this paper revealed that the UN family as such – not only the political elements – is now perceived by many NGOs to have become "compromised" or too politicised. As a consequence, many NGOs are re-assessing their relationship with UN humanitarian actors to minimize the risk of being associated with "political" actors. If more NGOs decide that the risk of association to the UN agencies is too high, the current system of humanitarian coordination could collapse.

2.3 INFORMATION SHARING BETWEEN NGOS AND THE UN

Uncertainties about how information is used and shared between the humanitarian/human rights actors on one hand and the political /military components of the mission on the other could jeopardise the information-sharing mechanisms fundamental to effective humanitarian response.

There is growing discomfort within parts of the NGO community with the sharing of information gathered through the cluster system with political/peacekeeping missions. Some NGO are concerned that protection-sensitive information provided by them through clusters may be passed on to political and military elements of the mission, either directly or indirectly through normal mission reporting procedures. They also fear information may be (ab)used to further the non-humanitarian, political or military objectives of the mission. Both in DRC

and Afghanistan, interviewees mentioned examples of staff from the political and military branches of the mission having participated in humanitarian coordination. Many NGOs are opposed to such participation, while others have no problems and are actually disposed to encourage it. While there is no agreement across the humanitarian community on this issue, the modalities for participation of military and peacekeeping personnel in humanitarian coordination ought to be clarified. The aim would be to minimise the risks to and augment the benefits of humanitarian protection. In DRC this has been promoted through periodic reviews of the protection cluster's terms of reference.

Information shared through the protection cluster is often highly sensitive and has been collected for the purpose of supporting humanitarian protection efforts. If such information is instead used for political or military purposes it could arguably jeopardise the security of individuals and communities providing information as well as humanitarian actors collecting information. According to interviewees, the protection cluster in Afghanistan at some point had to refrain from including all information in minutes of meetings to ensure that information did not end up in the "wrong hands" (i.e. the international military forces) and prevented staff other than from human rights/humanitarian sections from attending the meetings. The involvement of UNAMA Human Rights in the protection cluster, as Human Rights is explicitly part of the mission as well as being Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has also raised concerns with respect to information sharing. Similar points have been raised in relation to Somalia. The concerns are not primarily with the OHCHR office itself, but derive from uncertainties regarding the role of OHCHR in an integrated set-up and how information is shared between OHCHR and the rest of the mission.

In DRC, the implementation of a comprehensive protection strategy – including the peacekeeping forces, the political components and the humanitarian efforts – has exacerbated these concerns. In particular because the UN protection strategy is largely focused on threats posed by only one of the armed groups. Having political and military actors participate in the protection cluster and ensuring that information is exchanged between the humanitarian coordination system and the UN mission might make sense from a political "comprehensive strategy" point of view. However, the unintended consequence might be that some NGO representatives stop sharing information through the cluster and the necessary *humanitarian* coordination on protection may disappear from the cluster. As one NGO representative noted: "people will only share sensitive information with individuals and organisations they trust. If 'others' are in the room, information will simply not be shared".

Eroding information sharing on protection issues is a risk for several reasons. Not only might a decrease in information sharing result in more un-coordinated efforts and likely weaken the humanitarian response. The UN system also plays a vital role in addressing protection concerns with host governments. Weakening this role by limiting information-sharing, would also impact negatively on civilian protection.

One attempt to address concerns related to information sharing involves allowing the military/political staff to participate in some parts of the protection cluster meetings, while other parts are restricted exclusively to humanitarian actors.

2.4 THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

Humanitarian leadership is weakened by structural integration as individuals selected for the 'triple-hatted' DSRSG/RC/HC position rarely have adequate humanitarian skills or the political will to prioritise humanitarian advocacy above other competing priorities. They are perceived by many NGOs as prioritising harmonious relations with governments rather than advocating for humanitarian concerns.

The nature of the 'multi-hatted' role raises the question of whether one individual is able to promote independent humanitarian action while also supporting the SRSG of the political mission. NGO representatives interviewed mentioned some positive examples. Yet, Humanitarian Coordinators have repeatedly been accused by NGOs of not insisting on humanitarian needs or advocating for independence of humanitarian action with donors and governments. The criticism relates to subordination of humanitarian needs and priorities to political objectives and considerations.

Concerns are, however, not only linked to potential conflict of interest between the political and humanitarian responsibilities, but also to the level of responsibility the position entails. As the Humanitarian Country Team in Afghanistan highlighted in a letter to the Emergency Relief Coordinator in March 2011 asking for a "full-time" HC "separated from other functions". The letter argued

"[t]he current 'triple-hatted' responsibilities incumbent on the HC/RC/DSRSG substantially undermine the ability of the individual tasked with this role to ensure requisite attention is assigned to humanitarian responsibilities."

Important steps have been taken to incorporate a humanitarian component in Resident Coordinator training and to test humanitarian emergency management skills in the RC assessment. However, in reality according to NGO field staff interviewed for this paper, there are still gaps in the skills of RC/HCs. As individuals are selected to fulfil three functions, their ability to perform the Humanitarian Coordinator role is often perceived by many in the NGO community as seemingly the least important in the selection process.

2.5 OCHA'S ABILITY TO ENGAGE WITH THE NGO COMMUNITY

Lack of structural and physical separation between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the political/peacekeeping missions has created new challenges to effective humanitarian coordination and impacted negatively on relations between OCHA and parts of the NGO community.

In DRC and Afghanistan OCHA is established on the basis of the "one foot in, one foot out" model, according to which OCHA should be physically located outside the mission, while the HC also functions as the Deputy SRSG for the mission. Questions have been raised when the "one foot in – one foot out" model has been chosen in these highly politicised contexts – where the UN mission is mandated to support governments involved in military operations against armed groups. Arguably, both countries fulfil the criteria for a "two feet out" set up ("persistent widespread conflict or lack of credible peaceprocess"), where the HC role and OCHA are completely independent of the mission. As mentioned above, similar arguments were used by the humanitarian community when opposing structural integration in Somalia.

Not only is structural integration seen as incompatible with OCHA establishing an independent identity, but it also creates a very practical challenge to good coordination. It makes it cumbersome for NGOs to work closely with OCHA without unwillingly associating themselves with the political mission. Such concerns are highlighted in contexts such as Afghanistan, where OCHA has been physically co-located, on and off, with the mission since it was re-established in 2008.

OCHA's physical co-location with the UN mission causes discomfort within the NGO community. Attending meetings in the UN mission compound is seen as a risk; both in terms of perception and security of staff. Several UN compounds have been attacked over the past years in Afghanistan. Tight security measures at the compound also make it difficult for NGOs – particularly national NGOs – to access OCHA. Cars are often required to wait outside the UN compound, placing drivers at risk. The UN compounds are considered targets for attacks and in Kabul they are often located close to compounds of international military forces.

2.6 THE UN AS A FACILITATOR OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The role of the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA in facilitating access negotiations with armed opposition groups is increasingly questioned by parts of the NGO community as they are not seen as neutral brokers. Instead, promoting information exchange and advocating for humanitarian space with host governments are seen as useful roles that the UN could fulfil.

The utility of the UN (through the HC and OCHA) facilitating access negotiations is increasingly questioned. Parts of the NGO community argue that these UN actors still have a role to play in facilitation of humanitarian access negotiations with armed groups – which is indeed their mandate. Others claim that in the three contexts considered here, the UN is too compromised and aligned with one of the parties to the conflict to be able to represent independent humanitarian action. There are also concerns related to the lack of open dialogue on what the UN is doing in each context to "facilitate" access negotiations on behalf of the humanitarian community. In Somalia, for instance, several of the NGOs delivering assistance in South Central Somalia express reticence towards the public advocacy done to increase access by both the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of the humanitarian community. Association with the UN in the context of Somalia is considered to potentially compromise access and security of staff, hence public association to the UN is avoided.

Based on the consultations that inform this paper, there is no "one-size fits all" for the UN's role in facilitating access negotiations. In eastern DRC, OCHA used to facilitate interaction between the humanitarian community and armed opposition groups simply through providing contact information; a service reportedly highly appreciated by many within the NGO community. In contrast, recent attempts by OCHA in Afghanistan to come up with a common access strategy have largely failed to gain support from the NGO community. Many within the NGO community in Afghanistan do not consider OCHA sufficiently independent of the political mission to lead a joint effort to increase access to areas controlled by armed opposition groups. Moreover, the Afghanistan NGO coordination body – ACBAR – took a stand against OCHA's initiative.

Some NGOs argue that they are in a better position to provide their own facilitation and negotiation, a view underpinned both by the arguably "biased" position of the HC and OCHA in the countries in question, and linked to the restricted movement and limited influence of HC and OCHA staff with the various groups in control of areas needing humanitarian assistance.

Yet, many NGOs in both Afghanistan and DRC see a role for the Humanitarian Coordinator in particular to engage more strongly in advocacy towards the host governments on access. Administrative procedures, customs and taxation hinder humanitarian actors from carrying out their programmes effectively. There is recognition that efforts are being made, but many NGOs would welcome an even stronger engagement by the Humanitarian Coordinator with the host government to promote smoother administrative processes.

One concrete suggestion is for OCHA to provide the NGO community with the analysis made by elements of the political/peacekeeping mission on dynamics and power relations within the armed opposition groups. This could help humanitarians better understand the context, risk and opportunities. Similarly, OCHA's drafting of guidelines and policies, dissemination of lessons learned and best practices from other contexts along with building capacity of staff could add value in contexts where the UN is perceived as highly politicised.

2.7 UN REPORTING AND ADVOCACY OF HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Many NGO representatives see the UN's ability and willingness to engage in humanitarian advocacy as diminished.

According to the UN Secretary General's Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions, members of the UN family that "need to retain a public advocacy role should ensure that such advocacy is conducted in full coordination with the SRSG and in a manner that does not undermine the mandate of the mission". Some respondents argue that this compromises the ability of the humanitarian elements of the UN to raise humanitarian concerns of a politically sensitive nature. It is noteworthy that many NGOs consider the advocacy role played by several of the UN agencies as extremely important.

The country reports of the Secretary General (SG) have often been subject to criticism. Humanitarians believe the situation on the ground and the protection concerns are "downplayed". In DRC, the protection cluster went as far as to demand an official explanation from the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in 2009 for the information contained in one of the Secretary General's reports. According to the protection cluster, the displacement numbers presented in the report were not the ones presented to the SRSG from OCHA (they were lower). Additionally, the cluster maintained that human rights violations of civilians, committed by the Congolese army, were not presented correctly. Indeed, it was felt that they were given less importance than abuses committed by armed opposition groups. NGO representatives expressed similar concerns in relation to the SG reports on Somalia. Here, human rights abuses by the Transitional Federal Government and The African Union Forces had arguably been downplayed.

The ability of the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA to speak up and advocate for humanitarian needs is seen as a personality issue. NGO representatives applauded the advocacy role played by *individuals* performing the role as HCs and heads of OCHA. These individuals were appreciated for being strong advocates of humanitarian issues, who acted in support of the humanitarian agencies even when this meant "pushing back" against the UN mission.

2.8 COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES

UN-led coordinated strategies are raising additional concerns in the NGO community. They are seen to contribute to the politicisation of UN-led action and divert attention from humanitarian needs and needs-based responses.

Both the UN mission to DRC (MONUSCO) and Afghanistan (UNAMA) have engaged in stabilisation programmes aimed at expanding state authority and showing communities a "peace dividend". This means the UN family and its implementing partners engage quite closely with one party to the conflict i.e. the government. There is a real possibility that political objectives, rather than needs, are the determining factor for assistance. Politicisation of projects and humanitarian action is nothing new. Yet, the close correlation between assistance and counter-insurgency in countries such as Afghanistan has made it difficult for actors engaged in relief work to maintain an independent identity.

A similar example is the comprehensive protection strategy in DRC. The peacekeeping mission is tasked to protect civilians, a function that has largely been supported by the NGO community. However, the mission's involvement has also been perceived to shift the focus of the protection response from a civilian-based methodology to a military physical protection strategy aimed at reducing the threat to the civilian population by armed opposition groups (UN System-Wide Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in the Democratic Republic in the DRC, 2009). Other protection concerns, particularly those linked to abuses committed by individuals or groups representing the government, are - according to NGO field staff - given less attention owing to the political affiliation of the UN mission with the Congolese government. Similar concerns were put forward in relation to Somalia, where there was seemingly impunity for human rights violations committed by pro-government forces. Consequently, several NGO representatives would oppose joint or comprehensive programmes promoted as "best practices" of UN integration.

The new "Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection Strategies" seeks to strengthen NGO consultation through established coordination mechanisms. However, the concerns raised by NGOs with regard to: 1) UN protection strategies giving disproportionate weight to risks posed by one particular group; and 2) the participation of UN political/military staff in the protection cluster, remain unanswered. The development of guidance for interaction between the protection cluster and peacekeeping missions is underway. The process will need to take into account NGO concerns if it is to be useful in providing guidance to future protection scenarios.

2.9 SECURITY MANAGEMENT

The UN's integrated security management led by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) is seen to have the most direct negative impact on UN-NGO coordination and joint response.

While the security management system of the UN is not directly linked to integration, it is discussed in this paper as it has a direct, detrimental effect on humanitarian coordination and action.

The recently revised UN security system includes the adoption of a security risk management framework as a programme enabler, and the abolition of the Security Phase System. The emphasis is now on "how to stay" rather than "when to leave", making use of guidelines for acceptable risk and programmes crucial. As noted in OCHA's Stay and Deliver report, implementing these reforms within the contexts of integrated missions presents a challenge; particularly where humanitarian staff operate under the same security regulations as political staff who have a different assessment of programme criticality and tolerance of risk.

According to UN field staff interviewed for this paper, the UN security system is still more focused on preventing security incidents than on enabling UN agencies to carry out their humanitarian mandates in relative safety.

Additionally, the reliance on deterrence and protective measures (such as high fences, use of armoured vehicles, armed guards and escorts) has shifted focus away from acceptance strategies normally used by humanitarian actors. Humanitarians in both DRC and Afghanistan claimed that the UN had abandoned established guidance to use armed escorts as a last resort and that it had rather become the norm. "They have to negotiate with the security advisers not to take armed escorts, not the other way around", said one member of the humani-

tarian community in DRC about the UN agencies. These concerns are exacerbated in contexts where the armed escorts are provided by forces that are directly or indirectly involved in combat, such as AMISOM in Somalia. Using such forces as escorts increases the risk of being targeted due to perceived association with such military actors or becoming a casualty if the military escort itself is targeted.

The lack of room for the UN agencies to ground their security systems in acceptance strategies, combined with strict security measures, are seen as problematic by many NGOs for the following reasons:

• *Joint UN-NGO assessments are becoming more difficult as UN agencies use armed escorts in many areas.* The increased use of armed escorts has resulted in reluctance within the NGO community to carry out joint assessments with UN agencies as many NGOs do not want to be associated with armed escorts.

• *The 'bunkerization' of the UN is making it more difficult to access the UN.* The strict security measures implemented by UN agencies limit the interface between the UN and the NGOs. Meetings increasingly have to be planned far in advance and the arenas for interaction outside official meetings have decreased significantly, particularly in contexts like Afghanistan where UN staff have serious restrictions of where they can go.

• *UNDSS advice can to some extent impact security analysis of other actors.* According to some members of the NGO community in DRC, UNDSS recommendations also affect how the NGO community deals with their security. While this is not negative in itself, it could be detrimental to access and perception if the advice given is very restrictive and reliant on protection and deterrence measures. Some of the NGOs interviewed claimed that they did not follow UNDSS recommendations, one NGO staff claimed that "If UNDSS declares a road as "red" [insecure], many of the NGOs will stop using that road or limit their movement on the road". As many NGOs in DRC have limited security analysis capacity (particularly the smaller ones), it was retained that they are more likely to follow the advise of UNDSS to limit individual responsibilities. In Afghanistan and Somalia, the presence of the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) and the NGO Security System, was believed to have made NGOs more independent of UNDSS advice. Such systems provide the NGO community with security incident monitoring and analysis which is beyond the capacity of the single NGO. In addition to the value of having analysis done on particular NGO security concerns, it was seen to counter-balance UNDSS advice. Very few NGOs that NRC talked to in Afghanistan or in Somalia referred to UNDSS advice – while this was more common in DRC.

3. CONCLUSION

The assessment and consultations that form the basis of this paper indicate that UN integration has a significant impact on humanitarian coordination. The issue has the potential to become even more prominent if concrete steps are not taken to address the NGO discomfort with UN association.

While closer ties between the political and humanitarian elements of the UN might be desired for several reasons, a less desired consequence would be the diluting impact on coordination of humanitarian response between the UN and NGOs.

The relationship between the UN agencies, OCHA and the HC on one hand and the NGO community on the other is weakened by the perceived politicisation of the humanitarian UN. This is ascribed, amongst other things, to integration and is considered to be detrimental to effective humanitarian coordination and response.

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