UNHCR's Approach to Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

Synthesis of Evaluative Evidence

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UNHCR Evaluation Office

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report consolidates findings from independent evaluations for evidence of UNHCR's multi-faceted approaches to Accountability to Affected People (AAP). Additional internal- and external documents are sourced to provide the context and background. This report aims to contribute to learning and reflection on a central tenet of UNHCR's protection role and responsibilities: the participation by, and accountability to, the people UNHCR serves.

1.1. The evaluations were reviewed for evidence of the application of the four constituent dimensions[1] of the AAP approach, and related core actions, as prescribed in UNHCR's 2018 Updated Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy:
- Participation and Inclusion
  Women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully and are consulted on protection, assistance and solutions
- Communication and Transparency
  Women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds in all operations have access to timely, accurate and relevant information on (1) their rights and entitlements and (2) UNHCR and its partners' programmes.
- Feedback and Response
  Formal and informal feedback from persons of concern is systematically received and responded to, and corrective action taken as appropriate.
- Organisational Learning and Adaptation
  Interventions, planning, priority setting, course corrections and evaluation are informed on an ongoing basis by the views of the persons of concern.

2. Synthesis Method

2.1. The report uses the evidence of 17 independent evaluations, and other relevant documents, to examine AAP related activities and good practises in UNHCR operations. The evaluations reviewed include evaluations of emergency responses, global strategies and policies, regional- and country operations from 2018 to early 2022. A limited number of interviews were conducted with UNHCR staff and external counterparts to provide context.

2.2. The main limitation of the synthesis is its dependence on secondary evaluative evidence rather than direct fieldwork. Accordingly, the synthesis does not claim to represent UNHCR's global compliance with AAP standards. Despite its non-comprehensive scope, this synthesis aims to present a useful narrative of UNHCR's AAP approach through evidence based examples and good practises.

2.3. The evaluations reviewed do not focus on AAP, the evaluations examine UNHCR programs and activities; participatory approaches, including AAP, which underpin UNHCR's programs and activities. Compliance with the 2018 Updated Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy is mandatory for all operations. The country operations covered in the evaluations therefor all included participatory approaches and activities in their country operation plans[2].

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[1] see Annex 1
[2] Source: Country Operation Plans, UNHCR FOCUS database.

3. Accountability to Affected People approach in UNHCR

3.1. Participatory approaches, including the need for accountability to the people UNHCR serves, have been an integral part of UNHCR's protection approaches, supported by evolving policies[3] from the 1992 *Framework for People-Orientated Planning* to the recent 5 year AAP Strategy: *Working in Partnership with Communities.*

3.2. The organisation's commitment to AAP is one of the priorities outlined in UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026. The Strategic Directions identify eight areas *'for additional, accelerated and targeted action'.* The need for UNHCR to '*strengthen accountability to the people we serve, especially women and children'* is the second priority area.

3.3. The current mandatory responsibilities related to AAP are outlined in Core Actions 2 to 5 of UNHCR's Updated Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy (2018) (see para 1.2 above). The 2020 Operational Guidance on AAP and COMPACT Guidance for Senior Managers (AAP) provide concrete tools for staff to introduce measures to enable improved accountability. The Community-Based Protection (CBP) approach[4] is supported by increasingly tailored training and support materials, providing guidance for the inclusion and participation of specific populations (in specific contexts)[5], as the basis for an AAP approach and as required in the AGD Policy.

3.4. In UNHCR's approach, meaningful participation by, and accountability to, the people the organisation serves is not limited to recurrent assessments, communications or consultations. The objective of the various participatory tools is to arrive at a continuous process that engages communities meaningfully and substantively in all aspects of protection programming that affect them, to ensure they play a leading role in change. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExComm) reaffirmed the objective in a 2017 report: '*…all persons of concern, regardless of their age, their gender or specific identity group, are not just consulted, but meaningfully engaged in all decisions and actions that affect their lives*'[6]. The focus is echoed in the New York Declaration[7] and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)[8], which call for a people-centred approach with a particular emphasis on the protection and empowerment of women and children and persons with specific needs.
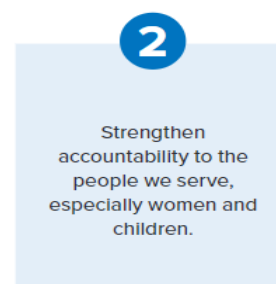
4. Accountability to Affected People – Inter-agency Context

4.1. Humanitarian organisations have recognised that there are continuing barriers towards improved accountability to crisis affected populations[9]. Additional to separate efforts by UN agencies[10] and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), there have been collective efforts to improve AAP in humanitarian crises. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) created a Task Force on AAP in 2012, followed by an Operational Framework for Accountability to Affected Persons[11]. Results

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[3] See: UNHCR Framework for People-Oriented Planning (1992); UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments in Operations (2006); Manual on A Community Based Approach in UNHCR Operations (2008); The High Commissioner's 2017-2021 Strategic Directions, UNHCR's role in the Participation Revolution (workstream 6) of the Grand Bargain, and the High Commissioner's role as IASC SEA/SH Champion.

[4] Understanding Community Based Protection (2013)

[5] For example: Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) persons in forced displacement; Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement; Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement;

[6] EC/68/SC/CRP.19, page 2

[7] https://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html

[8] https://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html

[9] Former Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Mark Lowcock, singled out Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) as the "biggest failure" of the humanitarian system, speech April 2021

[10] See: WHO AAP Approach: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/publications/operational-guidance-on-accountability-to-affected-populations.pdf?sfvrsn=ec7fb6c8_1

[11] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-people/documents-public/operational-framework-accountability-affected

towards an improved AAP were uneven, and the IASC revigorated its efforts in 2017 in an UN Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and AAP[12].

4.2. The 2017 IASC Policy laid out the four pillars of an AAP approach: 1. Integrating AAP approaches in the humanitarian programme cycles, 2. Adopt mechanisms to ensure participation by affected communities, 3. Inform and consult affected communities and provide feedback and corrective action, 4. Measure results of the AAP approach through standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS, see below).

4.3. UNHCR's four AAP dimensions (see under 1.1) are in line with the four pillars of the IASC Policy; AAP is a strategic priority for the organisation with participatory approaches mandatory for all operations. The objectives of the AGD Policy (to ensure meaningful participation and engagement by affected populations in all decsions that affect their lives) reflect the IASC commitments (see under 4.2). The global thematic evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches found that "UNHCR's commitments to accountability to affected populations are in line with international best practices[13].

UNHCR co-chaired the IASC Task Team on AAP/PSEA from 2017-2019, and has also co-chaired the IASC Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion from its creation in 2019 until 2022. Currently UNHCR co-leads two specific work streams on Feedback and Response and AAP Emergency Capacity under the current IASC Task Force on Accountability (established for two-years in early 2022). UNHCR is regarded as the agency with a strong institutional background in participatory approaches, community-based protection, and, age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach; as part of *Our Common Agenda*, the UN Secretary General has requested UNHCR to co-lead the development a UN system-wide policy that "puts people at the center of all its actions and takes into account the impact of intersecting personal characteristics such as age, gender and diversity". This system-wide policy will build on UNHCR's own long experience in AGD mainstreaming and participatory approaches.

4.4. The IASC states that '*Accountability to affected populations is an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist[14]*'. The continuing lack of a collective AAP approach was the subject of a 2021 report by senior staff from humanitarian organisations[15]. The report noted that while agencies continued to gradually increase their use of feedback mechanisms, these are not seen as being used to effectively influence decision-making. The IASC Principals have recently reaffirmed that '…*AAP is central to principled humanitarian action*..'[16]. Functioning AAP structures are also expected to render humanitarian assistance more effective and sustainable.

4.5. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) are another effort to arrive at international AAP standards. The nine commitments of the CHS set the minimum standards for appropriate, timely, equitable, efficient and coordinated humanitarian assistance. Commitment four relates directly to the need for participation and accountability:

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[12] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/documents-56
[13] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019
[14]https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_aap_psea_2_pager_for_hc.pdf
[15] IASC Collective Accountability to Affected People Workshop Final Report, June 2021
[16] Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Accountability to Affected People in Humanitarian Action, 14 Apr 2022

4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.

Findings

5. Participation and inclusion – AGD Policy Dimension 1

Women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully and are consulted on protection, assistance and solutions.

CORE ACTION: At a minimum, country operations will employ participatory methodologies at each stage of the operations management cycle, to incorporate the capacities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.

Key Finding

Almost all evaluations identify the prolific use of a varied range of mechanisms and instruments by UNHCR operations to engage with, and consult, the beneficiary populations.

Evaluations identify UNHCR's wide presence in crisis affected locations, and the operational need to engage directly with the people it serves, as important enabling factors for the participatory activities.

5.1. Activities include but are not limited to '…annual AGD assessments; monthly community meetings carried out by Community-Based Protection (CBP) teams; and systematic post-distribution monitoring (PDM)…[17]'. Individual refugee registration is another institutionalised moment for consultation[18].

5.2. In the 5 countries covered by the Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report, Burkina Faso, Thailand, Mexico, Chad and Greece, NGO and UN agency partners agree that UNHCR '…is playing a valuable lead role in championing AGD concerns in the overall humanitarian response…'[19].

5.3. Although participatory activities, including assessments, are one-time exercises evaluations found that they have helped to embed the principles of AGD into country operations, annual workplans, and the overall ethos of work[20].

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[17] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt Final Report (June 2021), page 36
[18] A survey conducted by DIP and DPSM in 2018 found that the main mechanisms used in-country to gather feedback from persons of concern on any issue were face to face (80 per cent), email and suggestion boxes (61 per cent), and hotlines (39 per cent). Accountability Survey Report October 2018, UNHCR.
[19] Page 9
[20] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019 (November 2019); Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021[20]

5.4. The protection risks of specific groups are assessed with the participation of these groups such as in Brazil where UNHCR regularly undertakes community-based risk assessments on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)[21].

5.5. Participatory approaches have been included in emergency responses: the operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was credited with having "introduced a community-based, participatory approach that provided real time information" to enable "community-based identification of solutions"[22] used to guide the overall humanitarian response.

> **Key Finding**
>
> The evaluations reveal continuing uneven levels of participatory practices in different operations.

5.6. In a number of operations participatory mechanisms were seen as weak or were absent, such as in the cash-based assistance program in Rwanda limiting the targeting of vulnerable groups and potentially increasing protection risks[23]. The evaluation of UNHCR's support to strengthen national asylum systems similarly found inadequate use of feedback mechanisms in the design and monitoring of asylum systems[24].

5.7. UNHCR works through partners (NGOs and government); this brings both opportunity and challenges. Evaluations report that most NGO partners appear to have a strong focus on participatory principles in their working approach, but many government partners have a more uneven technical understanding of participation (and related accountability) issues, and uneven capacities, or varied levels of commitment to diversity and the strategic vision for their implementation; this affects the implementation of UNHCR's AAP efforts[25].

5.8. Participatory assessments provide information on needs, vulnerabilities and priorities of affected populations. There is however no sampling methodology or frame of reference to ensure that these assessments are undertaken in a rigorous manner. There is no common platform to share and analyse assessment data[26].

> **Key Finding**
>
> Evaluations found limited evidence that the results of the participatory mechanisms resulted in changes in programming, implementation or prioritisation.

5.9. The evaluation of the AGD Policy found that '…feedback from… exercises is not sufficiently embedded in organisational processes to inform adaptations to programme activities, including in communications with partners and POCs themselves…[27]'. The evaluation noted that siloed ways of working (protection – programme – management) prevent the full and systematic inclusion of feedback into UNHCR planning.

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[21] Evaluation of UNHCR prevention of, and response to, SGBV in Brazil focusing on the Population of Concern from Venezuela (December 2019)
[22] Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the 2019/20 level 3 IDP emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (October 2021), p. 27
[23] Evaluation of the effects of UNHCR cash-based interventions on protection outcomes in Rwanda (July 2020)
[24] UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development (ACD) Evaluation (February 2022), p.12
[25] Evaluative review of UNHCR's policies and procedures on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (June 2020); Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021),
[26] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019 (November 2019).
[27] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021), p. 8.

5.10.   The lack of established procedures to include feedback from the people UNHCR serves makes it difficult to track the impact of the consultations: '…It is not always clear how much the agency's interventions have been able to adapt based on this feedback'[28]. The results of participatory efforts are not structurally included in existing planning processes and are still seen as somewhat separate from core operations[29].

5.11.   Evaluations note that many staff understand AAP as one-off annual participatory exercise, rather than an ongoing approach that provides continual feedback loops to inform programming[30]. The ACD evaluation observed that '…where experiences of asylum processes are recorded, they do not feed directly into the design or implementation of ACD activities…[31]'. The COVID pandemic had a negative impact on UNHCR's ability to carry out participatory assessments and consultative exercises with communities; activities were often suspended for extended periods due to access constraints[32].

Accountability in the Humanitarian System

The limited impact of current accountability efforts by UNHCR is reflected in the assessment on the progress towards accountability by humanitarian organisations more generally as referenced in the The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 ALNAP report:

'There was little sign of agencies using feedback to adapt projects or providing meaningful opportunities for community decision-making. Many humanitarian practitioners are aware, and critical of, the limited opportunities they can offer for including affected communities in design and decision-making, and increasingly recognise that changes in mindset are required. But wholesale changes to practice lag behind. The 'participation revolution' is still in waiting'[33].

Good Practices

The following good practises of community engagement in UNHCR operations were identified in evaluations:

DRC: the operation tailored strategies on GBV, CBI and local capacity building based on the information received in participatory assessments, triangulating the data with feedback from local counterparts[34].

Mexico: the operation forged close partnerships with NGO networks specialising in LGBTQI+ communities enabling a safe and continuous process of consultation[35].

Colombia: UNHCR supported the Government of Colombia in its plan to strengthen national mechanisms for protecting and assisting the country's forcibly displaced population[36]. UNHCR prepared tailored action plans with the affected communities with targeted territorial approaches based on participation assessments conducted separately with the groups of concern. The development of institutional measures towards inclusion as part of the government response; active participation (of communities) and building communities' capacity to organize and take control of their own solutions; and a systemic approach to accommodating

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[28] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt (June 2021)
[29] Evaluation of UNHCR's Innovation Fund (November 2020).
[30] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021)
[31] UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development (ACD) Evaluation (February 2022), page 8
[32] UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic Synthesis of evaluative evidence (June 2022)
[33] Page 210
[34] Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the 2019/20 level 3 IDP emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (February 2021).
[35] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021)
[36] Evaluation of the UNHCR - Government of Colombia Four-Year Plan (June 2020).

diversity (i.e. age, gender and ethnicity) are all aspects of their four-year plan[37]. As a result, problems and causes, available capacities, resources, and solutions were jointly identified.

6. Communication and transparency – AGD Policy Dimension 2

People have access to timely, accurate, and relevant information affecting their lives.

CORE ACTION: At a minimum, all country-level protection and solutions strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds, through means that are appropriate and accessible to all groups in a community.

Key Finding

Evaluations note that UNHCR operations have made progress in establishing communication and information channels for affected populations, including those tailored to specific groups. UNHCR's efforts and role are widely recognised by partners and counterparts.

6.1. Evaluations recognise that UNHCR makes extensive use of differentiated and increasingly tailored methods of communication, including a variety of digital mean (WhatsApp, Websites, SMS)[38]. In line with the Communicating With Communities (CWC) approach[39], operations have included the use of websites, social media and digital applications for chats, audio and video communication with affected communities[40].

6.2. A mix of communication methods have been used to inform refugees about GBV, gender roles and prevention[41]. In addition to digital communication, (prioritised) protection monitoring during emergencies is a valuable and important communication function, raising awareness on available assistance[42].

6.3. UNHCR operations are increasingly empowering communities in information efforts through trained community volunteers[43]. Refugees formed a network of volunteers conducting 82,635 outreach sessions that reached 439,200 in Lebanon; more recently internally displaced persons were involved in coordinating committees led by local authorities in Ukraine[44]. In Chad, teachers were engaged to

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[37] Idem

[38] See: Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019, [38] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021), [38] Evaluation of UNHCR prevention of, and response to, SGBV in Brazil focusing on the Population of Concern from Venezuela (December 2019).

[39] CwC approach supports staff to tailor information and outreach activities to contexts to ensure that affected populations receive the right information in a timely manner.

[40] See https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/category/cwc/, Effective and Respectful Communication in Forced Displacement, UNHCR 2015; UNHCR in Iraq launched help.unhcr.org in April 2020 to expand outreach on protection-related information, making the site available in four different languages and complementing it with Facebook pages and WhatsApp/ Viber groups run by local-level partners and community outreach volunteers: People at the Centre: The Intersection of Age, Gender and Diversity. Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report 2020.

[41] Evaluation of UNHCR prevention of, and response to, SGBV in Brazil focusing on the Population of Concern from Venezuela (December 2019)

[42] Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the 2019/20 level 3 IDP emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (October 2021)

[43] See ExComm report: EC/68/SC/CRP.19.

[44] People at the Centre: The Intersection of Age, Gender and Diversity. Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability, Report 2020, page 24

disseminate messaging on protection and assistance[45]. Operations have developed information and communication channels to promote awareness about rights and protection options among refugees and migrants, with UNHCR's information campaigns and websites being widely recognized[46]

6.4. Evaluations point to the catalytic impact of the COVID pandemic (limitations to face-to-face engagement) has had on the use of new communication means. Evaluations recognise UNHCR's efforts to sustain contact with affected communities (also reflected in Country Operational Plans); these included telephone helplines, online helpdesks, WhatsApp, SMS and email groups, and community- and national radio[47]. Operations expanded virtual information channels (in lieu of face-to-face interaction) that helped to combat COVID related fear and misinformation.

Key Finding

The evaluations point to uneven results in reaching the affected populations, including those with specific needs[48]. The plethora of new communication initiatives also include potential risks for vulnerable groups that have not been assessed.

6.5. A number of evaluations conclude that, despite UNHCR efforts, affected populations in a number of operations remain unclear about what UNHCR's services, as well as what complaints mechanisms, are available to them. Asylum-seekers lacked understanding and information on the asylum process, on what refugee status can provide, and on what rejection of an asylum claim entails.[49].

6.6. Evaluations reveal differences between country operations on the perceived roles and responsibilities towards communicating with affected populations: in Egypt, this was part of the external relations function[50], in other operations it is part of the protection units.

6.7. The shift toward digital and remote communication also exposed a lack of means (mobile phones) and/or inexperience with technology, especially for people with specific needs and older people[51]. Many refugees are at risk to be unable to benefit from the rapid increase of online tools and platforms designed to connect, inform and support them[52].

6.8. Evaluations found that UNHCR has not paid sufficient attention to the digital risks present in the new information environments for affected communities. There is no UNHCR-wide inventory and map of digital communication tools deployed; risks assessments and additional security protocols are needed to secure messaging platforms from risks[53]. The fact that new communication approaches are not evaluated for effectiveness and appropriateness creates (protection) risk of exclusion from information, and assistance[54].

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[45] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021)
[46] Evaluation of the UNHCR Regional Refugee Response to the Venezuela Situation (December 2020) k
[47] UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic Synthesis of evaluative evidence (June 2022)
[48] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019
[49] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt FINAL REPORT (June 2021); UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development (ACD) Evaluation An Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Support for Strengthening National Asylum Systems (February 2022).
[50] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt (June 2021)
[51] UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic Synthesis of evaluative evidence p.5,12 (June 2022)
[52] UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 pandemic Synthesis of evaluative evidence (June 2022)
[53] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021)
[54] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019; Evaluation of UNHCR prevention of, and response to, SGBV in Brazil focusing on the Population of Concern from Venezuela (December 2019)

Good Practices

The Brazil operation engaged an anthropologist to understand how displacement affected different populations and to ensure communication methods and messages were appropriate for the indigenous Warao population[55].

Telling the Real Story (TRS) project[56]. TRS provided an important mechanism to 'listen' to populations on the move and enabled those in other countries to share their experiences with individuals from their home countries. It was found to be 'relevant, appropriate, effective, and efficient' in its design and delivery of messages[57].

7. Feedback and response – AGD Policy Dimension 3

Feedback from persons of concern is systematically received and responded to, and corrective action taken as appropriate.

CORE ACTION: At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and promote feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.

Key Finding

Evaluations point to systematic issues around the ways that information, including the results from engaging with affected communities, is captured, analysed, managed and communicated within UNHCR. The closing of the feedback loop happens infrequently – it is not tracked or recorded and there is a lack of understanding of how to provide feedback.

7.1. Evaluations point to a mixed picture around feedback and response. Staff understand participatory approaches primarily as a means for one-way collection of information on affected populations, rather than a mutual process that includes feedback loops to the communities[58]. The participatory assessments themselves even bring up the lack of functional feedback and complaints mechanisms[59]. Data agreements with partners on feedback data are absent.

7.2. The evaluation on UNHCR's information management approaches resulted in 40 process maps of different data routines; the sharing of data with refugee families and communities was not included[60].

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[55] Idem
[56] Evaluation of the Telling the Real Story Project 2.0 (April 2021); TRS is an initiative that communicates with communities that may be vulnerable to, or contemplating, irregular onward movement, discussing the dangers they may face when moving irregularly, inform them about protection and assistance services and how to access them, and (where feasible) informing them about options for regular movement. TRS 2.0 has evolved from the first phase of the project (TRS 1.0) in response to the information needs of persons of concern (persons on the move) across a number of locations.
[57] Idem
[58] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021).
[59] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt FINAL REPORT (June 2021).
[60] Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, 2019

7.3. A number of digital communication means could potentially be used for feedback: hotlines, toll-free numbers, websites and online platforms, email, WhatsApp, and in-person support; but these may not be widely known or accessible to all[61]. There is also no common understanding on the responsibility, scope, and articulation of feedback.

7.4. Feedback and complaint mechanisms are not systematically established and are often delayed[62]. Operations do not have a standard or systematic tool to cumulatively record if or how feedback was provided to input from affected populations[63].

7.5. Even where feedback systems are in place, affected populations report difficulty accessing these[64]. The organisation recognises these shortfalls and a number of operations have begun conducting systematic reviews of feedback and response mechanisms, for example, across the Asia and Pacific Region, and plan to use the recommendations to improve information and communication needs assessments[65].

Good Practice

Evaluations and relevant documents point to new technologies being deployed to facilitate two-way communication with affected populations. A pilot project, Turn.io uses the WhatsApp messaging service to allow displaced populations to ask questions and be referred to appropriate UNHCR staff. Turn.io is being piloted in five countries: Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Sudan and Indonesia with plans for further five countries. In Equador, nearly 12,000 people used the platform in the first three months with 17 messages exchanged on average with each person. The tool allowed protection officers to track information priorities over time with unprecedented granularity and speed and saved significant time in answering questions[66].

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8. Organizational learning and adaptation – AGD Policy Dimension 4

Interventions, planning, priority setting, course corrections, and evaluation are informed on an ongoing basis by the views of persons of concern.

CORE ACTION: At a minimum, UNHCR operations will adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from persons of concern, and document this in Country Operations Plans and Annual Reporting.)

Key Findings

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[61] Evaluation of the UNHCR Regional Refugee Response to the Venezuela Situation (December 2020)
[62] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021); Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the 2019/20 level 3 IDP emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (February 2021).
[63] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021).
[64] UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt FINAL REPORT (June 2021)
[65] People at the Centre: The Intersection of Age, Gender and Diversity. Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability Report 2020
[66] INNOVATION SERVICE Assessment: UNHCR Innovation Service's Pilot Project for Facilitating Information Sharing with PoCs During Pandemic (May, 2021).

Evaluations[67] have revealed that there is an uneven uptake of participatory approaches by staff; the implementation of new policies is lagging, and implementation is being shaped by previous policies.

8.1. Evaluations note the lack of uptake of tools and guidance on AAP as an institutional barrier for progress on the stated objectives[68].

8.2. UNHCR has provided staff with training on participatory and accountability approaches (see links to training above) to accompany the different policies from the 1990s onwards (see paras 3.1 to 3.2) but this has not had the intended results.

8.3. Evaluations indicate there are specific reasons related to the lack of uptake of participatory approaches (see chapter 5); these are exacerbated by a general lack of uptake, and understanding, of new policies more generally within the organization[69]. The risks to a lack of training are well understood[70] and recent capacity building efforts include tailored and guided training on AAP[71].

Good practices

The evaluation[72] of UNHCR's Innovation Fund showed that almost half of the projects funded included a focus on testing new approaches to feedback, access to information or inclusion of affected people. The evaluation recognized these as opportunities to leverage the learning from these projects to enable UNHCR to continue to innovate in its approach regarding (AAP).

9. Conclusion

The evaluations reviewed for evidence of UNHCR's approach to AAP largely confirm the four barriers to the systematic and sustained institutionalization of AAP as identified in the 2021 AAP Strategy Concept Note[73]:

Limited dedicated capacity to concentrate on AAP and leverage cross-sectoral collaboration;

Weak structural capacities for information management and integration of feedback and response into programmatic review exercises;

Lack of available guidance and tools;

Weak engagement with communities in deciding on the use of new communication tools and channels;

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[67] Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report (October 2021).
[68] Evaluative review of UNHCR's policies and procedures on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (June 2020); Longitudinal Evaluation of UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy: Baseline Report
[69] Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the 2019/20 level 3 IDP emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo (February 2021); Evaluation of UNHCR's L3 Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai (February 2021).
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Annex II: the four dimensions of AAP
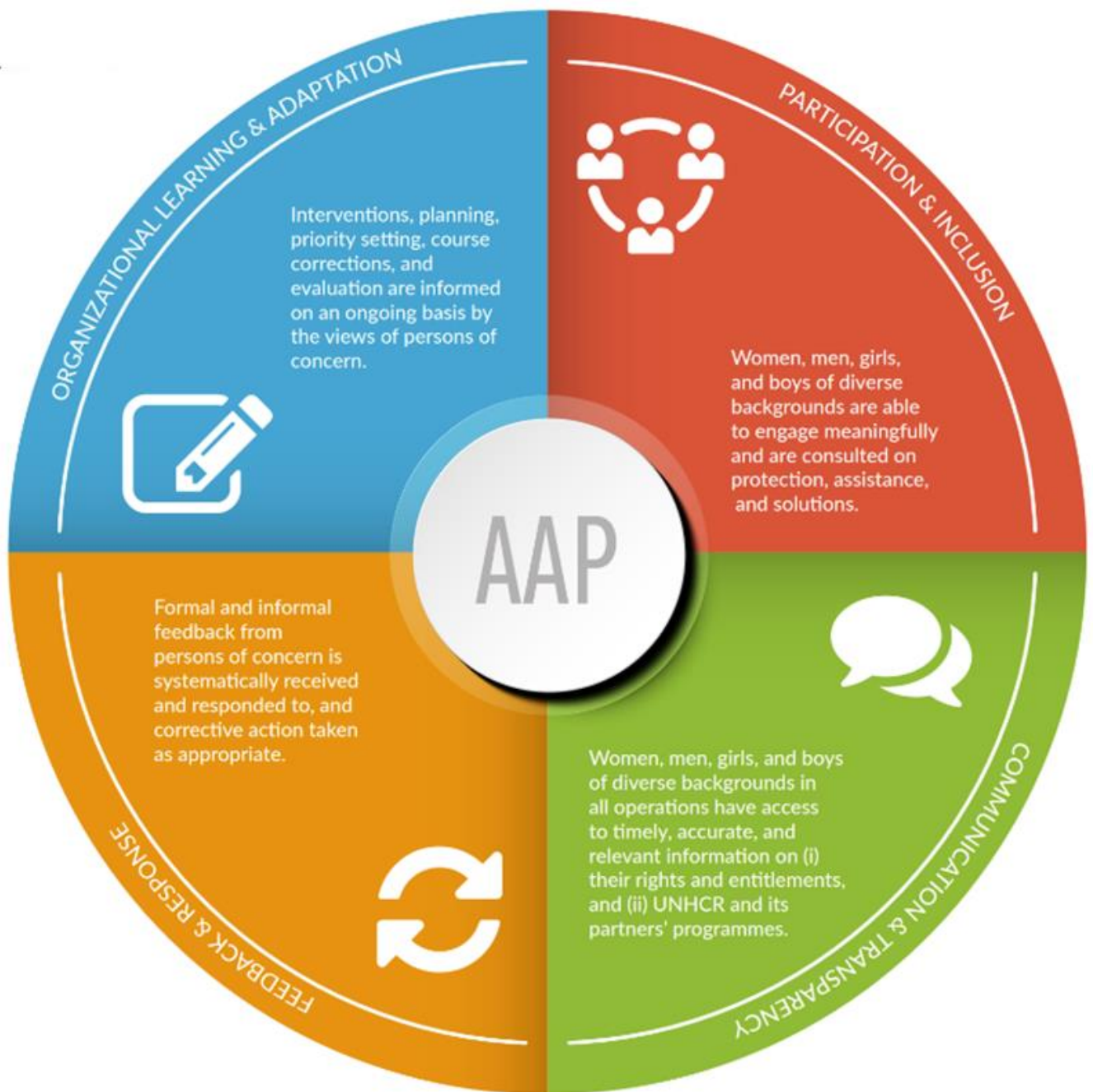
From: Compact Guide for Senior Managers

UNHCR's AAP 5 Year Strategy[74] has the following priorities:

Operational and Regional Support
providing operations with access to resources, tools, technologies and technical expertise

Documentation, Policy, Capacity Building and Tools
strengthening pathways to scaling creative solutions and ensuring efficiency in technologies and processes

Research & Advocacy
creating a solid evidence base to build safe, secure and future-proof channels of communication

Protection Leadership & Coordination
ensuring that protection in central to interagency efforts to engage with communities

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[74]Working in Partnership with Communities A Future of Accountability to Affected People in UNHCR