Evaluation Brief

What have we learned?  
   
The evaluation considered UNHCR's practices regarding data collection and information needs across its operational management cycle, aiming to improve assistance for forcibly displaced people. Five key challenges were identified:  
  
1. Determining information needs: A gap exists between identified needs and actual data collection, often leading to a reactive approach. For instance, the lack of precise information on Syrian refugee returnees' protection risks hampers effective planning.  
   
2. Data collection: The quality and availability of data vary significantly across operations, with some offices struggling to collect basic information, impacting decision-making. In Pakistan, for example, inconsistent data on education provision affects strategy formulation.  
   
3. Internal data sharing: There's a need to enhance data exchange across different departments and levels of the organization. The lack of shared, timely information reduces efficiency and may result in duplicated efforts or conflicting strategies, as observed in the Syria regional response.  
   
4. External data sharing: Sharing data with external stakeholders, especially local partners, could be improved to foster better coordination. Insufficient access to relevant data affects partners' ability to contribute effectively, as experienced in Zambia.  
   
5. Data analysis and storage: The evaluation revealed a lack of dedicated resources and expertise for data analysis and management, leading to underutilized data and potential security risks, illustrated by the challenges faced in managing sensitive information related to persons of concern.  
  
How did we get there?  
  
These challenges arise from several root causes, including a culture focused on reactive "doing" rather than proactive planning, heavy workloads limiting reflection time, and a lack of dedicated resources for data management and analysis. The absence of specific measurement criteria in evaluations also contributes, making it difficult to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.  
  
What is working well?  
  
Despite the challenges, UNHCR has implemented effective strategies in some operations. These include a community-based approach in Syria, engaging refugees in data collection for a more nuanced understanding of needs, and a centralized information management system in Pakistan, enabling efficient data sharing among partners. Additionally, the organization's commitment to including the perspectives of persons of concern in its operations is a notable strength.  
  
Now, what to do?  
  
The evaluation recommends the following:  
  
1. Operational Level:  
 - Enhance data collection methods and tools, ensuring consistency across operations.  
 - Improve data storage security measures, especially for sensitive information.  
 - Increase access to data for persons of concern and local partners, establishing feedback loops.  
  
2. Organizational Level:  
 - Increase investment in human resources, focusing on data specialists who can support operations in data management and analysis.  
 - Encourage a culture shift towards more proactive planning and dedicated reflection time.  
  
3. Strategic Level:  
 - Develop clear guidelines for determining information needs and managing data across the operational cycle.  
 - Establish inter-agency partnerships to share resources, expertise, and best practices for data management.  
  
Conclusion:  
  
The evaluation highlights the critical need for a nuanced and proactive approach to data collection and information management, which is essential for effective assistance strategies in forced displacement contexts.

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