GenCap Experience Document # 3:

Strengthening the Architecture of Coordination related to Gender Equality Programming

Overview of GenCap
Established in 2007, GenCap is a standby roster of gender experts managed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Sub-Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action and the Norwegian Refugee Council. GenCap Advisors are deployed to humanitarian situations for six to twelve months to provide support to information collection and analysis, programme planning, capacity building, coordination and advocacy on gender equality programming, using the IASC Gender Handbook: Women, Girls, Boys and Men – Different Needs, Equal Opportunities and the IASC GBV Guidelines to guide and inform their work.

Content:
• What is the purpose of this GenCap experience document?
• How can the GenCap Advisor to a UNCT benefit from this document?
• The IASC Gender Handbook and the GBV Guidelines – what do they say about coordination?
• Background information (specific Terms of Reference, contexts, etc.);
• The Architecture of Coordination – what does this mean?
• The Architecture of Coordination: Global to Local – what does the global campaign has to do with the GenCap Advisor’s daily work?
• Case Study 1: GBV Coordination in the Central African Republic UNCT;
• Case Study 2: Gender Equality Coordination in the Iraq UNCT;
• What were the lessons learnt?

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What is the purpose of this experience document?

GenCap Advisors will often find themselves faced with addressing the issue of gender equality and GBV (Response & Prevention) programming in challenging coordination and management structures and/or protracted and complex humanitarian situations. Facing such challenges will involve negotiating with and coordinating efforts of many stakeholders, including UN Agencies, national and international NGOs and local, regional and/or national government authorities.

The purpose of the experience document is to reflect on and to document the experiences and the lessons learnt from two very different GenCap deployments to the Central African Republic (C.A.R.; 8 August 2007 to 7 February 2008) and Iraq (24 February to 24 August 2008).

The report aims to demonstrate innovative approaches to challenges encountered and to filter out those points of learning that may be replicable in other settings, making the GenCap Advisor’s transition into what are relatively short deployments smoother and more effective. It is hoped that this experience document and the lessons learnt contained herein will also prove useful to anyone working at field level on gender, GBV (response and prevention) and protection coordination in humanitarian action.

The purpose of this particular experience document is to describe the processes by which the GenCap Advisor can contribute to building or strengthening the coordination architecture around gender equality programming in UN country teams.

How can GenCap Advisors benefit from this experience document?

While this experience document describes coordinating actors and enhancing work on gender equality and GBV (R&P) in already-established settings, lessons learnt from these experiences will also be valuable for those GenCap Advisors engaged with UNCTs at the very early stages of a humanitarian crisis.

After reading this experience document, GenCap Advisors should be able to:

- Develop a systematic plan to analyse the coordination capacity of an existing Gender Task Force/Working Group (hereafter referred to as a GenNet) or the capacity potential of the relevant personnel and UN Agencies and organisations to form a new GenNet.
- Assist in the establishment or strengthening of a GenNet, including the development of a Terms of Reference (ToR), Action Plan, Strategic Plan, etc.
- Facilitate the capacity building of proactive allies in order to ensure the effective functioning and sustainability of the group after the GenCap Advisor has left.

The IASC Gender Handbook and the GBV Guidelines – what do they say about coordination?

The IASC Gender Handbook – Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs – Equal Opportunities (December 2006), noting that “[n]o single intervention, individual actor or organisation can effectively address the diverse needs of women and men alone, particularly if other entities in the field are not sensitive to these gender differences” provides that “[c]oordination is essential to effective programming and response. When it comes to addressing the gender dimension of humanitarian responses, joint planning – the exchange of information and collaboration across the UN system and with international actors, including NGOs and local civil society – is crucial”.

GenCap Experience #3 – Coordination Architecture
Similarly, the Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies provides that “[e]ffective prevention and response to sexual violence require multisectoral coordinated action among, at a minimum, health and social services actors, legal, human rights and security sectors and the community... Establishing a coordination mechanism for sexual violence at the outset of an emergency will help to ensure more responsible and responsive action from the earliest stages of the emergency to the more stable phase and beyond. The overall aim of coordinated action is to **provide accessible, prompt, confidential and appropriate services** to survivors/victims according to a basic set of guiding principles and to put in place mechanisms to prevent incidents of sexual violence”.

**Background Information (Terms of Reference (ToR), context, etc.)**

The ToR relating to coordination for the GenCap Advisor in C.A.R. UNCT provided the following key tasks:

1. Facilitating the smooth coordination of an inter-agency gender network.
2. Liaising with gender advisers and gender focal points in other agencies and organisations (including governments, INGOs, local NGOs and women’s groups) and BONUCA (the United Nations Peace-building Office in the Central African Republic)
3. Providing support to cluster leads to fulfil gender commitments as articulated in the Cluster Lead Terms of Reference
4. Building strategic alliances with other key actors internally and externally to advocate for gender sensitive programming.

Under the heading *Existing strategies and mechanisms for gender equality programming*, the GenCap Advisor’s ToR for the UNCT C.A.R. stated that “[c]urrently, UNHCR convenes protection groups meetings twice a month where protection concerns are being discussed among the UN and NGO partners. Further, UNFPA convenes gender theme group meetings that focus on gender mainstreaming. Within the gender theme group, a task force that focuses only on GBV has met [a] few times. The focal points for health are in process of developing a protocol on management of rape. Training on the GBV IASC guidelines has been scheduled for August”.

The GenCap Advisor’s ToR relating to coordination for the Iraq UNCT provided for the following key tasks:

1. Catalysing the formation of and/or facilitating the smooth coordination of interagency, inter-cluster gender networks at the national, regional and local levels, as necessary;
2. Catalysing the formation of and/or facilitating the smooth coordination of interagency, inter-cluster GBV task force at the national, regional and local levels, as necessary;
3. Liaising with gender advisers, gender focal points, GBV managers and SEA focal points in other agencies and organisations (including governments, INGOs, local NGOs and women’s groups) and in peacekeeping missions in-country. *(it is worth mentioning here that the UNCT Iraq adopted the revised (May 2008) generic ToR in its entirety and, in fact, there were no SEA Focal Points in the UNCT now was their a peace-keeping mission in Iraq).*
4. Building strategic alliances with other key actors internally and externally to advocate for gender sensitive programming.

In the background document for the ToR for the UNCT Iraq, it is noted that, while a Gender Task Force existed, it had not met for more than a year.

*Integrated (development and humanitarian) operations*
In both C.A.R. and Iraq, the UN missions were joint or integrated [development and humanitarian] missions. This can make the GenCap Advisor’s work a lot more difficult because, if there is any engagement around gender equality, it will more than likely be in the development domain with humanitarian response largely marginalised. It was this GenCap Advisor’s experience that, in this case, there is complete resistance to establishing parallel coordination mechanisms or forums for gender equality in humanitarian action. Indeed, it would be this GenCap Advisor’s opinion that this would be neither feasible nor desirable and should not be the solution to be pursued. Rather, in this instance, it is best to work with colleagues working on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the development domain to also take on gender equality in humanitarian action. This may take a lot of persuasion as people are, for the most part, already under a lot of pressure and reluctant to take on more work. The GenCap Advisor should call on the support of the HC/RC to stress to the GenNet the need to integrate both the development and humanitarian domains in a joint operation. The GenCap Advisor will have to creative and flexible in the development of strategies that reflect this situation.

The ‘Architecture of Coordination’ – what does this mean?

The Architecture of Coordination is a term used to describe the formal organisation of the stakeholders’ structures and processes for the attainment of defined gender equality goals.

The use of the word ‘architecture’ acknowledges that coordination of a cross-cutting issue like gender equality requires the careful design and construction of a robust structure that considers issues such as functionality, purpose, sustainability and creativity. However, the word may be somewhat misleading insofar as it suggests that the GenCap Advisor may have more of an opportunity to design new coordination structures, mechanisms and processes than (s)he may realistically will; working as (s)he will be, in the majority of cases, in established humanitarian settings.

The Architecture of Coordination – Global to Local

The issue of strengthening the UN’s gender equality architecture is a ‘hot topic’ and there is an active global campaign for Gender Equality Architecture Reform in the UN. This campaign supports the creation of a stronger UN entity for women which, it is argued, will greatly advance gender equality, the empowerment of women and their human rights around the world.

But, what bearing does such a global campaign have on the work of the GenCap Advisor at UNCT level? The campaign acknowledges a number of issues that the GenCap Advisor will, in all likelihood, identify at a more local level; i.e. that, despite the ambitious commitments made to advance gender quality and women’s empowerment – the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform on Action, the Millennium Summit, UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), 1612 (2005) and 1820 (2008), as well as work done on specific aspects of gender equality by various UN Agencies – the UN still lacks an effective mechanism to deliver on many of the essential commitments made. A number of small and relatively under-resourced agencies (UNFPA, UNIFEM) focus exclusively on women’s issues and other larger agencies make critical contributions to human rights and gender equality (UNICEF, WHO, Human Rights Offices, etc.), but it is usually a small part of their mandate, and often receives low priority. This has a direct bearing on lowering the status of representation and decision-making on gender equality issues at the highest levels, both in policy development and programme operations at the global and the country levels.
The GenCap Advisor will invariably find that the level of UN staff appointed as Gender Focal Points to the GenNet will be low-ranking and, notwithstanding commitment and interest found among them, will not be a position to provide the high level of leadership required to effectively drive the gender equality and women’s empowerment agendas.

Accordingly, from the outset of building or enhancing the architecture of coordination, the GenCap Advisor should seek the support of the HC to direct the Heads of Agencies on the level and authority of the Gender Focal Point they appoint to the GenNet.

Coordination is essential to the achievement of a comprehensive, effective and sustainable forum for gender equality and GBV response and prevention in humanitarian programming. Accordingly, in order to achieve sustainable results, it is extremely important that the coordination forum is encouraged to gather their allies, organise themselves, coordinate their work and act collectively to maximise efforts.

Case Study 1: GBV Coordination in CAR (8 August 2007 to 7 February 2008)

Background

In early 2007, there was an attempt to establish a GBV sub-Cluster in C.A.R. The Group met three times but disbanded quickly thereafter without any achievements. The Group’s Terms of Reference (ToR) and the minutes of the meetings suggest that the ToR were too ambitious for the level of understanding, motivation and expertise in C.A.R. at that time.

At the same time there was a Gender Working Group in C.A.R. – Le Groupe Thématique Genre et Développement (GTGD) – that was led by UNFPA.

While the GTGD was working primarily in the development domain, it was clear to the GenCap Advisor that, with a serious humanitarian situation in the country requiring a significant response to humanitarian and protection needs, the work of the Group was also relevant to the humanitarian domain. As it was, the group had a lot to offer the humanitarian response in terms of advice on gender equality and women’s empowerment and it was important that the group be at the table in order to influence effective change.

Work carried out by the GTGD that was directly relevant to the humanitarian domain included:

- Work with the Ministry of Social Affairs on the National Policy for the Promotion of [gender] Equality and Equity (September 2005) and subsequent Action Plan (August 2007)
- Assistance to the Government of C.A.R. in the development of two laws on reproductive health and the protection of women from violence;
- Technical support for awareness-raising of the law relating to the protection of women against violence;
- Support on the drafting of the C.A.R.’s first (in 16 years) CEDAW report;
- Assistance to the Government on the development of the Family Code.

At the time of the GenCap Advisor’s deployment, no-one from the GTGD attended the Protection Cluster. Accordingly, the GTGD was not ‘anchored’ in the Cluster system and, consequently, their significant contribution was absent from the humanitarian domain.

Analysis

The GenCap Advisor’s analysis of the situation identified the following challenges:

- The gender group (GTGD) remained outside the humanitarian domain and, accordingly, there was a disconnect between the structural level and the systemic and operative levels;
• There was no established mechanism for coordination of gender equality in humanitarian action and, where Gender Focal Points existed, they were somewhat isolated;
• There was, at the time, no coordination on GBV response and prevention activities;
• Some Gender Focal Points felt the role had been imposed upon them and, accordingly, they were not committed to gender equality;
• Some Gender Focal Points had no decision-making authority;
• The turnover of staff meant that there were always new faces at the table, new relationships to be negotiated and, accordingly, progress was extremely slower;
• Only those organisations with a self-interest attended the Cluster meetings (i.e. INGOs who were funded by the UN);
• There was an assumption that the Gender Advisor/Focal Point was responsible for all things to do with gender and others did not have to engage with the issue in their work;
• In the absence of an effective gender and/or GBV forum, strategic communication was weak;
• Not one Cluster had a ToR; such a ToR should have included a commitment to gender equality and, therefore, none of the Clusters could be held accountable on this.
• There was little ‘buy-in’ or motivation from the majority of the cluster leads.
• There was only one actor in C.A.R. with a GBV response and prevention programme (and this had been the situation for over a year);
• Not all clusters had a Gender Focal Point, which meant that attention to the issue was disjointed;

Plan of Action

The GenCap Advisor facilitated an already planned workshop on the GBV Guidelines in October 2007. UNFPA’s Regional Office and UNICEF’s Geneva Office made important contributions in terms of experienced facilitators. One of the key recommendations of the interagency (IASC (GenCap), UNFPA and UNICEF) workshop was the establishment of a GBV inter-agency coordination mechanism.

Working with a small focus group, the GenCap Advisor developed a draft ToR for a GBV Technical Group that included the following key points;

• UNFPA as chair (UNFPA was the chair of the GTGD, was the one UN Agency engaged in the subject and, therefore, it was felt, their lead on this group would provide synergy between the two groups);
• Output-orientation with a maximum of five clear objectives within a detailed Action Plan;
• Recognising the limited technical capacity available, it was important that the plan was not over-ambitious on what the group could achieve in its first year;
• In order to ensure the group remained focused, the plan was time-bound with a review of achievements and effectiveness after one year;
• ‘Anchor’ the group in the Cluster system, under the Protection Cluster, which has the mandate for GBV in humanitarian action in C.A.R.; and
• Reporting line to the Gender & Development Thematic Group (GTGD) in order to optimise synergies and to avoid duplication or overlap.

With the GBV Technical Group under the Protection Cluster, the next step in the coordination architecture was to bring the GTGD into the Cluster system by way of representation at and reporting into the Protection Cluster in order to ensure proper and effective connections were made between gender equality (at a structural and systemic levels), GBV response and prevention (with the emphasis on sexual violence) and humanitarian programming (at the operative levels).
Case Study 2: Gender Equality Programming in Iraq (24 February to 24 August 2008): Strengthening an Existing Structure

Background

The situation of coordination of gender equality activities in Iraq is made especially difficult by the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the situation; an integrated humanitarian and development operation; a security situation that makes access to the field extremely limited (especially outside of Iraqi Kurdistan); and remote management and coordination by the majority of UN Agencies (from Amman, Jordan and Kuwait City). In addition, where UN personnel are present in Baghdad, Basra, Erbil (in Iraqi Kurdistan) or other locations, their movement outside of the UN bases, which are protected by the Multi-National Forces in Iraq (MNF-I) is seriously restricted and external stakeholders are prohibited, restricted or reluctant to enter the MNF-I protected compounds.

The GenCap Advisor’s ToR was effectively developed by the Information Analysis Unit (IAU). The IAU is a group composed of analysts from different participating UN agencies and NGOs in Iraq. The IAU was formed in early 2008 to improve the effectiveness of programming, advocacy, policy and coordination of the international response in Iraq and, therefore, the impact of the humanitarian and development response through the strategic use of information. IAU participating UN Agencies and NGOs include UNAMI, OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP, FAO, WHO, UNHCR, IOM, Mercy Corps, International Medical Corps and IMMAP.

The GenCap Advisor was deployed to the IAU to ensure a gender perspective and analysis is included in all of the Unit’s work.

The IAU identified that, while the obstacles, gaps and needs in the different sectors – especially Protection, Health & Nutrition and Education - are well documented, there was a certain dearth of data and information on the gender perspective of these obstacles, gaps and needs. This gap in knowledge meant that the Unit was not in a position to analyse the challenges, threats and opportunities that would guide the UNCT and the UN’s partners on the optimal intervention to promote gender equality. Accordingly, one of the GenCap Advisor’s primary tasks was to explore the gendered nature of the factors contributing obstacles, gaps and needs in the Protection (GBV Response & Prevention), Health and Education and to make recommendations to the UNCT and its operational partners for moving forward.

UNIFEM is the lead of the Gender Task Force (GTF). While a GBV Working Group convened for the purposes of reviewing GBV (response and prevention) -related projects being submitted to the CAP, the group disbanded after this task had been complete. It was intended at the time that the issue of GBV (response and prevention) would be dealt with by the GTF. However, this did not happen and the issue of coordination of GBV response and prevention activities was effectively side-lined.

Analysis

While UNIFEM was the lead of the GTF, and despite some unilateral initiatives and interventions by the agency in various sectors and projects, the group was largely inactive and had not met for many months prior to the GenCap Advisor’s arrival in late-February 2008.

The group had no Terms of Reference and no Strategic or Action Plans and, therefore, the group had no clear purpose or strategy.

While there was a network of Gender Focal Points in the majority of agencies, they were, for the most part, junior staff with little or no decision-making authority. In the absence of leadership on gender equality coordination, they had no incentive to self-mobilise.
Neither NGOs (international or national) nor government authorities interacted with the group. The issue of GBV (response and prevention) was being largely neglected despite the fact that there were a number of UN Agencies and NGOs – international and local – who reported that they were carrying out GBV response and prevention activities.

**Plan of Action**

- It was essential that the Gender Task Force (GTF) reconvene and be revitalised with regular meetings, new energy and clear purpose;
- NGOs working in the field, as the implementers of the majority of the programmes in Iraq, must be invited to the meetings to ensure cohesiveness and to share their experiences;
- The GTF must develop a clear Terms of Reference, which would ensure its reach across all of the Sector Outcome Teams (SOTs – this is the name given to Clusters in the Iraq Programme) to integrate a gender equality perspective;
- The GTF must develop a Strategic Plan which would be in line with the UNCT’s Assistance Strategy in Iraq (2008 – 2010) and, subsequently, develop an Action Plan of clearly defined roles, responsibilities and timelines which would ensure that commitments made under the Strategic Plan were met;
- The Gender Focal Points needed guidance in their role both in their own organisations and as representatives of the GTF at SOT meetings;
- Once the ToR, Strategic Plan and Action Plan had been finalised, they would be brought before the HC and the Heads of Agencies to ensure their ‘buy-in’ and commitment.
- It was only at this stage, when the group was organised and purposeful, was it in a position to try and reach Iraqi civil society and human rights organisations working in the area of gender equality and women’s empowerment. (It might be suggested that this should be one of the first steps. Unfortunately, however, outside of Iraqi Kurdistan, there is not a strong tradition in Iraq of civil society mobilisation and where such organisations do exist, of necessity and out of fear of reprisal, their work and identity are clandestine and they are suspicious of the UN due to their connection with the MNF-I. The remote location of the GTF (in Amman, Jordan) made matters especially difficult. In other locations the chronology of activities would have been quite different).
**What were the lessons learnt?**

Combining the experiences from the C.A.R. and Iraq experiences, the following points may assist the GenCap Advisors both time- and effort-wise to be more effective in contributing to the establishment / strengthening of a UNCT GenNet.

**Preparations**

When the GenCap Advisor receives her/his ToR and before departing on deployment, (s)he should ask the following questions if they are not already answered:

- Is there a GenNet in place?
- Is it active and does it meet regularly?
- Which organisation is the lead of the GenNet?
- Did the lead agency see and approve the GenCap Advisor’s ToR? (If the answer to this is no, then it is suggested that the GenCap Advisor requests that the hosting agency or, ideally, the HC, discuss and confirm the ToR with the lead of the GenNet).

When the GenCap Advisor has arrived in-country and once (s)he has met all the senior people (HC, Representative of the host agency, etc.), the next port of call should be the lead of the GenNet (if it exists), to make introductions, to see their ToR (if they exists), to discuss their progress, challenges, etc and to discuss how the GenCap Advisor and the lead of the GenNet will work together/complement each other’s work.

It is important to be mindful that the lead of the GenNet may not have been involved in the development of the GenCap Advisor’s ToR, may not indeed even know of her/his arrival. Accordingly, human nature being what it is, the GenNet lead may feel somewhat anxious or threatened by the arrival of the GenCap Advisor. This issue needs to be approached with sensitivity but, in the long-run, not to the extent that it hinders or slows the pace of the GenCap Advisor’s work.

**Mapping and Networking**

1. Explore the following issues:
   - If it already exists, is the current architecture supporting and adding value to the UNCT’s gender equality programming?
   - How might the architecture be modified so that it adds more value?
   - Based on what we know about what the UNCT wants to accomplish in relation to gender equality programming (see UNCT strategy documents), will the current architecture support or hinder that?

A value-based approach to building/strengthening the architecture of coordination is recommended in order to realise quick wins, most notably when the team is first being formed. An analysis of key questions as listed above should lead the GenNet towards their highest priority tasks. A GenNet that spends too much time documenting a plan without providing real value to decision-makers will be at risk of being ineffective or even disbanded due to lack of progress and motivation.

**Cluster / Sector Level**

- Speak with each of the Cluster/Sector Leads
- Understand their understanding of and level of commitment to gender equality programming;
- Ask to see their ToR and see what commitments they have been made to gender equality programming. If they have not developed a ToR, encourage them to do so and ensure that you facilitate their understanding of the importance of including S.M.A.R.T. commitments to gender equality; if they have developed a ToR but it does not contain a commitment to gender equality, encourage them to develop such commitments and ensure that the commitments are S.M.A.R.T.
- Ask to see their Action Plan and see what commitments have been made to gender equality programming. If they do not have an Action Plan or their Action Plan omits commitments and action on gender equality programming, offer to work with their Gender Focal Point(s) to facilitate them in making the necessary revisions.
- Attend the cluster / sector meetings regularly, contribute constructively and make sure that gender equality is included.

**Allies (within and outside the UNCT): Establishing a Network**
- Identify allies and potential allies
- Understand their decision-making authority
- Understand their sphere of influence
- Join forces with them and collaborate on how you can effect change in an organisation or agency, a cluster or sector or at a regional or national level
- Form a network for the exchange of views, experiences, lessons learnt and advice.

**Analysis**

Once the GenCap Advisor has carried out the preparation work and the mapping exercise above (s)he should be in a position to analysis the situation and develop a plan of action for addressing the issues.

**Plan of Action**

Develop a realistic Plan of Action, bearing in mind the timeframe of the deployment. In the case of an integrated [development and humanitarian] mission, work with the GenNet in a strategic, creative and flexible way to ensure synergies are captured and issues in both domains are prioritised.