



META-ANALYSIS OF THE ENGAGEMENT OF UNFPA IN HIGHLY VULNERABLE CONTEXTS

UNFPA Evaluation Office | May 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the meta-analysis

In order to leverage the wealth of evidence provided by decentralized evaluations, the UNFPA Evaluation Office conducted a meta-analysis aimed at generating learning on UNFPA engagement in countries at high risk of facing a humanitarian crisis as well as those emerging from humanitarian situations, such as natural disasters, epidemics and armed conflicts.

The purpose of the meta-analysis was to generate learning on UNFPA engagement in highly vulnerable contexts, with a view to improving future programming within the context of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The meta-analysis is a lighter exercise than a full evaluation. It does not intend to assess country-level results, but to establish the degree to which UNFPA is in a position to provide efficient and effective emergency support in future, as per its mandate.

The temporal scope of the meta-analysis puts particular emphasis on the period covered by the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

Approach and methodology

Building on a synthesis of the results of six previously completed clustered country programme evaluations, the meta-analysis gathered information on a wider

circle of 25 UNFPA priority humanitarian countries through document reviews, semi-structured interviews and electronic surveys.

Main findings

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights: UNFPA country offices have prioritized the Minimal Initial Service Package for Reproductive Health in Emergencies (MISP). Facilitated by the uptake of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and the MISP at global and regional levels, good progress has been made towards both its inclusion in the humanitarian sector and its implementation. Participation in overarching planning processes has encouraged the involvement of other actors and leveraged funding. Conducting MISP training seems to be a comparatively frequent activity, as is the assembly and delivery of emergency reproductive health kits, of which UNFPA is in charge internationally, and for which demand has grown. Responding to the needs of

survivors of sexual violence is an important responsibility, but can be very difficult. Factors impeding MISP planning and implementation are direct competition with classic emergency relief, small national health budgets and weak national capacities, cultural sensitivities as well as insufficient UNFPA funds, staff shortages and a lack of humanitarian coordination mechanisms. A sub-national presence and strong implementing partners have helped considerably; as has anticipation of, and pre-positioning for, recurring crisis situations.

Gender-based violence: UNFPA country offices have prioritized the issue of gender-based violence in emergencies; engagement has been facilitated by the formal designation of UNFPA as lead of the gender-based violence area of responsibility. UNFPA has worked towards incorporating gender-based violence standards and interventions in contingency and response plans. It has also engaged to improve gender-based violence information management in humanitarian contexts. Experience with dignity kits has varied and challenges have mainly pertained to procurement, contents and distribution. Pre-positioning has cut delivery time and raised visibility.

Data for emergency preparedness and response: UNFPA has supported programme countries in data collection and analysis with a view to strengthening capacities for better preparedness, recovery and needs assessments at the onset of emergencies. UNFPA has generated data for humanitarian programming with the help of population censuses and sample household surveys. It has also experimented with geo-referencing. Its involvement in needs assessments has increased. However, in most countries this area of work is not as advanced as its work on sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and gender-based violence. Across the globe, UNFPA is not the “go-to” agency for data collection and analysis and is not playing a leading role. Political instability and weak national systems have hindered the ability of UNFPA to engage, as have low levels of funding, insufficient human resources and missed opportunities to engage population and development officers in humanitarian programming. Corporate guidance and tools for operationalizing UNFPA commitment to increase investment in data in emergencies are inadequate.

Humanitarian-development nexus: UNFPA has committed itself to the “new way of working” as described in the Commitment to Action, signed by the Secretary-General and eight United Nations principals at the World Humanitarian Summit. This commitment frames the work of development and humanitarian actors,

along with national and local counterparts, in support of collective outcomes towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2017, the UNFPA Executive Board commended UNFPA for its invaluable work to bridge the humanitarian-development divide. Staff interviews and survey responses suggested similar understandings of the relevance of interlinking humanitarian assistance and development work for the benefit of vulnerable societies and communities in order to better prepare for, survive and recover from shocks. They also acknowledged the disadvantages of development and humanitarian actors working in silos. Working across the nexus has consequences for UNFPA alignment with country-level strategic frameworks, programme focus, modes of engagement, choice of implementing partners, geographical coverage and operations. In places, insufficient awareness due to the lack of a strong corporate position, resource gaps and separate structures and mechanisms were perceived as barriers to operating across different forms of aid. (Re) introducing comprehensive reproductive health services appears to be a particularly complex challenge.

Coordination and leadership: Where there is a sexual and reproductive health sub-cluster or similar mechanism at country level, UNFPA has played a leading role. However, this does not seem to be automatic, nor should it be taken for granted. The guiding role of UNFPA in sexual and reproductive health humanitarian coordination is affected by the fact that there is no sexual and reproductive health area of responsibility within the cluster architecture designed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a fact that interviewed staff widely regretted. At times the mere creation of a coordination mechanism was considered a success in itself. UNFPA leadership depends on the level of stakeholder engagement in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, which is often less than for classic humanitarian concerns, and the extent of competition for assuming a leading role. It also depends on stakeholder trust in the ability of UNFPA to lead, including at sub-national levels and during protracted crises. Future investment in human resources was considered a vital component in improving the reliability and credibility of UNFPA and thereby enhancing its leadership role.

UNFPA country programme design: UNFPA country offices working in highly vulnerable contexts strived to construct their country programmes on data, evidence and lessons learned. At least, they gathered and analysed new data for the specific purpose of designing country programmes. Vulnerable population groups were consulted as part of country programme design,

either directly or through civil society representatives. UNFPA staff interviews and country office surveys suggested that it is important for UNFPA to be engaged in scenario planning and subsequent programme adaptations throughout the programme cycle.

Operations: Funding for emergency preparedness and response programming remains insufficient. The regular resource allocation system was not revised to better take into account fragility and risk of humanitarian crises occurring. Although reliable and a timely source of funding, the UNFPA emergency fund has, measured against needs, faced resource constraints; funding from external sources such as the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has not met requirements. The Humanitarian Response Reserve was not activated due to financial austerity measures. In view of the increasing emphasis on the humanitarian-development nexus, the flexible use of humanitarian and development funds has become all the more relevant. Looking ahead, more effective resource mobilization will be key.

It appears that UNFPA runs a real risk of overwhelming country office staff working in highly vulnerable contexts. Work-life balance is an issue. Interviewees indicated that they needed more dedicated humanitarian aid staff capacities in order to credibly engage with other humanitarian actors. Sub-national level presence has been invaluable for UNFPA engagement. There has been a process to develop surge capacity for responding to humanitarian situations, and this has been very useful, but clearly not sufficient to fill long-term capacity gaps. Country offices have not been able to rely on surge personnel being deployed in a timely manner and with the necessary competences.

UNFPA headquarters and regional offices have provided useful support to country offices, although the scarce regional office humanitarian focal points/coordinators were not always able to respond to all requests. Concrete benefits were noted in the areas of human-resource deployment; resource mobilization; humanitarian commodities procurement and logistics; advocacy and communications; humanitarian mainstreaming; MISP capacity-building; leadership and coordination in the field of gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE); and the creation of a sub-national humanitarian hub.

Pre-positioning at regional, national and sub-national levels has been a particularly important aspect of UNFPA emergency preparedness work in highly vulnerable contexts, especially when humanitarian crises can be anticipated. While there are very good examples,

procurement has posed difficulties to delivering on the UNFPA mandate and consequently receiving the recognition and respect UNFPA deserves as a humanitarian actor. Reasons for this include the absence of an organisation-wide comprehensive supply chain management strategy for humanitarian settings; reliance on central procurement; stock outs; delays; corporate barriers to pre-positioning; inadequate procurement and logistics management knowledge at country level; and little use of logistics partnerships.

The revised UNFPA fast-track procedures have provided operational authority and flexibility, especially in terms of staff recruitment and commodities procurement. However, there appears to be room for further increasing operational flexibility in protracted emergencies, fragile contexts and high-security settings.

Conclusions and suggestions

Conclusion 1: A fair basis has been laid for UNFPA to position itself strategically and programmatically within the humanitarian-development nexus.

Suggestions:

- Develop a strong corporate strategy on working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus
- Produce case studies on linking development and humanitarian approaches in UNFPA niche areas
- Work towards more flexibility to shift financial resources from emergency to development interventions and vice versa

Conclusion 2: UNFPA humanitarian programming has grown, but funding is not commensurate with population needs, stakeholder expectations and corporate commitments in highly vulnerable contexts.

Suggestions:

- With the aim of enhancing the capability of country offices to adequately finance their emergency and response plan, including by leveraging additional other resources, use the mid-term review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 to adapt the UNFPA resource allocation system by (i) introducing funding floors and (ii) better reflecting fragility and risk

- Put a stronger focus on preparedness in UNFPA country programmes to reduce humanitarian needs
- Work towards more flexibility to shift financial resources from development to emergency interventions
- Continue to promote UNFPA as a humanitarian agency
- Continue to promote sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and gender-based violence prevention and response as frontline interventions
- Elaborate a UNFPA-wide resource mobilization strategy for humanitarian situations

Conclusion 3: UNFPA staff in highly vulnerable contexts are frequently thinly stretched, which impacts on their well-being and performance and the reputation of UNFPA as a humanitarian actor. Suggestions:

- Review office structuring to meet strategic plan humanitarian requirements
- Ensure an adequate presence of dedicated humanitarian staff in priority humanitarian countries
- Ensure that UNFPA staff are capable of working more flexibly across humanitarian and development programmes

Conclusion 4: The roles of UNFPA as leader of sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence humanitarian coordination are meaningful and appreciated, but lack a solid footing.

Suggestions:

- Continue to work towards better recognition of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights within the IASC cluster architecture

- Emphasize inclusion of sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and gender-based violence programming in humanitarian contingency plans
- Review and adjust coordination capacities in UNFPA priority humanitarian countries to promote an integrated approach to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence programming in emergencies

Conclusion 5: UNFPA is at a cross roads on whether to invest in becoming a “go-to” agency for humanitarian data or to accept a more modest role.

Suggestions:

- Clarify expectations underlying “increasing investment in data in emergencies” as per the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021
- Update the 2010 UNFPA Guidelines for Data Issues in Humanitarian Crisis Situations
- Ensure availability of adequate expert headquarters/ regional office support for country offices
- Explore options for better using/integrating population and development officers in humanitarian programming

Conclusion 6: UNFPA systems and processes for procuring and delivering humanitarian supplies are in need of a revamp.

Suggestion:

Commission an independent evaluation of UNFPA humanitarian supplies procurement and delivery



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