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Guidelines for Establishing a HR Co-ordination Network during Surge Responses

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INTRODUCTION

The current humanitarian cluster system, led by OCHA, to improve co-ordination during a response does not include a HR cluster. HR co-ordination can be invaluable during a response to provide support and learning between international and national agencies as well as provide benchmarks that allows employment terms, conditions and practices to be realistic to the specific situation.

The following is a case study from a HR co-ordination group established during the Nepal Earthquake response 2015.

HR CO-ORDINATION DURING NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015

Prior to the earthquake, several INGOs were already working in Nepal, as well as there being a number of national organisations involved in development and relief. No formal HR co-ordination group existed, but HR staff often knew other HR staff in different organisations and they might contact each other informally to ask questions.

When the earthquake response started the number of INGOs increased as well as existing organisations significantly expanding their programmes and as in most surge responses, the demand and competition for new staff was high. At this time, existing HR staff continued to use their informal network and some agencies agreed to share CVs of candidates with each other. New HR staff were not always known and the high workload in the immediate response phase meant there was not the opportunity to reach out or set up anything more formally. In retrospect, HR staff in Nepal feel it would in fact have been invaluable during the first few weeks. Whilst work load is often cited as the main reason for not taking time to share/co-ordinate, the very existence of the cluster system demonstrates how important it actually is. The same applies to HR as it does to more direct programme activities. The sharing of legal information, supplier contacts, recruitment practices and sharing ideas on creative ways of attracting new staff, cultural issues, benchmarking and so on would have provided organisations with a more credible basis on which to make decisions as well as build the confidence of HR staff in knowing that they had as much information as possible to support the response.

As the initial response phase moved into the recovery phase a number of the HR staff from different INGOs recognised the need to set up a more formal group and to initiate monthly meetings, with a co-ordinator for managing the group and who was rotated every 6 months. A terms of reference (ToR) was established and the group registered themselves with the Association of International NGOs in Nepal as a formal co-ordination group. Minutes from meetings are documented formally and shared widely within the INGO community. At the moment National NGOs are not a member of this group but it is recognised that there needs to be an expansion to include them soon.

Feedback from Nepal HR staff indicate that the key benefits have been learning and sharing from each other, sharing of documents and best practice, benchmarking, being able to set up shared training between agencies to provide cost-effective capacity building for staff, building the credibility of the HR profession in INGOs in Nepal through providing the best possible HR service which supports programme activities.

Setting up a group and developing a ToR for such a group does not have to be complex (an example is given below), commitment from members to such a network is key as is recognising the value of sharing, learning from each other and the benefits of co-ordination. As at June 2017 the group continues.

EXAMPLE HR CO-ORDINATION GROUP

Terms of reference

> Management/Administration

Lead co-ordinator to be nominated every 6 months on a rotating basis.

Role – to arrange meetings (via doodle poll) ever 2 months, to set the agenda, chair the meeting and produce minutes/action points.

> Membership

HR professionals or those responsible for HR in an organisation working in INGOs, National NGOs, government departments or other organisations supporting a humanitarian response.

Special attendees may be invited (e.g. finance staff) for specific agenda items.

> Purpose of the group

To work collaboratively with other HR professionals or those responsible for HR in [...] country, to share learning, best practice, benchmarking and possible shared initiatives.

> Specific areas to be covered

Salary and benefits benchmarking:

- Employment legislation, statutory requirements (e.g. social security, pension provisions);
- Ways of working between organisations that ensure staff are not ‘poached’ from one to another;
- Sharing of good practice regarding the full employee life cycle including recruitment practices and strategies, terms and conditions, staff welfare, employee relations, learning and development, exit processes;
- Possible setting up of shared training;
- Sharing networks and contacts (e.g. legal advisers, tax specialists);
- Peer support;
- Professional development for HR staff or those responsible for HR in an organisation.

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