

Evaluation Brief



Synthesis of the Series of Joint UNHCR-WFP Impact Evaluations of Food Assistance to Refugees in Protracted Situations

Background

The synthesis captured the main findings and common lessons emerging from a series of mixed-method impact evaluations assessing the contribution of food assistance to durable solutions in protracted refugee situations. The evaluations were conducted jointly by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through 2011 and 2012 in Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia and Rwanda. They tested the validity of an intervention logic derived from UNHCR and WFP policies and programme guidance, which posited that the two agencies' combined work would contribute to increased self-reliance over three stages following refugee arrival.

Simplified Logic Model

Time	Food assistance	Assumptions	Expected results
Short term	General food distribution (GFD) – full rations.	Emergency response assistance	Lives saved; improved food consumption; safety and protection provided. Minimal level of self-reliance.
Medium term	Food assistance decreases (partial rations)	Transition from emergency response; Complementary social service interventions are available, e.g. water, sanitation, education, housing, etc.;	Improved food basket, improved nutritional status (acute and chronic malnutrition). Increased capacity of beneficiaries to establish livelihoods.
Long term	Food assistance decreases (partial rations)	Livelihood interventions available; asset building	Refugee self-reliance; local integration; resettlement or repatriation.

Key Findings

Food Security and Nutrition

Unacceptably high numbers of refugee households remained food-insecure, especially in the second half of the period between food distributions. Female-headed households, often with high dependency ratios, were more food insecure than male headed households. Rates of chronic malnutrition reached or exceeded the 'serious' international threshold¹ in all four contexts, and anaemia prevalence was high, but similar to national rates.

Global acute malnutrition rates ranged from acceptable to serious, and were higher in Bangladesh. Trends were mixed, but rates were better among refugees than among the host population in all four contexts, suggesting that food assistance had a positive impact. Severe acute malnutrition rates were also mixed.

In some programmes, funding shortfalls, pipeline breaks and irregular updating of refugee registers resulted in general food distribution rations being less than the 2,100 kcal per day standard and deficient in proteins and micronutrients.

¹ 'serious' is classified as >30% height for age > -2 z scores. Source: CDC/WFP A Manual: Measuring and Interpreting Malnutrition and Mortality 2005.

Livelihoods

Livelihood options for refugees were very limited and livelihood support was generally weak. Refugees did not have access to formal labour markets, except for in Rwanda, or adequate land for agriculture, except for in Chad. As a result, the most common type of work for refugees was unskilled day labour in poor conditions, competing with local populations.

The main source of refugee income and collateral was food rations and non-food items, which were sold and exchanged primarily to meet unmet basic needs, such as clothing, and to pay for milling, health services and school expenses. Women were generally the managers of household food supplies and bore the burden and risks of indebtedness. However, except for in Rwanda, women's participation in camp committees remained limited.

In all four contexts, women's livelihood activities were especially precarious and often exposed them to risk. Many women and adolescent girls relied on activities such as collecting fuelwood, begging and domestic service; transactional and survival sex were common.

Protection and Gender

Refugees generally reported feeling safer inside camps, but protection issues were also reported inside the camps in all four contexts. Women were more vulnerable in all cases, because of both their search for livelihood opportunities and domestic violence. In food-insecure households, girls were sometimes forced into early marriages and women into unwanted marriages.

The evaluations indicated considerable variation in the provision of protection support, with protection interventions against sexual and gender-based violence tending to be reactive and failing to address the root causes, as perceived by refugee women and girls.

The evaluations presented a mixed picture of relations between refugees and host populations. In no context was the relationship purely antagonistic or purely harmonious, although it tended to be better where there was cultural affinity. The presence of refugees – trading in local markets and drawing in additional infrastructure and basic services – was usually welcomed. Conflict typically occurred when food assistance to refugees was perceived as ignoring the needs of local poor people and/or when refugees competed with local people for labour and scarce natural resources. UNHCR/WFP engagement with host communities was very limited and opportunities for synergies were being missed.

Factors Influencing the Results

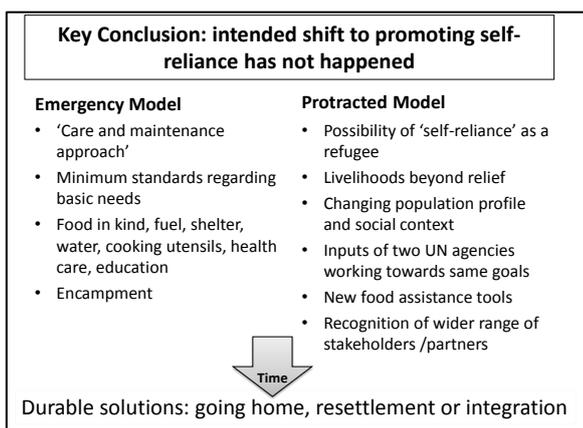
Two common key contextual factors stood out: donor funding policies and host government policies. Long-term support for protracted refugees fits uneasily with conventional donor funding modalities, which differentiate between humanitarian and development assistance. This resulted in serious funding

shortfalls and inadequate support for progress towards self-reliance. Mobility and access to job markets are essential for prospects for self-reliance. In all four contexts, host governments did not permit formal integration of refugees, insufficient land was made available and mobility was restricted.

The most prominent factors influencing the results that are within WFP's and UNHCR's control were inaccurate refugee household records and infrequent revalidation; insufficiently frequent and poorly timed distributions of non-food items; inadequate monitoring of food distributions; poor follow-up to joint assessment missions and weak joint plans of action; and missed opportunities for synergies with development or livelihoods and social protection programmes among the host population.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overarching conclusion from this series is that the intended evolution towards self-reliance has not occurred. The international community's response to refugees in protracted crises is failing to deliver. Concerted action is required among all actors to resolve the issues blocking progress, backed by the political and financial will to enable refugees to make productive contributions to the countries where they live, and to support other long-term durable solutions where appropriate.



Recognizing that WFP and UNHCR cannot solve this failure alone, the synthesis makes five strategic recommendations for various parties summarised below.

Recommendations (in summary)

Recommendation 1.

Under the auspices of the WFP/UNHCR High-Level Meeting, a working group from both agencies should develop a joint corporate strategy and operational framework for refugees in protracted displacement and for the role that food assistance can play. The strategy should:

- 1a) recognise that encampment brings risks to the prospects for self-reliance and that the current approach to food assistance is insufficient;
- 1b) outline plausible pathways to self-reliance and durable solutions for refugees in protracted displacement, and the role that food assistance – including complements to general food distribution (GFD) such as cash, vouchers or food for work – can play;
- 1c) develop a more holistic approach and the partnerships necessary to achieve it; and
- 1d) establish management mechanisms for implementing the strategy, incorporating more systematic use of the Joint Assessment Missions (JAM)s, both in specific countries and in synthesis for corporate learning.

Management Response: Agreed

For full text of Management Response, see below link: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/e_b/wfpdoco62408.pdf

Recommendation 2.

All actors should recognise that improving the lives of refugees in protracted displacement is not the business of WFP and UNHCR alone but must involve coordinated change in the approaches currently followed by United Nations country teams, particularly development-oriented agencies, host States, donors and implementing partners, as well as UNHCR and WFP. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Accountability to Affected Populations should be encouraged to take a lead role in building this recognition and the resulting actions.

Management Response: Partially Agreed

Recommendation 3.

- United Nations country teams should:
- 3a) engage and advocate with host governments for refugees' rights to mobility, to practice livelihoods, to protection and to some form of acknowledged integration when repatriation remains elusive;
 - 3b) engage with host governments to improve selection of camp sites for those in or likely to be in prolonged displacement with the goal of enabling refugees to make a meaningful contribution to national and local economic development and to minimise conflict over natural resources and accompanying negative implications for the environment, economy and protection;
 - 3c) monitor the prospects for repatriation and seek to increase spontaneous return;
 - 3d) encourage donors to be more flexible (*see recommendation 4*);
 - 3e) insist on greater involvement of United Nations agencies specialised in protection, development and gender issues;
 - 3f) engage with refugees' host and original States to advance political solutions to protracted displacement.

Management Response: Partially Agreed

Recommendation 4.

Donors should overcome or remove barriers to conventional funding restrictions, based on dichotomies between emergency and development situations.

Management Response: Noted

Recommendation 5.

WFP and UNHCR country teams should systematically develop consensual programme strategies for the transition to self-reliance, based on contextualised knowledge of refugees' specific needs and prospects for long-term durable solutions – repatriation, local integration or resettlement. These strategies should transform the existing planning architecture based on joint plans of action to provide a strategic management tool for the country level, which: 5a) draws in new partnerships and funding; and 5b) provides a reference point for operation design and approval.

Management Response: Partially Agreed



Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at <http://www.wfp.org/node/383882>

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