

RELEVANCE OF UNHCR'S ACTIVITIES TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As noted by the Secretary-General in his Report "In larger freedom",¹ the 2005 World Summit provides an appropriate occasion for UNHCR to reflect on the relevance of its activities to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also useful to see how international efforts, especially those of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, to pursue the same Goals have contributed to bringing greater focus to UNHCR's activities in the areas of protection and assistance. Among other things, this paper will argue that there has been a synergy between these two aspects of UNHCR's involvement with the MDGs.

II. UNHCR AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2. The United Nations Millennium Declaration² contained references to the challenge posed by refugees and internally displaced persons. In the Report of the Secretary-General entitled "Road Map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration,"³ a range of strategies targeted the Goal set out in paragraph 26 of the Declaration. These strategies have been taken up into UNHCR's own Strategic Objectives in its annual programming exercises, the Country Operations Plans (COPs), and the related UNHCR Annual Programme Budgets. On the other hand, the MDGs do not refer explicitly to refugees and other displaced persons. As a result, it has taken UNHCR some time to realize how a "development" initiative as reflected in the MDGs, could both contribute to and advance its humanitarian agenda, and how UNHCR's work could also make a modest contribution to the realization of the Goals. This is partly why it took some time for the Office to see the potential of the MDGs for its work and for possible contributions that UNHCR and refugees could make to the realization of the MDGs.

3. During the past two decades, UNHCR has been working in different ways to build linkages between humanitarian relief and longer-term development. These include initiatives such as the "Brookings Process" whereby development investments were sought to complement

¹ "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005).

² "We resolve therefore: To strengthen international cooperation, including burden sharing in, and the coordination of humanitarian assistance to, countries hosting refugees and to help all refugees and displaced persons to return voluntarily to their homes, in safety and dignity and to be smoothly reintegrated into their societies (para. 26, A/RES/55/2, United Nations Millennium Declaration)."

³ A/56/326 paras., 229-234 (6 September 2001).

humanitarian activities, especially in post-conflict situations. Following an address to the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Brussels in May 2001, the High Commissioner took a range of initiatives to make the linkages between relief and development more systematic. These included the development of the “Framework for Durable Solutions” with its three constituent elements: Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR); Development through Local Integration (DLI), and Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (the “4Rs”).

4. Although the groundwork had been laid in varying degrees to highlight the usefulness of a development context within which UNHCR could more effectively pursue its humanitarian agenda, it was not until the issuance of programming instructions for the year 2003, that the MDGs were first expressly mentioned. It is interesting to note that this reference was made in the context of a request to UNHCR Representatives to participate actively in the various joint initiatives and coordination processes that take place within the United Nations Country Teams. For the first time, it was affirmed that: “it is important to remember that the United Nations Millennium Development Goals are equally applicable to refugees.” It was partly the importance that the MDGs had assumed for UNHCR’s development partners in the United Nations system as a frame of reference for their own activities that led the Office to pay greater attention to the MDGs.

5. In the course of 2003, a number of important directives formalized the importance that the Office had begun to attach to the MDGs. The first was an internal memorandum issued in January 2003 which stressed the direct relationship between UNHCR’s work and the MDGs. This memorandum noted that the eight MDGs (accompanied by 18 targets and 48 indicators) had become the overall framework for the activities of United Nations funds and programmes and many specialized agencies during the next decade and beyond. It dealt with the relevance of the MDGs for UNHCR and how the Office could contribute to the achievement of the MDGs. UNHCR’s interest in the MDGs, in addition to seeing concrete achievements in relation to each of the eight Goals for the world’s poor, including refugees, was their significance for the way UNHCR did its programming, and the possibilities they opened for tapping development funds. The same memorandum noted that: “Discussions at the country level concerning the CCA/UNDAF and PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers] processes will certainly be directly linked to the achievement of the MDGs, and it is of paramount importance that UNHCR strives to incorporate the refugee agenda into the mainstream of international development cooperation, primarily at the field level. On a broader level, UNHCR can simultaneously begin the process of advocacy for inclusion of refugees among the global poor, and once it is acknowledged that there is a causal link between displacement and poverty, refugees may well become a priority category for MDG targets. This could assist UNHCR in opening up new possibilities for organizational alliances and identifying improved funding mechanisms.”⁴

6. Linked to the introduction in 2000 of Results-Based Management (RBM) as a means to better ensure the quality of UNHCR’s protection and assistance activities and the most effective use of resources (see para. 5 above), and as a tool to reinforce RBM, in 2003 UNHCR established a set of Standards and Indicators which were to be used as a global yardstick to do “gap analysis”, whereby the current situation, sector by sector, was measured in reference to the

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Idem, para. 7.

agreed global standards. In this way, UNHCR would be more capable, *inter alia*, of identifying existing protection and assistance gaps and, subsequently, of planning activities more effectively. As far back as 1982, UNHCR had developed a set of core indicators for refugee emergencies (*see Emergency Handbook*). In subsequent years, the Office worked to expand the use of standards and indicators and make them applicable to non-emergency situations. In January 2004, the first edition of the "Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations" was issued. These standards and indicators were established in the light of those developed under the Sphere Project, and the 48 indicators relevant to various sectors developed in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, UNHCR's efforts to reinforce its moves to institutionalize RBM through "gap analysis" had an added incentive to look at the MDGs. In December 2005, UNHCR will issue an expanded edition of its guide on the use of standards and indicators in its operations. This new edition will not only include standards and indicators for refugees in camp situations, but will also focus on the quality of programmes for urban refugees and returnees. It is thanks to the data being generated by the Office in relation to the use of its standards and indicators in the design of its programmes, that UNHCR is better able to detail its contribution to the MDGs, and to a range of other related programmatic issues (Convention Plus⁵; UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women⁶). The Annex to this Note gives some examples of the interface between UNHCR's work and the MDGs; this is based on the latest information available from UNHCR's Standards and Indicators Report (2004).

7. The next major step whereby UNHCR's work became more closely linked to the pursuit of the MDGs came with the High Commissioner's decision to request membership of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). In a memorandum issued in February 2004, the High Commissioner explained to the Office the rationale for such a move. One of UNHCR's strategies through its membership of UNDG was the inclusion of displaced populations in the efforts to pursue the MDGs. The High Commissioner stated that: "Displaced populations should be included in the MDG projects as a way to strengthen protection and durable solutions for them".⁷ Meanwhile, UNHCR has commissioned further studies in selected countries (South Africa, Armenia, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, and others) in order to assess the well-being of refugees and others of concern to the Office with regard to the MDG targets and indicators. These studies will provide important baseline data by comparing, in particular, the status of attainment of the MDGs of UNHCR beneficiaries with other segments of the population, and will give UNHCR the basis for corrective strategies.

8. A good example of the value of such studies is South Africa. In 2002-2003, UNHCR's representation in South Africa, with financial support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), commissioned a survey into the well-being of (African) urban refugees and asylum-seekers in South Africa. This National Refugee Baseline Survey revealed, *inter alia*, that 26 per cent of refugee parents reported that they were unable to enrol their children in primary education in the host country. In response, UNHCR declared access of refugees to primary education an operational priority, with the objective of ensuring 100 per cent access or that

⁵ *Putting Refugees on the Development Agenda: How Refugees and Returnees can contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals* (Forum/2005/4 of 18 May 2005).

⁶ *Report on the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women* (EC/55/SC/CRP.17 of 13 June 2005).

⁷ IOM 21/2004-FOM 21/2004 of 20 February 2004: *UNHCR's Participation in the United Nations Development Group (UNDG)*, para. 3 c.

refugee enrolment figures would reach a level similar to those for national enrolment in South Africa. A strategic plan was developed jointly with UNHCR's non-governmental organization (NGO) implementing partners and with the national and provincial Departments of Education. As part of the plan, NGO partners were encouraged to create dedicated posts of Education Officers (funded by UNHCR) which focused on advocacy and the development of programmes to remove obstacles to refugee enrolment. Pending confirmation through a new survey planned for 2006, there are strong indications that participation by refugee children in primary enrolment has shot up considerably as a direct result of these efforts.

9. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report 2005 has illustrated how conflicts and disasters exacerbate poverty and hunger. More generally, it makes the key observation that: "The Millennium Development Goals apply to all people, whatever their circumstances. Promoting the MDGs in humanitarian emergencies and post-conflict situations can help create a sound foundation for development over the long term."⁸

10. In an address to the June 2005 High-Level Segment of ECOSOC dedicated to mapping progress in relation to the MDGs, the High Commissioner highlighted three key points:

- National MDG strategies seldom refer to displaced persons;
- As many of the poorest people live in countries in conflict or just emerging from it, too little attention is being given to the relationship between conflict and the MDGs;
- Humanitarian agencies have made insufficient efforts to engage in and contribute to the discussion and policy formulation on the MDGs; providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance will not be sustainable without an effective development strategy.

UNHCR is now fully engaged in the international efforts to promote the MDGs, and the above points indicate the focus of UNHCR's future efforts in response to the call of the 2005 World Summit to move more resolutely towards meeting the MDGs.

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United Nations, New York 2005, page 9.

Refugees and the MDGs: some examples

MDGs	Selected UNHCR information			
	Goal	Standard	Indicator	Score-card summary
Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugees should receive the average national income. - Global acute malnutrition among refugee children should be below 5%. - Refugees should have access to 2,100 kilocalories per day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percentage of urban refugees below average national income - Percentage of malnourished children under 5 years of age. - Average number of kilocalories per person per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In 35 out of 51 countries with available data, urban refugees receive less than 75% of the average national income. In almost half of the countries, the reported income is less than half the national average. - 57% of the refugee camps meet the standard of less than 5% malnourished children (global acute malnutrition). - In 37 out of 87 refugee camps (43%), refugees receive less than 2,100 kilocalories per day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The income of refugees is difficult to measure in situations where relief items are distributed on a regular basis, particularly in camps. Therefore, this poverty indicator is limited to refugees living in urban areas. - During an emergency, refugees may face severe food shortages and hunger. In more stable situations, food distribution should ensure that refugees received the minimum dietary energy consumption. A limited diet may also affect nutritional status, particularly of children. - The amount of kilocalories is based on the food distributed. Food needs are generally complemented by locally produced food.
Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All school-age refugee children should attend primary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percentage of refugee students enrolled in primary school - Literacy rate of 15-24 years old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is estimated that around 20% of refugee children living in camps are not attending primary school. - In 47 out of 87 (54%) refugee camps, 95% or more of the refugee children are enrolled in primary school. - This indicator is available for only 17 refugee camps. Eight camps report literacy rates of less than 50%, while five camps report that 100% of the refugees are literate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNHCR strives to ensure that all refugee children have access to primary and lower secondary education. In practice, some of the lowest school enrolment rates are recorded in countries where the participation of refugee girls in school is limited.
Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender parity should be achieved in refugee education, camp management, food distribution, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ratio of boys and girls in primary and secondary school - Percentage of female members of camp management committees - Percentage of female food distributors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender parity in primary education is reported in 15 camps. 29 camps report a higher rate of females attending and 39 camps show a higher male enrolment rate. - Gender parity in secondary education is reported in 7 camps. 11 camps report a higher rate of females attending and 52 camps show a higher male enrolment rate. - The percentage of women participating in management committees is available for 95 refugee camps. In 28 camps, the refugee committee shows gender parity, in 10 camps women outnumber men and in 58 camps women constitute only a minority of the committee members. - Of the almost 4,000 food distributors in 63 refugee camps, 2,250 (56%) are women. Gender parity was reported in 61% of the camps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls' education can be promoted in many ways, ranging from the employment of female staff to programmes preventing drop-out. Concerns about girls' education should be addressed by working with the local community. - UNHCR actively promotes equal representation of women in administrative bodies representing refugees. - In cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR makes continued efforts to ensure that refugee women participate in food distribution.

Goal 5 Improve maternal health	- At least 50% of all births should be attended by skilled personnel	- Percentage of live births attended by skilled personnel, excluding traditional birth attendants)	- In two thirds (62) out of 95 refugee camps, 50% or more of the births are attended by skilled personnel. In 2004, out of a total of 57,000 reported births, some 40,000 (70%) were attended by skilled personnel.	To minimize maternal mortality, live births should be attended by trained health personnel (doctors, midwives, nurses).
Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	- To promote prevention of HIV infection and to halt the spread of AIDS	- At least 10% of refugees should participate in programmes on HIV/AIDS each year.	- In 2004, 31 camps out of 85 (36%) reported that at least 10% of the population participated in HIV/AIDS programmes. Another 12 camps (14%) reported a participation of 5 to 10%. In total, 240,000 refugees participated in HIV/AIDS programmes during the year.	- Providing community-based programmes on HIV/AIDS encourage participation in and ownership of solutions to health problems.
Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability	- To ensure that refugees have access to at least 20 litres of safe drinking water per persons per day. - Every refugee family should have an individual latrine	- Average quantity of water available per person per day. - Percentage of the population living within 200 metres from a water point. - Percentage of families with latrines	- Of the 1.4 million refugees covered by this indicator, close to half (680,000) have access to at least 20 litres of drinking water per person per day. More than 80% of the refugees have access to 15 litres or more of water per day. - Some 87% of the 1.5 million refugees for whom this information is available is living within 200 metres from the nearest water point. While one-third of the camps reporting (95), meet the standard, another third reported that fewer than 50% of refugee families have their own latrine.	- Providing a sufficient quantity of safe water for each refugee to meet domestic and individual needs is a central objective. Access to water should be secure, easy and equitable. Water can be obtained from various sources, such as taps or wells (hand-pumps). - A sufficient number of latrines are important to avoid congestion in latrine use and the spread of communicable diseases.
Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development	<p>In recent years, a number of UNHCR-led efforts, including the Agenda for Protection, the development of a Framework for Durable Solutions, and the Convention Plus initiative, have been geared towards the promotion of global partnerships capable of contributing to development and poverty reduction, increasing commitment to good governance, addressing the special needs of the least developed countries, and improving policy coherence.</p> <p>In addition, and also at UNHCR's initiative, in October 2004 the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) adopted a Guidance Note on Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons. For the first time, a common policy was adopted among United Nations development actors on the importance of attaining durable solutions for displaced persons and how to incorporate them into joint planning and implementation strategies. The Guidance Note has been included in the existing UNDG Guidelines on Common Country Assessment (CCA) and in the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (see Forum/2005/4 of 18 May 2005).</p>			