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Update on UNHCR's global programmes and partnerships

While responding to multiple, large-scale humanitarian emergencies in 2012, UNHCR worked to ensure the quality and integrity of its emergency response and coordination through the rapid deployment of technical specialists. To meet these challenges, UNHCR has drawn from its own staffing and called upon standby partners and experienced consultants.

While the priority has been on emergency response, UNHCR's global programmes have continued to strengthen the quality and technical integrity of service delivery in the Field, including through the provision of technical guidance and capacity building for staff and partners.

Shelter

UNHCR is developing a new shelter and settlements strategy to improve its shelter response in 18 priority countries. Operations in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan, for example, are working to reduce reliance on internationally-procured emergency shelter options by encouraging local solutions. UNHCR has also designed camp layouts to meet the needs of the predominantly nomadic Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger.

The Office continues to expand its options for shelter solutions. The technical specifications for a shelter winterization kit and frame tent have advanced as has research into alternatives to tents. Initiatives in the shelter area have drawn upon the expertise of other agencies, academic institutions and the private sector.

UNHCR is also working with partner agencies and conducting training to increase the number and quality of shelter experts available to support field operations. This year, UNHCR has deployed 27 shelter and physical planning experts and developed a learning module on meeting shelter needs for urban refugees.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and UNHCR are working together as co-leads of the Global Emergency Shelter Cluster to improve efficiency and accountability in line with the Transformative Agenda adopted by the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC). Having recently accepted the cluster lead role in the Central African Republic and the Sudan, UNHCR now coordinates 8 of the 15 country shelter clusters worldwide.

Education

UNHCR launched a five-year education strategy and designed implementation plans with national partners in priority countries, including Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Uganda. Kenya's Ministry of Education is developing a policy for refugee education that will be integrated in the national education strategy.

The education information management project, an integral part of the strategy, will support data collection and management in priority countries. Pilot projects making use of technology in education will enhance teaching and learning through the use of mobile phones for educators and Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) in schools.

UNHCR has deployed education experts to Ethiopia, Niger and South Sudan. More than 80 UNHCR and partner staff in Kenya, Pakistan and the Sudan were trained in basic education programming and girls' education.

Globally, more than 1,700 refugees are benefiting from the annual Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) tertiary scholarship programme.

Information management

The implementation of UNHCR's information and data management strategy for 2012-2014 progressed with the creation of nine Information Management Officer positions in key country and regional operations. The Office also enhanced its emergency response capacity in this area through the Workshop on Emergency Information Management (WEIM) and the development of an Emergency Information Management Toolkit.

Together with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), UNHCR launched the Gender-based Violence Information Management System in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Partnerships with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), and CartONG, supported the development of needs assessment tools, data visualization training, and guidance on mobile data collection.

Public health

The deployment of skilled public health coordinators to ongoing and new emergencies has been a top priority in a challenging year. The overall quality of UNHCR's emergency response in this sector improved through the integration of public health experts in the Workshop on Emergency Management (WEM) and the development of new guidance for both public health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes.

UNHCR has continued to strengthen evidence-based planning through better access to health data and information. The Office implemented a standardized indicator report to monitor ongoing emergencies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and South Sudan. A new Balanced Score Card tool has been used to assess the capacity and quality of health services in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda and will be implemented in other countries.

Health insurance schemes are now available to refugees in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Costa Rica, the Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nigeria and Togo. A version of the web-based health information system, adapted to urban contexts, will be piloted in the last quarter of 2012.

Reproductive health and HIV

Together with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR co-leads efforts to address HIV in humanitarian emergencies through the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on HIV and AIDS under the UNAIDS Division of Labour. During the 2012 International AIDS Conference, which took place in Washington, D.C. in July, the IATT stimulated discussion on preparedness and response efforts, while also highlighting the needs of populations affected by crises.

UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission are working to support the implementation of recommendations that emerged from a family planning review conducted in five countries. The project has now been extended to improve adolescent reproductive health in a comprehensive manner.

Efforts continued to improve access to quality maternal and infant care. A review of newborn survival rates in Chad and the United Republic of Tanzania will provide practical recommendations on newborn care globally.

Nutrition and food security

In response to high malnutrition rates in the Horn of Africa and South Sudan, as well as among those fleeing the situation in Mali, UNHCR deployed technical experts to enhance responses and improve coordination with partners. Special nutritional products are being used to help prevent malnutrition.

UNHCR increased its capacity to implement nutrition and food security programmes through guidelines for joint assessment missions, which were developed in partnership with WFP, using the Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) approach. UNHCR currently implements cash-based programme interventions in some 43 operations. Further studies will inform the expanded use of cash in this sector and in multi-sectoral interventions.

Water, sanitation and hygiene

UNHCR's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives were enhanced by the creation of 13 international staff positions and the deployment of 22 technical experts to more than a dozen countries. These efforts benefited from the expertise provided by partners, including academic institutions, the Veolia Environnement Foundation, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Remote monitoring of the aquifer in Kenya through satellite and mobile networks helped to better determine the quantity of water available for refugees. This method, which helps inform settlement planning, will be extended to Djibouti and South Sudan. The University of Neuchâtel was instrumental in supporting UNHCR's hydrogeology projects.

UNHCR has implemented the WASH monitoring system in eight countries, covering 51 refugee camps. The system, which provides a monthly WASH report card on seven key indicators, such as access to water and other critical parameters, will be replicated in operations beyond the initial priority countries.

Environment

Environmental management efforts addressed the protection risks arising from competition between refugees and host communities over scarce natural resources. UNHCR is seeking to reduce the security risks associated with collecting firewood in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya through the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves and alternative fuels. Private sector contributions for solar lighting have also contributed to improved camp security, enabling refugees to undertake social, educational and income generating activities during the night.

In the current financial environment, where emergency response and other life-saving initiatives take precedence, it is a challenge to expand UNHCR's environmental management programmes. The Office is launching an assessment to guide the development of a new domestic energy strategy, which will draw upon new technology and partnerships.

Livelihoods and self-reliance

In order to improve livelihood interventions, UNHCR undertook socio-economic assessments and strategic planning in Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Uganda, and the Sudan. In Nairobi, a household economy

assessment helped define a programme for expanding access to the labour market and building entrepreneurship opportunities.

UNHCR launched new operational guidelines for livelihood programming in May and has benefited from the experience of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in microfinance, skills and enterprise development, and the deployment of livelihood experts. UNHCR, the Brac Development Institute and Trickle Up, a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to fighting poverty, are in the process of piloting a “Graduation Model” for livelihood programming in refugee operations. The programme helps those displaced in rural or urban areas through grants, capacity-building and microfinance.

The Community Technology Access (CTA) programme supported the development of computer skills among approximately 20,000 school children, youth and adults from refugee and host communities in 24 countries. UNHCR commissioned evaluations of the CTA centres in Armenia, Georgia, Kenya, Rwanda and Yemen, which resulted in recommendations for the future strategic direction of the programme.

Engaging development actors in durable solutions

The prospects for durable solutions for a number of refugee situations were advanced by global and regional initiatives such as the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) in Colombia and the Sudan, and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees.

UNHCR, together with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is helping to implement the UN Secretary-General’s Policy Committee decision on durable solutions, which supports the sustainable reintegration of returning refugees and internally displaced persons in the aftermath of conflict. Thus far, three pilot countries have been identified for implementation of the decision during 2012 and 2013.
