



Country evaluation  
of the age and gender  
mainstreaming pilot project

*India*

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## Executive Summary

Following three independent evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and the role of community services, UNHCR launched an age and gender mainstreaming pilot project in early 2004. To date, country assessments followed by capacity building and planning workshops have been conducted in Iran, North Caucasus, Guinea, Zambia, Greece, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, India, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Sierra Leone.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the age and gender mainstreaming pilot project and to use this learning to inform the planned rollout of the project in 2005.

The team consisted of a member of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and a member of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. The principal methods adopted were document review and interviews with key informants on a one-to-one basis as well as in groups.

The age and gender mainstreaming pilot has had a measurable impact on the UNHCR office in India. There is a general awareness of individual responsibility for applying age and gender analysis to work practice and the way age and gender perspectives are relevant to work, albeit in varying degrees. It has been demonstrated by the pilot that the Multi Functional Team (MFT) can play a key role in the understanding of the age and gender approach and encourage the consideration of age and gender differences and inequalities in general implementation of work responsibilities.

The age and gender mainstreaming pilot, and more specifically the comprehensive workplan considered to be the primary benefit of the workshop, assisted UNHCR staff in taking a wide new range of initiatives to strengthen age and gender-sensitive approaches in its protection and assistance activities.

The multi functional team approach has an immediate value in the India context as it has clearly strengthened the team approach and led to the development of stronger linkages with other functional units and with the implementing partners. Staff, in particular those with relevant expertise, experience and training, have had a significant impact on the strength, efficiency and effectiveness of the team.

An evident change is the use of participatory assessment<sup>1</sup> in the Offices' work process in the form of structured dialogues with refugee groups. After the initial field assessment, UNHCR continued to "reach out" to the different communities by inviting them to regular open house meetings or organizing focus groups with various communities. The meetings were either held in a way that ensured a gender balance or separate meetings were held with women, men and children. Notwithstanding the benefits of the contacts, a developed, planned and systematic

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<sup>1</sup> Participatory assessment refers to the element of situation analysis that involves participatory discussions with refugee communities.

interaction with refugee community groups was not in place at the time of the evaluation and still needs to be implemented as a mainstream function.

Refugees and implementing partners (IPs) appreciated the changes in UNHCR's interactions. IPs noted changes in process, such as increased brainstorming and networking, and refugees welcomed the increase in the number of meetings with UNHCR staff and felt that through listening to their problems, UNHCR and the IPs had made positive programming changes.

The Chief of Mission (COM) has played a key role in initiating, supporting, and lending credibility to the effort to mainstream age and gender perspectives into the India operation; this was also the view of the staff.

### **Recommendations**

- The importance of the age and gender policy should be institutionalized at the highest level within UNHCR and directions to that effect should be given to Representatives and senior managers. Age and gender mainstreaming needs to be discussed at Representatives' meetings to receive the statement from top management regarding its importance.
- The methodology should be identified in a directive from HQ and applied during the roll-out.
- HQ guidance is required on the life expectancy, ongoing role, structure and evolution of MFTs. All trained staff should at one time or another participate as members of the MFT so that knowledge gained from their participation would be incorporated automatically into their day to day work.
- More interim feedback from HQ, comparative input and sharing of experiences from other pilot countries and guidance on how linkages between various tools and initiatives can be strengthened is needed.
- Managers need to identify the MFT members who have demonstrated the greatest competence so that these persons can participate in a team or teams designated to train staff in other operations during the roll-out.
- Resources should be allocated for training on age and gender awareness and participatory approaches as part of a wider human resources development. The focus should be on field methods, but also on improving communication and analytical skills.
- Baseline data should be gathered by HQ before the roll-out, so that subsequent monitoring and evaluation can assess the impact of the project.

# Introduction

## Background to the evaluation

1. Following three independent evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and the role of community services, UNHCR launched an age and gender mainstreaming pilot project in early 2004. To date, country assessments followed by capacity building and planning workshops have been conducted in Iran, North Caucasus, Guinea, Zambia, Greece, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, India, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Sierra Leone.
2. The three key elements of the pilot project methodology are: Situation assessment using a participatory approach, integration workshop and the use of multi-functional teams.
3. Each country conducted a mid-term review of the work and it was agreed that a process evaluation would be conducted at the end of the pilot phase<sup>2</sup>. Evaluations have taken place in Zambia, Colombia, India, Egypt, Syria, Greece, Venezuela and Ecuador<sup>3</sup>. These countries were recommended for the evaluation exercise as they represent diverse situations: camp setting, urban and internal displacement situations. This report presents the findings of the India evaluation.
4. The evaluators would like to thank the Chief of Mission and all staff, partners and people of concern who kindly gave their time to ensuring that this mission was a success.

## Evaluation purpose and objectives

5. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the age and gender mainstreaming pilot project and to use this learning to inform the planned roll-out of the project in 2005. Four areas of impact are explored. These are analytical approaches, procedures and work processes, leadership, and pilot methodology.
6. This evaluation is a process evaluation and is expected to be a learning tool. It has been designed to be a two way process, whereby the evaluation team and participants in the pilot project come together to explore learning and to build on experience. The evaluation is part of the wider mainstreaming project and as such is one important step in the process. In this way, the evaluation differs from a conventional end of project evaluation, which focuses on measuring impact. The process focus also arises from the practical reason that a key focus of this project is to change attitudes and ways of working. The impact is thus less clear to measure than in a more quantitatively defined initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> This evaluation should be read alongside the Mid-Term Reviews which contain additional examples of impact.

<sup>3</sup> Meetings were also held with Jordan and Lebanon projects to explore impact and learning. Findings are presented separately as 'Notes for the File'.

7. The objectives of the evaluation are:
- To document and explore progress towards age and gender mainstreaming
  - To examine the appropriateness/effectiveness of the methodology used as a first step towards mainstreaming
  - To highlight lessons and recommendations for the roll-out of the project

### **Methods and approach**

8. The team consisted of a member of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and a member of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. The principal methods adopted were document review and interviews with key informants on a one to one basis as well as in groups. Stakeholders interviewed included:

- UNHCR Branch Office staff, members and non members of the MFTs and the Chief of Mission.
- UNHCR Partners: VHAD, DBA, SLIC, YMCA and PILSARC.
- Refugee groups: Myanmarese, ethnic Afghans and Indian origin Afghans (focus group discussions with women and men).

9. A document review was also conducted and included workplans, COPs, project submissions, SITANS (situation analyses), and other relevant documents.

10. Difficulties in measuring the impact among people of concern included the size of the groups assembled by UNHCR and the IPs; the short period of time elapsed since the participatory assessment; the fact that only some of those present had participated in the participatory assessment; the Burmese community's focus on the phase-out of subsistence allowances and the ethnic Afghans' focus on resettlement to the exclusion of other issues. The lack of baseline data and a perhaps incomplete understanding of "participatory approaches" presented challenges in terms of measuring impact with staff and others. Additional time with IPs at the end of the evaluation could have provided opportunities to probe more deeply regarding impact.

## Findings

11. The UN guidelines for gender mainstreaming suggest that attention needs to be given to three areas of work<sup>4</sup>: analytical approaches, procedures and work processes and leadership. These areas, and an additional area on the pilot methodology, formed the framework for this evaluation.

### **Analytical approaches**

**Findings regarding attitude change and the extent to which the age and gender mainstreaming pilot has encouraged the consideration of age and gender differences and inequalities.**

12. The age and gender mainstreaming pilot has had a measurable impact on the UNHCR office in India. There is a general awareness of individual responsibility for applying age and gender analysis to work practice and the way age and gender perspectives are relevant to work, albeit in varying degrees. It has been demonstrated by the pilot that the MFT can play a key role in the understanding of the age and gender approach and encourage the consideration of age and gender differences and inequalities in the general implementation of work responsibilities.

13. It was not possible to measure the extent to which there were changes in attitude as there was no base on which to make the comparison at the time of the evaluation. However, there is general enthusiasm for the project among UNHCR staff, an eagerness to have a deeper understanding of the objectives of age and gender mainstreaming and to further apply this knowledge to their day-to-day work.

14. UNHCR staff stated that the pilot helped bring age and gender into focus and empowered staff to pay attention to subtle nuances in age and gender vulnerabilities, and that a heightened awareness of the issues reinforced internal efforts to achieve gender balance in other areas. One staff member stated that the pilot helped him understand the chain reactions in refugee lives; another said the process was a constant reminder to “think of the other side”.

15. Implementing partners noted changes in process, such as increased brainstorming and networking; how the pilot triggered increased contact by UNHCR staff with the refugee community and how the gender sensitivity workshops opened new avenues for exchange with refugee women.

16. It was also not possible to assess attitude changes among communities of concern, especially given constraints mentioned above. When asked if they had observed any change in their interactions with UNHCR, ethnic Afghan men gave answers that indicated a perceived change in attitude by UNHCR. They said that there were more meetings and they felt that through listening to the refugees’

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<sup>4</sup> UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender issues and the Advancement of Women, Division for Advancement of Women, Office of Human Resources Management. Undated. ‘Facilitator’s Manual Competence Development Programme on Gender Mainstreaming. P.4.

problems, UNHCR and the IPs made positive programming changes. They also appreciated the improved reception area and regular protection meetings with refugees. (Note: The re-opening of the possibility of resettlement clearly played an important role in the positive attitude of the ethnic Afghan group.) UNHCR Staff reported that as awareness grew in the refugee community, women requested female interpreters, and Afghan women attended meetings and spoke up more.

### **Procedures and work processes**

#### **Findings regarding changes to practice and the extent to which the age and gender mainstreaming pilot has encouraged consideration of gender equality and age equality issues at critical decision-making steps of normal work routines.**

17. The age and gender mainstreaming pilot prompted UNHCR India to take a wide range of new initiatives to strengthen age and gender-sensitive approaches in its protection and assistance activities. These initiatives include, for example:

- Beginning to integrate the concerns of men, women, boys and girls into planning and programming. The situational analysis to date has impacted on the COP, IP sub-agreements, and regular reporting.
- Changing the Resettlement Panel to the Durable Solutions Panel, providing a weekly forum to identify and discuss age and gender issues, taking into account specific concerns of particular groups, for example the middle-aged, single ethnic Afghans.
- Modification of the reception area to include separate sections for women, children and the elderly.
- Revision of booklet “Information for Asylum Seekers” to include numbers of help lines for women in distress and children; extension of section on SGBV in the booklet “Information for Refugees.”
- Amendment of form, Standard Operating Procedures for Identification of Applicants for Fast Track Refugee Status Determination Processing (SOP), to highlight forms of vulnerability that a woman could face beyond SGBV, thus widening the concept of women with special protection needs.
- Amending the database to capture age and gender information for visitors on Public Dealing Day.

18. The IPs stated that the pilot has encouraged an age and gender focus on ongoing activities as well as stimulated changes and the development of new initiatives. New initiatives include Hindi language classes for children; programmes for the elderly (“recreation corner”); and a crèche to help working mothers. Changes include more outreach to refugee women, creating separate HIV/AIDS classes for men and women, which has increased women’s attendance. In response to the finding in the participatory assessment that ethnic Afghan women were not comfortable with the male doctor available in the mobile van, VHAD arranged for a female doctor to go out in the van on particular days.

19. The MFT approach has an immediate value in the India context as it has clearly strengthened the team approach and developed stronger linkages with other functional units and with the IPs. Staff, in particular those with relevant expertise, experience and training, have had a significant impact on the strength, efficiency and effectiveness of the team.

20. The MFT in India is composed of three senior national staff members, one male and two female (protection, programme and community services). This arose because at the time of selection, all international officers were being rotated. Their job description and performance appraisal were revised to include age and gender mainstreaming work.

21. UNHCR staff stated that, through mainstreaming, they have become more proactive in finding ways to prevent and reduce problems before they arrive by being aware of age and gender issues and addressing particular risks. The Deputy Chief of Mission observed that protection and programme teams addressed age and gender issues separately, and from a different perspective, in the past. For example, a refugee's SGBV problem was seen from a protection perspective, and not holistically from both a programme and protection perspective. Now, rather than addressing a case like this as an individual protection problem, the Office of the Chief of Mission (OCM) India looks at a cycle for the individual and as a result identifies problems earlier.

22. OCM India was able to make non-budgetary changes (i.e. revision of forms) while reallocations within the existing budget supported some initiatives during 2004. In 2005, the Representative's senior secretary position was converted into a Programme Assistant post in order to support the Community Development approach. Going forward, increased resources will be required to support progress on mainstreaming.

23. An evident change is the use of participatory assessments in the office's work process in the form of structured dialogues with refugee groups. A UNHCR staff member described the pilot as giving UNHCR staff a "renewed understanding of the importance of communicating directly with people of concern", and an opportunity for the office to "move from social welfare to community development."

24. Contact with refugees groups in a structured dialogue form was limited prior the age and gender mainstreaming pilot. Refugees and IPs have noted an increase in UNHCR staff contact with refugees as a result and welcomed the UNHCR staff's dialogue with different members of the refugee population. After the initial field assessment, UNHCR continued to "reach out" to the different communities by inviting them to regular open house meetings or organizing focus groups with various communities. These meetings were held while ensuring a gender balance or holding separate meetings with women, men and children. Women, who had taken part in a participatory assessment in late 2004, indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to meet separately from the men. Although frustrated with what they described as UNHCR's "inability to solve their problems," they would gladly participate in further similar meetings to search for solutions together.

25. Notwithstanding the benefits of the contacts, a developed, planned and systematic interaction with refugee community groups was not in place at the time of the evaluation and still needs to be implemented as a mainstream function.

26. The new participatory assessment tool provides a standard assessment and evaluation process for information gathering and analysis on protection and well being of refugees and persons of concern. This tool, in addition to being complex is time consuming and if it is to be used regularly, consistently and efficiently will need to be resourced.

27. OCM India filled the Programme Assistant post (GL6 level) with a person with a strong community services background whose time is dedicated to improving contact with the community and carrying out participatory assessments. The MFT has, to a certain extent, delegated this responsibility to the programme assistant and will participate in assessments if their schedules permit it. One MFT member said that the more she carried out the participatory assessment and was away from her office, the longer the waiting time for RSD interviews would become.

28. The programme assistant will not be able to carry out her/his functions efficiently alone and it is imperative that she/he is continuously supported by staff from other units, in particular by staff with protection expertise. It is important to build understanding and ownership of the participatory assessment process at all levels of the Office.

29. The team has been stable since its formation. There is a risk that a MFT with static membership could delay the mainstreaming process. As one MFT member indicated: "the challenge is to keep everyone involved." A rotating multi-sectoral team approach would greatly contribute to the dissemination of policy priorities to all staff in the office, thus overcoming weaknesses inherent in the practice of designating focal points.

30. Clearly additional efforts are required to establish the age and gender policy as integral to the ethos of UNHCR. The role and responsibilities of the MFT adequately reviewed after the initial pilot phase could be fundamental in achieving this.

31. A general perception of the staff, voiced by many, was that the MFT should be retained as a feature by which all staff members with relevant qualifications and ability could be given training in the methods of the age and gender approach to continue to disseminate the strategy and knowledge to implementing partners.

### **Management leadership**

**Findings regarding changes in managerial behaviour and the extent to which management has taken an active role in providing guidance to staff about objectives and responsibilities for age and gender mainstreaming, and provided a supportive environment for staff to explore issues and approaches**

32. The COM has played a key role in initiating, supporting, and lending credibility to the effort to mainstream age and gender perspectives into the India operation; this was also the view of the staff. The COM viewed his role as "limited to kick-starting the process" after attending the meeting of Representatives in Geneva; that meeting itself showed that HQ attached importance to the project. Although initially sceptical of the idea of Multi-Functional teams, the Chief of Mission set up the team and proceeded to support it.

33. The COM demonstrated his ongoing support and ensured momentum by endorsing the use of staff time to undertake the participatory assessment and travel for the workshop in Amman; corresponded with implementing partners; ensured that the midterm review took place and reviewed the document; mentioned the pilot during periodic staff meetings; and let staff know he was interested in the progress.

34. Leadership is now held accountable for age and gender mainstreaming; it is included as one of the COM's annual objectives and he recommends it be included as a managerial competency. According to the Deputy Representative, "It's a given that it is part of Senior Management's role" and this leads to a proactive approach to the issues.

### **Pilot methodology and delivery**

#### **Findings regarding the extent to which the age and gender mainstreaming pilot was delivered effectively and appropriately, highlighting areas of learning and for improvement.**

35. The preparation period for the pilot was considered by MFT members as too short. The members considered that they were not adequately briefed on the purpose of the pilot, the field assessment and the relevant tools and the expectations of the mission from Geneva. The background information was provided without sufficient lead-time. The participatory assessment tool arrived as a long document and more guidance in its application would have been appreciated. The MFT team would have preferred that the documents (introduction to the project and the participatory tool) had been sent earlier and that there had been a "space" (ideally a week) between the field assessment and the workshop for discussion, analysis of the data and debriefing. In addition, it would have been helpful if HQ were clear in advance about how the assessment should be organized; this would also have helped to prepare and brief the implementing partners.

36. The value of the participatory assessment was that it sent the team into the field; made them talk to women separately, and for the first time, to children as a separate group. The assessment also helped the transition from "welfare" mode to the community development approach. The main limitation for the MFT was that the assessment was rushed.

37. The primary benefit of the workshop was considered to be the fact that a comprehensive work plan came out of it and concretized the process. The rights-based versus needs-based session was highly rated; more gender focus was recommended. Inconsistent preparation among the country teams attending the workshop (Amman) was a hindrance. Overall, it was also thought that more training was needed in the overall methodology to be used and much more so in training in the community development approach.

38. The MFT found it challenging and time consuming to incorporate the pilot after the sub-agreements with implementing partners were already finalized.

39. The MFT would have welcomed feedback from Headquarters on their own progress as well as information on the progress and experiences of MFTs in other pilot countries. It is suggested that HQ should provide more detailed training in the

project as envisaged by them, in the methodology to be used in the contacts with persons of concern, and give some indications as to what can be explained to them when they ask what additional benefits they will derive from these contacts. In the absence of those or other inputs over time, the MFT members saw the support they had received as a one-off event.

## Learning and recommendations

### Learning

40. At this juncture, more can be said about the process than the impact on the lives of refugees, although refugees apparently appreciated the increased and more open dialogue.

41. The methodology of the project has had enthusiastic acceptance by UNHCR staff and their implementing partners and if conducted in a strategic and structured manner will engender the information and knowledge that would enhance the implementation of age and gender mainstreaming.

42. The absolute commitment to the mainstreaming of age and gender by Representatives is an essential prerequisite to success. Direct oversight and management of the process including the tool of the MFT by the Representatives is necessary for ensuring that staff will have full understanding and incorporate age and gender perspectives in their daily work.

43. The participatory tool should be applied thoroughly and in a structured manner in order to guarantee the continuity of the benefits identified by the pilot scheme.

### Recommendations

- The importance of age and gender mainstreaming should be institutionalized at the highest level within UNHCR and directions to that effect should be given to Representatives and senior managers.
- Age and gender mainstreaming needs to be discussed at Representatives' meetings to receive the statement from top management regarding its importance. (COMs from the earlier pilots could present their experiences.)
- The methodology should be identified in a directive from HQ and applied during the roll out. These directives should include information on:
  - How to involve the persons of concern in these discussions, to direct their thinking from personalized needs and how they could collectively cooperate to assist the process.
  - How to project the interest of UNHCR and the type of information that will be required by the Office.
  - How to encourage the full participation of implementing partners and how to obtain from them information relevant to the process.
  - How to educate and include host governments.
- HQ guidance is required on the life expectancy, ongoing role, structure and evolution of MFTs. Does the team continue as originally constituted, or

does membership revolve among other staff and partners? Does the MFT evolve from a catalyst to something like a review committee?

- More interim feedback from HQ; comparative input and sharing of experiences from other pilot countries and guidance on how linkages between various tools and initiatives (SGBV Guidelines and regional workshops, Protection Learning Programme, Standards and Indicators) can be strengthened.
- All staff members with the qualifications and experience should be further trained in and held accountable for applying the directives developed by UNHCR in the above recommendation.
- All trained staff should at one time or another participate as members of the MFT so that knowledge gained from their participation would be incorporated automatically into their day to day work.
- Managers need to identify the MFT members who have demonstrated the greatest competence so that these persons can participate in a team or teams designated to train staff in other operations during the roll-out.
- Resources should be allocated for training on age and gender awareness and participatory approaches but part of a wider human resources development. The focus should be on field methods but also on improving communication and analytical skills.
- Baseline data should be gathered by DOS before the roll out so that subsequent monitoring and evaluation can assess the impact of the project.

### **Overall conclusion**

44. Determined, structured, clear and ongoing efforts will be needed at Headquarters and in the field to change entrenched attitudes, modify establish approaches and to overcome UNHCR's operational environment.