

# Livelihoods



## Key message

Everyone has the right to a livelihood. For displaced persons, the loss of livelihood might engender a number of protection risks, as it affects the psycho-social well-being of individuals by lowering self-esteem. Generating income during displacement not only improves the quality of life for individuals; it helps avoid protracted dependency and exposure to further discrimination and abuse.

Although livelihood programmes, as such, may not be sustainable, they should aim to sustain livelihoods in both the short term to save lives and the long term to build resilience and address vulnerability

## 1. What are sustainable livelihoods?

**Livelihood** refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living, i.e. to secure food and income through a variety of economic activities. A **sustainable** livelihood is one that enables a person to<sup>2</sup>

- Cope with and recover from stress and shocks,
- Maintain or enhance his/her capabilities and assets,
- Provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation,
- Contribute net benefits to the community in which he/she lives.

**To achieve these objectives, livelihood programmes** cover a range of issues including community mobilization, development of leadership skills, non-formal education, vocational training and skills-training programmes, income-generating activities, food or cash-for-work programmes, apprenticeship placement projects, micro-finance schemes, agriculture programmes, business start-up programmes, seeds and tools projects, animal husbandry projects and self-employment and job-placement programmes.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The disruption of livelihoods in the context of internal displacement


When displaced persons can no longer rely on known ways of generating income, they have difficulty to adjust to new markets, learn new skills and fully integrate with surrounding communities. This situation triggers a larger number of protection risks, which may seriously affect many aspects of an individual's life and the life of the host community in a variety of ways, such as:

- The disruption of livelihoods might aggravate **the trauma and stress** already caused by conflict or disaster. Prolonged humanitarian assistance will make it more **difficult to become self-reliant**. The earlier livelihood interventions take place, the easier it will be for displaced persons to regain their self-esteem and their ability to be self-reliant. Close cooperation between psycho-social services and livelihood-support organizations is important in ensuring an innovative approach to each intervention (see Part IV.11).

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Livelihoods Connect, *Creating Sustainable Livelihoods to Eliminate Poverty*, Institute of Development Studies, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Longley, C. and Maxwell, D. "Livelihoods, Chronic Conflict and Humanitarian Response: A Synthesis of Current Practice," Overseas Development Institute, London, UK, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *Women, Girls, Boys and Men, Different Needs Equal opportunities*, IASC, Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, December 2006.

- The lack of livelihood can also trigger **family separation**, with parents having to leave their children or older relatives behind to find work. **Children might have to abandon their schooling** to contribute to their families' income.
- **Sexual abuse and gender-based violence** is often a grim consequence of the lack of sustainable livelihoods, affecting particularly displaced women, girls and boys who might be forced to provide sex in exchange for food and basic supplies.
- In some displaced societies, **men may find themselves unable to play their traditional role** of “breadwinner”, as gender roles might have been re-defined during displacement. This can lead to loss of self-esteem, abuse of alcohol or drugs and increased domestic violence.
- **Surrounding communities might perceive the presence of displaced persons as a threat** to their already scarce resources, leading to discrimination and exclusion, particularly in regard to the labour market.
- **Interventions that focus only on identifying sustainable livelihoods for IDPs may create tension with host population** and negatively affect the ability of displaced persons to find durable solutions. Livelihood interventions for the host communities, when they face similar constraints, can contribute to peaceful coexistence and ensure that the livelihood strategies intended for internally displaced persons are sustainable.
- **Authorities might view livelihood interventions as a way of consolidating a specific durable solution and hampering others.** For instance, a government trying to facilitate the return of displaced persons might be concerned that livelihood support in areas of displacement might promote local integration and discourage return. A dialogue with the government can help reach the understanding that the promotion of self-reliance should be seen as the precursor to any of the three durable solutions (return, local integration or resettlement) (see Part VI). 

### 3. The role and responsibility of the State

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The government and public service providers have primary responsibility for ensuring that the environment is conducive to achieving self-reliance. Displaced persons, however, often face considerably more obstacles than other civilians in achieving sustainable livelihoods because of the loss of their own assets and strategies, disputes over lost land and property, and the breakdown of their previous socio-economic support networks. This requires the State to take specific actions to support displaced persons in developing sustainable livelihoods during and immediately after their displacement. These include:

- Ensuring non-discriminatory access to public services, such as health, education, social welfare and housing loans to secure a stable and dignified environment so that displaced persons can become self-reliant.
- Developing an appropriate legal and administrative framework to enable displaced persons to have access to the labour market while taking into account their specific needs, including recognition of academic and professional credentials, non-discriminatory job-recruitment policies and psycho-social support.
- Respecting and promoting freedom of movement of displaced persons for economic purposes.
- Integrating the development of IDP livelihoods into national development programmes and poverty-reduction strategies.
- Securing all areas related to livelihoods and strengthening the rule of law to protect the assets and activities of displaced persons in their attempts to become self-reliant.

## 4. The role of human rights and humanitarian actors: the protection response

When there is a crisis, the international community tends to mobilize its efforts and resources to respond to the most urgent needs (food, water, shelter, health) of displaced and other affected populations. Livelihood interventions are broadly regarded as pertaining to the post-emergency phase. However, after the first year of displacement, when the international attention has been moved to a new crisis, many displaced persons still find themselves dependent on a rapidly decreasing amount of assistance and with few opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

**Early involvement by reintegration and development actors** and joint programming between them and protection agencies is vital for maximizing the protection impact of humanitarian interventions. The Protection Cluster/sector or working group needs to work closely with the Early Recovery and the Agriculture Clusters, and with other relevant clusters/sectors, to develop a joint approach to development, humanitarian assistance and generic protection interventions. Livelihood interventions should thus be part of a multifaceted strategy to further the realization of legal, social, cultural and economic rights of the displaced and other affected populations.



### In our work we can...

#### 1. Assessment (see Part III.1)



Through a joint assessment exercise:

- Identify **pre-displacement household livelihood strategies** and economic and traditional roles, particularly with regard to the control of resources and assets, mobility, access to markets and access to and administration of resources. A thorough understanding of how income used to be generated will help ensure that livelihood interventions promote gender equality and the maximum use of existing resources within the community.
- Identify, through participatory assessments, the skills and capacities as well as the **economic coping strategies during displacement**, focusing on various age and gender groups. Ensure that the results inform the design of livelihood projects and build on existing coping strategies specific to each group. What may be appropriate for demobilized combatants, for example, might not be appropriate for female heads-of-households or older persons.
- Be sensitive to **skills and activities that might be unproductive** or even seen as undesirable from different perspectives (i.e. undignified, discriminatory, unsustainable, overloading of local market, lack of markets for products produced).
- Assess the livelihood situation of all groups in the **local community**. The results of this assessment should be used to identify areas of intervention among the most affected populations. Commission an **analysis of the local market** to identify local production, workforce and services in the public and private sectors.
- Identify instances of **discrimination in accessing vital natural resources**, such as water, firewood or land, and try to understand the reasons (whether economic, political, or other) and its impact on displaced persons' access to livelihoods.
- Consult with displaced persons to identify the **barriers** they face in accessing **national programmes** that give access to greater livelihood opportunities, such as micro-finance institutions, housing loans, etc.

#### 2. Coordination and partnerships

- Promote **practical exchange of knowledge** and experiences among human rights/protection staff involved in livelihood programmes to ensure protection aspects are integrated into programming and delivery of livelihood interventions. ➔

- Liaise with agencies promoting self-reliance, livelihood and development to ensure that **livelihood-support programmes are launched from the outset of displacement** along with food aid and other emergency interventions.
- Within the **Early Recovery clusters or sectors, ensure cooperation** between humanitarian agencies and national and local public institutions to develop a common livelihood strategy and to ensure inclusion of livelihood programmes for IDPs in national poverty-reduction strategies.
- Advocate for **livelihood projects that promote peaceful coexistence**, reconciliation and conflict prevention, such as by setting up vocational training centres benefiting both IDPs and surrounding communities.
- Promote close cooperation of **psycho-social and health institutions** with employment and income-generation projects to strengthen the link between trauma recovery and self-reliance.
- Where feasible, mediate for the **incorporation of IDP leadership and associations** into existing local structures, such as municipalities or unions, to support economic and social integration.

### 3. Protection monitoring and reporting (see Part IV.1)



- Monitor **instances of discrimination against IDPs in accessing public support schemes**, such as credit schemes and agricultural programmes. Ensure that discriminatory policies and procedures are reported and addressed by the relevant actors, including national authorities, local unions, and development and humanitarian actors.
- Monitor the **security aspects** that affect the sustainability of livelihoods in IDP and other affected communities, such as freedom of movement for economic purposes, arbitrary detention, the presence of mines in agricultural fields and roads and local markets (see Parts V.3 to 6).
- Identify **instances of child labour** and ensure adequate livelihood support to families with the aim of eradicating such practices. Refer cases of children performing work that may be hazardous or harmful to their development and growth to specialized organizations so they can be immediately removed from dangerous environments.
- Monitor possible **increase in local commercial sex work** (women and girls selling sex for their survival) and identify any possible links with the increase of internally displaced persons and their lack of alternative and dignified livelihoods. Identify exploitative and trafficking networks and ensure that national mechanisms for protecting victims of trafficking and exploitation are activated (see Part V.7).
- Closely monitor criteria and procedures for accessing livelihood support programmes and micro-finance schemes, particularly to **identify instances of economic and sexual exploitation**, including by humanitarian workers involved in implementing these programmes.
- Monitor the **viability of IDP settlements** to ensure that they allow for the achievement of sustainable livelihoods. This should take into account the economic situation in the area, affordable housing or the possibility of building new houses, access to land and markets, attitudes of the host community and availability and access to services. If in-depth monitoring leads to the conclusion that a certain settlement is not viable, ensure that local authorities are engaged in finding alternative solutions (see Parts IV.12 and V.13).
- Monitor whether or not **procedures for recognizing educational or professional qualifications of IDPs** and other affected populations who lost their documentation are in place and, if so, whether they are simple, transparent and effective.

#### 4. Community participation and mobilization (see Part IV.10)



- Identify existing **community-level traditional support mechanisms**, formal and informal leadership structures, self-help groups, management committees, community-run care facilities and social clubs that can be supported by the international community to maximize their capacity. This is particularly important in situations of **urban displacement** or rural dispersion, where it is difficult to identify and reach IDPs directly.
- Support **existing local and traditional livelihood strategies in host communities** and promote the participation of IDPs in their structures, such as in traditional group-based micro-finance, small holders associations, producers associations and market committees.
- Ensure **differentiated livelihood support strategies** to address the specific needs of IDPs and members of the host community, depending on the particular protection risks they face. Make sure that IDPs participate in the design and development of these strategies. Be aware of:
  - **Persons with disabilities**, including those with disabilities resulting from trauma and/or conflict-related injuries, who may require specific support to identify suitable employment opportunities.
  - **Single heads-of-households** who might require additional support to access self-reliance activities through community-based day-care centres where they can leave their children while they go to work.
  - **Youth** (above 18 years old) **formerly associated with armed groups** who require dedicated support for their reintegration into civilian life. Generating youth employment is vital for providing an alternative to warfare as a mean for living.<sup>4</sup> Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should be promoted.
  - **Ethnic minorities** who are often exposed to increased levels of discrimination, including by displaced communities. Supporting the development of a certain skill or area of work can lead to improved social status in the society.
  - Groups or individuals who prefer to remain in **hiding** close to their areas of origin will require tailored income-generation support that can be undertaken from their hidden locations while ensuring that their products can reach local markets.
- Assist in the **organizational development of IDP community groups** and associations that include members of the host community. This will enable IDPs to assume an active role in their new community and provide valuable services to others. IDPs' efforts to reconstruct their livelihoods greatly depend on the reconstruction of such community-support networks.

#### 5. Skills development and (re) training

- Support livelihood programmes that help develop **skills that match local market needs**. Target however the less saturated areas of the local market, which may also help prevent possible tensions between the displaced and host communities.
- As far as possible, work to **overcome traditional gender patterns for division of labour**, thereby ensuring that women and men have access to non-traditional professions, such as women working in construction as carpenters, plumbers or accountants.
- Focus skill development and **re-training programmes** on activities that do not require using the host areas' limited natural resources as a way of facilitating reconciliation.
- Support the implementation of **quick orientation programmes** for groups or individuals with specific needs, such as persons who are illiterate, prior to skills-training programmes to ensure that they can participate.

<sup>4</sup> This can be done by, for instance, including youth in reconstruction and rebuilding projects, such as restoration of vital transportation routes or health and education facilities.



- Support and encourage the design and implementation of **two-phase skills and vocational training activities** that allow participants to ‘graduate’ from the training and have access to a start-up grant or loan to facilitate links between the skills acquired and self-reliance.
- Promote **re-certification and re-credentialing programmes** in situations where IDPs already have the necessary skills to match local market needs, but do not have professional or academic certification due to lack or loss of documentation.

## 6. Legal aid, counselling and human rights advocacy (see Part IV.5 and IV.3)



- Provide **legal aid and legal counselling to IDPs and national actors to overcome and eradicate instances of discrimination** concerning livelihoods. Often, this includes:
  - Providing technical advice for the establishment of an adequate legal and administrative framework for local institutions.
  - Supporting and advocating for the development of concrete measures allowing IDPs’ access to opportunities and services on a comparable basis to those in the surrounding communities.
  - Through advocacy with local authorities and training of IDPs, facilitate women’s access to documentation, education, health services, social assistance programmes, and employment and property rights.
  - **Provide** training materials and programmes to staff of relevant ministries, local health and education providers and local social assistance offices to promote better understanding and knowledge of these rights.
  - Promote the inclusion of a “**fair and non-discriminatory treatment clause**” in the **Code of Conduct** of national civil servants and high standards of conduct in job descriptions.
- Support IDPs in **accessing natural and productive resources and assets** to re-build their livelihoods. Oversee restitution and compensation mechanisms in cases of land disputes. (see Part V.10)
- In situations where stealing of livestock has been widespread, support the establishment of a system for the restitution of the livestock that will contribute to the local reconciliation process.
- Promote **mechanisms to ease administrative procedures for IDPs to access employment** in the public and private sectors. Ensure an appropriate balance between emphasizing the specific needs and the equal rights of IDPs to avoid undue categorization or marginalization.
- Advocate for State support for the **recognition of academic and professional titles** and certification, particularly of individuals who lost their documents during flight and violence. Promote technical guidance for recognition procedures, if required (see Part V.1)
- Advocate for the clear regulation and respect of **labour rights**. Advocate for the development of national institutions that can support “decent work conditions,” such as cooperatives, unions, administrative tribunals, labour courts, and social insurance bodies. **Unions and cooperatives** are particularly strong public actors that seek to uphold the socio-economic rights of their workers/employees. As such, they can often become highly effective advocates for IDPs and other affected communities.
- Promote “**life skills**” **support programmes** in conflict-resolution, negotiation, peaceful coexistence.
- Promote rapid and well-conceived **income-generation support immediately following displacement** to help restore human dignity and help people avoid illegal or unsustainable strategies.





### 7. Material, technical or financial assistance

(see Part IV.4)



- Work with relevant clusters and sectors for **multi-dimensional projects** covering all required services, including housing, health, employment, because livelihood needs are interlinked.
- Ensure that **material and financial assistance** for livelihood opportunities also involve and target individuals or groups with **specific needs in host communities** to avoid creating tension between IDPs and surrounding communities.
- “Mainstream” as many livelihood projects as possible into State services through specific coordination and hand-over structures
- Advocate with relief and development agencies for the implementation of projects aimed at **strengthening the absorption capacity of host communities** by investing in and/or upgrading infrastructure, community services and the local economy.
- Support the development of sustainable assistance and community-support projects to assist **IDP and other affected communities to care for older persons, persons with disabilities** or other members of the community with specific needs in order to fill the gaps left by the disruption of family-based economies and care structures that existed prior to displacement.
- Support national and international efforts to create employment and development **opportunities for all in places of return or new settlement**, regardless of gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Agree with all stakeholders, including IDPs, on clear, transparent and protection-oriented **criteria for phasing out** assistance and livelihoods programmes that will be handed over to long-term development programmes. Material and financial aid for livelihood programmes should continue until IDP livelihoods are self-sustaining or until support through national institutions is available and sustainable.

### 8. Evaluation and monitoring

(see Part III.3)



- Develop and agree with relevant partners on **benchmarks for self-reliance** in a given displacement situation. IDPs and the other affected communities should be closely consulted in order to arrive at criteria that are relevant, realistic, specific and measurable within a given period. Use these criteria to measure progress of humanitarian and early recovery interventions.
- Take part in debriefings following programme evaluations and use monitoring reports to follow up on identified **protection concerns** that threaten the effectiveness and success of livelihood interventions, such as security threats, discrimination in accessing resources, gender inequality or lack of resources from or training by the public administration.

## 5. Key legal principles and standards

The right of internally displaced persons to access sustainable livelihoods is primarily rooted in the principle of **non-discrimination, the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to work**. Access to **education** and adequate **health** care are also closely linked to the ability to develop a sustainable livelihood. In turn, achieving sustainable livelihoods is considered a prerequisite for the exercise of other fundamental rights.

The **right to an adequate standard of living**<sup>5</sup> encompasses several more specific rights, including the right to food, the right to water, the right to clothing, and the right to housing.

<sup>5</sup> Art. 11 of ICESCR; See also General Comments 7, 12 and 15, Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The **right to work**<sup>6</sup> refers to the right of everyone to the opportunity to earn a living in a safe work environment, and also provides for the freedom to organize and bargain collectively. This right also prohibits the use of compulsory or forced labour.

The **Guiding Principles** on Internal Displacement<sup>7</sup> establish that internally displaced persons shall not be discriminated against as a result of being displaced, and refer to the right to **freely seek opportunities for employment and participate in economic activities**.

The right to an adequate standard of living and the right to work do not mean that the State is obliged to provide houses or jobs to everyone. Rather, it is a basic obligation of States to **take steps**, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical to achieve the **full realization** of these rights.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of **humanitarian relief operations**, however, this means that the State is required to **provide** goods and services, such as shelter, food and water, to persons who, due to the circumstances, are unable to satisfy their basic needs. If a state is unable or unwilling to guarantee a minimum level of each right, international human rights law requires that the State seek international assistance.

**International humanitarian law (IHL)** includes the prohibition of attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. This prohibition is a norm of customary law and applies in both international and non-international armed conflicts.<sup>9</sup> These objects include crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works. The list is not exhaustive and includes other productive assets together with medicines, clothing and shelter.

IHL also **prohibits the use of starvation as a method of warfare**, a customary rule that applies in international and non-international armed conflicts. Starvation used as a weapon of war constitutes a war crime under the Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>10</sup> Under IHL, this rule does not prohibit the use of siege to achieve a military objective. However, when conducting such military operations the parties to the conflict are to respect another customary rule of IHL: they “must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without adverse distinction, subject to their right of control.”<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Key stakeholders

A credible livelihood programme will require that IDPs and other affected populations are at the centre of the initiatives taken and will involve close cooperation with the IASC Country Team, the government, and development actors such as the World Bank, UNDP, ILO, FAO and bilateral agencies. There should be coordination mechanisms within the Ministry in charge of internal displacement, and among other ministries, particularly those responsible for planning, finance, labour and economic development, agriculture, health, housing, education and public order. Protection and assistance programmes for IDPs should be incorporated into national development plans and poverty-alleviation initiatives.

Discussions with donors should involve suggestions how they can best contribute to self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods. Members of the international community can use their influence and “good offices” with national authorities to advocate for sustainable livelihoods for IDPs.



<sup>6</sup> Art. 23 of UDHR; Art. 5 (e) (i) of ICERD; Arts. 6 and 7 of ICESCR.

<sup>7</sup> Guiding Principles 22 and 29.1.

<sup>8</sup> Art. 2 of ICESCR

<sup>9</sup> Rule 54, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Vol. 1: Rules.

<sup>10</sup> ICC Statute, Art. 8 (2) (b) (xxiv).

<sup>11</sup> Rule 55, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Vol. 1: Rules. Art. 54 (2) Protocol I, Art. 14 Protocol II.





## References

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- *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action: Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs, Equal Opportunities*, Inter-agency Standing Committee, 2006.
- *Guidelines for Social and Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, ILO Crisis Response and Reconstruction Programme (to be released end of 2007).
- *Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities*, UNHCR, Geneva, 2004.
- *Handbook for Self-Reliance*, UNHCR, Geneva, 2005.
- *UN Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*, available at [http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/iddrs\\_guide.php](http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/iddrs_guide.php)



## Useful websites

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- Livelihoods Connect, Support for Sustainable Livelihoods <http://www.livelihoods.org>
- UNDP, Crisis Prevention and Recovery  
[http://www.undp.org/cpr/we\\_do/early\\_recovery.shtml](http://www.undp.org/cpr/we_do/early_recovery.shtml)
- United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre  
<http://www.unddr.org>