



Country evaluation  
of the age and gender  
mainstreaming pilot project

*Colombia*

## **Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

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# Executive Summary

Following three independent evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and the role of community services, UNHCR launched a 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.

At the time of the evaluation, the participatory assessment from an age and gender perspective had only recently been completed by the Office in Colombia. The needs and priorities identified by the field assessment have yet to be incorporated into the planning and programming, thus it was not possible to evaluate how the situational analysis has impacted the operation.

The age and gender mainstreaming pilot project was well received after initial scepticism and the results indicate that there is high potential for success. There can be initial challenges to introducing the age and gender mainstreaming project in an office in which awareness of gender issues is high and gender perspectives are to a large extent already incorporated in work programmes.

The age and gender mainstreaming pilot project in Colombia has reached a critical juncture. The next months will establish if the information and knowledge gained from the participatory assessment and analysis is efficiently and effectively used to improve planning and programming. Expectations from staff and partners are very high.

Time, familiarization and commitment by all staff to the tools of the age and gender mainstreaming project are needed for the benefits of the project to be realized. The long term value of the approach has been recognised by the office in Colombia and it is felt that the tools used would enhance mainstreaming. It is recommended that this initiative continue in Colombia.

**The key recommendations for the future development of the age and gender mainstreaming initiative in Colombia are as follows:**

- HQ should ensure that the initial Representatives meeting in Geneva on age and gender mainstreaming at the start of the project is maintained. All persons taking up posts as Representatives should be given a fundamental knowledge of the principles and objectives of UNHCR in introducing age and gender mainstreaming into all the functions of his/her Office.
- The Representative should establish an accountability structure, develop a permanent chain of command for

implementation and identify the responsibilities at each level through the Performance Appraisal (PAR) process which would enable him/her to monitor and measure efficiency and effectiveness.

- The Deputy Representative should continue to chair the multi-functional team (MFT) and with other MFT members participate in field assessments on a regular and scheduled basis. He also should be responsible to the Representative for ensuring that instructions from the MFT to the Field Offices are carried out.
- All staff, including those of the Field Offices, should be involved in the work of the MFT in the Branch Office with the aims of developing a wide dissemination of the objectives and modalities of the MFT and to increase the number of staff familiar with the programme across the country operation. Whilst it is understandable that consultants are used, it does not meet the objectives of mainstreaming.
- MFTs composed of UNHCR staff and partners should be established in the Field Offices. This would help to ensure continuity and inclusiveness.
- The Chair of the MFT, with inputs from Staff who are members, should present to the Representative a semi-annual briefing report on the progress, functions, challenges and future needs of the MFT together with any suggestions for improvement that may come to light from experience.
- UNHCR should ensure that the participatory assessment becomes an ongoing and scheduled process, with wide staff and partner involvement.

**The key recommendations for the proposed wider roll out of the initiative are as follows:**

- HQ should ensure that the participatory tool is user-friendly, translated into the UN working languages and takes into account the specificities of the beneficiary caseload.
- Field Offices should look at how and in which form to share the results of the participatory assessment with the UN country team and with people of concern.
- Future workshops and training organized by HQ should be tailored to suit the specific needs of each office with tools structured to take into account factors such as the participant culture, level of knowledge and skill and group size.
- HQ should ensure that there is clear understanding of the differences between POP and the new participatory tool and why one has replaced the other.

- HQ should facilitate the initial sharing of information and experiences on age and gender issues between country offices in particular regional offices or operations with similar caseloads.



# Introduction

## Background to the evaluation

1. Following three independent evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and the role of community services, UNHCR launched a 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>1</sup>. Evaluations have taken place in Zambia, Colombia, India, Egypt, Syria, Greece, Venezuela and Ecuador<sup>2</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 Colombia evaluation. The Colombia programme operates in an urban setting.
4. The evaluator would like to thank the Representative 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 rollout 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 evaluator 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

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<sup>1</sup> This evaluation should be read alongside the Mid-Term Reviews which contain additional examples of impact.

<sup>2</sup> Meetings were also held with Jordan and Lebanon projects to explore impact and learning. Findings are presented separately as 'Notes for the File'.

ways of working. The impact is thus less clear to measure than in a more quantitatively defined initiative.

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. This evaluation was based on semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Interviews were conducted on a one to one basis as well as in groups.

9. Stakeholders interviewed:
  - UNHCR desk staff in Geneva
  - UNHCR Branch Office staff and staff in the field, members and non members of the MFT and the Representative
  - Relevant partners: Opción Legal and UNIFEM.
  - IDPs in Pasto department. Separate small meetings were held with women, men and adolescents. The evaluator spoke to a large group of 8 to 10 year old school children and separately with their teachers.

10. A document review was also conducted and included workplans, project submissions and other relevant documents.

11. At the time of the evaluation, the participatory assessment<sup>3</sup> from an age and gender perspective had only recently been completed by the Office. The needs and priorities identified by the field assessment have yet to be incorporated into the planning and programming, thus it was not possible to evaluate how the situational analysis has impacted the operation. Meetings in Bogotá with Branch Office and relevant field staff were scheduled for mid February 2005 to discuss the incorporation of the results of the assessments into the 2006 COP.

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<sup>3</sup> Participatory assessment refers to the element of situation analysis that involves participatory discussions with refugee communities.



## Findings

12. 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.**

13. UNHCR in Colombia has for over a decade worked towards ensuring gender equality perspectives in analysis, data collection and activities. Since 1999, UNHCR and its partners have been working with what they call the 'differential approach', a method of analysis that takes into account age, ethnic origin and gender. It is in this context of a high level of awareness of age and gender issues that the pilot project was introduced to the UNHCR team and their implementing partners.

14. The age and gender mainstreaming approach was initially met with scepticism and was not generally perceived as useful as could be observed from the comment of one staff looking back at his initial reaction at the start of the project: "After 15 years of gender efforts in Latin America, we don't need another workshop, we need to get the work done." However, reservations slowly diminished as the Multi Functional Team (MFT) was formed and the benefits of the situation analysis tool were recognized as the incoming Representative took an interest in the implementation of the pilot project. The Representative stated that since August 2004, there had been a positive change in the belief that the pilot project could contribute to the objective of mainstreaming.

15. Several UNHCR partners have said that they have noticed a positive change of attitude on age and gender issues in some UNHCR staff members since the start of the pilot project. Others have noted that certain staff members fail to recognize that there is need to build on existing approaches. One partner stated that "people need more training to be convinced, one workshop is not enough."

16. The age and gender mainstreaming pilot project has today reached a critical juncture. The next months will establish if the information and knowledge gained from the field level assessment and analysis is efficiently and effectively used to improve planning and programming. Expectations from staff and partners are very high. A representative from UNIFEM, who participated in all stages of the pilot commented that, "what is not changed in practice, is not changed."

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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.

## 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. There is broad agreement that the two main achievements of the Branch Office during the pilot project were the creation of the Multi Functional Team and the inclusion of age and gender perspectives in the review on the Colombian government's public policy on internal displacement.<sup>5</sup>

18. From the onset there was consensus that all units should participate in the MFT. The MFT in Colombia is composed of staff from Public Information, Community Services, Protection and Programme units. The Deputy Representative is the chair who describes the MFT as a "coordination body." The MFT has met regularly since its creation and concentrated its efforts in the first months on revising the situational analysis tool and reviewing the draft evaluation report. At the time of the evaluation age and gender mainstreaming and the implementation of relevant policies were not incorporated into the Performance Appraisal (PAR) process.

19. The objectives outlined in the workplan have been met. These included designing a gender sensitive checklist for public information staff, reviewing and adapting the situational analysis tool and protection and programme training modules to incorporate their "differential approach" and completing the participatory assessment.

20. It is the view of most UNHCR Colombia staff members that the leadership of the incoming Representative and the creation of the MFT were two developments that led to the strengthening and improving of the overall team dynamics within the Branch Office. The MFT is seen by partners and staff in the field as an important decision making forum and an essential tool towards mainstreaming but at times lacking in dynamism and an action oriented approach. Within the MFT there is broad agreement that too much time was spent in the initial months on discussing and planning the implementation of the pilot.

21. The coordination with the Field Offices is described by staff as being the main aspect that needs to be elaborated. There appears to be no permanent mechanism for the MFT as a group to interact with the Field Offices or with implementing partners. A UNIFEM staff member commented that it was unclear from UNHCR's side who was leading the debate. MFT members tasked with the coordination and the follow up with the field offices felt that at times their messages were disregarded by field staff. Heads of Field Offices were unanimous in their opinion that the MFT in the Branch Office needed to be more pro active and take into account field perspectives.

22. At times effective implementation of the age and gender mainstreaming pilot was hindered by rotation or lengthy absences of key staff in the field. Another important constraint identified by the MFT and staff in the field was the heavy daily workload. One MFT member stated that: "The pilot is very ambitious; you can't stop doing your normal work."

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<sup>5</sup> Balance de la política pública de prevención, protección y atención al desplazamiento interno forzado en Colombia, agosto 2002 - agosto 2004.

23. To overcome these constraints the Branch Office has relied on a consultant to coordinate with the Field Offices the structured discussions with IDPs in the field. This assistance was also welcomed by the certain field offices which relied on the consultant for the data analysis and compilation. At the time of the evaluation, a consultant (IRC surge Gender Protection Officer) had started his deployment with the objective of supporting the Office in the mainstreaming project. The surge Protection Officer has been tasked with the follow up on decisions of MFT members with action in the field.

24. The MFT to a certain extent delegated the coordination of the participatory assessments and will rely in the future on a consultant to assist in the facilitation of the delivery for mainstreaming. It must be questioned whether this arrangement does not detract from the collective responsibilities for mainstreaming and joint ownership of policy priorities by all staff. UNHCR Colombia should build understanding and ownership of the situation analysis tool at all levels of the office. One UNHCR staff member commented that “UNHCR has two responses towards mainstreaming; hiring consultants and organizing workshops. I am a believer in internal teams.”

25. The participatory assessment was carried out by a team composed of a UNHCR consultant, the Community Services officer, a number of staff from the programme Units, UNHCR field staff, a UNIFEM consultant and staff from the implementing partner Opcion Legal. Much of the initial skepticism with the situational analysis tool was overcome as the tool was used in the field. One staff member commented that one of the shortcomings in the past was that “there is inertia with needs analysis; you tend to meet the leaders.” A Head of Field Office explained “we thought that we knew but we discovered more during the participatory assessment” and gave the example of indigenous women revealing during the assessment that they were reluctant to consult health personnel in their areas because they were not female personnel.

26. The IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) interviewed welcomed the participatory assessments and clearly understood the goals and objectives of the exercise. They welcomed the discussions in separate groups and expressed the desire for structured dialogues to continue. IDPs were very critical of the approach of other agencies and explained that they were disappointed with “failed projects with other international agencies because the projects were not tailored to the needs.” The IDPs understood the financial limitations of UNHCR and hoped that the results of the participatory assessments could be shared and become a catalyst for other organizations.

27. A group of IDP women interviewed stated that structured dialogue with IDPs had enabled the leaders to replicate the exercise within their community which allowed them to continue identifying the different needs to be taken into account for their advocacy work. A female IDP leader explained that the group meetings enabled the leaders to be in touch with the community at large, as UNHCR organised and pays for the transport to the capital Bogotá.

28. The tool is viewed today by most stakeholders as essential and contributed to strengthening the relationship between UNHCR Colombia and the implementing partners. However, UNIFEM, who participated in situation analysis in certain field locations and welcomed the opportunity, stated that they would have preferred to

make a more planned contribution to the exercise and felt that their relationship within the UNHCR framework was dictated by the urgent need of the UNHCR Office. This criticism is shared by UNHCR's main implementing partner in Colombia, Opcion Legal. Both organizations indicated that they felt that they had not been properly included in the data analysis phase. Establishing MFTs at the field level with implementing and operational partner staff could be one way to ensure continuity and inclusiveness.

29. Life expectancy of the situation analysis tool according to the Deputy Representative "will depend if it provides comprehensive help." The test, according to MFT members, will be on the analysis that incorporates the findings of the structured participatory assessment is used in developing protection strategies, Country Operation Plans (COPs) and project submissions. This process of information gathering so far is widely perceived by UNHCR Colombia staff as a task.

### **Management leadership**

**Findings regarding changes in managerial behavior 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**

30. The current Representative started his assignment in Colombia in August 2004, eight months after the start of the age and gender mainstreaming pilot project. There was no handover on the project from the outgoing Representative. The current Representative did attend the meeting in Geneva on the age and gender pilot project with the Representatives from the other pilot countries. He considers that meeting as key for the "buy in" of the project by the Representatives.

31. His role, as he saw it, was to "push things forward." The Representative acknowledges that "when things come from the Representative, they have a different impact." In terms of following the process he said that he felt that he had a responsibility as Representative to respond to the initiative and that it was part of his professional esteem to do so. On the other hand, he is burdened by other priorities and he cites the work-load as the main constraint to being involved further.

### **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.**

32. As mentioned above, the meeting with the Representatives in Geneva is perceived as an important step of the process. The high level attendance contributed to strengthening the message and its importance. The Representative in Colombia stated that HQ is "pushing us, it's like the Sword of Damocles."

33. Workshop participants interviewed acknowledged the importance of having the workshop. However, whilst recognizing that the level of understanding among participants differed, there was a general feeling that a more in depth discussion was needed around the different concepts presented and that the workshop was

generally too basic. One UNHCR staff member stated that he regularly consults UNDP and World Bank WebPages for technical advice on how to effectively carry out participatory assessments. There was also a general feeling that the participatory tool was a “repackaged version” of POP.

34. The participatory tool was considered by the MFT as too long, too elaborate and conceived mostly for a refugee camp population. The MFT with cooperation from UNIFEM created a simplified version tailored to a non camp IDP caseload in the form of a practical guide in Spanish on how to implement the situational analysis.<sup>6</sup>

35. The MFT commented that they believe that they would have benefited from information contained in the workplans of other pilot countries, in particular from UNHCR operations dealing with urban caseloads.

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<sup>6</sup> Guía practica para implementar el Análisis Situacional.



## Learning and recommendations

### Learning

36. There can be initial challenges to introducing the age and gender mainstreaming project in an office where awareness of gender issues is high and gender perspectives are to a large extent already incorporated into work programmes.

37. Time, familiarization and commitment to the tools of the age and gender mainstreaming project are needed for the benefits of the project to be acknowledged. It is important to have a functioning MFT whose members adhere to their Terms of Reference, a strong coordination mechanism between the Branch and Field Offices and involvement of partners throughout the process.

38. The new situational analysis tool is essential, but time consuming and if it is to be used regularly, consistently and efficiently, will need to be resourced. The heavy work load of the staff is a constraint towards participating in the structured discussions with IDPs. However, this function needs to be incorporated in the daily work and the use of consultants could delay this and the mainstreaming process.

39. The commitment to the principle of age and gender mainstreaming by Representatives is an essential prerequisite to success. The creation of permanent structural modalities and overall management of the process including the tool of the MFT by the Representatives is necessary for ensuring staff enthusiasm and their own commitment to fully understand and incorporate age and gender perspectives into planning daily work functions.

40. It could be in UNHCR's interest to share the results of the participatory assessments with the UN country team.

### Recommendations

**The key recommendations for the future development of the age and gender mainstreaming initiative in Colombia are as follows:**

- HQ should ensure that the initial Representatives meeting in Geneva on age and gender mainstreaming at the start of the project is maintained. All persons taking up posts as Representatives should be given a fundamental knowledge of the principles and objectives of UNHCR in introducing age and gender mainstreaming into all the functions of his/her Office.
- The Representative should establish an accountability structure, develop a permanent chain of command for implementation and identify the responsibilities at each level through the PAR (Performance Appraisal Report) process which would enable him/her to monitor and measure efficiency and effectiveness.

- The Deputy Representative should continue to chair the MFT and with other MFT members participate in field assessments on a regular and scheduled basis. He also should be responsible to the Representative for ensuring that instructions from the MFT to the Field Offices are carried out.
- All staff, including those of the Field Offices, should be involved in the work of the MFT in the Branch Office with the aims of developing a wide dissemination of the objectives and modalities of the MFT and to increase the number of staff familiar with the programme across the country operation. Whilst it is understandable that consultants are used, it does not meet the objectives of mainstreaming.
- MFTs composed of UNHCR staff and partners should be established in the Field Offices. This would help to ensure continuity and inclusiveness.
- The Chair of the MFT, with inputs from Staff who are members, should present to the Representative a semi-annual briefing report on the progress, functions, challenges and future needs of the MFT together with any suggestions for improvement that may come to light from experience.
- UNHCR should ensure that the participatory assessment becomes an ongoing and scheduled process, with wide staff and partner involvement.
- Look into the options of forming a Regional MFT for the next phase. This may allow for tapping into a higher level of resources as well as addressing common issues around Colombia case loads.

**The key recommendations for the proposed wider roll out of the initiative are as follows:**

- HQ should ensure that the participatory tool is user-friendly, translated into the UN working languages and takes into account the specificities of the beneficiary caseload.
- Field Offices should look at how and in which form to share the results of the participatory assessment with the UN country team and with people of concern.
- Future workshops and training organized by HQ should be tailored to suit the specific needs of each office with tools structured to take into account factors such as the participant culture, level of knowledge and skill and group size.
- HQ should ensure that there is clear understanding of the differences between POP and the new participatory tool and why one has replaced the other.
- HQ should facilitate the initial sharing of information and experiences on age and gender issues between country offices in particular regional offices or operations with similar caseloads.

**Overall conclusion**

41. The age and gender mainstreaming pilot project was well received after slight scepticism and the results indicate that there is potential for success and the initiative should therefore continue in Colombia.



42. As the project progressed the long term value of the approach has been recognised as has the value of the tools for enhancing mainstreaming. The level of success achieved can also be attributed to the high level of age and gender sensitive work that had been in practice in Colombia prior to the pilot programme.

43. The pilot project has helped in the understanding of the meaning of mainstreaming and has permitted the inclusion of past practices on age and gender to be systematically structured to the lessons learned during the pilot project.