

Encouraging Self-Reliance



A survivor of Typhoon Haiyan
builds a boat for livelihood
purposes in eastern Samar,
Philippines



UNHCR / J. MAITEM

Refugees everywhere want to stand on their own feet. Self-reliance means that people can make their own choices, provide for their families, and plan for their future.

This contributes to rebuilding confidence and hope for individuals who have lost so much during displacement.

Self-reliance is often achieved through productive work, such as owning a business or engaging in a profession. However, many refugees and other people of concern to UNHCR do not have access to employment in a safe environment, leaving them dependent on humanitarian assistance. ●●●

UNHCR's livelihoods programmes seek to expand opportunities for self-reliance by linking refugees' capabilities and communities to local markets as consumers, business owners and workers, and advocating for the right of displaced people to work. Such efforts can help refugees to live a more productive, more dignified existence and avoid aid dependency. Examples of ongoing and planned initiatives in this respect are presented in this chapter.

For 2015, UNHCR is planning corresponding interventions in its programmes across the world in five main areas: data collection and analysis; strategy development in targeted countries; partnerships; learning; and capacity building.

UNHCR'S GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR LIVELIHOODS

UNHCR's five-year Global Strategy for Livelihoods provides the direction for its interventions through to 2018. The strategy is framed around four objectives designed to foster self-reliance from the onset of an emergency.

The first objective is to build the conditions needed to create an enabling environment, including the right to work, use of local training and financial services, and access to land, water, and other productive resources. In Ecuador, for instance, UNHCR has negotiated access to financial services through a local bank, allowing refugees to open bank accounts and receive basic financial counselling. Since the agreement with the bank in June 2014, 130 refugees have opened bank accounts, and some refugees have started discussions with the bank about access to microcredit options.

The Global Strategy's second objective focuses on helping refugees to maintain their productive assets in displacement and meet immediate consumption needs. This means

preserving or recovering livestock and other capital when possible, and providing sufficient food, household goods, cash and services to prevent refugees from further depleting their assets. UNHCR has helped preserve the pastoralist way of life for nomadic Tuareg herders from Mali by organizing a trek across the desert to bring the refugees' animals to safety in Niger, and negotiating access to land and water for the refugees to continue their way of life as pastoralists instead of placing them in camps. The Office is currently carrying out a study of this process, hoping to draw lessons learned that can be applied to other contexts.

Helping refugees to enter the job market is the third objective of the strategy. Refugees are supported to acquire the skills to find jobs, adapt existing skills to local conditions, create their own businesses, and access the services they need to achieve financial stability. UNHCR and partners provide many training programmes according to local needs. Some form part of a wider approach to help people move away from dependency to join the work force. The Graduation Approach, originally developed by the BRAC Development Institute and the Ford Foundation, uses a combination of social protection, training and microfinance to move people out of extreme poverty. Over the past two years, UNHCR has launched pilot projects in Egypt, Costa Rica and Ecuador which bring the Graduation Approach to urban settings and the refugee context for the first time.

The Global Strategy's fourth objective recognizes the need to learn from experience and build on successful approaches to livelihoods development. Using such experience, UNHCR has identified several areas that require new approaches. One of these is the transition from food assistance to durable solutions in protracted refugee situations. Through a series

of joint evaluations, UNHCR and WFP have concluded that current approaches to food assistance are hampering self-reliance, and are piloting new strategies to link food assistance to self-reliance programmes in Chad and Uganda. South Sudan was originally included in the pilot programme, but was stopped owing to the current emergency.

Evidence-based programming – built upon context-specific assessments of the population, including economic indicators, levels of education and skills, interest and motivation – underpins the strategy. UNHCR is scaling up its use of frameworks and tools such as the Household Economy Approach to better understand how families at different income levels cope with displacement. This data, combined with local market assessments to determine which products or skills are most in need, and value-chain analyses to identify opportunities in the supply chain, will allow UNHCR to make better decisions on how to structure programmes to achieve maximum impact.

Partners from the private sector, government, academia, international organizations, and international and local NGOs will be involved in putting the Global Strategy into practice. In July 2014, UNHCR hosted the first meeting of the Livelihoods Advisory Board, which brings together 12 prominent experts in areas such as rural development, vocational training, financial and marketplace literacy, social protection, private-sector partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation. The Board will help guide implementation of the Strategy and link UNHCR to the expertise and partnerships needed to strengthen and professionalize UNHCR's livelihoods programming.

BUILDING BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

UNHCR has developed two important initiatives in 2014 that link refugee workers to opportunities with private-sector employers. Both endeavours help build refugees' self-reliance while contributing to peacebuilding and protection.

In Lebanon, UNHCR and partners have helped foster connections between Syrian artisans and Lebanese designers and entrepreneurs. Syrian artisans are well known for their skills in inlaid wood, hammered metal, embroidery and crochet. These unique skills are useful for Lebanese design companies, allowing them to incorporate diverse crafts into their furniture, household goods, and clothing and jewellery designs, developing new product lines that would not be possible without the Syrian artisans' skills. This partnership allows refugees to practice, update and improve their skills while in displacement, continuing their traditions and generating income, and increases the marketability of Lebanese crafts with new styles. UNHCR is currently seeking international retailers for these products, and aims to expand the project to other countries that may benefit from lessons learned in Lebanon.

In India, UNHCR is developing a partnership with a local NGO – *Anudip* – to train refugees in market-aligned information technology skills. *Anudip* works with employers to quickly place graduates in jobs such as customer service, retail, banking, and call centers. After training, many graduates acquire jobs with *Anudip*'s private-sector partner iMerit, a global IT outsourcing social enterprise that enables urban poor to become part of the value chains of multinational client companies. UNHCR is currently working to identify companies that may be interested in outsourcing data work to iMerit, thereby offering possible employment opportunities for refugees.

COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY ACCESS (CTA)

As part of ongoing efforts to draw on technology in its livelihoods interventions, UNHCR is finalizing a strategic plan to give new direction and momentum to CTA programming, in order to improve learning and employment opportunities for refugees and pursue new approaches for internet access. The Office also launched the UNHCR Exchange platform in 2013 that enables staff, partners and refugees to create and access learning content in line with their economic realities. Refugees in 57 locations are able to take online courses, create learning content for other refugees, search for jobs and access microwork internet-based employment. The platform will be modified in late 2014 to include an offline version for use in locations without reliable internet access. The modifications will also introduce a user-friendly course creation tool. This tool will

allow refugees to create courses for other refugees, and to earn money teaching them new skills. UNHCR will continue training refugees in video production and course creation in order to meet the context-specific learning needs of refugee entrepreneurs.

UNHCR Exchange will also allow humanitarian and development practitioners and experts to share information and interact with each other in theme-specific communities of practice. The platform already has hundreds of users and is expected to grow throughout 2015 and beyond. The CTA programme is exploring for-profit approaches to support sustainable internet access in areas where the local market has yet to accommodate refugee access needs. An incentive loan programme will encourage investment in internet centres or cafes, while ensuring adherence to humanitarian protection standards. ■

AREAS OF INTERVENTION ANTICIPATED IN 2015

EXAMPLES

Basic needs and essential services

Self-reliance and livelihoods

Improve data collection and analysis for targeting, planning and monitoring of livelihoods programmes

- Data on refugee education and skills profiles including Household Economy Approach (HEA), market assessments and value-chain analyses in four countries (Ecuador, Egypt, Chad, and Costa Rica) will provide accurate mapping of potential for income generation.

Develop multi-year self-reliance strategies in priority countries

- Strategies that link refugee profiles and market opportunities will be developed in four countries.

Establish new partnerships that bring needed expertise

- Initiatives in rural livelihoods, value-chain development, technology access, marketplace literacy and impact sourcing through new partnerships with local and international organizations will be expanded.
- Access to services, resources and market opportunities for refugees will be increased through new relationships and partnerships.

Increase UNHCR's expertise in livelihood programming through enhanced learning opportunities

- Learning opportunities in livelihoods and solutions-related areas will be improved through four field studies.
- Learning opportunities with partners and development networks will be identified.

Expand field capacity to deliver quality livelihood programmes

- Five additional expert livelihood practitioners will be recruited.
- Learning and exchange opportunities will be increased through the UNHCR Exchange platform.

Implement the Graduation Approach in five countries

- The Graduation Approach will be adapted to three new contexts, including one rural location.

CAR refugees have little in their pockets, but bring skills and enterprise

This article is an adapted version of a UNHCR news story

11 APRIL 2014

GORE, April 2014 |

Asia and her family had no time to pack their belongings. "I had to spend most of my cash, 10,000 FCFA (about USD 20), to get to Chad. We had nothing when we arrived and I had to feed my children," she says.*



UNHCR/M. FARMAN-FARMAIAN

Asia has used her cooking skills to establish a small business that provides enough income to support her family and employ a friend. UNHCR is working to make CAR refugees arriving in Chad self-sufficient.

Since early 2013, an estimated 23,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) have fled violence and human rights abuses and crossed the border into southern Chad.

Traumatized by the violence they have fled, the majority of refugees from CAR opt for relocation to a refugee camp where they receive food and basic household items, as well as access to potable water, shelter, education and health.

Asia, 48, arrived in Chad in April 2013. "When we fled, I had no idea where I was going" she says. "I just followed my relatives into the bush."

Asia and her four children made it to Chad but her husband, a truck driver, was killed by

militants on the way. "The rebels just came and destroyed. They stole, they killed and they burned. Nobody knew what they wanted."

With little left and needing to care for her children, Asia invested the last of her money on ingredients for cakes. In the main market of Dosseye camp, Asia, wearing a colourful skirt and a bandana around her head, carefully displays her homemade galettes (sweets), perfectly golden brown, in her newly-constructed stall.

"I made a little profit from the first batch of galettes and borrowed a little more money," says Asia with a smile, "so I could also make bouillie (a local porridge made of peanuts) and boule with sauce." It proved very popular.

Today, Asia has not only paid back her debt, but her profits allow her to support her family and send her children to school.

UNHCR has re-oriented its strategy in Chad to focus on promoting the self-reliance and livelihoods of the refugees. Income-generating activities, micro-credit, skills training and capacity building in management and maintenance services are among the activities.

The Office hopes to use the experience and expertise of refugees like Asia to help others re-establish their lives, gain socio-economic stability and return to normality. This will also prepare refugees for the time when they return to their homes. "My advice to other refugees," Asia says, "is not to sit around

with their arms folded, but to pull themselves together and do something to make a better life for themselves." ◦

**Name changed to protect the individual.*