



Examining Accountability, Gender and Protection in WFP's Cash Based Programme in Iraq

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Introduction

In any humanitarian emergency, it is crucial to deliver timely food assistance while maintaining open contact with crisis-affected households. This ensures that assistance is provided in the most appropriate, effective and efficient way, and enables vulnerable families to meet their food needs. In doing so, assistance must adhere to a people-centered approach. This means that the affected populations are consulted regularly in order to ensure that their needs and preferences are considered and that humanitarian workers remain accountable to crisis-affected populations. This approach is guided by the overall framework for "Accountability to Affected Populations" and "Communicating with Communities". WFP regularly meets with its affected communities to strengthen and mainstream this people-centered approach in its programming in Iraq.

Background

The unrestricted cash modality was piloted in Iraq, based on WFP Iraq's 2016 priorities and a growing body of evidence from the region on the effectiveness of cash transfers. This evidence reveals that, when provided with unrestricted cash and freedom of use, food, along with rent, is among the highest priorities for most vulnerable families. The pilot was implemented in urban and peri-urban areas in the Akre District of Ninewa governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). It aimed to provide food assistance to support 800 Syrian Refugees in the Akre Castle refugee camp, and about 10,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in and around Akre municipality, including in Bijel, Banasur, Dinarta and Kardisan.

Rationale

Several monitoring and evaluation exercises were conducted to gauge the effectiveness and relevance of the pilot project for meeting food security needs, in addition to interviews and focus group discussions. This helped to further investigate how cash affected people's lives, how gender roles in decision making related to food were affected and how accessibility to markets were impacted. The pilot helped to improve understanding of the implications, both positive and negative, of cash programming for gender and protection.

As a result, WFP set up Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) as a strategy to establish two-way communications with IDP communities

throughout the project cycle. The aim of these interactions was to establish a dialogue with communities to learn if cash-based transfers were improving lives or at least doing no further harm to beneficiaries. AAP also helps to reveal more information on the new modality and the effect it could have on gender and community dynamics. The aim is to see if beneficiaries support the intervention, feel empowered to make informed decisions and have better control over managing the food needs of their family. This relates to the idea that increasing dialogue with people complements accountability, monitoring, impact evaluation and programme design. Affected populations therefore become stakeholders in the assistance process.



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Methodology

From February to May 2016, WFP conducted a series of focus groups and interviews (both in person and via telephone) with IDPs through its field staff. The focus groups were held with beneficiaries in urban as well as rural areas both before and after the intervention's roll out.

The aims of the focus groups conducted before the pilot intervention were to find out:

- How beneficiaries are meeting their existing food needs
- What food assistance they get
- What their main concerns are
- Which modality of assistance they prefer and why
- What their living context is, with regards to food assistance, gender and protection.

Once the beneficiaries received their cash assistance, the same participants, consulted

¹ Department for International Development, 'Value for Money in Cash Transfers in Emergencies', February 2015; Danish Refugee Council, 'Lebanon UNHCR 2013 - 2014 Winterization Cash Program, Post Distribution Monitoring Report', November 2014; International Rescue Committee, 'Emergency Economies: The Impact of Cash Assistance in Lebanon' (An Impact Evaluation of the 2013 - 2104 Winter Cash Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon). August 2014; and UNHCR / WFP, 'Examining Protection and Gender in Cash and Voucher Transfers', September 2013.

before intervention were consulted again to understand:

- How cash-based transfers have changed the way they are purchasing and using food
- If unrestricted cash assistance has changed (positively or negatively) levels of dignity, empowerment and safety, and how
- Impact of the project on social dynamics at the household and community level

Participation

Out of 12 participants of the focus group held in the centre of Akre, five were female heads of household. All participants were middle aged (between 40 and 65) and came from Ninewa (Qaraqosh, Ba'shiqa, Sinjar, and Mosul). These participants had been receiving in kind assistance from WFP since January 2015.

From June 2015 onwards, they were assisted with paper vouchers until February 2016. The people invited for discussion were those who met WFP's targeting criteria. They were invited for a discussion a week before receiving cash assistance. They were informed about WFP's targeting criteria. On average, the consulted households had eight family members.

The participants in Dinarta presented the views of communities in rural areas. Dinarta is a sub-district with around 6000 households, including 162 IDP households. The participants of the focus group were among the 72 households which met WFP's targeting criteria. The average family size of each participant was ten people. Christians, Muslims, Yazidis, Shabaks and Turkmans live together in Dinarta. There are certain Shabak communities who speak the Shabaki lanaguge, which is different to Badini, another Kurdish variant spoken by the host community of Dinarta. The participants were receiving inkind rations prior to cash assistance.

Findings

Pre- Intervention

The participants of the focus group in the centre of Akre said that both WFP's monthly food rations and other actors' vouchers were not sufficient to meet their food needs. In terms of quantity, with monthly food rations they were stretching the assistance for 10 days or so. In terms of quality, they said that monthly food rations didn't give them the liberty to cook anything other than what was provided.

"We hardly ate any vegetables or meat for lunch",

said 53-year-old Wahida from Mosul. Wahida is a widow and a head of household. In terms of quality, some participants commented on the quality of rice given by WFP in monthly food rations. Some of them sold specific food items to buy different or better quality items. Most of them were buying additional food, utilizing savings or buying food on credit. Abbas Abid, 43 from Sinjar, said that he has to employ his boys as casual labors in order to overcome the debt the family is in. Abid said, that previously his boys were attending to school.



WFP/Phyza Jameel

In Dinarta, the participants said that WFP assistance was complemented with PDS rations which they were intermittent: "If we receive PDS rations, WFP's oil, rice, lentils, salt and sugar is almost complete, we don't have to buy much more food from the market," Muhsin Qassim, 48 years old, said. Muhsin has 12 people in his family.

The situation is not the same for all families. 51 year old Hussein Mansour has 3 adults in his family who are sick with chronic diseases and cannot work. The 75 year-old Abdelsattar, with 12 family members said that WFP monthly food rations are consumed very quickly, especially oil, sugar and wheat flour.

Abdelsattar did not like the quality of rice, and said that he was selling it for IQD 2000 (around USD 2) to buy another quality of rice.

With regards to existing protection and safety risks, the participants were comfortable in sharing their experiences, as they continue living with host communities. None of the participants of the focus groups in Akre and Dinarta faced safety risks or challenges. Most of them enjoyed good

relationships with local authorities and host communities. One contributing factor was that most of the participants said they were living with their relatives and they could easily integrate in host communities. When the focus group was held, targeting criteria had not been rolled out, and so there were no IDPs excluded from WFP's assistance. Female participants claimed that Akre was a safe place, and they were comfortable accessing places such as markets.

They found Akre safe and the people of Akre respectful. In Dinarta, some Shabak families faced problems with communication, due to the difference in dialect, but they found the local community helpful.

Accessibility to markets and options were found to be much better for participants in Akre, than in Dinarta where people were buying items from farmers instead of from markets. To buy other food items such as wheat, rice and oil there were a limited number of shops.

When asked which modality of food assistance they would prefer if given a choice, all preferred cash assistance. They claimed that it would be easier for them to buy food according to the specific needs of their whole family. Some families preferred cash to prioritize other needs along with food, such as water and at times medication. In 70% of households, women were found to make the decisions on how to utilize food assistance given by WFP.

Most of the participants have cell phones, which served as the best source of information for finding out about assistance. To seek information on other aid, they usually speak to Community and camp leaders (Mukhtars) in their area.

Post Intervention

The participants WFP met before the cash distribution were invited to meet again after receiving the cash assistance. The participants in Akre said that after receiving cash, they were not limited to voucher shops and could even go to wholesale shops to buy commodities at much lower price. Salwa Siddiq, 52, from Ba'shiqa said, that now she could go to shop which is much near to her house, and no more have to spend money on transportation. Wahida Ali, who is head of household, said that cash assistance had helped her to buy food from multiple shops, and she could now make choices on what to buy, when to buy and from where to buy, to meet her needs.

Participants also said that when receiving vouchers, they had to spend the whole amount at once, where as with cash, they could save money to buy fresh food, such as milk and vegetables, on a daily basis. Some participants were also found to be using cash on needs other than food. For example Intisar Bahnan, 42 years old woman from Mosul said that she saved some of her 80\$ entitlement given by WFP for her monthly medication.

In Dinarta, participants said they were mostly buying oil, rice and sugar with the amount given by WFP, keeping some small money on the side for other needs. "With my cash entitlement I bought missing commodities, such as oil and wheat flour", said Abdur Rehman Tawfiq from Mosul. With Dinarta being a small place, options are limited meaning that most of the cash assistance is actually spent on food rather than on other items.



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Further discussions were held in order to see if receiving cash had exposed people to any discrimination or safety issues. As no major safety or protection cases were reported, but there were some exceptional cases. Khalid Habib Youham, 42 from Qaraqosh said in a separate interview to WFP that his neighbors had noticed that he is one of the few ones who is getting WFP's assistance. "There are many families who are no longer receiving assistance from WFP, due to targeting criteria, the ones who are no longer on assistance sometimes pass teasing remarks to me," said Youham. WFP plans to improve communication with host communities and excluded beneficiaries to get them understand WFP's targeted assistance, to avoid jealousy at the community level. Iandal Haben from Mosul said she buys poultry and dairy products with her USD 50 entitlement. She said she faced no issues as she thinks that

as a female-headed household, the community has empathy with her as a vulnerable household. For Iandal she was thankful for the support of the community.

In Dinarta, Abdur Rehman Tawfiq said that instead of food he spends his USD 30 entitlement on medication for his son. When asked how he meets his food needs, Tawfiq said that his family relies on PDS and money earned through casual labour work. Jamila Abid, 55, is a widow and a single member in her family who qualifies for WFP's targeting criteria. Her son, who is not receiving assistance from WFP, said that he found it unfair, and was not happy that only his mother got assistance and not him.

On Gender dynamics at the household level, there had been some slight trends noticed in gender roles in decision-making. As the decision remains with women on what to buy for food through unrestricted cash, they are dependent on male households to access markets in some cases, which is primarily due to cultural reasons.



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