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ANNEX
Cityscape: Taking stock of new initiatives
in response to urban refugee needs

Assisting refugees in urban settings:
Lessons learned and program models

Introduction

This is an overview of the breakout sessions during the 2010 UNHCR/NGO Consultations workshop entitled: “Making it work: From policy to practice in urban settings.” There was a rich discussion that benefited from the extensive experience of participants in protecting and assisting refugees in urban settings. Drawing upon this wealth of first-hand, practical knowledge, participants shared lessons learned in cities across the globe and described approaches and program models that have proved effective in addressing the many challenges faced in urban settings.

The sessions noted the particular characteristics of the urban refugee population that should be considered when designing and implementing urban programs:

- Urban refugees tend to be more mobile and dispersed within cities.
- Interventions are needed not only in large, capital cities but in smaller cities within a country.
- Partnerships are critical at all levels, with national governments, local/municipal authorities and civil society.
- Governments may have different legal frameworks; therefore approaches to assisting urban refugees may vary from country to country.
- To avoid parallel structures and programming for urban refugees, all stakeholders should advocate for access to existing services, whenever possible.
- Shifting needs and circumstances of urban refugees requires flexibility in program design and implementation.
- The nature of urban displacement may require multi-year funding.

LESSON LEARNED 1: Involve non-traditional actors, create new alliances and “entry points” for assisting urban refugees; expand services wherever possible.

HIAS/Argentina – In Nicaragua, advocated with local banks to allow refugees to open bank accounts. Banks also agreed to give micro-credit to refugees.

Asylum Access/Ecuador—Advocacy with banks and explaining how laws applied to refugees led to amending refugee documents to become compatible with the banking system (adding one more digit to their ID number). This enabled access to banking services such as check-cashing.

Kituo cha Sheria/Kenya— Initially launched as a local NGO that provided legal services to poor and marginalized Kenyans, it expanded services over the years to also address the needs of refugees in Nairobi. By training local magistrates and other local government officials on refugee/asylum law, the NGO managed to create a spirit of partnership which enabled it to address legal issues.

Jesuit Refugee Service/Cambodia – Worked with a local NGO that provides trauma counseling for Cambodians and now also serves refugees.

PURE, Indonesia – Developed linkages with local markets to enable the sale of rice and fish produced by refugees.

Myanmar Red Cross: The Mine Risk Education project being implemented by the MRC and funded by UNHCR to support and provide services to mine victims has also served as an entry point for assisting urban refugees.

LESSON LEARNED 2: Create linkages and alliances with “like-minded” groups to work on rights issues that also are relevant to refugees; build ties between refugees and local communities.

GTZ/Nairobi: Blend refugees with local groups, for example, workshops that might be held for elderly members of the local community can include elderly refugees.

Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights Cairo: Works with women’s rights groups within the country to include issues around rights of refugee women.

Sin Fronteras/Mexico – Created alliances with a group of feminist therapists offering non-formal psychosocial counseling, creating a space for women refugees to talk with each other and come up with solutions.

LESSON LEARNED 3: Create networks or committees to help collectively resolve urban refugee issues and do case management

Urban Refugee Protection Network/Kenya—Comprised of local and international NGOs, UNHCR and municipal authorities, the network allows for holistic interventions and helps to avoid duplication given limited resources. It also encourages the use of existing structures rather than creating new ones.

Solutions Committee/Ecuador and Venezuela – UNHCR and NGOs discuss best solutions for individual refugee cases, work in partnership recognizing that the solutions can be different for each refugee.

House of Rights/Costa Rica – Established under agreement with municipal authorities to be a kind of “one stop shop” where international organizations, civil society, local municipal authorities and development organizations work together under the same roof and provide

services to migrants, refugees and low-income nationals. Services provided include legal advice, micro-credit, psychosocial support, etc.

International Medical Corps/Jordan— A mental health and psychosocial coordination group was formed, which currently consists of 60 organizations working to ensure that gaps are identified and overlap is avoided. The plan is for the group to be eventually led by the Ministry of Health.

Sin Fronteras I.A.P. – Has established a network of lawyers to reach out to migrants in detention centers and provide legal assistance. They visit the centers and educate detainees with regard to the legal process and give special attention to women and children at risk.

Crossing Borders/International Federation of Medical Students Association: Merging the IFMA’s migrant projects under an international umbrella project (Crossing Borders), increased its efficiency substantially. Its website makes educational documents available to all project managers so that they can edit them to meet their needs. It has created a project handbook that documents all activities – both successes and weaknesses – allowing innovative ideas to be shared, mistakes to be learned from and not repeated elsewhere and thorough dissemination through the network provides another form of peer evaluation and resource sharing.

LESSON LEARNED 4: Flexible, more individualized programming and innovative approaches may be necessary to address issues of access to refugees and difficulties in outreach to communities.

Jordan River Foundation: To address issues of isolation, trauma and the lack of strong social networks, a program – ‘Better parenting, Better future’ – was designed targeting mother, fathers and caregivers. Focusing on developing healthy family dynamics and included both Iraqi refugees and Jordanians, it was originally envisioned that the project would take place in a community center. It soon became apparent, however, that although initial research had demonstrated the refugees’ need for and interest in the project, few Iraqis were actually attending the sessions. Focus group discussions revealed that refugees were afraid to leave their homes and travel to the center, so the program was modified to adopt a home-based approach. Iraqi refugees did training in their homes for groups of 10 -20 people. This approach also contributed to creating a social network among the refugee population.

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA: A possible model was proposed for accessing the most vulnerable within the population: UNHCR to partner with NGOs to reach out to local communities and local NGOs to help identify vulnerable refugees and then link them to available services and service providers. This model could be implemented globally.

International Relief and Development/Jordan: Even when the Jordanian Government allowed Iraqi refugee children to attend school, many parents were not sending their children. Iraqi women from the community were hired as community volunteers to help campaign to enroll kids in school.

LESSON LEARNED 5: Refugees should be involved in project design and delivery and viewed as a resource in assisting their community.

UCCB: When developing services to vulnerable populations, refugees were included as staff for their projects in positions such as interpreters, community health workers, etc.

Caritas/Benin: Looks to build on skills and competencies of the refugees within the community. For example, nurses and doctors within the refugee population are engaged in the design of refugee health programs and in developing solutions around health needs. Also, the day that is celebrated for refugee children is organized by teachers within the refugee community and refugee women are engaged in planning and providing meals for the event.

AMERA/Egypt: Their program has been training refugee staff to conduct psychosocial needs assessments and then deploying them to their own communities to assist in implementing the project.

African Refugee Development Center/Israel: Involving refugees in the decision-making process is key. Within the organization, a group of refugees from nine African countries are formally accepted Board members and, as such, help guide the organization. They have also testified before the Israeli Parliament (Knesset).

<p>LESSON LEARNED 6: It is critical to engage the local population, both by including them in the services available to refugees and in education and training of local actors.</p>
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Jesuit Refugee Service/South Africa: JRS invited local leaders to inform them about JRS activities and to encourage their participation. These community contacts helped to strengthen transparency around the activities for urban refugees.

FAHAMU Trust/Hong Kong: Has worked with local universities to provide trainings to law students, law firms and schools around refugees and asylum law.

Sin Fronteras/ Mexico: Has worked with Mexican migration and asylum authorities to inform the civil registration officials of the need to register Mexican-born children of migrants under the provision of Mexican law. This documentation can open doors to other social services.

Jesuit Refugee Service/Cambodia: Advocated with local officials to allow for legal representation for refugees during the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process by making the point that representation serves to increase the efficiency and integrity of the system.

IRC/New York: The suggestion was made that good examples on how to engage local populations may be found within refugee resettlement countries. For instance, there may be approaches used within the US resettlement system, which is often resettling refugees in urban settings, which could be applied elsewhere with regard to educating local government officials and others. Also events such as those around Refugee Day, etc. that bring in the local community help bridge gaps.