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JOINT PROGRAMME EXCELLENCE AND TARGETING HUB

LESSONS LEARNED
MAURITANIA

FEBRUARY 2024

SUPPORTING MALIAN REFUGEES IN MAURITANIA

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNHCR, WFP AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE JOINT HUB

This document captures learning from the process of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) working together to support Malian refugees in Mauritania.

The learning review explores collaborative action in terms of (1) **meeting needs**, through the provision of humanitarian assistance, (2) shifting needs, through refugee inclusion in national social protection systems, and (3) **reducing needs**, through supporting efforts to increase refugee self-reliance.[1]

The findings presented here are based on a learning review mission conducted by the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub (Joint Hub) in November 2023, during which individual interviews and group discussions were held with staff from WFP, UNHCR, the Government of Mauritania and other partners (NGOs, the World Bank, GIZ[2]) as well as with refugees themselves. The learning review used a participatory process of reflection that sought to identify what has worked well and why and any areas for improvement. The learning review focused on four themes:

1. Collaboration between WFP and UNHCR as well as with other key stakeholders;
2. Protection and accountability to affected people;
3. The use of evidence for decision-making;
4. The capacity and human resources required for the ongoing joint work.

The lessons learned reflect the views of the staff and refugees consulted during the learning review, as well as those of the Joint Hub team.

The aim of this learning review is to inform future collaboration between WFP and UNHCR in Mauritania, as well as to inspire similar approaches in other contexts. For the Joint Hub, this review serves to improve the quality of support it provides to WFP and UNHCR country operations.

[1] These three areas of collaboration reflect commitments between UNHCR and WFP at the global level (as agreed at UNHCR-WFP High Level Meeting, 16th March, 2023)

[2] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE IN MAURITANIA

Certain pre-conditions are necessary for refugee inclusion

The context in Mauritania was conducive to refugee inclusion in the national social protection system. This is not the case in all contexts. The existence of development funding (primarily from the World Bank in this case), the legal framework, willingness of the Government and capacity of the social protection system are all important pre-conditions for the successful inclusion of refugees.

Adopt a collaborative mindset

When both WFP and UNHCR share a strategic vision of what can be achieved through working together - and have a collaborative mindset and willingness to coordinate - solutions can be found to the inevitable challenges that are encountered and successful partnership can be maintained throughout the process.

Greater investment – by a broad range of stakeholders – is necessary to support resilience and self-reliance and thus reduce refugee needs in the longer-term.

As budgets for humanitarian assistance reduce, both WFP and UNHCR recognise the importance of finding dignified alternatives to assistance dependency, so that those refugees with labour capacity can engage in sustainable livelihoods and meet their own basic needs.

Targeting is not one-off; it is a programmatic approach which needs to be financed and updated on a continual basis.

Greater clarity is required regarding the frequency of joint (re)targeting and appeals processes in the future, in order to include new arrivals and those absent during previous assessments, as well as to re-categorise households whose vulnerability situation has changed dramatically over time. One of the lessons learned expressed by WFP and UNHCR was that the Joint Hub could have put greater emphasis on strengthening the internal capacity of the two agencies (and especially the capacity of national staff) to maintain the targeting approach in the future, as well as providing further support vis-à-vis the implementation of continuous targeting mechanisms.

Joint Hub coordinators should share 'time and space' equally with staff from WFP and UNHCR.

It is important that Joint Hub coordinators divide their time between the offices of both agencies and are thus not perceived as having a stronger affiliation to one agency over the other.

UNHCR/Omar Doukali

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF COLLABORATIVE ACTION

- Meeting needs with humanitarian assistance: WFP and UNHCR successfully developed a targeting approach which is used for both humanitarian assistance and social cash transfers delivered through Government-led social protection programmes. WFP, UNHCR and the Government's Social Registry worked in close collaboration to conduct a joint assessment in 2021; analyse refugees' capacity to meet their basic needs; consult refugees and integrate their perspectives into the targeting approach; and categorise refugees into three vulnerability groups and thus design a needs-based targeting strategy for the delivery of food and cash assistance (implemented from January 2022).

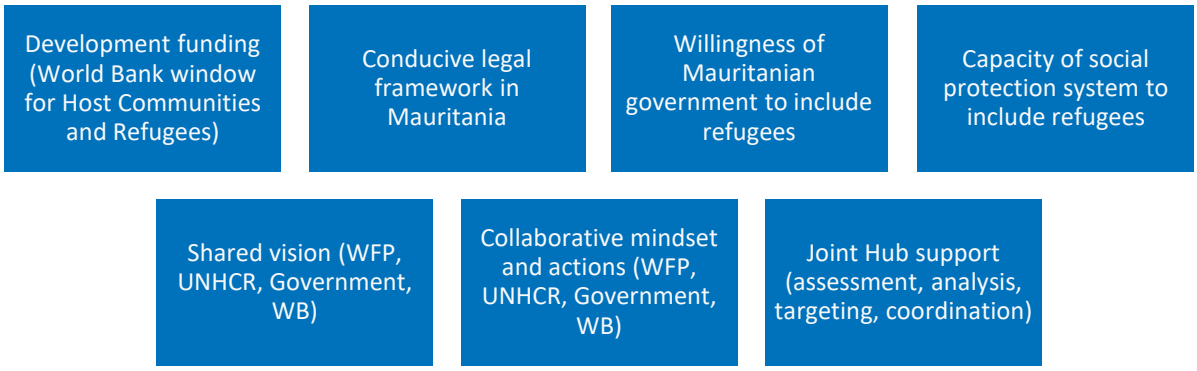
- Shifting needs through inclusion in national systems: the Government of Mauritania, with support from the World Bank, has successfully included refugees in the national social protection system. WFP and UNHCR collaborated with the Social Registry to ensure all refugees in and around M'bera camp were assessed and registered (an ongoing process) and that the most vulnerable were selected as eligible to receive assistance through social protection programmes. The resources required to meet a proportion of refugees' basic needs, on a regular and predictable basis, are therefore partly covered by the national social protection system, thereby reducing the overall burden on humanitarian assistance budgets (though WFP and UNHCR's assistance is also provided in addition, to increase transfer values). While funding for humanitarian assistance is still insufficient to cover all identified needs, the resources available are used to prioritise those who are most vulnerable.

- Reducing needs by supporting resilience and self-reliance: the collaboration between UNHCR and WFP has led to a shared goal of reducing dependency on assistance and to working together to support refugee self-reliance. WFP and UNHCR have also successfully advocated for other partners to improve refugees' opportunities for employment and income generation. However, overall investment in refugee self-reliance remains low and employment opportunities – for both refugees and Mauritanians alike – are relatively limited.

UNHCR/Malika Diagana

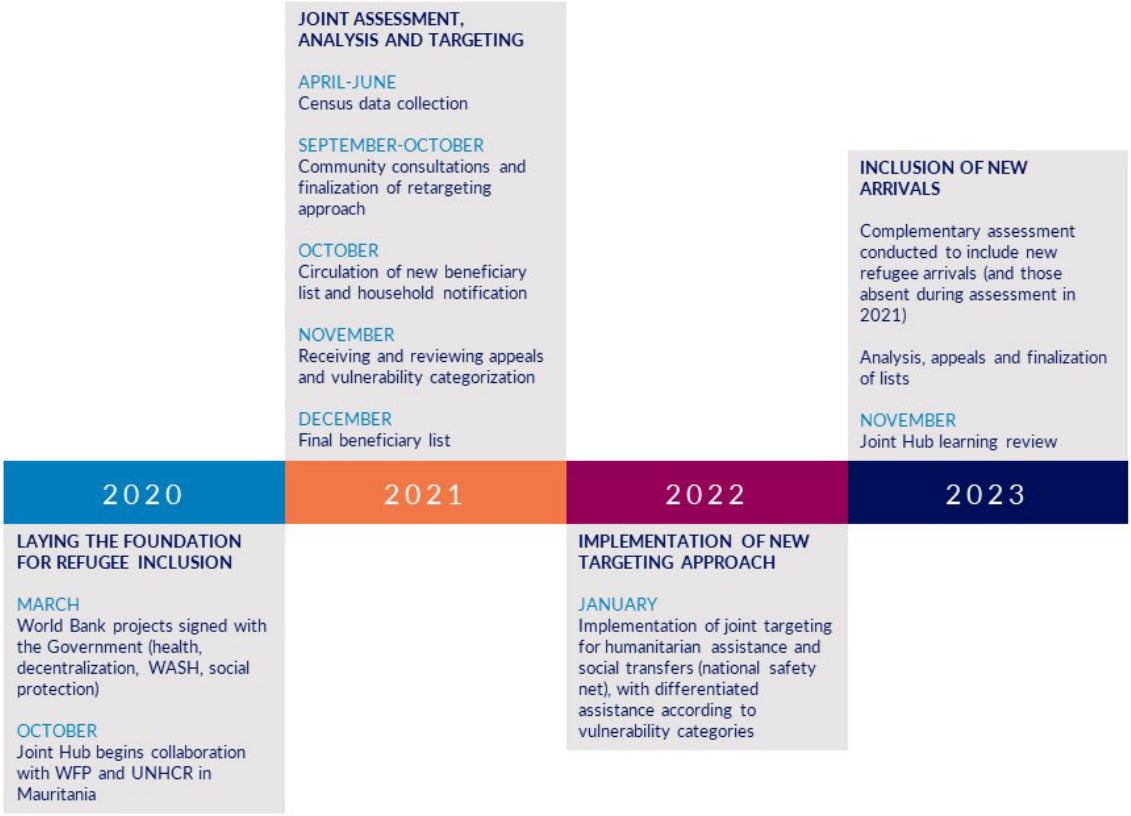
WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THESE ACHIEVEMENTS?

A number of factors converged in 2020 to create the right conditions for collaborative action (as shown in the boxes below). Throughout the learning review, it was argued that these 'pieces of the puzzle' were necessary for successful inclusion of refugees in the national social protection system and for the inception of a harmonised approach for targeting both humanitarian assistance and social transfers.



The primary drivers behind this successful collaboration were the Government of Mauritania and its open policies towards refugees and asylum seekers and the availability of predictable funding from the World Bank, buttressed by WFP and UNHCR's knowledge of and access to refugee communities, as well as the technical solutions facilitated by the Joint Hub. In this scenario, no one single actor could have achieved this result alone, suggesting that timing and partnership are the cornerstones of identifying and building lasting solutions for forcibly displaced people.

TIMELINE: JOINT TARGETING FOR REFUGEES IN AND AROUND M'BERA CAMP



COLLABORATION

WHAT WORKED WELL?

COLLABORATION BETWEEN WFP, UNHCR AND THE JOINT HUB

The collaboration between WFP and UNHCR was consistently described as 'very good'.

Partnership between the agencies has become a reflex, anchored in the way in which staff work together, from senior management to field level staff. A commitment to collaboration and high levels of trust were observed between the two agencies, both in Nouakchott and Bassikounou.

Collaboration with the Joint Hub was highly appreciated.

In addition to regular remote support for assessment, data analysis, accountability to affected people and coordination, the Joint Hub team conducted two in-country technical support missions (in addition to this learning review mission) and deployed two successive coordinators to Mauritania (for 18 months in total). The Joint Hub's support helped to bring UNHCR and WFP together, to align technical approaches and to work with the Government's Social Registry.

Successful partnership was a result of having the right mindset and attitude.

Since 2020, both UNHCR and WFP have shared a 'big picture' vision of the benefits that could result from fruitful inter-agency partnership and therefore worked hard to maintain the quality of collaboration and high levels of trust. For example, one senior manager explained that it was important to "treat partnership in an objective way", explaining that, alongside their counterpart in the other agency, they took a strategic approach and if at any time there was disagreement between the two agencies: "we diagnosed the problem and found a solution". Regular coordination and clear communication between the two agencies facilitated this resolution of difficulties that staff inevitably came up against in the course of this complex work.

Alignment at senior management level enabled technical teams to work together and resolve issues.

The shared vision and commitment to partnership demonstrated by senior management trickled down to the technical work of the teams, who felt they could 'follow the lead' and resolve issues in this same spirit of positive partnership. Collaboration at technical and operational levels included prompt sharing of data; UNHCR piggybacking on WFP's financial service provider contracts (thereby enabling joint cash distributions to refugees in the camp); sharing logistics for data collection exercises; and jointly managing appeals processes. Staff reported feeling reassured that the commitment to collaboration at the senior management level gave them the green light to find these practical solutions to implementation challenges.

COLLABORATION WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

WFP and UNHCR's aligned approach facilitated collaboration with external partners.

For example:

- From the perspective of the **Social Registry**, it was helpful that both agencies spoke with 'one voice' and that they could interact with WFP and UNHCR together rather than with two separate interlocuters.
- For **GIZ**, their work on capacity strengthening of the Social Registry was facilitated by aligning with UNHCR and WFP's existing approach, thus further contributing to common goals.
- The **World Bank** also recognised that the close collaboration between WFP and UNHCR contributed to the successful coordination and detailed technical work.

In summary, WFP and UNHCR were stronger together and able to achieve these important results by virtue of their aligned approach when collaborating with the Government and development actors. Arguably it would have been challenging for either agency to have achieved these results alone.

ALIGNED PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES

WFP-UNHCR collaboration is also demonstrated by clear alignment in programme design and implementation. Through the targeting approach, each refugee household has been categorised as highly vulnerable (category 1), moderately vulnerable (category 2) or least vulnerable (category 3), and this categorisation is used as a reference for a range of programmes, for example:

- WFP delivers differentiated assistance packages for general food distributions (GFD), prioritising those categorised as highly vulnerable to receive the highest value of food assistance. Moderately vulnerable households receive lower levels of food assistance (subject to resource availability), while least vulnerable households are not eligible.
- UNHCR delivers multipurpose cash assistance for non-food needs (hygiene kits, soap[3]). While to date all categories of households have been eligible for this assistance, if budget constraints require it, UNHCR prioritises the households categorised as having higher levels of vulnerability.
- The Mauritanian Government's social protection programmes target highly vulnerable refugee households (category 1). These households are eligible for monthly social transfers through Tekavoul, free healthcare coverage through the Inaya programme, as well as additional support during the lean season through El Maouna (depending on regional analysis of food security indicators presented on a yearly basis).
- For livelihood and resilience programs, categorisation is often (although not always) a reference, with interventions targeting mainly the moderately vulnerable (category 2) households. Additional targeting criteria – based on an individual's labour capacity and willingness to engage in livelihood activities – are also used to determine eligibility. The rationale is that agencies invest in the livelihoods of those households that are progressively excluded from receiving assistance (due to budget constraints) and have the potential to transition, over time, from assistance dependency to greater self-reliance.
- In terms of longer-term planning and the broader inclusion agenda, household categorisation is also a reference that may be used in the future, if deemed appropriate. For example, regarding inclusion in national health programmes and water supply systems, both of which require some cost-recovery, there are discussions around gradually shifting to a model in which self-reliant households (Group 3) would be the first group of users that would contribute to paying out-of-pocket costs for healthcare and water usage (under the same conditions as Mauritanian nationals).

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED?

Greater investment – by a broad range of stakeholders – is necessary to support resilience and self-reliance and thus reduce refugee needs in the longer-term. As budgets for humanitarian assistance reduce, both WFP and UNHCR recognise the importance of finding dignified alternatives to assistance dependency – so that those refugees with labour capacity can earn an income and meet their own basic needs. The two agencies have been working together to support refugees' self-reliance; however, initiatives have thus far been piloted on a relatively small scale - and only by UNHCR - due to insufficient funding for livelihoods programming. WFP and UNHCR have successfully advocated for other partners to improve refugees' opportunities for employment and income generation; one example is the opening of the Techghil national employment agency in Bassikounou, with support from the Government and GIZ. While positive developments are evident – such as WFP having recruited a consultant in 2024 to focus specifically on inter-agency programming for refugee self-reliance - greater investment and collaboration with a broad range of partners continues to be necessary in order to find longer-term solutions to refugee self-reliance. Funding for refugee self-reliance remains limited and the

[3] Note that all women of reproductive age (11-49) are eligible to receive cash for hygiene kits, while for cash for soap, only households in categories 1 and 2 (and new arrivals) have been prioritized in 2023 (all individuals of any age).

employment opportunities – for both refugees and Mauritanians alike – are relatively scarce in the Hodh Chargui region (where the majority of refugees are located).

Greater clarity is required regarding the frequency of joint (re)targeting in the future and the methodology to be used. During the learning review, it was agreed by both agencies that the targeting system requires updating, for three main reasons:

1. Newly arrived Malian refugees need to be categorised and receive differentiated assistance according to their needs (to be assessed after the agreed six-month period of 'stabilisation' during which they are entitled to receive the highest value of food assistance);
2. Households absent during previous assessments need to be assessed and categorised in order to receive targeted assistance;
3. Households already categorised need to be recategorised, at some point in time, as their vulnerability situation changes (either becoming more self-reliant or becoming more vulnerable) and thus their need for – and eligibility to receive – assistance.

While it was agreed that the 'complementary targeting' conducted in 2023 was successful in categorising new arrivals as well as households that were absent during the assessment in 2021, the question of *how* to jointly maintain the targeting approach – whether at a regular frequency or on a rolling basis, and whether to keep using the adapted methodology developed by WFP and UNHCR or the Government's targeting methodology – remains unanswered. While technical alignment is sought with the Government's system where feasible and appropriate, the census-based approach implemented by the Social Registry is used for the targeting of social safety net assistance that is received for a period of five years and designed to support households living in extreme poverty. It would be costly to implement this method on a more frequent basis (i.e., for re-targeting humanitarian assistance every 1-2 years). Furthermore, the way in which refugees' vulnerability is assessed in the Government's Proxy Means Test (PMT) remains unknown to UNHCR and WFP, and there is therefore understandable hesitancy to use this method to assess the vulnerability of all Malian refugees, particularly those in M'bera camp and surrounding host villages.

UNHCR/Omar Doukali

PROTECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

WHAT WORKED WELL?

It was agreed during the learning review that protection and accountability to affected people have been successfully mainstreamed into the process of assessment, data analysis, development of the targeting approach, inclusion in the national social protection programmes and the management of appeals. For example:

- Inclusion of people with specific needs in the targeting approach: the categorisation of households was based on five vulnerability dimensions (food access, education, dependency ratio, health and specific needs, and working capacity). Specific needs – which includes chronic illness and disability, as registered in the UNHCR ProGres database – were given a relatively strong weighting in the overall vulnerability calculation which was used to categorise households, and this was perceived as one of the ways in which protection concerns were successfully integrated into targeting.
- Close WFP-UNHCR collaboration on community consultations and communication. Both agencies worked together to consult community members during the design phase of the targeting approach to integrate their perspectives and communicate key messages regularly across a variety of communication channels.
- Good access to a joint appeal mechanism: in focus group discussions conducted for this learning review, refugees consistently reported knowing about the appeal mechanism and how to make an appeal (if they did not agree with the categorisation of their household). Many refugees had already made appeals themselves and their categorisation and assistance level had changed as a result.
- Stable social cohesion within the refugee community, even though the level of acceptance of the targeting approach is low. In focus group discussions, community leaders broadly showed acceptance for the rationale of targeting, while other refugees were less accepting of the approach, frequently requesting that 'all refugees should receive assistance' equally. However, in all discussions, refugees expressed high levels of frustration that some households were, in their opinion, wrongly categorised, giving examples of apparently vulnerable households that do not receive assistance and, conversely, of seemingly self-reliant households that continue to receive assistance. Despite the frustration expressed by refugees, social cohesion remains stable, and tensions were at the level of discussion and arguments between refugees, rather than physical violence, at the time of the November 2023 mission.
- Inclusion in the national social protection programmes did not appear to have a negative effect on refugees' protection, according to the findings of this learning review. UNHCR staff are present during Tekavoul cash distributions to facilitate communication between refugees and the Tekavoul programme staff to resolve issues. In addition, UNHCR continues regular protection monitoring and case management, as well as providing cash for protection to vulnerable individuals and households, when required, assessed on a case-by-case basis. It will be important for UNHCR and WFP to continue to monitor the impact of refugees' inclusion in national systems, and especially with regard to protection outcomes.
- Refugees have been included in the national social protection programmes (Tekavoul, Inaya, El Maouna) under *broadly similar conditions* as Mauritanian nationals.[4] Certain modifications have been made to the process to ensure that inclusion takes into account the specificities of refugees' situation and does not expose them to protection risks, for example:

[4] As part of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR, 2020), the Government of Mauritania made several pledges including the commitments to (1) Enroll all refugees with civil registry, issue them with national identification numbers, secure national identification cards, allow their inclusion in national systems; (2) Ensure the inclusion of refugees in health services under the same conditions as nationals; and (3) Ensure that refugees have the same conditions of access to the labour market as nationals.

- Eligibility for assistance was determined (in 2021) using the adapted assessment approach (scorecard) developed by WFP, UNHCR and the Joint Hub, based on five vulnerability dimensions, rather than through the PMT formula that the Social Registry uses for nationals. This adapted targeting approach has been used for refugees in M'bera camp and surrounding host villages. However, for urban refugees in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, the same PMT formula that is used for nationals has also been used to assess their vulnerability.
- UNHCR and WFP provided support to household assessments. Under a data sharing agreement, UNHCR provided refugee data so that the Social Registry could locate and identify the refugee households in order to conduct the household survey. For Mauritanians, household assessments are conducted by staff from the Social Registry, whereas for refugees, in addition to Social Registry staff, the assessment team also included an interpreter and community representative. WFP and UNHCR further provided technical support throughout the duration of each assessment. In urban areas, the teams were accompanied by UNHCR and NGO partner staff (in addition to Social Registry staff and an interpreter).
- Refugees could make appeals concerning their eligibility through the UNHCR-WFP joint appeals mechanism and the finalised lists were transferred to the Social Registry, once appeals had been resolved. Appeals were received during a three-week window and responded to before any changes were made to community members' eligibility for assistance.
- Social cash transfer assistance is delivered via the same delivery mechanism, and at the same frequency, as for Mauritanian nationals. UNHCR and WFP staff are present during the Tekavoul cash distributions in the camp, to ensure that the distributions run smoothly and to facilitate communication between Government staff and refugees.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED?

- Strengthened communication on the five vulnerability dimensions used to categorise households. From the discussions conducted with refugees during this learning review (not a representative sample), most refugees interviewed were not aware of the five dimensions used to categorise households (food access, education, dependency ratio, health and specific needs, and working capacity). This is problematic as refugees frequently expressed frustration that households had been wrongly categorised based on the condition of their shelter or their clothing, which they argued does not always reflect the real capacity of households to meet their basic needs. Shelter conditions were not, however, part of the dimensions used to score vulnerability, and this could be better communicated to refugees so as to reduce frustration around perceived targeting errors.
- Use of appeals decisions as an opportunity to further communicate about eligibility. When refugees receive the decision following their appeal, this could have been used to further communicate why some households are eligible and others are not. This could further serve as an opportunity to communicate about the five vulnerability dimensions used to categorise households.
- Provision of regular opportunities to submit appeals. At the time of the learning review in November 2023, for refugees in M'bera camp and surrounding host villages, eligibility for assistance was based on data from the household survey conducted in June 2021 as well as the appeals process that took place in November 2021 – more than two years previously. There have been no changes to the eligibility lists since that date. For example, if a family has become a child-headed household due to the death of an adult member (and their status has been updated in proGres registration database), their eligibility to receive assistance has not however changed. This could be considered an 'implementation exclusion error,' as the household meets the eligibility criteria but is not selected to receive assistance. While both agencies agree that this is an issue that needs to be resolved, there have not yet been any changes to the eligibility of households assessed in 2021, nor has a sustainable appeals mechanism been established, partly due to a lack of clarity as to whether households that are recategorised as highly vulnerable could be included in the government's social protection programmes, and if so, by when.

- Increased involvement of community leaders in selecting eligible households, according to refugee representative. The Coordinator, who is the leader for the refugees in M'bera camp, strongly put forward his preference for the use of community-based targeting in future exercises, for example by having community members themselves lead on the selection of eligible refugee households (based on intra-communal consultations and community knowledge of households' vulnerability). However, there is much difference of opinion about the extent to which the community should be responsible for targeting. Other community members were less supportive of taking on such a responsibility. A change in targeting method would require further exploration and protection risk analysis.

EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING

WHAT WORKED WELL?

- Good collaboration for data collection, between WFP, UNHCR and the Social Registry, including planning for the data collection, training of enumerators, sharing costs and logistics, communicating with community members before the data collection, and conducting the household surveys. Coordination and working relationships appear strong.
- Use of both quantitative and qualitative data for the design of the targeting approach. A mixed methods approach was successfully used, in which quantitative data (collected through household surveys) was combined with qualitative data (collected through focus group discussions with refugees) to determine the vulnerability dimensions used to categorise refugee households.
- Use of qualitative data from community consultations to inform programmatic decision-making**.** While the collection of qualitative data is a core component of UNHCR's work, WFP noted that they have increased their use of such approaches, learning from the collaboration with UNHCR and the Joint Hub. For example, in 2023, when faced with resource constraints for delivering food assistance to the 'moderately vulnerable' households (category 2), WFP successfully consulted refugees to determine together the preferred frequency and timing for the distributions. For WFP, it was a novel approach to use the qualitative data from community consultations to support programmatic decision-making – and build community acceptance in the process.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED?

- Strengthened capacity of enumerators and interpreters to conduct household surveys (understanding the objective of the survey, refugee context, terminology, etc.). During the learning review, both field staff and those involved in data cleaning and analysis stressed that the enumerators did not adequately understand the refugee context – or misinterpreted certain words – and this negatively affected data quality when household surveys were conducted in M'bera camp and surrounding areas (2021). While enumerators were indeed trained – and accompanied by interpreters – the capacity of data collection teams could have been further strengthened. It will be important to include interpreters in future enumerator trainings to also improve their understanding of the terminology used in the questionnaire. A good practice, used for household surveys conducted in 2023 for urban refugees (in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), was to have data collection teams comprised of Social Registry, an interpreter and a staff member from an NGO partner, with close support from UNHCR in organising the survey (meetings, locations, providing interpreters). While there is undoubtedly an added cost to this each member is important and plays a different role – such a team composition and level of support could be considered for future surveys for refugees in and around M'bera camp. As an additional measure, once the data collection is underway, daily data quality checks should be carried out and findings fed back to enumerators.
- Conducting regular Joint Post-Distribution Monitoring (JPDM) surveys: while WFP and UNHCR have conducted JPDMs together (for example in April 2022), these could have been more frequent and also included a qualitative component (e.g., to collect community feedback on the ongoing targeting process and to monitor any protection concerns for refugees, particularly with respect to inclusion in national systems).
- Measuring the impact of joint targeting: UNHCR and WFP staff stressed that they would have liked to measure the impact of joint targeting, from a pre-targeting baseline to regular monitoring (through JPDMs or other approaches). Both agencies requested that, in hindsight, the Joint Hub could have provided guidance vis-à-vis the design of such an approach to impact monitoring (through a longitudinal study or other methodological approach).

CAPACITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES

WHAT WORKED WELL?

- WFP and UNHCR expressed appreciation for the work of the Joint Hub, which was instrumental in successfully developing the joint targeting approach. The Joint Hub's technical support – particularly in terms of data collection, analysis, designing a targeting approach and integrating protection and accountability – was a considerable addition to the capacity of WFP and UNHCR's existing teams. The coordination support provided by the Joint Hub helped the two agencies share information and align approaches in a practical manner, as well as facilitated information exchange with externals partners (particularly the Social Registry).
- Good learning environment for staff. Looking back over the achievements since 2021, WFP and UNHCR staff noted that they had learned a considerable amount by going through the whole targeting process – step-by-step – and being guided by the Joint Hub. The rationale of targeting has been by WFP and UNHCR staff at all levels, who are able to explain the targeting approach and why it is necessary in clear terms – to refugees and other partners. Furthermore, lessons learned from receiving appeals in 2021 have led to improvements in the process (in 2023), simply by asking refugees from different camp zones to lodge appeals on different days, thereby considerably reducing waiting time for refugees and easing pressure on staff receiving the appeals.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED?

- Joint Hub in-country coordinators could have shared their time more equally between the two agencies. While the Joint Hub coordinators were a resource for both agencies, there was a perception that they were 'closer' to UNHCR than to WFP. Reportedly the coordinators spent more time sitting in UNHCR's office and were therefore privy to the informal level communication that happens when staff share 'time and space' together. It is important that Joint Hub coordinators divide their time equally between the two agencies and are thus not perceived as having a stronger affiliation to one over the other. This could be addressed at the time of contract design and definition of working arrangements.
- Increased use of French by the Joint Hub. While the Joint Hub in-country coordinators conducted all their work in French and in-country missions were also mostly conducted in French, it was highlighted during the learning review that much of the documentation produced was in English, as well as some of the meetings conducted online. The use of English rather than French hindered the full participation from staff in Mauritania, particularly national staff, restricting the contributions they could make to discussions.
- Capacity strengthening and clearer exit strategy for the Joint Hub. WFP and UNHCR both expressed that greater emphasis should have been placed on explicitly strengthening the capacity of teams on the ground, particularly of national staff who are not subject to the frequent rotations of international staff. It was suggested, for example, that the Joint Hub's in-country coordinator could have worked in tandem with two national staff (from UNHCR and WFP respectively) throughout the targeting process, to strengthen internal capacity. The learning review highlighted that both agencies perceive there to be a lack of internal capacity to maintain the targeting approach and a lack of funding for posts or external consultants to undertake this work. It was felt that the Joint Hub's gradual exit could have been better prepared for with sustained capacity strengthening throughout the period of support.

In 2024, WFP and UNHCR Country Operations in Mauritania continue to collaborate on the joint targeting and delivery of basic needs assistance, as well as working closely with the Government of Mauritania and development partners to support socio-economic inclusion and opportunities for refugees. The Joint Hub is in the process of phasing out its engagement in Mauritania, having supported WFP and UNHCR country operations since 2020 with coordination, technical support and capacity strengthening.

The work of the Joint Hub is made possible thanks to the generous support of two US government entities, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), and the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM).

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