



Food Security & Livelihoods Programs

Tips for Protection Mainstreaming

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This note aims to provide sector-specific measures to ensure that beneficiaries' protection concerns are reflected in the Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) Sector responses. Below are practical protection recommendations pertinent to prioritizing safety and dignity, including avoiding harm, facilitating meaningful access, and ensuring accountability and participatory approaches with the community. It is divided into four sections, representing the key elements of protection mainstreaming. The tips are not meant to be exhaustive but present examples of important actions to be taken to ensure the integration of protection principles in the delivery of FSL assistance as part of the refugee response in Bangladesh.

Although each tip should be considered throughout implementation, some key actions are especially important during emergencies in the project cycle's assessment, design, and monitoring stages. Some activities can be sensitive by nature or may need to be referred to either protection focal points at the camp level or to the Protection Sector in Cox's Bazar.

The contents of this note are formulated to complement the protection mainstreaming tip sheet for FSL programs developed by the Global Protection Cluster. The tips have been adapted to the context of the refugee response in Bangladesh to maximize the positive impacts of FSL programs on people's safety and dignity, and to support affected populations access to and enjoyment of their rights. The tip sheet was developed by the FSL protection mainstreaming focal points, in consultation with the Protection Coordination Team, and reviewed and adapted by the Protection Working Group Task Team and the FSL Sector in Cox's Bazar.

Prioritize safety & dignity, and avoid doing harm

- Food, cash, vouchers or livestock interventions are particularly valuable in a humanitarian response but may place those who manage or own these types of assets at greater risk of violence, abduction, abuse, or threat.

- **Identify high-risk practices and activities**, collect information to better understand the local security environment, including ownership patterns, recent history of looting/raiding, husbandry practices, and access to livestock services/markets.
- Work in coordination with protection and gender actors, such as camp Protection/Child Protection/GBV Focal Points and Protection Emergency Response Units (PERU) to put in place measures **to prevent and respond to physical/sexual violence** arising from food distributions. FSL staff in the field should be aware of the camps' existing mechanisms for prompt referrals to the protection/CP/GBV focal points (the updated lists can be found here for the [Protection FPs](#), [CP FPs](#), and GBV FPs).
- Apply **effective data protection measures**: keep lists of female and male beneficiaries and personal data confidential and safe from unintended use, at any time (not only during the distribution).

- Beneficiaries may face problems, particularly with sexual assault, theft, intimidation, extortion, or robbery, including at official or unofficial checkpoints **while traveling to and from a distribution or service point**. The environment

through which beneficiaries must travel must be safe and accessible for women, men, girls, boys, gender diverse populations concerned, including those with specific needs including disabilities. If there are specific locations identified as having safety concerns, inform Camp-in-Charge (CiC), Site Management, gender and Protection Focal Points in the camps.

- **Identify central locations** - beneficiaries should not have to traverse long distances or pass through dangerous areas to access distribution points. If safety is a problem, consider moving the distribution point.
- **Avoid placing distribution points near military/law enforcement installations.** Weapon bearers should not be present inside or outside distribution points.
- If only specific individuals face safety concerns, make a special effort to **provide transport or implement an alternate collector mechanism** (but avoid stigmatization of the individuals by consulting directly with concerned persons to identify best method for access)

- Beneficiaries may face problems at **distribution or service sites**. The environment in which assistance is provided must be safe for all the people concerned (taking into consideration AGD-related tailored risks), beneficiaries and FSL staff.

- **Ensure the mode and frequency of distribution minimize safety risks**, e.g. distributions should occur in daylight hours, giving beneficiaries enough time to travel home before nightfall.
- **Ensure the ration size is appropriate** for beneficiaries to carry home with no additional physical or financial burden and without being dependent on others to take it for them.
- Consider the **frequency of distributions** – the greater the time between distributions the larger the quantities **distributed**, which puts beneficiaries at risk of attacks and pillage.
- Identify most at-risk individuals and **consider alternative forms of distribution**, e.g. door-to-door distribution or **alternate collector mechanisms**.
- Invest extra time and resources in **assessments and monitoring if distributing during an emergency**, e.g. natural calamity, and involve the PERU.
- **COVID-19 safety measures** should be applied, e.g. social distance at distribution points, hand-washing facilities, face masks, awareness raising on COVID-19, respecting age, gender and diversity consideration and without harming the dignity of beneficiaries.

- When a **child is found alone** at a distribution site: do not immediately remove the child. Ask the child who they are with and where this person may be. Consider that girls may prefer speaking to female staff or that the child may feel uncomfortable speaking to you if the child thinks those around her/him are risks or threats. Ask people around the child if they know anything about the child and if the child may be separated from family or unaccompanied, as the parents may return shortly. For babies and young children who do not know their names and places of origin or children with disabilities, ask adults and older children around them whether they know the child or their family and where the group came from, before moving the child from the area (unless it is unsafe to keep a child there). If confirmed the child is alone, immediately contact a Child Protection Focal Points.

- Consider whether items like food, cash or vouchers can be used for **anti-social purposes**, e.g. purchase of or exchange for small arms or alcohol, tobacco or drugs. In this case, the risk of abuse can increase violence (including domestic violence), corruption, and other health and social concerns. Special attention should be given to resource allocation in situations of polygamy or divorce. Assessments, post-distribution monitoring (with protection questions), focus group discussions and complaint mechanisms are useful tools. Also, all measures should be in place to avoid that the response **inadvertently empowers or strengthens armed groups' position** in the camps.

- Monitor if distributions are creating tension between the refugee and host communities, undermining **peaceful coexistence** between the communities. When challenges arise, reach out to protection partners engaged in mediation or peaceful coexistence activities to support mitigation jointly with local officials. Consult both displaced and host communities about food security and livelihoods needs.
- Food assistance or other interventions should **not harm the local labor market**. FSL intervention for marginalized groups should consider the impact on the relationships within and beyond communities, as activities may exacerbate tension or build cohesion amongst certain groups against others.
- Food, cash, vouchers or livestock responses may undermine people’s efforts to protect themselves and increase their vulnerabilities. **Positive coping strategies** contributing to food security and dignity should therefore be supported.

- It is crucial to **identify groups at risk of unsafe livelihood practices** (e.g. child labour, survival/transactional sex) and prioritize the provision of alternatives for these groups.
- **Develop** livelihoods programs in a way that protect and support household caring responsibilities and **promote family unity**. Participation in livelihood opportunities should not undermine child protection or other caring responsibilities. Consider employing care-providers or providing care facilities (nursery) or supporting community care mechanisms to enable women’s participation in such programs.

- When planning for livelihoods interventions, be aware of **applicable labor laws and codes and the economic implications** of the program. A comprehensive context-specific analysis, including cost efficiency, secondary market impacts, and risks of insecurity, exploitation and corruption, should inform the choice of program. FSL should monitor and respond to potential exploitative practices or abuse of power by employers in livelihood projects.

Meaningful Access

- Collect **disaggregated data** by age, gender, vulnerability and location to assess and monitor access to food security and livelihood programs. This data may help identify whether there is discrimination or if any food is diverted. Ensure monitors check and follow up that assistance reached the most vulnerable. **Register children** who are heads of household, unaccompanied or separated in their own names. For food distribution, children 14 years and over can be registered as primary holder of the Assistance Card. For children below 14 years, a trustee/guardian is required.
- Ensure that assistance and services are **accessible for everyone, in particular those with specific needs**:

- **Identify and prioritize those with specific needs** in the community and prevent discrimination or exclusion of marginalized groups (refer to existing registration data or reach out to Protection/CP/GBV focal points in the camps).
- When providing assistance, ensure that **location, distance and access routes to the distribution points are accessible** to all members of the community, including the most vulnerable groups.
- **Organize the queuing areas**. As much as possible, separate male and female (for both registration and distribution), child-headed family, pregnant women, persons with disability queuing areas and ensure female staff presence during distributions so that the centers are accessible to women and girls.
- Consider the **gender balance of distribution teams and committees** to ensure enough women are available as a contact point for female refugees.

- Establish **mechanisms to prioritize** (e.g. priority lanes) those who cannot stand in line for long periods, such as older persons, persons with disability, unaccompanied children, pregnant and lactating women, including alternate collector mechanisms.
- Identify **different delivery mechanisms**, as often in-kind distribution, vouchers, or cash can be less accessible to vulnerable people or specific groups (e.g. women). The choice of delivery mechanisms must be based on an assessment of options and consultation with beneficiaries.
- Apply a systematic outreach process or referral mechanism with registration or protection focal points to ensure that **all beneficiaries**, especially vulnerable persons such as older people or persons with physical and mental disabilities, are **included in distribution lists**.
- Ensure that **lack of or incomplete documentation should not exclude individuals from accessing services and refer them to appropriate entities to obtain the correct documentation**. If there are issues, reach out to protection focal points and UNHCR's Registration Unit.
- Respond to the **special needs of pregnant and lactating women, under 5's children headed families, and older persons** and ensure that the quality of their assistance and services is equitable to that of other groups.
- Ensure **separate washroom facilities** for both male, female; eliminate the barriers for the access to the facilities by persons with disability; set up a breast feeding corners
- **All the children should be treated in a dignified way**. Dignity refers to a position that a child holds within his surroundings for being a child. It encompasses all the environment where he/s lives. Ensure safety and security for the children when you are planning any project under your program.
- If a protection issue is identified, **reach out to registration or protection focal points** to ensure female-headed households, child-headed households and unaccompanied children are able to access distributions in their own name.
- If access remains an issue, ensure that **special arrangements** are made to bring food and other assistance to those who cannot access the services or are unable to carry rations, e.g. older persons or persons with disabilities. It should not be assumed that friends or family will do it. Coordinate with specialized protection actors, e.g. Age and Disability Working Group, community groups, youth groups, protection focal points and Protection Emergency Response Units (PERU), to identify individuals with limited mobility and include them in the programme assistance programs, including the designation of alternate collectors.

- **Activities must not discriminate** (or be perceived as doing so) against any group. Consider whether women and men may have different barriers to access cash compared with in-kind resources. Activities should promote and help protect the rights of people who have historically been marginalized or discriminated against, such as religious or ethnic minorities, or women and girls.
- Ensure **clear and open communication**. Inform refugees about the process, the entitlements, and the criteria applied to distributions in the most appropriate way. Ensure that beneficiaries know how to obtain food assistance and livelihood opportunities, where and when the distributions will take place, what they will get, how long it should last, and how to use the items.

- **Communicate information through various means** to reach the broader community and to account for: different literacy levels (e.g. door-to-door, poster, radio, social media, use of pictograms); age differences (elderly persons or unaccompanied children), and specific needs (e.g. functional limitations related to vision, hearing, mobility, cognition, self-care, medical and psychological conditions)

- **Identify the power dynamics in the area**. Who has access to food, assets and inputs? Who can influence decisions on food, agriculture and livelihoods? Use this information to inform monitoring activities and identify any barriers to access, discrimination against particular groups or whether assistance is being diverted. Take this into consideration when determining locations for food security and livelihood interventions.

- Ensure that both men and women have **equal and fair access to opportunities**, including cash/food-for-work schemes, micro-credit, cash transfers, agricultural inputs and skills training, and that they receive the same benefits for their input and work. Ensure that marginalized and disenfranchised groups have equal and fair access to livelihood/agricultural assets (e.g. land, tools, seeds, fertilizers for homestead gardening and livestock). Offer livelihood opportunities that are suitable for persons with disabilities and older persons – these groups are often excluded from such projects and find it difficult to source funds or other inputs.
- Ensure **children are not responsible for collection of food for family members**. Consider age of children in livelihoods programs to encourage learning, ensure livelihoods programs do not disrupt education and that child labour is not exacerbated by livelihoods activities. Designing programme should follow age and gender diversity of the children. Livelihood of boys’ and girls’ children is not same so their diversity should take under consideration when we plan to access to the services for them.

Participation & Empowerment

- **Involve and consult all categories and layers of the refugee community** in identifying and responding to FSL needs. Different criteria may affect the power dynamics. Partners, communities and beneficiaries need to be involved in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs so they can make informed decisions.

- **Engage male and female community and committee representative** to play an active role in identifying solutions and in the decision-making processes that affect them, to promote a sense of ownership, build their self-esteem and improve the relevance and sustainability of the response.
- At the same time, **go beyond community leaders**: consult women, men, boys, girls, persons with disabilities, chronically ill persons, older persons, pregnant and lactating women, and marginalized persons to collect accurate information about their specific food and nutritional requirements and preferences for food distribution points and livelihood services, in the most age and gender appropriate way. Be sure to include persons with functional limitations related to vision, hearing, and mobility, among other participants.
- Children should have participation in any of the project designed under FSL programme to make sure that children are get services in a way that they want. In all the phase of project design their participation is essential for any positive outcome and changes in their lives.
- Consult the community on how to **adapt strategies best to prevent GBV** in food security and distribution programs and give special attention to the groups more exposed to GBV risks. Have female staff talk to and be available for women and girls during the distribution and listen to their concerns. This will give opportunity to the children to express themselves for any support.

- When selecting FSL staff and relief committees **make sure that all groups within the community (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic group, disability) are represented**. Similarly, ensure that food or livelihood committees are representative of all groups within the community. Include targeted measures to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of representatives of all groups in the community. All staff and committee members should receive protection mainstreaming training. In fact, they are on the frontline and can play a key role in identifying issues related to exclusion and discrimination and be proactive in ensuring the voice of marginalized groups is represented.
- Reinforce the **capacity of the community** and encourage collective livelihood projects over those that benefit individuals. Collaborative practices contribute to community protection and resilience, particularly in rural community economies closely linked with social networks, community structures and cultural traditions. Identify, support the role,

and strengthen the **capacity of local authorities and civil society**. Where possible, empower local food security committees consisting of beneficiaries to identify problems and propose solutions by themselves. Make sure beneficiaries and staff know where to refer or report incidents of rights violations.

Accountability

- **Be transparent** when explaining the services provided and provide accessible and timely information on selection criteria for targeted assistance, organizational procedures and processes that affect beneficiaries. Make sure beneficiaries are entitled for assistance, that they know they have a right to equitable and safe aid, and where and how to obtain it. Food security actors need to be transparent in their objectives with beneficiaries and non-beneficiary communities and with their government and NGO partners.
- Provide communities with accessible, efficient and confidential **complaint and feedback mechanisms** to improve programming, understand community perceptions, promote, promoting beneficiary empowerment and assist in the early detection of misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, food diversion and fraud.

- A **complaint and feedback** mechanism should: a) include a standard complaints form, though all complaints should be reviewed regardless of format; b) give persons submitting a complaint the opportunity to identify themselves while respecting their anonymity should they fear retaliation; c) include provisions to submit complaints through a person other than the one against whom the complaint is made; and d) incorporate appropriate procedures for effective follow-up.
- The complaints mechanism should be **staffed with both men and women**, and it should be accessible for children and persons with specific needs.
 - Feedback should be collected and addressed by **staff other than those** delivering the FSL services.
 - **Privacy and confidentiality** should be ensured throughout the process.
- Mechanisms **should be** accessible, e.g.. place feedback surveys in food baskets, have feedback box at distribution sites, and provide complaint hotlines. All mechanisms should be accessible by both literate and illiterate persons, with alternative means for them to express their feedback and complaints.
- **Respond to complaints** in a reasonable time. Provide feedback even if no corrective measures can or need to be put in place.
- **Organize awareness-raising** sessions, targeting the community with different tools (specific to their different needs), so that people know how it works.
- Consider a **joint feedback mechanism** with other sectors to minimize confusion, promote strong referrals and dignified holistic services for people in need.
- Receive **feedback from the children** as part of accountability to them, maintaining separate complain/suggestion box and provide child friendly information and avenues for reporting for the children in your facility will encourage them to express their opinion about any of the services for them. Feedback and complaint mechanism ensure that humanitarian actors respond appropriately. Children must be able to provide feedback or say complaints in a safe dignified and confidential manner and we should receive appropriate response when they deserve.

- Ensure all FSL staff, implementing partners and volunteers working with affected populations understand, sign and adhere to a **code of conduct** stating their commitment to respect and foster humanitarian standards and the rights of beneficiaries. Ensure measures in case of violation and fight impunity. Similarly, for **PSE**, ensure that mechanisms are in place for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and that they are, regularly updated and are functioning effectively.

- Continue to **strengthen coordination with the PSEA network** in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. Respond to all complaints, regardless of whether corrective measures can or need to be put in place following existing principles and procedures recommended by the PSEA network. Ensure that signs are available at distribution sites saying all services are free of charge . Ensure mechanisms are in place to mitigate and report PSEA. In partnership with PSEA network, identify dedicated focal points and raise awareness about PSEA. Provide clear information that beneficiaries do not have to provide services or favors in exchange for receiving services or accessing facilities.
- **Inform child protection focal point** immediately if you hear of or observe any protection concerns for children or come across any vulnerable/at risk/abused children. If you identify any children that you think might be extremely vulnerable, for example, child headed households, separated and unaccompanied children or disabled children, please pass concerns onto the child protect focal point.

