WFP Iraq: Emergency Food Assistance for Displaced People in Iraq

As a new year begins for displaced Iraqis, with few indications that they will be able to return to their homes, WFP sought to deepen its understanding of the challenges they face through a pilot Community Consultation Exercise. These face-to-face meetings gave WFP the chance to elicit direct feedback about its assistance from a sample group of displaced people living in Erbil, as well as hearing their concerns about information dissemination and the humanitarian assistance they can access.

WFP Communicating with Communities

To connect better with communities and to strengthen its service delivery, WFP is rolling out Communicating with Communities (CwC) interventions. These aim to establish platforms to listen and learn from affected communities, in line with WFP’s global commitment to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), under the AAP objectives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. WFP Iraq’s CwC strategy is rooted in providing affected populations with life-saving information which is timely and relevant, and instigating a more inclusive and participatory approach to assistance, by listening effectively to the people served by WFP, and translating that feedback to WFP programming for IDPs in Iraq.

What is CWC?

CwC is based on the principle that information and communications are critical forms of assistance, without which populations affected by emergencies cannot access services or make the best decisions for themselves and their communities. At the same time, CwC links to the idea that increasing dialogue with people complements accountability, monitoring, impact evaluation and further programming design. Affected populations thus become stakeholders in the assistance process.

“This team is the first to consult us and listen to our problems.”

Background

In August 2014, an inter-agency team carried out a rapid assessment with displaced populations and host communities to understand their information needs and access to communication channels. The team’s findings revealed that displaced Iraqis often have only limited access to conflicting and broken information regarding the provision of and access to basic services. The team recommended the launch of an inter-agency two-way communications centre to provide IDPs with timely information and to refer complaints, feedback and urgent needs to the humanitarian community.

Community Consultation Pilot

Building on the findings of the assessment, WFP held a pilot Community Consultation Exercise in Erbil, to connect and strengthen dialogue with affected communities about its service deliveries. Based on the success of the pilot, WFP now plans to roll out similar community consultations with displaced people in Sulaymaniyah and Duhok governorates. Through CwC interventions, WFP aims to create a system-wide culture of accountability in humanitarian contexts, enabling improved program monitoring, and ensuring outreach to vulnerable communities.

Two-Way Call Centre

The establishment of a national toll-free hotline for populations affected by the conflict in Iraq is underway. This landmark project is coordinated and funded by a fully inter-agency team of UN agencies and NGOs, with WFP providing US$250,000. The hotline will provide information about all types of humanitarian assistance, such as food distribution points, medical services and shelter options, streamlining information provision for consumers, as well as efficiently harmonizing information provision for all agencies. The call centre will also register and refer urgent needs, feedback and complaints, and provide a mechanism through which people in need of or receiving assistance can convey their feedback, suggestions, and concerns about the efficacy of programming.

With approximately 1.6 mobile phones per Iraqi family and a penetration rate of 75%, the establishment of an inter-agency two-way communications centre (or “2WCC”) will enable conflict-affected communities to access vital information on available services, their rights and entitlements, and processes and procedures. Displaced people and affected communities would also have access to a complaint mechanism. In so doing, the call centre will foster two-way communication with affected communities, enable clusters to provide specialized information as per their respective mandates, and allow humanitarian agencies to improve their operations according to the needs and requirements of beneficiaries on the ground.

Call Centre Key Objectives

- Provide affected communities with timely and accurate information and referrals
- Identify trends in information requests and information provision from affected communities
- Promote trust with conflict-affected Iraqis and other stakeholders by enhancing two-way communications
- Provide an avenue for people receiving or in need of humanitarian assistance to lodge complaints and express concerns or unmet needs
- Offer a confidential service to receive and appropriately direct sensitive complaints and reports regarding exploitation and abuse
- Provide a simple interface that humanitarian agencies can access to monitor issues related to their organization
Erbil Pilot Consultation Exercise

In December 2014, WFP staff entered into a series of community consultations with displaced Iraqis living in Erbil City. This pilot consultation exercise gathered feedback from affected communities relating to WFP’s in-kind food assistance and voucher programmes, and distributions by its cooperating partners. The lessons learned from this exercise have informed WFP policy and strategy. For example, preferences were recorded amongst participants for certain types and quantities of WFP food commodities. This feedback has prompted WFP to start regular assessments on food basket preferences, in order to revise commodity procurement, and to develop cooking instructions to be printed with packaging.

In addition, the consultations allowed WFP to develop an overview of information dissemination within the camps, along with the communication gaps identified by displaced people, and their communication preferences for interacting with humanitarian agencies.

Purpose of Consultation Exercise

- Consulting with the people WFP is serving in Iraq informs the organisation’s decision-making, ensures accountability to affected communities, and allows WFP to continue improving its assistance.
- WFP also undertook these consultations to better understand information needs, and uncover gaps in communication between humanitarian organisations and affected communities.
- Consultations were also intended to shed light on the needs of affected communities, as well as the coping mechanisms they were deploying to solve problems.

Methodology

- A WFP team organised focus group discussions (FGDs) and listening exercises with individuals, with a total of 120 displaced people participating in 9 FGDs, and 30 people taking part in individual interviews. Groups were organized along age, gender and diversity lines, to include youth, elderly people, women, men, and people living with disabilities.
- WFP sought feedback from people receiving its food assistance in three camps in Erbil city: Harshem and Baharka camps, and Ainkawa Mall.
- Three main themes were explored in detail:
  1. WFP in-kind and voucher assistance
  2. Information dissemination within the camps, and existing means of communication
  3. Complain ts and feedback mechanisms

Information dissemination to affected populations

- The consultations revealed that displaced people have limited access to information regarding the provision of humanitarian services, entitlements and registration procedures for several programmes. According to some informants, lack of and conflicting information has created confusion, inaccessibility to assistance and on many occasions, mistrust.
- Generally, IDPs in the camps are informed about the monthly and regular distributions but not about their entitlements and criteria based on their family size. “Nobody has ever informed us about our entitlements,” said one woman at a consultation in Baharka camp.
- When it came to the information related to distribution of items, however, people from two of the camps in particular commended the efforts of their camp managers, who either go door to door to inform people, or communicate via section leaders, who are nominated by camp residents.
- Most people were not aware of systems to submit a complaint. “We’d like to have a toll free number to call, so that we could raise our concerns,” said one participant.
- Largely, participants agreed that no one has yet asked them about their concerns, or taken feedback. “This team is the first to consult us and listen to our problems,” said one female participant in an FGD.

Lessons Learned from the Community

- To improve the effectiveness and reach of distributions, and increase opportunities for the affected populations to access them, plenty of time should be allowed for the dissemination of information about pending distributions.
- The following methods for information dissemination were recommended:
  - Camp management
  - Public announcements
  - SMS (text messages)
  - Leaflets/brochures
- Participants would prefer to interact with agencies providing assistance through:
  - Monthly face-to-face meetings
  - Open an office or help desk in the camp
  - Toll-Free Hotline
- Most participants suggested that humanitarian organisations provide information at the start of the month regarding the assistance that will be provided. This information should include what will be distributed, time and dates of distribution, the quantity of items, and criteria for entitlements based on family size. Providing these details would help families to prepare themselves for collections.