Introduction

WFP meets regularly with beneficiaries as part of its efforts to better understand their needs and improve its service delivery to them. For WFP, the focus remains on three key commitments: transparency or information provision, participation, and complaint and feedback mechanisms. These commitments enable WFP to be more accountable to the people it seeks to serve, while supporting community empowerment through participation. This approach is rooted in the overall framework of “Accountability to Affected Populations” (AAP) and “Communication with Communities” (CwC).

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.

WFP Community Consultations

As its pilot CwC intervention, WFP is carrying out community consultations with IDPs living in both camp and non-camp settings in the Iraq initially for internally displaced persons (IDPs), and are intended to instigate a more inclusive and participatory approach to WFP’s assistance, allowing WFP to adjust its programming in light of the concerns and feedback from affected population. complaints and concerns raised by the IDPs collectively in these sessions are addressed at various levels, followed up, resolved The consultations were also intended to inform WFP’s overall CwC strategy, by highlighting gaps and needs in information provision surrounding humanitarian assistance.

WFP Registration Lists

“I received food rations last month, but I haven’t been included in the list now. So I’m here to get information on resuming my food rations,” said 47-year-old Sabah, who was using crutches.

A key concern voiced at the community consultation was about registering for food assistance. Some IDPS believed they had been omitted from the distribution list. One IDP reported having received food rations for two months, and then finding his name had been deleted from the beneficiary list. He said it was his third month without receiving rations.

Follow up: WFP immediately liaised with its cooperating partner (CP) to address this issue. Investigation of the cases by WFP’s CP revealed these particular complainants had been displaced for more than two years, and were not arrivals of 2014. Their names had therefore been removed from during revision of the distribution list.
To ensure that that complaints continue to be properly considered, WFP assisted its CP to strengthen the proper complaint and feedback mechanism at the distribution point, with a designated team to resolve the issues raised by beneficiaries.

**Process of Registering for Assistance**

Participants were unclear about registration criteria for assistance. It was evident from the discussion that they needed more information about government procedures, particularly regarding the role of the Bureau of Displacement and Migration and Asayish (official Kurdistan Region security organisation) in registering as a displaced person. “The mechanism is ambiguous,” said a male IDP.

Government protocol requires that IDPs in Sulaymaniyyah are guaranteed or sponsored by a local resident, in order to be granted security clearance by the Asayish and acquire a residency card for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Some of the participants were discontented with the procedure, as they had difficulties finding a guarantor. “I'm still not registered because people refuse to vouch for me,” a 35 year old male participant told WFP staff after the consultation. Some IDPs even reported to have paid for the guarantee.

**Follow up:** According to government officials, security clearance for IDPs involves communication with other governorates, in order to clearly establish the whereabouts of the individual. If a particular IDPs location cannot be verified and they do not have a local guarantor, that person is asked to regularly report to the local security department.

**Feedback on WFP Food and Voucher Assistance**

Participants were vocal about their differing preferences for food, and asked for more rations. They requested different food items, which better matched their regular eating habits. For example, many did not like pasta, and preferred lentils to white beans. Several IDPs did not like the type of rice and lentils in WFP's food parcel. “We sell the rice and lentils, and add cash to buy better quality,” said one IDP at the consultation.

Many asked for vouchers instead of in-kind assistance, expressing that they felt the difference in assistance was unfair.

WFP’s monthly family food parcels are currently designed for five people, matching standard Iraqi family demographics. A number of participants suggested that rations should be based on the actual number of family members instead. They suggested adding an extra ration for families bigger than seven people (WFP currently provides an extra ration to families of eight or above). “A family of seven has much greater needs than a family of three: we don't understand why both get the same amount of rations,” said one participant. Most of the IDPs found the WFP rations sufficient for around 20 days, using their savings to tide them over until the next distribution.

**Follow up:** WFP is investigating the possibility of delivering individual rations, as well as revising its food basket.

**Access to Information about Distributions**

Most participants confirmed they had been notified by cooperating partners, community leaders, as well as the Asayish. “I got information about food rations through neighbours and fellow workers. Sometimes the situation is not clear, so we keep coming to check,” said a female school teacher who came from Mosul. IDPs informed by community leaders were often found to have incomplete information. Most of them had heard about the distribution through word of mouth.

Usually the IDPs gathered at the distribution site on the morning of the distribution day, far in advance of the time they had been requested to attend. Some of them discovered that their names were not on this list of registered beneficiaries, demonstrating inadequate understanding of which distribution point had been designated to them for collection of their rations.

Spread of information by other IDPs and community leaders was apparently creating misinformation. Confusion about the time of distribution had caused a mass gathering of IDPs at the distribution point, making it difficult for WFP’s cooperating partner to organise the distribution process. “We wait for long time to receive the aid because of delays in distribution, sometimes five to eight hours, because we are not sure about the exact time of the distribution,” said one of the boys accompanying his mother who was standing in the queue.

**Follow up:** WFP and its CPs are working to improve the process of information dissemination to beneficiaries, and WFP’s sub-office in Sulaymaniyyah provided support to the CP to further improve the distribution process.

**Humanitarian Information Provision**

The IDPs access to information about humanitarian assistance was hampered by ambiguity and
confusion, especially regarding their entitlement to assistance. WFP learnt that information provision to IDPs living in a non-camp setting was particularly challenging, and was contributing to their confusion and frustration.

Most were finding out about access to assistance through the Asayish and Bureau of Displacement and Migration (BDM). “Our source of information is mainly Asayish, since that’s the first filter we go through once we arrive here in Sulaymaniyah,” explained one IDP. “Sometime we go to the BDM to ask about our entitlements, the issue gets resolved sometimes, but we are not that clear about which to contact.”

Feedback and Complaints About Assistance

Participants showed a satisfactory level of confidence in available complaints mechanisms. Although many reported to have used complaint boxes, the level of confidence for lodging official complaints among women was relatively low. Most of the male IDPs preferred to use the phone or formal letters as mechanism to make a complaint, whereas the women generally seemed to prefer to lodge their complaints in face-to-face interactions.

Further Challenges for IDPs

Many of the IDPs said they urgently needed other forms of emergency assistance, particularly health care for those suffering life-threatening illnesses. “What matters now is health care. Most of the elderly need medication on a regular basis, and our savings are now spent on healthcare, which reduces the money we have for our other basic needs,” explained one participant.

Their biggest costs were rent and education for children, consuming the majority of their savings and small incomes. “We need fuel to cook, and a refrigerator is so important as summer is approaching and we can’t store food,” said a women with small children at the consultation.

Recommendations

As a result of these community consultation, the following recommendations are proposed as short to long term responses. These should be enacted within three months.

- Separate consultations for women should be held, to give them an opportunity to speak freely about gender-related challenges they face.
- Some participants spoke neither Arabic nor Kurdish; an interpreter is needed to enable their participation in the consultations.
- WFP’s Minimum Information for Food Assistance Standard Operating Procedure should be used, to ensure the correct information is disseminated to communities regarding food rations.
- Dialogue between IDP communities and government stakeholders should be instigated, to reduce confusion among regarding entitlements to assistance and residency.