Introduction

In May, WFP organized a series of feedback consultation sessions with female IDPs in the Southern governorates. These sessions served to better understand the needs of displaced persons, specifically women, who are affected by the conflict. WFP meets regularly with those receiving its assistance. For WFP, these consultations are central to delivering on three key commitments: transparency or information provision, participation, and complaint and feedback mechanisms. These commitments make WFP more accountable to the people it serves.

Background

- Since January 2014, over 3 million Iraqis have been internally displaced by ongoing violence between pro-government forces and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). An estimated 4.4 million people require food assistance.
- WFP provides food assistance to approximately 1.5 million people per month, across all Iraqi governorates.
- According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 272,000 IDPs (45,313 families) now reside across Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit governorates, with the majority in Kerbala and Najaf.
- During May, WFP assisted 1,500 individuals 300 families living in camps and 200,000 individuals (40,550 families) living outside of camps in the Southern governorates.

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

Building on a series of pilot CWC interventions, WFP carries out community consultations with internally displaced persons (IDPs) periodically. These consultations 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 raised by members of the affected population. At the same time they serve as listening sessions, where communities have a chance to freely express their feedbacks and concerns. Complaints and concerns collectively raised by the IDPs attending these sessions are subsequently addressed by WFP at various levels. The listening sessions are also intended to inform stakeholders about the assistance process. In addition, they contribute to the development of WFP’s overall CWC strategy, by highlighting gaps and local needs in humanitarian assistance.

Following May-time distributions, WFP held six community consultations in the following governorates: Najaf, Karbala, Babil, Muthanna and Thi-qar.

Profile of the participants:

- The participants of the community consultations were selected to gauge the particular needs of female IDPs. The group included the young, the elderly, women with children, and women living with disabilities.
- The groups comprised women from different Shia and Sunni sects.
- Participants originated from Anbar, Babylon, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-din, Baghdad and Ninewa governorates.

Consultation Goals:

- To establish an understanding of the special needs and concerns of female IDPs in non-camp locations;
- To create trust and increase confidence among women IDPs, thereby allowing them to freely express their views and receive feedback on assistance;
- To receive feedback on WFP’s ongoing assistance;
- To understand information dissemination and means of communication among IDP communities;
- To examine the existing complaints and feedback mechanisms.
Key findings

Najaf: The focus group in Najaf city allowed female IDPs to share the concerns and challenges that they now face on a daily basis. Access to proper hygiene and washing facilities was severely restricted, whilst many of their children were suffering from minor illnesses, lice and scabies. Many of the ladies specifically requested sanitary towels, diapers and underwear. According to WFP focal point Khuld Karam, participants were delighted that a humanitarian organization, “were taking an active interest in their concerns and difficulties.”

When asked about how they are informed of WFP distributions, the women agreed that SMS updates and word of mouth were vitally important. “We know right away when we see trucks heading to Najaf’s warehouses,” noted one participant.

Thi-Qar: Many of the women who participated in the Nasiriya district focus group, Thi-Qar governorate, were displaced from Nineawa governorate during fighting in 2014. When asked where they receive information on WFP food distributions, SMS updates and word of mouth were the most common source. Although some received monthly food rations through the Public Distribution System (the Government funded Social Safety Net), the women confirmed that WFP’s assistance was still of crucial importance; neither the PDS or WFP ration is sufficient to provide for large families. Only informal complaint mechanisms were deemed to be available, with community leaders, relatives and friends providing advice.

Muthanna: In Samawa district, Muthanna, WFP met female IDPs shortly after the local food distribution. They had received less food than usual, with funding shortfalls forcing WFP into providing reduce rations for people living with host communities. “All of them reported to need more wheat flour,” reported Shatha Kando, WFP focal point in Muthanna. The women participants suggested changes to the composition of rations. For example, they indicated that they did not strictly need the full 10 kg of pulses, but used other commodities far more. They reported to be in need of detergents, sanitary towels, shampoo, undergarments, scarves and summer clothes. They also shared their concerns about privacy: “Women are missing the privacy in their social lives, each family is living in one small room regardless the family size, in addition to that 25 families share one toilet and one bathroom,” reported Shatha.

Kerbala: For women living in non-camp settings in Kerbala City, such as the local mosque, the primary source of information about distributions was the local IDP community. “Each group of IDPs has nominated a person among them, who can be contacted by WFP’s cooperating partner, Directory of Displacement and Migration (DDM) - or this nominated person may visit DDM periodically to check the scheduled assistance,” reported Isra Jassim, WFP’s focal point in Kerbala. Many IDPs lamented their lack of access to a structured complaint mechanisms for humanitarian aid and often relied upon over-stretched local government representatives.

Babel: Heyad Musa, WFP’s focal point in Hilla District, Babel, hosted a focus group with a group of IDPs from Mosul, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorates. From her discussions, it became apparent that female headed families were in greatest need: “The oldest resident, named Kareema, is a widow and came with her seven daughters. Information on distributions was generally unreliable, with many relying upon word of mouth.” Furthermore, a lack of transport to and from distribution points meant that many missed distributions altogether. When asked about WFP food assistance, participants reported being largely satisfied with the quality. Nevertheless, they suggested including other essential items like tomato paste, vegetables and dairy products. Participants explained how the recent reduction in ration sizes came as a shock, with many expecting an increase to coincide with Ramadan.

Basrah: In Basrah city, focus group participants insisted that as a result of the ration reductions they were no longer able to meet the need of their families, especially for those with more than seven people. Many of the women requested that tomato paste, tea, infant formula and milk be considered as future ration commodities. According to Najla Suhail, WFP’s focal point in Basra, many of the women interviewed were dependent upon local government representatives and personal contacts to solve any complaints.

WFP Recommendations:
- Due to the lack of information, confidence and trust in Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms, further work is required by WFP and humanitarian partners to amplify the voices of the people we serve.
- A coordinated plan is required to strengthen the capacity of CwC focal persons at the grass roots level across Iraq.

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