

Integrating protection into food aid

by Mariangela Bizzarri

The World Food Programme (WFP) does not have a specific protection mandate but its activities are increasingly shaped by awareness of the need to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

WFP operates in unpredictable situations where staff members are often confronted with human rights violations and other protection-related challenges. They need appropriate guidance and support in dealing with these challenges. Adopted in 2002, WFP's Gender Policy¹ ensures that certain protection measures are integrated

into the agency's operations such as enhancing women's control of food in relief food distributions. In 2005 we launched a country-level protection project, one part of which examined the link between protection and gender and focused specifically on SGBV including the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse and its link to HIV/AIDS. Protection and

SGBV-focused research conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Liberia, Uganda and Colombia confirmed WFP's need to continue focusing on:

- taking women's concerns into account
- delivering food aid as close as possible to where beneficiaries are located to reduce risks during collection
- keeping deliveries of food rations small in order to reduce the

occurrence of attacks on refugee/ IDP camps to steal rations

- providing gender sensitisation and SGBV awareness training for all WFP field staff.

Findings from the missions included the following good practices and the need for an increased focus on SGBV-related issues in food distribution:

- use participatory approaches for beneficiary identification, activity identification and planning to make sure that women's needs and concerns are taken into account
- examine the impact of SGBV on women, girls, families and communities as well as its social, economic and health implications, including HIV/AIDS
- establish distribution points in secure places and help ensure safe travel to and from them
- designate women as family ration card holders
- start distribution early in the day to avoid the need to travel in the dark
- explain clearly about food entitlements (size and composition

of rations, beneficiary selection criteria, distribution time and place) to all beneficiaries

- establish channels for beneficiaries to report cases of abuse linked to food distribution
- encourage women to travel in groups to and from distribution points to reduce the risk of attacks in situation of high insecurity
- expand programmes, where food aid is an appropriate response, to support survivors of SGBV – such as providing food to hospitalised women to allow them to stay in hospital for the full recovery time.

It is recommended that WFP should continue supporting activities to restore, enhance or secure the resilience of households and of communities via income-generating activities and food-supported training and work activities. Specific capacity-building activities should be developed to provide vulnerable women and girls with the necessary livelihood skills to avoid resorting to such destructive coping mechanisms as transactional sex. It is important to link with partner organisations working on the sensitisation of communities – and

especially men – on issues such as human rights violations and abuses, SGBV and its link with HIV/AIDS.

WFP needs to work with partners to better understand the link between violence generated by conflict and food insecurity and SGBV's impact on the health, social and economic status of the population. Women's roles as drivers of peace and key actors in preserving a community's social fabric must be acknowledged. Resources must be sufficient to address the root causes of violence. Demobilised fighters need adequate resources to meet their basic needs, food in particular.

Action on these recommendations will help WFP develop a more strategic approach to protection, providing sound policies and guidance to support WFP staff members in dealing with protection-related challenges, including sexual and gender-based violence.

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1. www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/gm_facts/Wfp.pdf



Vulnerable women beneficiaries of a Food for Training Project run by the World Food Programme in Bangladesh.

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