



REFUGEE LIVELIHOODS



**WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**

LIVELIHOODS

AT A GLANCE

||| The Issue

- Without economic opportunities, displaced women are forced to take desperate measures to provide for themselves and their children, such as selling the only things they have—their bodies and their meager food rations.
- Displaced young people often do not go to school or learn skills essential to getting a job.
- The majority of refugees are in long-term situations that last an average of 17 years. When displacement ends, most will not have the education and skills they need to earn a living or rebuild their countries.

||| Our Response

- Launched three-year initiative to assess current livelihoods approaches.
- Identified best practices and gaps in services by visiting refugee settings and talking with refugees and humanitarian workers.
- Partnered with other humanitarian agencies to test innovative approaches.
- Published groundbreaking comprehensive manual to help humanitarian workers design and implement more effective economic interventions for displaced people.

||| Next Steps

- Distribute manual to humanitarian workers, nongovernmental organizations, government and UN agencies and humanitarian aid funders.
- Conduct in-country workshops for humanitarian workers on how to create market-ready livelihood programs.
- Advocate with policy makers to adopt our recommendations and with donors to fund only market-based livelihood programs.



Promoting economic opportunities for refugee women and young people

Background

Almost 45 million people are currently displaced by armed conflict and human rights abuses—forced to leave their homes, their communities and their jobs, or the means by which they earned a living and supported their family. The majority of refugees are in long-term situations that last an average of 17 years. During this time, young people often do not go to school or learn skills essential to getting a job, and adults are rarely able to earn a living. Farmers no longer have land, small business owners leave behind all their assets and it may be illegal for refugees to work in their country of asylum. Dependent on international assistance for food, shelter and basic necessities, many displaced people are idle and frustrated.

This lack of economic opportunities leads to wasted potential and may result in increased domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Many people are forced to resort to harmful



behavior, such as prostitution and trading sex for food, to survive. Or they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in unregulated jobs, without recourse to local law enforcement. When displacement ends and they are able to go home or resettle in a new country, they will not have the education and skills they need to rebuild their countries or earn a living in a new home.

Displaced Women and Young People Need Dignified, Paid Work

Livelihood programs are activities that develop economic self-reliance, such as non-formal education, vocational and skills training, income generation activities, microcredit schemes and agriculture programs. The Women's Refugee Commission has found that livelihood programs designed for refugees, who have crossed an international border, and internally displaced people, displaced within their own country, are generally poorly designed. Only a small percentage of displaced people has access to them. The programs largely focus on meeting basic survival needs rather than on developing long-term self-reliance and enabling people to support their families in a dignified manner.

During displacement, the roles of women and young people often change. They may become the family's primary income earner and may be burdened with an overwhelming workload, including working to earn a living, looking after children and fetching water and firewood. They may be single



heads of household or disabled. Livelihood programs must recognize these realities and be flexible enough to allow women and young people to participate. Women and girls should be ensured access to professions that are usually considered “men’s work,” as traditional male occupations tend to carry both higher status and higher income.

Livelihood programs often provide training in skills that are already widespread or do not bring in an adequate income, such as hairdressing or tailoring, and flood the market with people who then struggle to make a living. Programs should be driven by market demand, that is, what consumers in a particular area want and can afford. This will help ensure that individuals and families can make a sustainable, dignified income.

Building Livelihoods:

The Women’s Refugee Commission at Work

The Women’s Refugee Commission has completed the first three-year phase of a comprehensive livelihoods initiative. The project focuses on transforming the way livelihood programs for displaced populations are designed and implemented. Our aim is to enhance the protection and well-being of displaced women and young people through more targeted, effective and sustainable programs that lead to income generation and self-sufficiency. In Phase One of the initiative, we:

- assessed current livelihood approaches and gaps in services for refugees in diverse settings throughout the world, including refugee camps and urban areas where displaced people settle;
- worked with displaced women and young people to identify their needs, ideas and aspirations;
- identified and documented promising practices that build on existing skills, target market needs and build self-reliance beyond basic survival needs;
- partnered with humanitarian agencies to test and implement innovative practices; and
- produced and are now promoting *Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings*, the first-ever comprehensive “how-to” manual on livelihoods programming for use by staff working in refugee situations.



“I used to grow only wheat and earn 1,000 rupees per harvest. Now I grow a variety of crops and earn 10,000 rupees per harvest.”

Farmer in a small village in Surket district, Nepal





In Phase Two of the initiative, we will encourage implementation of the interventions outlined in the field manual, including through workshops and trainings for field workers and advocacy with policy makers and donors. We will promote practical, realistic economic opportunities for refugees that take into account local conditions and constraints.

The Field Manual: Providing Practical Guidance

Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings (2009) is the first-ever comprehensive guide to help field-based programmers and practitioners design and implement more effective economic interventions for displaced people. The manual focuses on the economic needs of displaced women and young people, covering camp-based and urban displacement settings, as well as return to communities of origin when conflict ends.

Based on 10 field assessments and insights garnered from multiple pilot projects and interviews with experts, the manual clarifies the steps necessary for effective program design. Several chapters detail specific program interventions, such as cash-for-work, vocational training and apprenticeships, agricultural interventions, microfinance and enterprise development. The manual provides tools and approaches for conducting participatory needs assessments, market assessments, “value chain analysis” and monitoring and evaluation.

Download the manual at:

womenscommission.org/docs/livelihoods_manual.pdf



“ There are so many things we’d like to do; we’d like to bottle water and start a laundry soap production business. ”

Burmese-Karen refugee women in Umpiem refugee camp on the Thai/Burma border



OUR MISSION: Since 1989, the Women's Refugee Commission has advocated vigorously for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and displaced women, children and young people—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

OUR VISION: We envision a world in which refugee, internally displaced, returnee and asylum-seeking women, children and young people are safe, healthy and self-reliant, participating in the decisions that affect their lives.

HOW WE WORK: Through research and fact-finding field missions, we assess and identify best practices and find solutions on critical issues that include lifesaving reproductive health care, dignified livelihoods for refugees and, in the U.S., fair treatment of women, children and families seeking asylum. On Capitol Hill, at the United Nations and with humanitarian organizations and governments, we push for improvements in refugee policy and practice until measurable long-term change is realized.

GET INVOLVED: Learn about the ways you can help ensure that our far-reaching, life-saving advocacy for women, children and young people continues. To sign up for our action alerts and to make a tax-deductible donation, please go to:

womensrefugeecommission.org.
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Learn more about refugee livelihoods and download individual country assessments and reports on the links between livelihoods and violence against women at: www.womensrefugeecommission.org/livelihoods

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