



As Millions Flee Conflicts, Women's Refugee Commission Urges New Focus on Livelihoods for the Displaced

Without Work, Average 17 Years as Refugees Means 17 Years of Dependency and Despair

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NEW YORK – As large-scale refugee crises in Pakistan and Sri Lanka continue to make headlines, the Women's Refugee Commission today urged the humanitarian community to end dependency-inducing programs and focus as early as possible on helping crisis-affected populations – who spend an average of 17 years displaced – to resume their lives and their livelihoods.

“It is imperative that we begin to rethink the role of humanitarian assistance and shift away from handouts and enforced dependency,” said Dale Buscher, Director of Protection at the Women's Refugee Commission. “The people we are seeing uprooted today are likely to spend years in camps or otherwise displaced, only to return to shattered villages with no viable economies. All too often, livelihood assistance is about pocket money and busywork, rather than helping people to find dignified, market-driven, sustainable jobs.”

Toward that end, the Women's Refugee Commission today announced the launch of *Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings*. The 353-page manual is the first of its kind to provide humanitarian workers with important information and practical tools for designing and implementing more effective livelihood programs.

A “livelihood” refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living and develop self-reliance; examples include employment-readiness programs like vocational training, micro-financing, animal husbandry, agriculture programs, cash-for-work, and supporting and growing small and medium-sized enterprises.

As the manual highlights, more than 40 million people are currently displaced by armed conflict and human rights abuses. Almost completely dependent on international food assistance and often not allowed to work, they are idle and frustrated. This lack of economic opportunities often results in increases in domestic violence and alcohol abuse, with many forced to resort to harmful behavior to survive, such as prostitution and trading sex for food.

“Without opportunities to make use of or further develop their skills during displacement, women and young people will not be able to fully participate in rebuilding their communities and lives when they return to their homes or settle permanently in a new location,” said Carolyn Makinson, Executive Director of the Women's Refugee Commission. “Our findings make clear that the

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humanitarian assistance community must develop effective, sustainable livelihood programs that focus on giving people the training, tools and support they need to be able to feed and care for themselves.”

The *Building Livelihoods* manual is based on two-and-a-half years of research and 10 field assessments covering all contexts of displacement: refugee, internal displacement and returnee situations, in camp settings, as well as in rural and urban areas. It is informed by several pilot projects, lasting from one to three years, funded by the Women’s Refugee Commission in places such as the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border; with women at-risk of gender-based violence who have returned to Burundi; and in the slums of Bogotá, Colombia, home to a large displaced population.

Extensive field research conducted by the Women’s Refugee Commission identified numerous examples of successful livelihood projects, including:

- In **Nepal**, a public/private partnership that provides Nepalese formerly displaced by the civil conflict with the tools to distill aromatic herbs and plants for the Aveda cosmetics company instead of selling the plants in hard-to-reach markets for far less money.
- In **Peshawar, Pakistan**, vocational training for refugees with disabilities in trades that do not require much mobility, such as tailoring and weaving. The project has resulted in over 90 percent employment as well as reduced stigma for people with disabilities.
- In areas of **South Asia** devastated by the 2004 tsunami, cash-for-work programs that allowed participants to earn money rebuilding their own communities and provided incentives for people to return home and speed the recovery efforts.

As part of its multi-year project, the Women’s Refugee Commission is now convening workshops in key areas of the globe to assist local practitioners in strengthening their livelihood interventions by improving the program choices, design, assessments, and tools used to ensure that programs are market driven and participatory.

The first workshop took place in **Accra, Ghana** last month; additional workshops are scheduled for **Nairobi, Kenya** (June 23-26) and **Bangkok, Thailand** (August 11-14).

The workshop in Kenya will include organizations working with Somali refugees in Kenya and those internally displaced within Somalia as well as organizations working with Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda and returning populations in Burundi and Rwanda. At the workshop in Thailand, the Women’s Refugee Commission is inviting organizations that are currently dealing with the refugee crisis in Pakistan, where an estimated 2.5 million people have fled their homes in recent weeks.

The Women’s Refugee Commission will also be presenting the manual at the InterAction Forum in early July, the largest gatherings of NGOs, donors and policy makers in the United States.

For more information, go to: www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/protection/livelihoods