



WFP & Social Protection

Iraq case study

WFP is working with key stakeholders to directly provide assistance to vulnerable households in Iraq, particularly internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees. It also supports the government with capacity-strengthening assistance to plan, design and deliver the national social protection system and safety net programmes.

Background

Iraq is classified as an upper-middle income country but the upsurge in conflict from 2014 and a concurrent downturn in the macro-economy currently threaten livelihoods, increase poverty, and contribute to vulnerability and food insecurity, especially among internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, women, girls and boys, and the poor.

Efforts are being made to articulate support for social protection through mechanisms such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2015-2019), the Humanitarian Response Plan and Iraq's own National Development Plan for 2018-2022. A more focused alignment with Agenda 2030 will be contained in a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2018-2022, which defines three broad pillars to achieve poverty reduction, namely creating opportunities for generating sustainable income, empowerment and building human capital, and the establishment of effective social protection.

Interventions

WFP's assistance programmes fill critical gaps for vulnerable populations, directly supporting more than 850,000 people in September 2017.

Implementation of Food-based Safety Nets

WFP is on the frontlines of the conflict in Iraq providing life-saving food support and with UN partners, other vital supplies such as water, sanitation items, and dignity kits. It then provides monthly food and

nutrition assistance to people in camps, in coordination with government systems and the broader humanitarian community.

Wherever possible, WFP looks to align its safety nets with the wider social protection system, complementing and strengthening government support. The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a government-owned, food-based safety net available to most of the population. Introduced in 1991, it helped Iraq avert a major humanitarian crisis during the sanctions of the 1990s. However, due to the economic crisis over the last years, the PDS has not been able to provide supplies consistently. This is where WFP has been able to play a strategic role by ensuring a 'top up' of basic commodities to the most vulnerable IDPs, with WFP complementing rather than duplicating PDS supplies. At the height of the displacement crisis, when WFP was supporting 1.6 million people monthly with food assistance, coordination with the PDS was saving an estimated US\$4 million per month.

Harmonization with the government's PDS system is at the core of WFP's delivery systems and beneficiary registration processes in Iraq. WFP uses the identification number from PDS cards in the SCOPE beneficiary management information system, helping to build and further strengthen the government's social protection database and laying the foundations for an eventual targeting mechanism through a unified beneficiary registry. This is in line with the government's next Poverty Reduction Strategy and is supported by the World Bank and other UN agencies.

Implementation of Cash-based Assistance

In the first half of 2017, WFP delivered monthly cash-based assistance to around 342,000 IDPs and over 55,000 refugees in Iraq. Following a retargeting exercise this year, the number of IDPs receiving cash from WFP decreased to about 190,000 in September; a separate exercise is ongoing for refugees.

WFP has been at the forefront of supporting vulnerable families in areas where markets recovered quickly in newly retaken areas, but liquidity remained the primary hurdle to a fully functioning marketplace. WFP with its partners was the first UN agency to provide multi-purpose cash assistance to eastern Mosul after it was retaken by the Iraqi security forces, injecting vital cash assistance into households and the local economy at a critical time. WFP also expects to reach 4,950 households in and around Mosul starting from September.

In delivering cash assistance, WFP leverages pre-existing commercial solutions where available, and accordingly, delivers around 70 percent of its monthly cash assistance in the form of Mobile Money Transfers through a private financial service provider since July 2017. When the environment is not yet conducive for using mobile money, WFP relies on SCOPECARDS, an in-house payment solution, which allows beneficiaries to spend their electronic food vouchers at local shops.

WFP is closely engaged with the Cash Working Group (CWG) in Iraq, a coordination body focused on improving the delivery of cash-based safety nets, and bridging the gap between humanitarian cash assistance and the government's social protection floor. Along with CWG partners and other UN agencies, WFP is currently exploring how to capitalize on the advantages of mobile money transfers to achieve a more coordinated cash response, including supporting IDPs with a returns package.

Country Capacity Strengthening

The Government of Iraq is currently preparing its National Development Plan for 2018-2022 which will set out sectoral priorities for development over the next five years. Near term priorities are expected to focus on reconstruction and recovery following years of conflict. This will be complemented by the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which identifies six key outcomes for the government and its partners: higher and sustainable incomes; improved health; improved education; suitable housing; social protection; and emergency response. [WFP has actively engaged in the preparatory work for the Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), identifying areas of support for school meals and social protection.

Through the Poverty Reduction Strategy, WFP aims to support the government of Iraq in its efforts to adopt a targeted approach to the PDS system, so that assistance prioritizes those most in need. WFP's ability to support the government with identifying vulnerability levels and targeting needs is greatly enhanced by the use of PDS identification numbers in WFP's beneficiary information management system.



Innovations

During its multi-year humanitarian relief operation in Iraq, WFP has developed advanced delivery methods for humanitarian assistance. The knowledge gained from using new technologies such as SCOPE and SCOPECARDS can now be transferred to longer-term social protection programmes, to increase the efficiency, reliability and flexibility of these schemes.

In close collaboration with the private sector, WFP launched an innovative Tech for Food pilot programme for Syrian refugees. It focused on giving hundred refugees tangible and portable digital skills with the objective of accessing online digital freelancing work and generating income through any internet access point. The first phase of the project has resulted in numerous internships with private sector companies, coaching opportunities, and even the establishment of a small freelance business.

Next steps

Supporting a Unified Social Protection Database

The new Poverty Reduction Strategy proposes social protection reform, including the creation of a unified beneficiary registry or database. Since WFP's beneficiary database is already aligned with the government's main safety net and has been used by other humanitarian partners, WFP will look to offer technical support to the government in establishing the new national database.

Developing Resilience-Building Safety Nets in Local Communities

WFP is in the final stages of identifying resilience-building safety nets in areas where displaced populations have been able to return to their places of origin. WFP is working with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and other key stakeholders to bring critical and stabilising programmes that will hopefully trigger a resumption of food self-sufficiency. These activities aiming at protecting, restoring and promoting the livelihoods of most vulnerable households will focus on supporting food value chains, asset rehabilitation and income generating opportunities.

Further reading

Web page dedicated to the Iraq Emergency
www1.wfp.org/iraq-emergency