

# WFP IRAQ SPECIAL REPORT

## Listening to Affected Communities

*Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Kirkuk, Najaf and Baghdad*

Najaf—WFP/Khuld Karam

*The World Food Programme (WFP) provides vital food assistance to 1.5 million conflict-affected people per month across Iraq. Due to severe funding constraints, WFP has had to make substantial cutbacks to the level of assistance provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps and non-camp settings. During the December 2015 cycle, WFP assisted 1.1 million people with in-kind Family Food Parcels and vouchers.*

*During January 2016, WFP's field staff organized meetings with beneficiaries in order to take stock of their food based vulnerabilities. This also allowed WFP to learn about the different needs, profiles, and contexts of vulnerable groups in different areas of Iraq. The consultations also helped WFP to have a deeper dialogue with beneficiaries, and to learn whom they perceive to be most vulnerable in terms of food security, within their particular community.*



### Community Consultations

In January, WFP held focus groups in Baghdad, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Najaf, and Sulaymaniyah governorates with IDP communities. These communities represented a relatively high vulnerability status. All consultations were held in the local dialect after in-kind and voucher distributions in January, and aimed to:

- Investigate the different vulnerabilities of IDPs based on their food consumption patterns and coping strategies;
- Understand beneficiaries' point of view regarding vulnerability, such as asking who they think is most vulnerable;
- Inform communities of the assistance criteria that is now linked with the Public Distribution System (PDS) card, and the reasons behind the criteria;

- Understand levels of access, trust, and confidence of IDP families in existing complaint and feedback mechanisms;
- Identify trends and gaps in information provision, and requests from affected communities.

### Participant Profiles

In **Baghdad**, the focus group was organized in a camp with a large number of unemployed families. In **Najaf**, the focus group was held at a camp in the suburbs of the main city with no shops or markets. In **Sulaymaniyah**, the focus group was organized at an isolated camp in the mountains. In **Dohuk**, the field staff met with people with disabilities in Domiz. In **Erbil**, the focus group was with female members of the camp outside the city perimeter, while in **Kirkuk** the discussion was taken up with female-headed households.

### Key Findings

#### On Vulnerabilities:

For most of the communities, lack of job opportunities, together with diseases and disabilities presented a worst-case scenario. This was further aggravated by the severity of the weather, presenting a challenge for households with young and old family members.

In **Baghdad**, the participants identified their own vulnerability criteria. In their opinion, females, particularly elderly or disabled women, with no source of income were the most vulnerable. On the next tier they identified large families (even with men of a working age) with elderly and infirm relatives, but without a stable income (social security or government salary). This is because most men of a working age are not allowed to work unless they have special approval from Iraqi security authorities. They identified smaller families headed by men with no income as better off than the previous two categories. All of them considered households who are still receiving government salaries as less vulnerable.

In **Najaf**, the situation was not much different. Due to being far from the main city, the participants reported having no job opportunities. The situation is even more challenging for widows, and households with children, elderly family members, and the chronically ill, but without a working, male adult. Most of the male-headed households where the male was the sole breadwinner for a big family also seemed to be employing severe coping strategies.

In **Sulaymaniyah**, the participants suffer from a lack of public services, such as transportation, healthcare and educational facilities, and work opportunities due to being far from the city. Due to the distance to the city, participants reported that beyond food assistance, they haven't been assisted by any other international or national NGOs. Most of the participants reported being in debt. The participants perceived families with children or elderly persons, to be more vulnerable in their communities than others.

In **Dohuk**, as the families shared their individual concerns, the discussions showed that family size, head of the family, and accommodation were contributing factors for making certain families better off than others within their communities. They said that they see some IDPs coming in cars to the distribution point to donate their ration to others because they don't need it, and could identify that some people are not vulnerable to food insecurity.

In **Kirkuk**, female participants said that the vulnerability of each household depends on the male members who are able to support families. The participants added that vulnerability is exacerbated when a household has no male members. This could be because of an absence of male family members, or having males who cannot work due to disability or age.

In **Erbil**, the female participants identified that an absence of male members in certain households, increased their food based vulnerabilities.

#### On Coping Strategies:

Many of the participants shared stories as to how they were coping with food insecurity.

A 30 year-old unaccompanied widow with five children said that due to the reduction of rations,



she was feeding her small children, while not herself eating. In **Baghdad**, the Asia camp is reported to be better off as PDS rations are complementing WFP rations. In **Sulaymaniyah**, a father of 3 children said that all of his children had to drop out of school, as he just cannot afford it anymore. Most of the participants said they were in debt. In **Dohuk**, the participants said that they were forced to sleep hungry. In **Kirkuk**, female participants said they had been selling their assets to meet their food needs.

#### Information Provision:

During the focus groups, the communities were informed that they must have a PDS number to be entitled to WFP assistance. Participants were informed of the reasons for linking assistance with PDS: to be able to identify each assisted family with only one unique identifier, in order to remove duplicates, and to sort out the families who need assistance more than others. This information was given in conjunction with an ongoing WFP messaging campaign to inform all communities of the changes to entitlement linked to PDS information. The communities were further informed of referral and complaint mechanism to register for their PDS cards.

#### **What are AAP and CWC?**

Information and communication are critical forms of aid. Without these, affected people cannot access services or make the best decisions for themselves and their communities, nor can they hold aid agencies to account. When people are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and provide feedback, this enhances their sense of wellbeing, helps them adapt to the challenges they face, and better enables them to take an active role in their own recovery.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is based upon two important considerations. Firstly, the humanitarian community must consider the needs of the people it serves. Secondly, humanitarian agencies must strive for accountability to crisis-affected populations by engaging them in the decision making process. By facilitating and acting upon their opinions, WFP is helping to fulfil their right to live with dignity – a fundamental human right at the heart of the assistance framework.

Communicating with Communities (CwC) links to the idea that increasing dialogue with people complements accountability, monitoring, impact evaluation and programme design. Affected populations thus become stakeholders in the assistance process.

#### **WFP Recommendations**

- Variation in geographical location to be reflected in vulnerability criteria.
- Vulnerability criteria to take into account: IDPs perception of vulnerability, income support opportunities, size of families, age, and physical and mental wellbeing.
- IDP's perception of vulnerability to be incorporated in the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment, planned for later in 2016.

#### **Contact CwC**

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