Measuring Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative
Nairobi Workshop Outcomes
20-22 March 2017

Summary
This document represents the collective work and input of 15 agencies, foundations, academic institutions and governments that came together in Nairobi in March 2017 for the Measuring Refugee Self-Reliance workshop.

Participants included the Danish Refugee Council, the IKEA Foundation, International Rescue Committee, the Joint IDP Profiling Service, Mercy Corps, Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, RefugePoint, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat, Samuel Hall, Solutions Alliance, Trickle Up, UNHCR, US State Department/PRM, the West Asia and North Africa Institute, and the Women’s Refugee Commission.

The workshop itself was the culmination of a year-long engagement among many of the participants in a Community of Practice focused on determining common measures that could inform and promote self-reliance programming for refugees.

This summary document and the Community of Practice serve as a platform to build further collaborative initiatives around measurement, programming, and complementary efforts to promote self-reliance for refugees.

Background:
The refugee landscape is changing. At present, there are over 65 million people forcibly displaced, inclusive of 21 million refugees; more than 80% of refugee crises last over 10 years; 60% of refugees now reside in urban areas and 80% of refugees are in developing countries. At the same time, solutions for refugees are dwindling. In recent years fewer than 2% of refugees worldwide have been able to avail themselves of any of the “durable solutions,” i.e., return home; resettle to another safe country; or legally integrate into the host country. This tumultuous time has highlighted the need to do better on behalf of refugees and the sheer number of people on the move provides us with an urgent call to action.

Shrinking humanitarian aid budgets can no longer support refugees dependent on aid for long periods of time. Refugees themselves tell us that they want to be self-reliant and request support to build independent lives in their host countries, whether temporary or permanent. Numerous agencies have been grappling with this same challenge to support and then measure self-reliance. In June 2016, RefugePoint and the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC), two organizations working to address this gap convened a global Community of Practice of organizations wrestling with this issue. Following quarterly calls focused on learning and tool sharing, an in-person meeting was planned.

Nairobi Observation Day & Workshop:
RefugePoint and WRC organized a three-day event in Nairobi to bring together members of the global self-reliance measurement Community of Practice. An observation day at the RefugePoint office in Nairobi kicked off the event to provide peer learning and a foundation for the two-day workshop. The observation day allowed participants to see the inner workings of a self-reliance
program and to meet with refugees and hear of their paths toward self-reliance. Building on this experience, the two-day workshop focused on four objectives to build and develop our collaborative approach and understanding of refugee self-reliance.

**Workshop Objectives:**
- Gain a common understanding of what we want to measure and why – ‘self-reliance and well-being’ – as a way to promote this outcome and the programmatic designs that facilitate this outcome.
- Gain agreement on principles of ‘self-reliance and well-being’ programs and measures, to ensure that any indicators we agree on are consistent with those principles.
- Develop (or make significant progress towards developing) a common set of core indicators that could be adapted to local use and that we could move forward with piloting.
- Identify programmatic implications of these indicators and opportunities to scale.

The Measuring Refugee Self-Reliance workshop was designed to be interactive and to draw out the vast experiences of the members of the Community of Practice in self-reliance and resilience programming. The first day of the workshop encouraged participants to debate and unpack the components of self-reliance, agree on a definition and then together build self-reliance programming and measurement principles. On this first day, partners presented their experiences on which this initiative could build. The second day of the workshop was the hard work of thinking through and agreeing on how self-reliance outcomes should be measured.

**Defining self-reliance**

After reviewing numerous definitions of self-reliance pulled from multiple policy and guidance documents, the participants gravitated towards the definition contained in the UNHCR Handbook on Self-Reliance (2005), though with modifications.

This is the original definition included in the Handbook:

"Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity.”

Nairobi workshop self-reliance definition:

“**Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet its essential needs in a sustainable manner.**”

The participants felt that it was important that the definition include both economic and social aspects of self-reliance (i.e. not solely financial independence), and that there be an element of sustainability in the definition to avoid a “slice of time” analysis, though the time horizon for measuring sustainability was not determined. The participants also felt that it is best not to specify what is included in essential needs, as that might vary from context to context. Finally, the participants determined that while dignity is extremely important, it is extrinsic to the definition of self-reliance, is very subjective and difficult to measure.

Building on this definition, an extensive list of potential principles for self-reliance programming and measurement were shared with participants. The goal of this session was to explore what
principles, core assumptions, or standards should undergird any survey tool, indicators, or program designs we might consider. The draft principles presented for deliberation were drawn in part from principles already put forth in related UNHCR policy and guidance documents, with new ones added. Participants were divided into three groups and each was provided a first draft of principles to discuss, debate and agree on a final list of principles to guide our work going forward.

**Principles of Self-Reliance Programming & Measurement**

**Overarching Principles**

1. Adhere to the principle of “Do no harm” and prioritize the well-being and dignity of clients.
2. Continually advocate for refugee rights, access to national services and employment opportunities (even while proceeding pragmatically in the absence of these)
3. Introduce self-reliance strategies early in the displacement cycle and incorporate them into all types of programming (i.e. not only livelihoods)
4. Collaborate and partner with locally relevant groups such as refugee organizations, religious groups, development actors, and government actors and service providers
5. Involve refugees in program and measurement design and implementation, with regular feedback loops
6. Consider how the protection and legal environment supports or undermines self-reliance and client safety.

**Program Design Principles**

Self-Reliance programming should be designed through...

1. A comprehensive systems and gender analysis that is appropriate for the local context
2. A client-driven plan for self-reliance inclusive of an exit vision/goal developed with clients
3. Integration and coherence of various program elements (e.g. laddering support in a deliberate, coordinated way, using a case management model if possible)
4. Appropriate evidence-based programming and policy

**Measurement Design Principles**

Self-Reliance measurement should...

1. Be simple and easy to use (as few indicators as possible)
2. Be adapted, as necessary, for the local context
3. Be aware of perverse incentives (i.e. indicators that yield results that look good on paper but do not translate into benefits for refugees)
4. Clarify who will store, manage and use the information collected. Information should be analyzed and shared with both clients and program managers for a fruitful feedback loop.

With agreement on the definition and principles, on day two we began discussing how exactly self-reliance could be measured. Assessment domains (listed below) from a number of self-reliance, integration or well-being measurement tools were shared and participants were asked to vote on the items that they felt were essential.

**We agreed that measuring the following domains would tell us most of the story regarding a refugee household’s journey toward self-reliance (as defined above).**

1. Income/Savings
2. Employment
3. Shelter
4. Food/Nutrition
5. Health care
6. Education
7. Social capital
8. Safety/Protection
9. Well-Being/Hope for the future

Other domains that were considered but either eliminated or merged with the above domains include:
- WASH
- Basic needs
- Human dignity
- Quality of life
- Expenditures
- Utilities
- Psychosocial support
- Child protection
- Access to information
- Documentation
- Household supplies and furnishing

The participants developed numerous indicators for each of the agreed domains, and these remain a work in progress. The participants debated the tensions between refugee perception vs objective measures, refugee vs host community experiences and the constant struggle of creating simple and easy to replicate indicators. There was also much discussion and debate about which indicators are crucial for an understanding of self-reliance, and which might be very important but peripheral to that understanding. With these tensions in mind, RefugePoint and WRC will work on these indicators for presentation back to the community of practice for further discussion and testing.

Based on a common belief that self-reliance programming should expand with measurement and goal-setting being key to that, in the final sessions we discussed how the initiative should build and grow. Participants were asked to reflect on how we can build momentum / uptake of these measurements and methods and participants broke into groups to recommend next steps for this initiative. Recommendations included finalizing the indicators for partner testing, growing the Community of Practice, and connecting to other initiatives to build buy in and widespread adoption of self-reliance approaches. RefugePoint and WRC are using the recommendations of the participants to guide the next steps of this initiative.

For more information on this initiative, please contact info@refugepoint.org.