

Principles of Good Practice for Self-Reliance Programming

Introduction

Self-reliance is "the social and economic ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet its needs in a sustainable manner." While self-reliance is often associated with livelihoods, the ability of a household to achieve this milestone is equally dependent on social inclusion and safety.

Economic interventions often focus on the most highly educated, skilled and/or most able. Targeting this cohort can create easy 'wins' for implementers. While it is true that these individuals often provide for spouses and families, lifting entire households as well as their communities, humanitarians still have a responsibility to ensure the needs of all household members are met. Reaching and including all household members requires approaches that overcome barriers to self-reliance for groups of individuals who have been historically marginalized, such as women, adolescents and youth, older persons, persons living with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals. Additionally, achieving self-reliance for households requires addressing their economic and social well-being holistically – ensuring that all their basic needs are being met. In order to know if self-reliance has been achieved requires measuring program impacts over time to capture forward movement, and program adaptation if progress is not being realized.

The Self-Reliance Index, which measures program impacts and related inputs and supports at the household level over time, is neutral in its application in terms of client targeting and inclusion. However, the Index is envisioned to support and identify good programming that contributes to the achievement of self-reliance. As such, practitioners using the Self-Reliance Index are urged to apply the following principles in their programs.

Principles

In order to optimize self-reliance programming for households and all the individuals within, the success of which can be captured by Self-Reliance Index, programming should be anchored in the following principles:

✓ Gender

Promoting self-reliance presents an opportunity to transform gender roles and household and community power dynamics – shifting access to and control over resources and creating more equitable households and communities where everyone can benefit. Women's social and economic empowerment leads to positive and higher educational trajectories for girls, delays their age of marriage and childbirth, reduces poverty levels, and has knock-on effects for subsequent generations. Targeting and including both women and men in economic programming is not only the right thing to do – it is the smart thing to do to promote economic development in communities and societies.

A thorough gender analysis is the cornerstone of effective programming and is required to understand the current capacities, division of labor and decision-making within the household. In situations of

conflict and displacement, women often emerge as the primary breadwinner for the household. Economic programs targeting women should focus on dignified, sustainable livelihoods and care-work efficiencies rather than targeting women as a source of supplemental income.

✓ **Inclusion**

In every society there are marginalized individuals and social groups. Addressing marginalization requires an understanding of intersectionality and how various identities and social markers facilitate or impede access to resources and opportunities. Ensuring that humanitarian aid is based on need requires understanding which populations and individuals are in greatest need and it is often those with intersecting identities – for example, women living with disabilities, LGBTQI refugees, and religious, racial, and ethnic minorities. An inclusive approach identifies the unique needs and priorities of each population and sub-population group and provides opportunities based on individuals' needs as well as their capacities. It requires viewing persons with disabilities, for example, as people with abilities who can and want to contribute as well as individuals who may have specific needs. An inclusive approach recognizes that LGBTQ individuals are often overlooked in humanitarian programming because they live beyond normative gender roles and are unrecognized as heads of households or have left their households due to intra-household prejudice, discrimination and even violence. Inclusion means moving beyond merely targeted programming for specific populations and sub-populations but meaningfully including and partnering with them into all aspects of program and service delivery, including government safety net programs.

✓ **Agency**

All refugees and displaced populations possess skills, life experiences, knowledge, and expertise that should be identified and built on to promote sustainable, dignified choices including livelihoods that are safe and provide opportunity. Refugees' social networks are a source of protection, information, and economic opportunity and humanitarians should be intentional about strengthening refugees' social capital as a means to increase both their human and financial capital and to enhance the full expression of their economic, social and political rights.

✓ **Supporting Households and Individuals**

In situations of displacement, households often require multiple income earners in order to sustainably meet their basic needs. The focus should be on increasing the assets and well-being of the entire household – financially, socially, and physically. This requires recognizing that women in male-headed households and female and male youth are often household income contributors as well as perform care work which contributes to the household economy and household savings. Instead of merely targeting heads of household with economic interventions, programs should challenge assumptions about primary and secondary breadwinners and support the various roles and contributions made by all family members.

✓ **Risk Mitigation**

Economic opportunities can both reduce exposure to some protection risks while at the same time increase exposure to other risks such as sexual harassment and abuse, labor exploitation, xenophobia and discrimination. These risks may occur when refugee entrepreneurs or employees navigate public spaces, use mass transportation, and interact with employers and fellow employees. Humanitarian practitioners need to ensure that their programs do not increase exposure to risks for their clients, but rather proactively mitigate such risks by identifying risks with their refugee clients from the outset, developing risk mitigation strategies within their program design and implementation which require regular monitoring to ensure effectiveness.

✓ **Coordination**

Achieving self-reliance requires that households are able to address all their needs comprehensively – nutrition, shelter, education, health care, transportation, and so on. Practitioners should consider using a case management approach with their clients to understand the myriad of needs within the household and to use referral mechanisms to other service providers for needed services and expertise that their own organization does not provide. This requires an ongoing level of coordination and cooperation often absent in humanitarian response, but one that is critical to truly addressing household needs holistically. It requires facilitating access to governmental and other host community services including those provided by NGOs and civil society actors.

✓ **Learning and Evidence**

Designing and implementing programs that promote better self-reliance outcomes for refugees requires knowledge and evidence on what works. This requires ongoing monitoring and course correcting in real time, as needed. It requires gathering age, sex, and diversity disaggregated data to understand which programs work best, where, and with which populations. By doing this we can build the evidence base on what does and does not work (including programming components, modalities, approaches and partnerships). We need to identify, share, and apply the elements that are critical for program success and lessons learned to address and overcome barriers and challenges. The use of the Self-Reliance Index supports learning on whether and how our programs are moving households forward towards self-reliance, which can help improve programs and scale effective models and approaches.