Protection & Accountability to Affected Populations | WFP Myanmar

Protecting Most Vulnerable from Hunger

Myanmar is undergoing a significant political and socio-economic transformation, including the formation of its first civilian government in 2016. While expectations for growth and development are high, the new Government is challenged with consolidating democracy and building a culture of respect for human rights, reconciliation, sustainable development and peace. Without a fully-fledged nationwide ceasefire agreement and accelerated national reconciliation, ethnic conflicts and inter-communal violence continue to exacerbate the already fragile situation in the country.

The protracted state of conflict and displacement prompts negative coping mechanisms, growing sexual violence and vulnerability to risky migration, with women and girls from ethnic minorities at the highest risk. In Kachin, Rakhine, Shan States and other conflict-affected areas, hundreds of thousands of people remain internally displaced and food insecure, mostly relying on humanitarian assistance for their survival. The country is also highly susceptible to a variety of natural hazards including cyclones, floods, earthquakes and landslides. Recurrent social tensions and instability of humanitarian access creates a highly complex and volatile humanitarian context. Hence, strengthening a comprehensive protection-specific environment for the individuals at risk has become particularly important for WFP in recent years.

Protection is also intrinsically linked with human rights and international humanitarian law. Thus, protection risks are the threats to an affected individual’s rights.

Key Protection Elements
- Safety: from injury, violence, coercion, deprivation or the threat of any of these
- Dignity: self-determination, respect for aspirations and wishes, self-worth
- Integrity: respecting the full spectrum of people’s needs, rights and capacities

WFP’s Approach to Protection

WFP’s specific commitment to protection is outlined in its 2012 Policy on Humanitarian Protection. As a UN organization and member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), WFP is committed to promoting and encouraging respect for human rights, which is a core purpose of the UN and a key commitment of IASC. Safety, dignity, and integrity are the key elements of WFP’s definition of protection. Engagement in protection is consistent with WFP’s efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 - to achieve zero hunger. In practice, integrating protection into WFP operations is about good programming. Protection can enhance the programmes’ positive impacts and help avoid negative effects for the women, men, boys and girls by ensuring that food assistance is provided in a safe, dignified and appropriate manner.

Strategizing Humanitarian Access

In 2016, WFP in Myanmar faced several challenges to maintaining humanitarian access to affected people. In Kachin and Shan States, armed conflict continues to affect people causing pockets of new and secondary displacement and putting many civilians at risk. In the northern part of Rakhine State, attacks on border guard posts and following security operations seriously compromised the food and nutrition security in highly vulnerable areas. To strengthen the Humanitarian Country Team’s negotiation capacity to engage with major stakeholders and address access challenges, WFP sponsored a support mission from the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (Centre) from Switzerland in November 2016. It was followed by advanced technical workshops on humanitarian negotiation in March 2017 facilitated by the Centre in close cooperation with OCHA, UNICEF, WFP as well as Trocaire.

WFP’s Definition of Protection

Designing and carrying out food assistance activities that do not increase the protection risks faced by the crisis-affected populations receiving assistance, but rather, contribute to the safety, dignity, and integrity of vulnerable people.

Why does Protection matter?

Food assistance as a scarce and strategic commodity, is a fundamental tool to protect the basic right to life. Hunger can cause and exacerbate existing protection risks and, in crisis settings, people’s consumption and availability of food is altered. The degree of access to and control over food can affect all aspects of lives. Vulnerability to food insecurity is therefore often linked with vulnerability to protection risks. The most food insecure are frequently those affected by forced displacement, harassment and physical attacks (e.g. outside official camps of internally displaced persons). Other severe protection risks include child labour and sexual and gender-based violence. Food is a key factor impacting people’s exposure to and ability to cope with such risks. However, food assistance can be a powerful tool to help people be safe and maintain their dignity and integrity.

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Progress Towards Protection and Gender-Sensitive Programming

In 2016, WFP in Myanmar conducted a gender analysis across its activities to contribute to future programming and to support the integration of gender and women’s empowerment. WFP was actively engaged in the global campaign “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence” to raise awareness to end gender-based violence (GBV) and emphasize how food insecurity and lack of access to sufficient resources could exacerbate and reinforce GBV. Male WFP staff signed up to the “WFP Men Stand for Gender Equality” pledge to mobilize support for the movement to end GBV and promote gender equality.

Moving forward on Accountability to Affected Populations

WFP’s first accountability is to food-insecure people who are the primary actors in their own survival and protection. The objective of WFP’s Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) commitments is to facilitate the participation of affected people in WFP’s programmes by ensuring that programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes are informed by and reflect the views of affected people. WFP focuses on three main areas:

- **Information provision:** WFP must provide accurate, timely and accessible information about assistance to affected people.
- **Consultation:** WFP seeks the views of all segments of the affected population.
- **Complaints & Feedback Mechanisms:** WFP provides a means for affected people to voice complaints and feedback on areas relevant to operations in a safe and dignified manner.

Complaints & Feedback Mechanism

Focusing on engaging affected populations in the processes and decisions that affect their lives, WFP established its country-wide complaints and feedback mechanism (CFM) to improve accountability and transparency towards its beneficiaries and serve them more effectively. To this end, WFP introduced communication channels such as exclusive telephone hotlines and e-mails to complement the traditional letter boxes and feedback received through WFP and cooperating partners’ staff. As highlighted in the 2016 post-distribution monitoring, most households were able to use CFM regardless of the sex of the head of the household. Although still at a pilot stage, the CFM generates valuable outcomes in WFP operational areas in creating a channel of communication for the most marginalized communities. The CFM is particularly powerful when less vulnerable households suddenly become most vulnerable again. In Myitkyina, the head of a household with four small children receiving 70 percent of WFP’s assistance, sadly stepped on a landmine. WFP was immediately informed through the CFM channel and increased its assistance to a full monthly food basket. WFP also increased its monitoring frequency and conducted livelihood profiling activities that included questions on protection issues ranging from knowledge of complaint mechanisms to negative impact of having to pay illegal fees, discrimination or suffering abuse.

Meeting Noor Bar and her son

Noor Bar is the head of a household comprising nine family members. Following the social unrest in the northern part of Rakhine State in October 2016, her husband was arrested during the security operations in the area. Since then, she has to take care of the entire family including two disabled children and toddlers. She explained that during the events, her family had to run away many times from home to escape from the area clearance operations. They spent a lot of time in the paddy field without enough food. “We were a poor household. My husband earned a living by doing causal labour. I was a housewife and stayed at home doing the household chores, but we were a happy family”, Noor Bar recalled. Noor Bar and other households like hers in the village had no food for months after the unrest. For their survival they had to ask for help from neighbours. “Whenever the kids felt hungry, we begged for food by offering them to provide general domestic work in exchange. However, all the families in the neighbourhood were in shortage of food, and we had countless days without any food”, Noor Bar told WFP. “Finally, a WFP truck arrived early in the morning. When we saw that the truck carried WFP food to our village, we were extremely relieved. You cannot imagine how happy we felt to get out of the desperate situation”. Monthly food deliveries have been restored in the affected areas of Maungdaw North since January 2017. Distributions include fortified blended food and high-energy biscuits, to the most vulnerable people like Noor Bar, who relies entirely on WFP’s live-saving food assistance and has neither income nor livelihood activities. “Thank you so much, WFP, you saved our lives”, Noor Bar kept expressing her gratitude over and over again.

Internally displaced man in Kachin with his monthly WFP cash assistance.

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