Targeting cash and food assistance
for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt:

Issues emerging, lessons being learned

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Consultancy report for UNHCR and WFP

Contents

1.   Introduction

1.1.   Objectives and scope of the report

This report is an output of a consultancy to review the process of developing protocols for targeting cash and food assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan during 2014. Under the auspices of the High Level Meeting between WFP and UNHCR (May 2014) and the WFP and UNHCR Joint Action Plan on cash and vouchers (2014), WFP and UNHCR made a commitment to explore methods and mechanisms for ensuring complementary targeting of multi-sector cash and food assistance. Both agencies have dedicated considerable time and expertise to joint activities on targeting in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt (among other countries). The main objective of the consultancy is to document the process, capture the viewpoints and reflections of the people involved, and to examine emerging issues and lessons which should be considered in future guidance and operations.

This work is also part of a larger project under the planned lessons learned on the "Building Blocks of CBIs in MENA region" planned for 2015, and is intended to feed into the development of targeting guidance for UNHCR country offices.

A major goal of the work done on targeting in the MENA region during 2013 and 2014 was to improve understanding of economic vulnerability for the targeting of cash assistance. This is a relatively new approach in refugee contexts. The development of economic targeting criteria in the Syria Crisis has received significant assistance from the World Bank, in leading UNHCR through methods of econometric analysis (i.e. identifying reliable predictors of consumption poverty through statistical analysis), applying a proxy means test (PMT) approach well-tested in poverty-reduction programmes. On the other hand, the analysis and targeting of food insecurity has benefited from decades of experience and methodology development by the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit of WFP.[1]

Conceptually, to the extent that household food security is a function of economic access to food[2], and food assistance contributes to overall household budgets (particularly when provided in near-cash equivalent form such as vouchers and e-cards), the World Bank and WFP approaches are analysing the same thing but from different angles. There is a very substantial overlap in the factors analysed and therefore the data collection requirements of the two approaches, and there is broad consensus on the benefits of joint data collection. However, the analytical methods are very different. Operationally, too, there have been challenges in developing complementary targeting of cash and food assistance given the different mandates, procedures and resource streams of the two agencies.

Within UNHCR, targeting by poverty or economic vulnerability is also a major departure from the established principles and procedures based on protection criteria. There has been much discussion about how to integrate the two, and concerns that the new approach should not displace protection principles.

The report provides a summary of issues and challenges described by stakeholders in these processes, together with observations by the consultant (drawing on international targeting literature and experience), and some indication of lessons emerging from the MENA process so far. It is not an evaluation. At the time of the stakeholder interviews (December 2014) the development of targeting protocols was still in progress in all three countries, with both Egypt and Lebanon engaged in new data collection exercises. It was therefore too early to assess the results or efficiency of the approach. Such an evaluation would in any case require much longer and more detailed research in each country. Equally, the consultancy did not aim to review the technical details of questionnaires and analytical methods, which had already been scrutinised by many experts. Rather, the aim was to look at the bigger picture, consider the work done in the context of an operational view of targeting, and try to capture some of the institutional memory of the process.

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[1]   See WFP (2014) *Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security*
(http://www.wfp.org/content/consolidated-approach-reporting-indicators-food-security-cari-2014).
[2]   Food security is commonly understood as a function of three contributors: economic *access* to food (via purchase or exchange), *availability* of food (markets and production), and *utilisation* – including the knowledge, attitudes and practices necessary for adults and children to consume a healthy diet. Identifying which of the three contributors is the limiting factor for food security, in turn identifies the appropriate response. Food (in)security can be a combined function of all three.

1.2. Regional and country context

The Syrian refugee situation is in some ways unique. At the same time, the three countries covered in this review have much in common but also differ in various ways (context, capacity, constraints, and the scale and characteristics of their refugee caseload).

Characteristics of the Syrian crisis:

- A significant largely urban, non-camp, middle-income displaced population.
- A well-resourced humanitarian operation with a considerable amount of data collection at the household level.
- A rapid rise in case-load (2013-14) resulting in an urgent operational need to target driven by resource constraints.
- A multitude of actors.

Characteristics of the three countries:

- Lebanon with over 1 million refugees increasing at an average rate of 1000 per day between 2012-2014. An unstable government with a subsidy-led poverty reduction strategy that prefers in-kind and vouchers to cash interventions. A multitude of players distributing cash for different purposes. UNHCR with a triple role as lead agency, coordinator and direct responder. And a plethora of data collection initiatives, not least the WFP-led Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR).

- Jordan with a previous cash programme for Iraqi refugees. A data collection effort, led by UNHCR and implemented by a long-standing partner, that allows for 100% household interviews. UNHCR-led cash programming. Multi-agency, independent vulnerability analysis task force, the Vulnerability Analysis Framework (VAF). Use of income and expenditure data from the onset for targeting of cash programming, led by UNHCR. Validation of the method by the World Bank in 2014.

- Egypt with a previous cash programme for Iraqi and African refugees; a smaller caseload than the other two countries and consequently smaller cash and food assistance programmes, with fewer stakeholders - WFP, UNHCR and Save the Children are the main partners in socio-economic assessment. A shift from geographic targeting of food assistance and categorical targeting of cash assistance to a common method in 2014, facilitated by respective HQ and regional technical support (WFP and UNHCR) – however no continuous in-country technical expertise in data collection and analysis in either agency. Interrupted access to home visits for socio-economic assessment (hence office-based interviews) due to government restrictions.

1.3. Methodology

The review was conducted through stakeholder consultations and a review of documentation.

At the beginning of the consultancy a short mission was undertaken to meet face-to-face with stakeholders and to gain initial impressions of the targeting process and institutional set-up in each country, as well as contextual factors affecting the practicalities of targeting. The itinerary was as follows:

- 2 working days in Egypt (1-2 December).

- 3 working days in Lebanon (3-4 and 9 December), including a visit to the UNHCR / WFP North Lebanon office in Tripoli (9 December) to hear views from the field.

- 3 working days in Jordan (10-11 and 14 December), including participation in the UNHCR regional *Cash-Based Interventions Meeting* on 11 December.

After the mission, follow-up discussions were held by e-mail and skype. Annex A contains a list of all the people consulted. In general, the interviews focused on staff members of UNHCR, WFP and implementing partners (including task force and steering committee members). Only one donor representative (ECHO, in Lebanon) and one government counterpart (also in Lebanon) were included. Given the short time in-country and the primary focus of the study, this selection is considered appropriate: however it will inevitably narrow the range of stakeholder perspectives represented in this report.

The most obvious, deliberate, exclusion from the stakeholder consultation is that the consultant did not meet with any persons of concern or beneficiaries. Given the institutional focus of the study, it was judged that a

few brief discussions with refugees would not add significantly to the consultant's understanding of the key questions in the TORs. Therefore, it was not considered justified to interrupt the registration or interview process or to intrude on the refugees' privacy (particularly given the "assessment fatigue" noted by various interviewees). It is important to remember, however, that the ultimate stakeholders in the targeting process are the people who will be provided with or excluded from assistance. It is recommended that any planned evaluation of targeting outcomes should be sure to include their views.

Annex B lists the documents collected and reviewed. Many of these are available on the UNHCR portal (http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents).

2. Targeting: an operational framework [3]

This section sets out the necessary components of a functioning targeting system, in order to put the later discussion of issues into a broader operational context. A targeting system, as summarised in Figure 1, must be able to *define, identify* and *reach* the intended beneficiaries. *Defining* the target group involves, firstly, clear statements of organisational mandate and priorities (component ①), followed by a framework and terminology to define who, in principle, a specific type or programme of assistance should be targeted to, and what sort of need or problem it is intended to address.

This framework (step ②) is not a theoretical exercise: any inconsistency or lack of clarity in the definitions at this stage is likely to cause practical problems of misunderstanding and mis-targeting at later stages. In the context of UNHCR's cash-based assistance, this step has included discussions about the definitions of 'at-risk' categories of persons of concern, versus 'vulnerability' or 'poverty / welfare' (in WFP and World Bank terminology, respectively). From this discussion a general consensus has emerged that the target group for cash assistance in the refugee context should be the *economically vulnerable*, defined as people who are unable to meet their basic needs for lack of money. This group is very likely to overlap with people who are 'at-risk' in terms of UNHCR's protection criteria, but it is not identical (see UNHCR 2014, *Operational Guidance for Cash-Based Interventions in Displacement Settings*, p.18, and section 3.3 below). Clarifying the relationship between food insecurity and economic vulnerability would also fall under this step.

Step ③ is the critical link between defining and identifying the intended beneficiaries. This step requires data analysis to profile the vulnerability, poverty and needs of the population and then to select the most reliable criteria or indicators that characterise individuals or families who belong to the target group. There are a number of possible approaches to doing this, but all should be based on the best evidence available and should be tailored to the specific situation and population of concern. Standardised international indicators and thresholds (such as measures of nutritional status) are appropriate for some types of assistance, but less so for economic vulnerability which is context-specific. Participatory methods may be used, alone or more often in combination with objective analysis, to ensure the communities' perspectives and insights are taken into account. Existing data sets (such as ProGres or the Jordan home visit survey data) may be used, or new surveys may be mounted to collect the information needed.
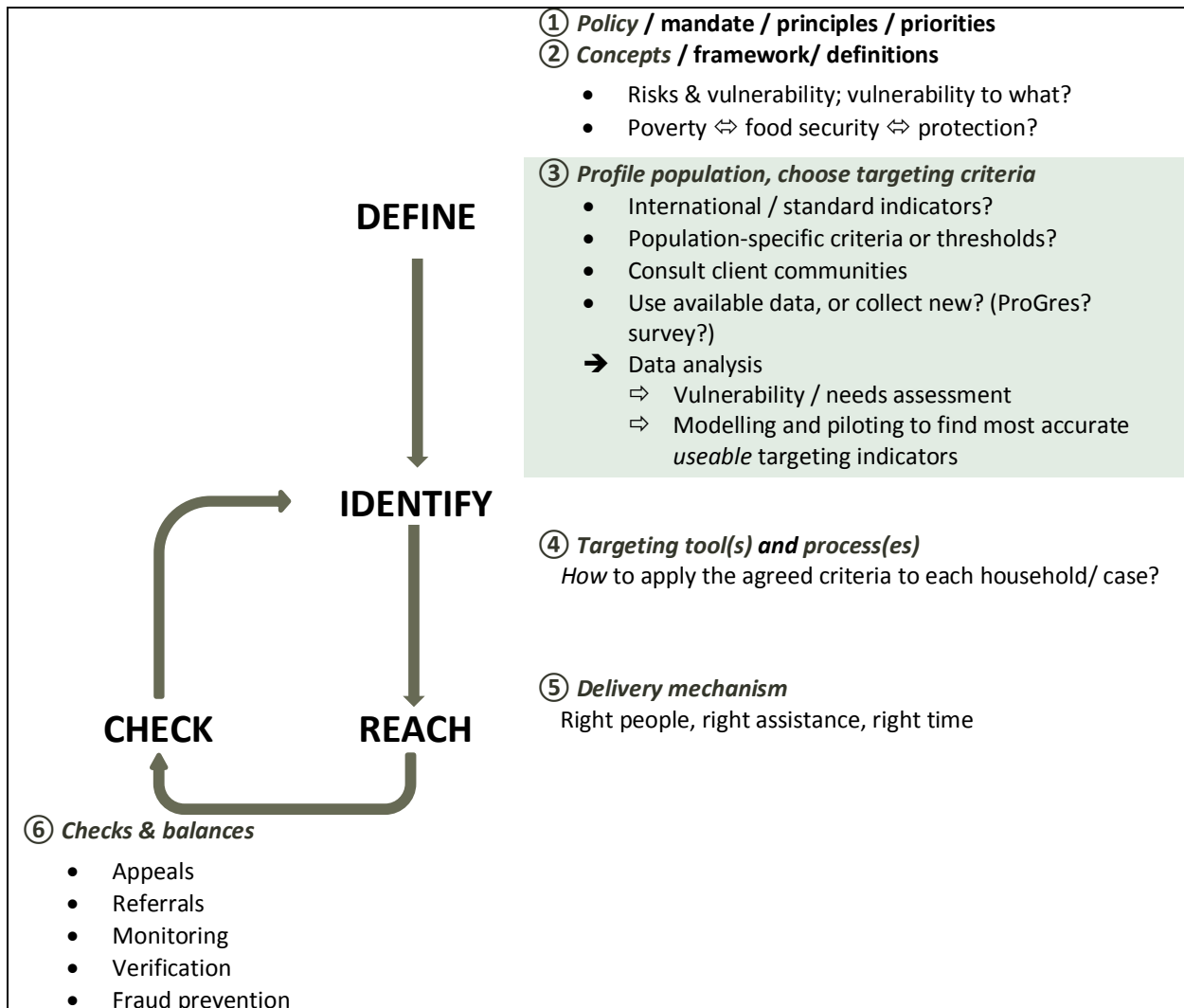
Whichever data sources are used, different analytical approaches can then be applied, the two main ones used in the current context being vulnerability analysis (as developed by WFP, using weighted indices based on expert judgement and international experience), and statistical/ econometric analysis to test which characteristics in this specific population are most reliably associated with a key outcome, in this case expenditure (i.e. people's ability to pay for their basic needs). The latter approach, as used by the World Bank and taken up by VAF in Jordan and UNHCR HQ, is used to generate a proxy means test (PMT) combining those indicators which are proven to give the best statistical match with the outcome.

Whichever approaches are used, the data collection and analysis conducted at this stage, in addition to identifying targeting criteria, can provide an overall assessment of the situation, vulnerabilities and needs of the population of concern. Crucially, it also provides an estimate of *how many people* fall into each category of need or vulnerability, and what types of assistance are needed. It usually produces much more information than is needed strictly for targeting, and can provide essential context and background for a range of operational and resourcing decisions. In most cases this analysis is based on a representative sample of the

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[3] This section is based on a presentation given by the consultant at the UNHCR regional *Cash-Based Interventions Meeting* on 11 December 2014, and incorporates some of the discussion and feedback from workshop participants.

population, and therefore does not provide targeting data on the whole population. It does not, in itself, identify which individuals or families are eligible for assistance.

Figure 1: Components of an operational targeting system

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                          ① Policy / mandate / principles / priorities      │
│                          ② Concepts / framework/ definitions               │
│                             • Risks & vulnerability; vulnerability to what?  │
│                             • Poverty ⇔ food security ⇔ protection?         │
│                          ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐  │
│          DEFINE          │ ③ Profile population, choose targeting criteria│  │
│                          │   • International / standard indicators?      │  │
│            │             │   • Population-specific criteria or thresholds?│  │
│            │             │   • Consult client communities               │  │
│            │             │   • Use available data, or collect new? (ProGres?│
│            ▼             │     survey?)                                 │  │
│                          │  ➜ Data analysis                             │  │
│                          │     ⇨ Vulnerability / needs assessment       │  │
│                          │     ⇨ Modelling and piloting to find most accurate│
│    ┌──────▶ IDENTIFY     │        useable targeting indicators          │  │
│    │         │           └──────────────────────────────────────────────┘  │
│    │         │           ④ Targeting tool(s) and process(es)               │
│    │         │              How to apply the agreed criteria to each household/ case?│
│    │         │                                                           │
│    │         │           ⑤ Delivery mechanism                            │
│  CHECK     REACH            Right people, right assistance, right time    │
│    ▲         │                                                           │
│    └─────────┘                                                           │
│  ⑥ Checks & balances                                                     │
│     • Appeals                                                             │
│     • Referrals                                                          │
│     • Monitoring                                                         │
│     • Verification                                                      │
│     • Fraud prevention                                                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Step ④ consists of the procedure(s) and tool(s) which will be used to screen potential beneficiaries and *identify* which individuals or families meet the agreed criteria. A targeting tool (such as a questionnaire, score card, or protocols for subjective assessment or community selection) should be simpler than the data collection tools used in step ③ for analysis, modelling, and vulnerability / needs assessment: the step ③ analysis should select and narrow down a minimum set of information needed for the actual targeting decision. More than one targeting tool and process may be used, to triangulate the decision and to catch needy people who fall through the net. No single targeting tool will be 100% accurate.

Reaching beneficiaries through the delivery mechanism (step ⑤) is often not considered as part of the targeting process, but if the delivery mechanism does not work in such a way as to deliver the right assistance to the right people at the right time, then the targeting system has failed no matter how much analysis has been done. In designing and monitoring a delivery system, care must be taken that it does not unintentionally exclude some intended beneficiaries (for example, by requiring them to travel or to be literate in order to collect the assistance).

Finally the targeting system must also be able to *check* on an ongoing basis that the assistance is in fact reaching the right people: this last component (step ⑥ on the diagram) should include appeal or referral mechanisms to catch people who may have been wrongly excluded from assistance. It should also include

monitoring of the targeting system, measures to prevent fraud or double-counting, and evaluation of the targeting outcomes.

Most of the work done on targeting in the three countries during 2014 falls under step ③ (the shaded box on Figure 1), i.e. profiling the population and choosing targeting criteria. This is an essential component of the targeting system, but it is only one component. A key observation relating to stakeholder expectations is that many of the people involved did not realise at the beginning that the extensive data-collection and analysis exercises undertaken would not directly result in a targeting tool: this requires a further stage (step ④). A vulnerability/ poverty / needs analysis, while extremely useful (not least to inform the design of a targeting tool) is not the same thing as a targeting tool. This point has been frequently made by the Jordan VAF team among others. One result of this confusion has been a widespread frustration at the perceived slowness of the process to produce a useable targeting tool.

3. Cross-country issues and lessons emerging

3.1. Complementarity of food and cash assistance

Conceptually the links between food insecurity and poverty are clear, particularly in an urban market-based context where economic access to food is the dominant factor in food security. WFP and others have invested decades in understanding food security and vulnerability, and have developed globally-accepted indicators such as food consumption score, household dietary diversity, food-based coping mechanisms or household hunger scales, etc. WFP has developed the CARI indicators with a very well-defined approach to 'scoring' individuals with regards to their level of food insecurity[4]. Importantly, CARI includes economic vulnerability (measured by household consumption/ expenditure in relation to national poverty lines, and food expenditure share) among its indicators of coping capacity which contribute to the overall food security score.

In standard poverty analysis and socio-economic studies of the sort promoted by the World Bank, poverty lines are drawn from income, consumption and expenditure surveys to include the cost of an adequate diet in addition to essential non-food expenditures.[5] Therefore, the food poverty line, also called the extreme poverty line, is drawn at a lower income / expenditure threshold than the overall poverty line. A similar logic underlies other methodological approaches such as household economy analysis, in which two thresholds of cash and food income are set for humanitarian programming – the 'livelihoods protection threshold' (which includes a minimum level of non-food expenditure such that families do not have to engage in asset depletion in order to meet food and other needs) and the lower 'survival threshold' which is the income level needed to cover only food and related essentials.[6] Similarly, the minimum expenditure baskets (MEB) used for cash targeting in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt include the cost of food plus other needs, while the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) is a lower threshold reflecting the cost of food and essentials only.

Thus in principle, given general consensus that food insecurity in these urban contexts is largely due to lack of purchasing power, it would be expected that food poverty and overall poverty could be identified as different points on the same scale of income, and that the people in need of food would be a smaller subset of those in overall poverty.

In practice, however, the number of refugees receiving food assistance in the three countries is consistently much larger than the number targeted for unconditional cash. There are operational, institutional and resource-based reasons why establishing the complementarity of food and cash assistance is not so straightforward.

Food assistance is normally provided to all or nearly all refugees arriving in the early stages of a crisis, on a blanket coverage or at most geographically targeted basis. There are a number of reasons for this, including historical issues related to resource availabilities, existing pipelines, experience and institutional mandates. Most importantly it is generally considered impractical to assess people for targeting in the early stages of a

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[4] WFP (2014) Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (http://www.wfp.org/content/consolidated-approach-reporting-indicators-food-security-cari-2014)
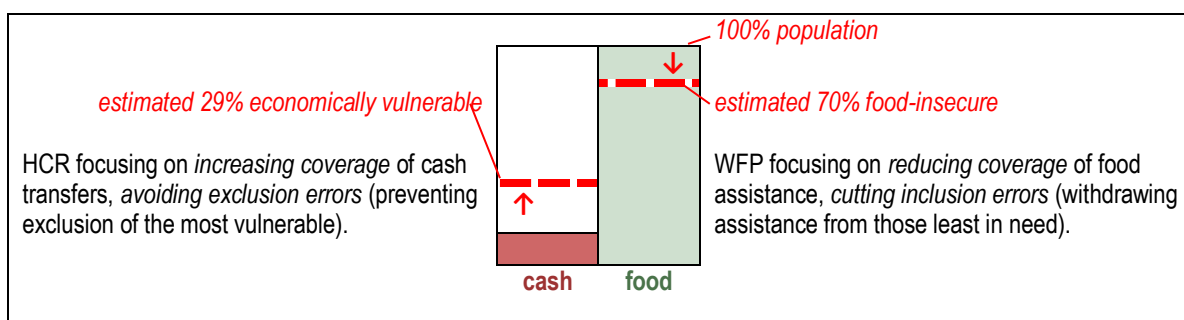
[5] See, for example, http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty.

[6] See FEG / Save the Children *The Practitioner's Guide to the Household Economy Approach*, particularly Chapter 4 (Outcome Analysis). http://www.feg-consulting.com/resource/practitioners-guide-to-hea/

refugee influx, due to the usual absence of data and the lack of time to collect and analyse it, as well as the humanitarian imperative to focus attention and resources on more urgent actions. The amount of food assistance provided is based on nutritional needs (the minimum caloric requirement of the affected population, broken down by protein, carbohydrates and fats). Rather than targeting from the beginning, targeting usually occurs when resources start to dwindle, and/or when the situation of the refugees has stabilised and people have started to find jobs or other income sources. WFP's targeting process therefore starts from blanket coverage and then focuses on identifying and removing people who do *not* need food assistance, i.e. reducing inclusion errors.

UNHCR's targeting of its unconditional cash transfers is, in operational terms, coming from the opposite direction, with a relatively small resource stream, focusing on identifying the small percentage of refugees who are *most in need* of economic assistance, and then expanding coverage as resources allow and as needy cases are identified. In Jordan, for example, unconditional (multi-sectoral) cash assistance started in 2012, and reached 6,000 families by the end of the year. It then built up steadily to 12,000 families in 2013, 18,000 in 2014, and a projected 22,000 in 2015. In Lebanon also, UNCHR started by providing multi-purpose cash assistance to 3% of the refugee population in 2014, with the intention of increasing the number of targeted cases gradually each month. The targeting priority in this context is to minimise exclusion errors, focusing assessment on the neediest. Of course this is a simplification, as all targeted programmes should pay attention to both exclusion and inclusion errors, but the different starting points are key to understanding the modus operandi of WFP and UNHCR targeting. This is illustrated by the example of Lebanon in Figure 2.

Figure 2: UNHCR & WFP targeting objectives (Lebanon 2014)

Understanding the difference in approaches, experience, and strengths and weakness of the various methodologies and actors engaged in developing targeting strategies is a key lesson learned. Furthermore, again due largely to the agencies' respective 'ways of working' and the size of the caseloads, WFP may focus more on the total numbers: the logistics and the delivery statistics. Whereas UNHCR, through a protection lens, will take a more case management approach which is individualised. The two may have been relevant when cash and food assistance were miles apart, but the two are converging, with cash increasingly being considered 'the first response' rather than food. While this is an opportunity for agencies targeting cash and food assistance to learn from each other, it should be recognised that those coming from a food security perspective (or shelter, health, education), will think in terms of 'their assistance' recognising that the fungibility of cash assistance means that cash will not necessarily be used to meet 'their' objective.

It is important to recognise that technical solutions may not resolve these institutional issues. Inter-agency consensus on every detail of a targeting system is unlikely to be achieved, and is probably not desirable. Different organisations have different mandates, accountabilities, operating procedures, specialisations and capacities which will affect how they target assistance. This applies to coordination with implementing partners, as well as to complementary targeting of cash and food assistance by UNHCR and WFP. The goal should be to identify common ground and economies of working together (e.g. joint data collection but separate analysis for different purposes; triangulation between beneficiary lists),[7] while accepting variation in other areas. In this sense harmonisation is likely to be a better goal than standardisation.

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[7] In Lebanon, for example, a joint data collection tool and support platform through RAIS was established in January 2015.

3.2. Continuous versus categorical targeting criteria

An additional challenge with targeting economic vulnerability (as opposed to specific-needs groups, for example) is that poverty is a 'continuous variable'. Being poor is relative, it is not a yes or no question. The poverty line is relative and scalable, that is the threshold for eligibility can be moved up or down the scale according to changes in the cost of living or in the number of people who can be assisted. Everyone needs cash, whether one's priority is food or a medicine.

'Traditional' UNCHR targeting criteria, by contrast, are categorical and observable, e.g. female headed households, unaccompanied children, disabled, those without shelter, etc. These are relatively easy targeting criteria to apply and to communicate because they have a yes or no answer, and can be observed and agreed with relatively little controversy.

However there are advantages and disadvantages of continuous data. The threshold can be moved easily thus increasing or decreasing the numbers of persons targeted depending on resources that are available or a change in policy or complementary assistance that would change income and expenditures. At the same time, this can result in uncertainty for a beneficiary if they are close to the threshold and assistance is not reliable. Thresholds cause problems and generate complaints because of the grey area on both sides of the threshold, particularly when your neighbour is on one side of the threshold and you are on the other.

Targeting based on thresholds is a feature of targeting both cash and food assistance that agencies have to think through. This has to be explained to beneficiaries, as if the affected population do not agree that this is an appropriate, not least the best, approach, it will generate problems for implementing agencies - at a very minimum increased complaints, if not redistribution of assistance.

One lesson learned is that working with a 'score', whether it be calculated by a computerised formula or a simple score-card, needs to find a balance between being strict most of the time, but allowing for some exceptions. The appeals process in Lebanon, for example, re-included 23% of cases who appealed after being excluded from food assistance. They were excluded on the basis of a 'burden score' generated from demographic data in ProGres. They were re-included based on a household interview that generated a VASyR vulnerability score. However an additional 5% were re-included based on the subjective evaluation of the Multi-Functional Team, a cross-sector team that includes protection staff, which is the core of programming in UNHCR. Allowing for exceptions (as long as they remain exceptional) is important.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that while WFP is more comfortable and familiar with this type of targeting (usually based on food consumption scores or other CARI indicators), scoring approaches are less familiar to UNHCR. While it was recognised that the sheer number of Syrian refugees necessitated an automated first stage of targeting, a number of UNHCR staff interviewed were concerned that the computer-based scoring being introduced with economic targeting should supplement but not replace the case-by-case approach. The review of flagged cases by the MFTs is a way around this.

The Lebanon experience is also important because it highlights the impossibility of finding one perfect targeting criterion or mechanism. Targeting strategies will always require mechanisms for cross-checks and review. This latter point is further discussed below.
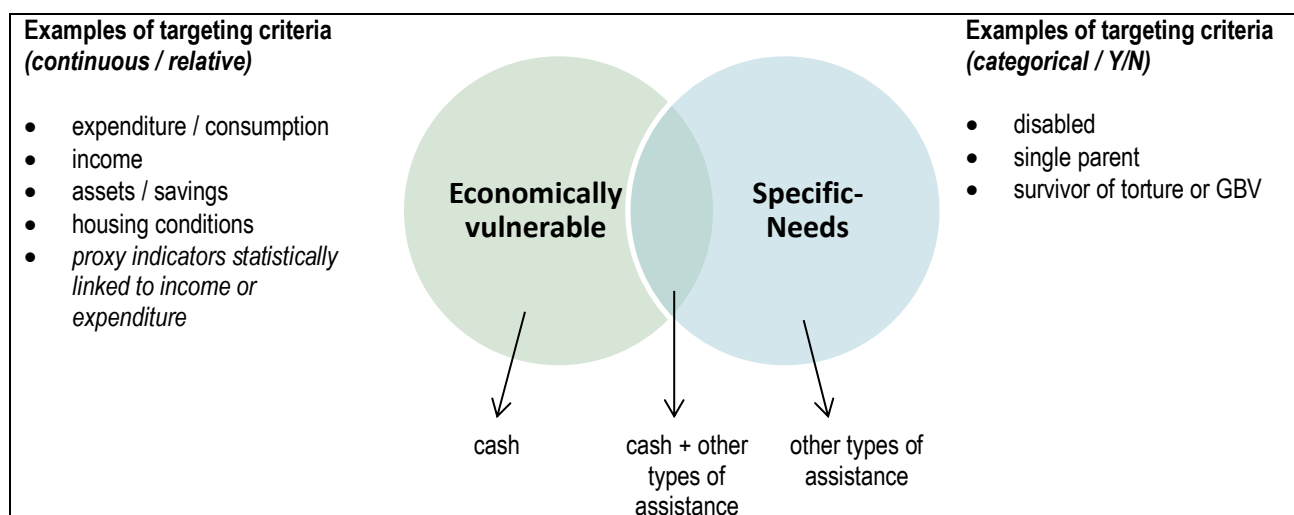
Understanding the differences between continuous and categorical criteria does not mean it is necessary to choose only one option. UNHCR Jordan applies a hybrid model using both continuous (economic) and categorical (protection) targeting criteria for its unconditional cash assistance. The economic vulnerability threshold (poverty line) is used as an initial eligibility filter to list all those who qualify for assistance on economic grounds. Then, because resources are not sufficient to provide cash assistance to everyone on this list, a second step is applied using selected protection categories to prioritise the most needy for immediate assistance. UNHCR thus has a waiting list of people who are economically vulnerable but cannot be covered by available cash resources.

3.3. Integrating protection concerns and economic targeting

Targeting through a protection lens has been largely through the use of protection or specific-needs criteria which are categorical and basically have a Yes/No answer (although categories can and do change). This is in contrast to poverty which is continuous in nature, and employs thresholds that are relative. There is the possibility of using both together as represented in Figure 3. Agencies can seek to target those with specific

needs, and among them those that are poor may benefit from cash assistance. Conversely, of the poor who would benefit from cash, agencies may decide to prioritise those with specific needs (as in Jordan – see section 3.2 above). Either is possible, as long as cash is the appropriate solution for a target group's particular problem. In the Syria crisis, the socio-economic surveys undertaken in all three countries show that a large number of people are economically vulnerable (i.e. they do not have enough money to meet their basic needs as measured by the Minimum Expenditure Basket or MEB) without falling into the specific-needs categories. Therefore, both types of targeting and assistance are appropriate.

Figure 3: Overlap of economically vulnerable and protection-related target groups

Examples of targeting criteria *(continuous / relative)*
- expenditure / consumption
- income
- assets / savings
- housing conditions
- *proxy indicators statistically linked to income or expenditure*

Examples of targeting criteria *(categorical / Y/N)*
- disabled
- single parent
- survivor of torture or GBV

Economically vulnerable — cash
Specific-Needs — cash + other types of assistance — other types of assistance

3.4. *Economic targeting in a refugee context*

The World Bank has considerable experience of using proxy means tests (PMT), derived from extensive income, consumption and expenditure surveys, for the targeting of national poverty programmes and social protection in development settings. However, some features of displaced and refugee contexts may need to be taken into account when applying this approach.

A relevant example of PMT targeting in a non-refugee context is Lebanon's National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP), which is being supported by WFP food vouchers (in the form of e-cards) as part of an integrated strategy to address the needs of both host and refugee populations in the region. [8] The NPTP, started in 2012, provides various types of assistance to the 8% of the population who are below the extreme poverty line. To be included in the NPTP, people must first apply for it and then answer a questionnaire. Data from the questionnaire is cross-checked with information held by other government departments (e.g. health, education and finance). The questionnaire is scored according to a PMT formula which contains 55 variables and is derived from the 2004 national household budget survey data. An exercise to check the accuracy of the targeting by re-interviewing 15% of beneficiaries in 2012 found only a 5% inclusion error (i.e. 95% of beneficiaries were correctly identified).

Refugee contexts rarely if ever allow a similar scale and continuity of data availability and management, governance, or sustained and predictable resource flows. More fundamentally, the poverty or economic vulnerability of refugee populations is likely to be less predictable or stable over time. Refugees arrive with savings that will be depleted. They may gain access to employment that can change their economic situation overnight, particularly when he/she arrives with an education and skills, or conversely lose access to employment due to host government regulations. Expenditures, which are a commonly accepted proxy for

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[8] See UNHCR 2015, *3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-16 in response to the Syrian crisis*.

income, can be over-estimated when they are financed by unsustainable sources, such as savings, selling assets and access to credit or unpredictable sources such as assistance.[9]

Not only does this instability and unpredictability affect the determination of reliable criteria, but also identifying those who meet the criteria, particularly if criteria are demographic. Refugees will split their households, reunite or move depending on their individual families' circumstances, or situation either in situ or back home.

Note: The World Bank-UNHCR study on Welfare and Poverty (forthcoming) uses econometric modelling to test the assumption that expenditures analysed at one point in time, are a reliable enough measure to use as a dependent variable for determining proxies for predicting expenditures in the future.

3.5.   *Case versus household as the unit of assessment and targeting*

This is an important issue that was only lately realised as a potential problem in the countries studied. Socio-economic data is normally collected and analysed on the basis of a household unit, which can be defined in a variety of ways (e.g. people who 'eat from the same pot') but is basically the smallest economic unit within which income, assets, food supplies, shelter etc. are shared. Sometimes the definition of household is not the same for the stakeholder agencies, or not defined the same way over time, presenting a problem for analysis of time-series data. A common and consistent definition of the household is essential for such analysis.

UNHCR, however, registers refugees as a case, usually the principal applicant plus the dependents that the principal applicant has arrived with (who may or may not be close family members). As such a 'household' (people living together and pooling resources) may be comprised of multiple cases. A 'family' may not be the same unit as either a case or a household, giving grounds for further confusion. ProGres data is collected at individual level and grouped into cases. It is technically possible to combine cases to give household-level data, but the challenge is establishing which cases are living together as households.

This issue has caused confusion and potentially targeting errors at assessment interviews, particularly when household interviews have multiple objectives, e.g. on a case basis for updating ProGres and on a household basis for determining socio-economic status. Both respondents and enumerators become confused and data reliability is very likely to suffer. Translation of the term 'household' into Arabic has reportedly been problematic, the exact meaning is not always clear. Different agencies sometimes use different definitions (for example, in the training for the Egypt socio-economic assessment).

The issue of case versus household has implications not only for data collection and analysis, but also for operational decisions such as determining the transfer amount when cash assistance is scaled according to household size (as in Jordan), as well as identifying the households that are eligible for assistance. In Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan, household size is a strong predictor of welfare (inversely proportional) and single member households are often proposed as the first to be excluded from food and cash assistance. However, ground-truthing has revealed that these single-member 'households' are in fact usually members of larger households and may be supporting a number of people. Conversely an example was given in Lebanon of a registered case of single mother with children who appeared very vulnerable, but in reality was living in a household with extended family members and was supported by them. This issue is recognised and is being grappled with in all three countries. In Jordan the VAF unit is working on data management processes to link targeting data for registered cases residing in one household, and has developed concept papers analysing the relationship and impact with regard to the welfare analysis.[10]

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[9]   Notably, the Welfare and Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (UNHCR and World Bank, forthcoming) note the high rates of poverty of those who report depending on credit or assistance as their main source of income.

[10] See "Creating household data: a conundrum of feasibility", January 2015.
http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=7926.

3.6.   Inter-agency collaboration and roles of task forces

Inter-agency collaboration has been an important feature of the process in all three countries. Consensus-building and harmonisation of targeting approaches are essential, but a number of stakeholders felt that the process had been over-long and that lessons should be learned to streamline similar initiatives in future. This was particularly the case in Lebanon, where Targeting Task Force members commented that the terms of reference were too broad, and that the task force lacked a clear governance and decision-making structure. In Jordan, by contrast, the steering committee had a technical unit (VAF) to call on; management buy-in and involvement by decision-makers; and facilitation by a neutral outsider. Two overall observations are:

a) A distinction should be made between tasks that can best be carried out by a committee or task force, and those that need specialist and/or time-intensive technical inputs: the latter should be delegated or outsourced.

b) As mentioned above, inter-agency consensus on every detail of a targeting system is unlikely to be achieved, and is probably not desirable because of the different mandates, accountabilities, operating procedures, specialisations and capacities of different partner organisations. In the Lebanon TTF it was commented that too much emphasis was placed on maintaining a united front, which made it more difficult to reach decisions. At the December workshop in Amman it was also pointed out that UNHCR has a leadership role in refugee assistance: at some points in the development of targeting protocols, it is appropriate to issue a decision and clear guidelines to partners, rather than extending discussions in pursuit of total consensus.

In sum, inter-agency task forces are necessary to ensure buy-in for results, however it should be clear what is a constructive set of tasks for an interagency group to do (the terms of reference). Specifically there are certain steps that could be outsourced, such as data collection and analysis, even facilitating discussions on results and application or operationalisation of results. This would allow the inter-agency task force to be the client rather than the service provider, and focus on decision-making and application.

One possible solution is the use of common data collection events, processes and tools, to maximise efficiencies, but allowing for the development of different formulas based on the objective of the assistance. One lesson learned is to focus on the best data and shared data. The data collection exercise is undertaken by professionals (potentially outsourced) to ensure high quality results that are pre-defined by stakeholder-users. This also reduces the likelihood of multiple sources of data collected using different methods, which can bias results of analysis. There is a case for outsourcing the questionnaire development, data collection and analysis, not least so that these steps are negotiable only to a certain point.

Other lessons learned are that targeting exercises may work better when:

- Protocols for managing and accessing data are clearly agreed. [11]
- There is a dedicated and independent responsibility for data analysis.
- The number of agencies participating is limited and dependent on the commitment of senior technical staff with appropriate specialisations. This task force tasks the dedicated body for data analysis.
- The task force has a clear decision-making path or protocol and is decision-making oriented so that tasks are well-defined to purpose and have a clear time frame and output.

3.7.   Costs of developing and testing targeting protocols

It was clear from discussions held during the mission that the complexity and the resource requirements of collecting, managing and analysing reliable socio-economic survey data had been widely underestimated both within UNHCR country offices and by their implementing partners. The types of resource requirements and constraints identified by stakeholders, which should be considered in the planning of similar exercises in future, were:

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[11]   See for example the data-sharing MOUs developed by the VAF in Jordan. Partners who participate in data collection understandably expect access to the data, but note that safeguards must be in place to ensure data protection and confidentiality.

- *time* – in terms of the duration of the process, from design and piloting, through organisation of the data collection, recruitment and training of survey staff, data cleaning and processing, analysis and interpretation, to the final 'product'. In some cases there were concerns that assistance was delayed because the assessment / targeting process was too long.
- *time* – in terms of additional workload on UN and partner staff members, most of whom already had demanding full-time roles, and many of whom felt they were struggling to manage too many new things at the same time.
- *technical expertise* in survey (questionnaire and sampling) design, and especially in statistical and econometric analysis of survey data. The main constraint here is not the quality of expertise but the number and availability of people with these skills. This was most clear in Egypt, where neither UNHCR nor WFP had in-country specialists to work on the analysis and development of vulnerability scores for targeting. Short-term inputs from regional VAM experts and from the Jordan VAF were much appreciated, but the lack of continuity and the limited opportunities for dialogue and explanations between the analysts and the country office staff were problematic. A number of stakeholders interviewed in all three countries noted it was difficult for non-specialists to engage with the debates and decision-making around the highly technical analytical models. UNHCR should consider establishing a cadre of experts within the organisation, comparable to WFP's VAM, who could be called on as needed to provide more consistent technical support.
- *technology* for data capture and management – including hardware, software and specific technical experience in applying both of them. For example, delays were encountered with providing partners with sufficient tablets and servers for data collection and transmission; technical hitches with the data-capture software were solved through trial-and-error, but caused frustration and absorbed more time than expected. To some extent, such problems are inevitable when introducing new technology, but standardisation and exchange of experience between country offices would be helpful in this area. By the time of the mission, all three countries were using ODK software for data capture. If this is now agreed to be the best option, UNHCR should consider having a pool of IT staff trained in this application, who could be called on to support country offices when they need to set up a survey.
- *field staff skilled in interviewing and data-collection*. This last constraint applies particularly to Egypt and Lebanon, where multiple partner organisations are involved in data collection and it has been difficult to ensure adequate and consistent training in the new questionnaires with the time and human resources available. However, even in Jordan, where the established home-visit survey system implemented by one partner generates high-quality data with near-census coverage of the refugee population, concerns were expressed by the partner agency (IRD) that the rapid expansion of scale during 2013 had necessitated rushed recruitment and reduced training of field survey staff. "Training, training and training" were cited by one WFP VAM expert interviewed as the three key factors in data reliability.

Several lessons learned emerge from the sometimes costly and time-consuming process of trying to get the perfect targeting criteria.

- Do not wait for the perfect criteria before commencing the programme and providing assistance. Robert Chambers, a well-respected development expert, coined the phrase "ready - fire - aim" – i.e., do not delay action because your aim is not perfect yet, start and then improve as you go. Not only do affected populations suffer for the delays in much needed response, but in the case of Lebanon, resources for the cash programme were re-allocated due to the delays in determining the first list.
- Costs, workload, capacity (technical) and time requirements for developing the targeting protocols / criteria were generally underestimated. This includes the cost of data collection which can be hundreds of thousands of dollars. These need to be considered in relation to the potential benefit of improved targeting, and the value of the transfer.
- A number of stakeholders noted that an ethical balance needs to be struck between the cost of resources (cash and capacity) spent on data collection and analysis and the value of assistance offered. In Jordan, the VAF partners were able to leverage existing data-collection mechanisms in a cost-effective manner, but there was still an awareness of the need to "minimise assessment and maximise response". This consultancy did not attempt to calculate the actual cost of data collection and analysis, but it would be useful to do this in detail at the country level.

If UNHCR intends to increase its cash programming (which it does), it will behove UNHCR to improve its capacity to use ProGres (the Profile and Registration Global System) to target its assistance. In the interim that

role falls to RAIS (Refugee Assistance Information System). The Policy Section (PDES) is working closely with the World Bank to harness their expertise to better understand refugee vulnerability and welfare, not only to better target assistance, but for advocacy and policy development on behalf of refugees. The Field Information Coordination and Communication Section (FICCS) is revising ProGres to allow for the regular collection of vulnerability indicators. And UNHCR is positioning itself to be a leader in cash programming for refugees, not least as cash is perceived as one tool to meet basic needs and support livelihoods of refugees. The experience in the Syria crisis may go a long way in ensuring that targeting is done more efficiently in the future.

It is difficult to anticipate the relative gains in improving targeting and this question cannot be answered until afterwards. In Lebanon some people expressed frustration or disappointment that the final formula for targeting cash assistance was family size, dependency ratios and living conditions (feeling that they took a very long route round to come back to more or less where they started with the burden score). However there is also value in testing assumptions, and having them proven wrong or right, and using targeting criteria with confidence.

In sum, investments made in 2014 in the region can be considered 'start up' costs, given the learning curve. But agencies will have to demonstrate this learning so as not to repeat 2014 over and over again.

3.8. *Using registration interviews to collect information for targeting*

There are obvious advantages to maximising the collection of data during the registration or verification interview (economising on staff time and other costs, reducing the burden on the refugees themselves, timeliness of data collection, analysis and decision making). However, there are also a number of disadvantages and challenges which were raised by various stakeholders:

- The length of the interview can become very long (hours). This is burdensome for the interviewees, and in a situation where there is a considerable backlog for refugee registration this could cause unacceptable delays in the registration process.
- The appropriate frequency of data collection is different for different objectives. For example, verification happens every 6-12 months, while follow-up on protection concerns should be done more frequently. There is no simple answer to how often economic vulnerability or purchasing power should be assessed, but in practical terms it should probably be done at the end of every assistance cycle, or whenever there is reason to reassess a case.
- The type of data and indeed the interview skills required for the different objectives is different, and asking them together may undermine the reliability of the information gathered. Protection interviews require developing trust without any underlying intention on the part of the respondent or the enumerator to use the data to determine access to assistance.
- Office-based interviews may be appropriate for registration and to discuss protection concerns, but are not the most effective for socio-economic assessment which benefits from direct observation of living conditions, asset holdings, and the extended household. Home visits are not only an opportunity to triangulate information on income and expenditures, but are also valued as an outreach opportunity. In all three countries this valuable time spent with refugee households was seen as an opportunity to combine verification interviews (for updating ProGres), protection interviews (to identify and follow up on protection abuses) and the socio-economic assessment (for targeting cash assistance).
- Registration interviews usually take place soon after refugees arrive in the host country and often before they know where and how they will live, or what work and other income sources they may be able to access. This is not the best time to assess their economic vulnerability. If socio-economic questions are to be added to ProGres, UNHCR should consider applying them in verification interviews (after people have been in country for a few months), rather than at initial registration.

One lesson learned here is that the questionnaire should take into account the setting in which the interview will take place, to avoid asking inappropriate or unreliable questions.

3.9. *The need for appeals, safety-nets and cross-checks*

It is clear that there is no perfect formula for targeting, and no single method which is perfectly accurate. It is inevitable that some people who are eligible for assistance will be incorrectly identified as ineligible, and vice

versa. It is essential that a targeting strategy allow for catching people who fall through the net of the first-stage targeting criteria. In the countries visited, this is done largely through referrals and appeals mechanisms.

Using both categorical and continuous targeting criteria, as represented in Figure 3, can also provide some safeguard against needy people being excluded. For example in both Lebanon and Jordan, WFP has a 'safety net' programme which provides food assistance to specific categories of individuals (pregnant and lactating women and children), independently of the household assessment. This is one way to ensure some assistance to nutritionally vulnerable groups even if their household does not meet the socio-economic or food security targeting criteria. In all three countries, also, home visit teams can 'fast-track' vulnerable cases, including protection categories, for socio-economic assessment if they judge that they are in urgent need of cash assistance.

Appeals mechanisms (through which people excluded by the targeting system can request a re-assessment of their case) are inherently challenging in the Syria Crisis simply because of the sheer size of the undertaking. For example in Lebanon over 30,000 families appealed for re-inclusion in food assistance programmes after the first targeting exercise based on the VASyR. In addition to clear communication of objectives, entitlements and targeting criteria, there is a need to review the management of complaints and appeals mechanisms and find ways to make it more manageable, including outsourcing it, making it step-wise with automated data collection (by phone or internet) to pre-screen and prioritise those for verification of eligibility, etc. Perhaps a more detailed case study of the Jordan appeals mechanism would identify potential efficiency and effectiveness gains.

3.10. Community roles in targeting

UNHCR recently drafted a chapter on targeting guidance in its Digital Emergency Handbook, which proposes using a flexible combination of household surveys, ProGres data and community-based targeting. Community-based targeting covers a spectrum of approaches and degrees of community engagement or empowerment. 'Pure' community targeting is defined in some of the international literature (particularly from NGOs) as handing over the entire targeting process to the community, who are responsible for deciding the criteria and determining who meets them. In a displacement setting, and generally in urban settings, the essential step of understanding who represents the 'community', to ensure representativeness and inclusion of potentially marginalised groups, can be problematic. For example, in Lebanon VASyR focus groups found that the most vulnerable people were those who "did not know the right people" (e.g. Sunnis living in a Shia area). Great care is needed to understand who might be excluded or unrepresented by "community" leaders or institutions in such contexts. Also if standardised targeting criteria are needed (e.g. if one poverty line or MEB is to be used across a large refugee population), this is not compatible with empowering local communities to decide criteria. Community-based targeting in this complete sense is therefore probably not the most appropriate approach for refugee or displaced populations (although some implementing partners may be in a position to use it locally).

However, there are a number of ways in which both refugee and host communities can participate in and improve targeting, bringing elements of community-based targeting into the overall system. For the practical application of community participation, it should be broken down into useful and doable parts, such as:

- Ground-truthing or developing definitions of what it means to be vulnerable, and who is vulnerable, in a given situation and community. This can include validating indicators or criteria which have emerged from statistical analysis or expert task forces. Feedback from the community can help determine whether people agree with the targeting approach (and therefore whether it will work in practice or will generate large numbers of complaints), how questions on specific indicators should be asked, whether the proposed approach will miss any important factors in vulnerability or vulnerable groups, etc. An example is the qualitative assessment carried out using focus groups by the Lebanon Task Force during the development of targeting criteria (report pending). In Jordan, too, refugee focus groups were convened specifically to test understandings of vulnerability and inform the development of targeting criteria. These

focus groups were added to the annual participatory assessment exercise and followed established UNHCR guidelines.[12]

- Developing the Minimum Expenditure Basket, through discussion with the community about what they need to buy, where, in what quantities, and what prices they actually face (given that refugees may pay different rates from the host population for key expenditures such as rents). This was done with focus groups in Jordan, for example.

- Testing questionnaires and other data-collection methods, to identify and improve any questions that might be sensitive or unclear, before a large-scale survey.

- Assessing cases which have been referred or have appealed after being excluded by a first stage of targeting. The host community may be able to play a helpful role in this. In Jordan, for example, respected Jordanian elders and leaders of local Community Based Organisations are members of the cash review committees.

- Ensuring two-way communication between the refugee community and the agencies about the overall targeting approach, particularly any changes in process or criteria such as a switch from blanket to targeted food assistance, or the prioritisation of the poorest (a major change from familiar protection categories). Some stakeholders in Lebanon suggested that the very high volume of appeals from the first targeting exercise in 2013 was partly due to poor communication beforehand (see also the following section).

3.11. Communicating the targeting strategy to affected populations

Communication, transparency, ensuring understanding of objectives of humanitarian programme and the targeted group are essential to meet accountability standards and increase the ownership and buy-in of communities in humanitarian interventions.   Without clear and regular information sharing, experience has demonstrated time and time again, there is the risk of misunderstandings which can lead at best to an unmanageable volume of complaints and at worst to violence. However there is the 'moral hazard' of giving away too much information, enabling potential recipients to manipulate enumerators and provide false data. There are good communication strategies for accomplishing the first without compromising the second. One lesson learned from Lebanon was the importance of involving communication experts from the beginning. It is also crucial to train front-line field staff on how to relay the information.

3.12. Judging the success of targeting

The question of how to evaluate the success of a targeting system is relevant at two levels:

a) what is the priority objective for UNHCR and WFP in terms of targeting (e.g. minimising inclusion, or exclusion? avoiding waste of resources? reducing 'pull' factors or dependency?), and

b) in practical terms, how will the targeting outcome be evaluated (what sort of data is needed, is it being collected, and how will it be analysed)?

During the stakeholder interviews as well as the UNHCR workshop in December, by far the most frequent answer to the first question from UNHCR was that the top priority is to ensure that the people most in need are helped – in other words, to minimise exclusion errors (although UNHCR is always attentive to monitoring both inclusion and exclusion). WFP, given the operational context outlined above (section 3.1), is more focused on reducing inclusion errors while ensuring fairness and avoiding unnecessary expense.

Exclusion errors can be more difficult to detect and quantify than inclusion, because by definition people who are excluded are not on beneficiary lists and may be missed by post-distribution monitoring or similar systems. Appeal and referral mechanisms, as well as supplementary targeting mechanisms, are therefore important. A further challenge raised by several stakeholders is how cash programmes can include all those identified as vulnerable, given the limited resources (although this problem is better described as under-coverage rather than exclusion error).

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[12] See http://www.unhcr.org/450e963f2.html.

It is also informative to assess not only the percentage or rate of exclusion error, but also *who* is excluded. If someone has been classed as not eligible because they are a borderline case, just on the wrong side of the eligibility threshold, that is a completely different targeting problem from someone who is extremely economically vulnerable but has been excluded because there is a loophole in the targeting criteria or a flaw in the process. Borderline cases will always be difficult to judge, and are unfortunately a feature of any targeting system that sets an eligibility threshold on a continuous variable (such as income, expenditure, or proxies for these): some people will always fall just outside wherever the line is drawn. If this type of targeting is found to be excluding large numbers of people who are judged by other criteria or cross-checks to be in real need of the assistance offered, there is probably a strong argument for raising the threshold to include more people. Of course, funding limitations mean this is not always possible. Outlier cases of exclusion (people who clearly meet the target group definition but have been missed by the targeting mechanism) should be dealt with either by adding to or adjusting the criteria, or ensuring there are adequate safeguards or supplementary targeting methods to catch them. Decision-making guidance for country offices should include a prompt, when designing targeting methods and choosing criteria, to ask "who will this exclude?".

4.   Conclusion

The lessons outlined in this paper are in many cases suggested as starting points rather than definitive solutions to the issues raised. Further work is needed and is undoubtedly being done in all three countries and both agencies. This report aims to contribute to an ongoing discussion and exchange, and indeed it is clear from comments received on the first draft that things have already moved on considerably since the beginning of 2015.

What is clear is that there is no one best way to target. Rather targeting 'advice' should present options that can be selected based on context, resources and capacity available, and who you are working with (government, NGOs, etc). For each of these options, the advantages and risks of using the option should be highlighted and risk mitigation strategies proposed. Advice should not be prescriptive as one size does not fit all. Where technical advice is needed, this can be provided in the form of 'guidance', such as WFP's CARI indicators, or UNHCR's *Use of Income and Expenditure Data in Socio-economic Targeting* (forthcoming).

It is recommended that UNHCR and WFP consider what further work could usefully build on this review, with the aim of contributing to:

- UNHCR targeting advice for cash-based interventions (CBIs);
- continued harmonisation of UNHCR and WFP targeting approaches for cash and food assistance;
- the wider UNHCR process of lesson-learning on the "Building Blocks of CBIs in MENA region"; and
- a possible effectiveness study to evaluate targeting costs and outcomes in the region.

Annex A. Stakeholders interviewed

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EGYPT

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LEBANON

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	Hanna Bassous	Field Officer	n/a
	Julissa Farah	Field Officer	n/a
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JORDAN

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* Focal points for the mission

Annex B. Documents reviewed

Regional and international

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Egypt

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UNHCR (January? 2014) <u>Financial Assistance Eligibility Criteria for 2014</u>

UNHCR (2014) <u>Socio-Economic Assessment Guidelines for upload on tablets</u>

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UNHCR (August 2014) <u>Syria Refugee Response Cash Assistance: EGYPT NEWSLETTER</u>

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WFP/ UNHCR? (October 2014) <u>Socioeconomic assessment results</u> (powerpoint)

WFP (November 2014) <u>Household socioeconomic assessment questionnaire, v2</u>

Jordan

CARE International (April 2014) <u>Lives Unseen: Urban Syrian Refugees and Jordanian Host Communities Three Years into the Syria Crisis</u>

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Nanayakkara, L. (October 2014) Targeting for Food Security Assistance, Jordan EMOP, WFP

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Annex C.   Acronyms and abbreviations

CARI	Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Insecurity (WFP)
CBI	Cash-based intervention
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRD	International Relief and Development
LHIF	Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFT	Multi-Functional Team
NPTP	National Poverty Targeting Programme (Lebanon)
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PMT	Proxy Means Test
ProGres	Profile Global Registration System
RAIS	Refugee Assistance Information System
SMEB	Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket
TTF	Targeting Task Force (Lebanon)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
VAF	Vulnerability Assessment Framework (Jordan)
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (WFP)
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
WFP	World Food Programme