



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Strengthening the Cooperation between
the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United
Nations (FAO)
and
the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
(UNHCR)**

Joint Letter by

the Director-General, FAO

and

the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR

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and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

Dear colleagues,

During a meeting in March 2003 between the Director, Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Director, Operational Support Division of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and subsequent meetings at the working level, the two organizations agreed on the importance of enhancing cooperation. This letter to all FAO and UNHCR offices in the field and to the relevant units at the respective headquarters is part of an effort to encourage staff involvement to reach this goal.

UNHCR's mandate is to provide protection and assistance to refugees and returnees and to achieve durable solutions for refugees and other persons of concern. FAO focuses on raising the nutritional levels and living standards of the poor by saving and replenishing agricultural assets, improving agricultural productivity and incomes, and enhancing the ability of the poor to acquire and utilize nutritionally adequate food effectively.

The cooperation between FAO and UNHCR is seen as contributing to the UN reform, which aims at improved strategic planning, coherent policy development, integrated resource mobilization and programme implementation. The cooperation would also strengthen the linkages between humanitarian, rehabilitation and development assistance. The partnership will also provide impetus for FAO and UNHCR to further the work towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In furthering the cooperation, the two organizations will utilize the existing coordination processes such as the Interagency Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), CCA/UNDAF and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as the major planning and implementation tools, where these are in place, as well as joint UN post-conflict transition processes.

The need for enhanced cooperation between FAO and UNHCR is based on the fact that the majority of the world's refugee population is hosted by, and originates from, developing countries, where extreme poverty is one of the main factors contributing to both hunger and conflict-related population displacement. Both FAO and UNHCR are aware that any assistance targeted to refugees and returnees, if not designed carefully within the context of the local situation, could potentially create or exacerbate conflicts over resources between refugees/returnees and the hosting community. To help prevent such conflicts, FAO and UNHCR intend to join efforts to ensure that the integration and reintegration programmes are designed and implemented in a way that promotes self-reliance, co-existence and peace-building for the refugees/returnees and the local population, thus paving the way towards more sustainable solutions for displaced populations.

In this regard, UNHCR has developed, together with other agencies, the *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern*, which aims to achieve a more equitable sharing of burdens and responsibilities relating to refugee populations. It also seeks to increase capacities to receive and protect refugees and encourage a more focused effort in the search for durable solutions. The Framework consists of three elements: first, the promotion of Development Assistance for Refugees ("DAR") through better targeting of such assistance to countries and areas hosting large numbers of refugees over protracted periods; second, the establishment of "4Rs" programmes in post-conflict situations, aimed at ensuring an integrated approach to repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and third, the promotion, in those cases where local integration of refugees is a viable option, of a strategy of Development through Local Integration ("DLI"). In effect, the Framework would serve as a common platform for building the collaboration between FAO and UNHCR.

FAO has a vital role to play in improving peoples' self-reliance and the technical expertise to lay the foundation for recovery in the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors, in countries affected by natural and human-induced calamities. FAO's agricultural assistance strategy for displaced populations sets the framework for addressing key priorities over the immediate period while seeking the support for durable solutions, in partnership with various partners, including international financial institutions, donors, host governments and local communities. Access to land for agriculture is one of the crucial requirements for any sustainable integration and reintegration programme for refugees and returnees. Through its Land Tenure Service, FAO has been working on conflict prevention in various countries, including Angola and Mozambique, and can contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building through various initiatives, including policy formulation and the legislative framework concerning land access and use, land tenure conflict management tools and materials, and capacity building.

Currently, FAO and UNHCR collaborate in various areas of assistance to refugees, returnees and, at times, to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Collaborative projects include: joint needs assessments of agricultural relief and rehabilitation needs; information exchange; joint programmes, including the promotion of food security; and the provision of agricultural inputs to achieve self-reliance for returnees and refugees.

Strengthening and development of cooperation

In view of the above, FAO and UNHCR are planning some immediate practical processes and steps to strengthen the cooperation, which will include the following:

- review of the past and ongoing cooperation and identification of new potential fields of joint work;
- further development of the existing collaboration, including through the designation of focal points in both agencies and monitoring of progress;
- enhancement of the technical assistance and programmatic contribution of FAO to current and future activities undertaken by UNHCR;
- identification of joint action to promote food security and self-reliance of refugees, especially of women and those in protracted displacement situations, and of host communities, through crop production, livestock and fisheries;

- joint implementation of programmes to support sustainable reintegration of returnees in post conflict situations;
- involvement of FAO in ongoing and future UNHCR programmes of Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs), and Development through Local Integration (DLI);
- encouragement of field staff to identify complementary activities of FAO and UNHCR, particularly in needs assessments and programme design;
- identification and pilot-testing of innovative ways of addressing the issue of protection of livelihoods of the beneficiaries;
- sharing of country assessments on ongoing collaboration.

In addition to the above-mentioned steps, there are many potential areas for enhanced or innovative collaboration between UNHCR and FAO in the spheres of policy, project implementation and programme support. Regional and country offices, as well as relevant headquarters' units, of both FAO and UNHCR are encouraged to explore opportunities for strengthened collaboration, through various mechanisms such as Memoranda or Letters of Understanding, Exchange of Letters, Project Agreements, etc., especially in the following sectors:

- ***Joint needs assessment and programming:*** The joint identification of the needs of the displaced and the elaboration of the medium- and long-term agricultural development programmes aimed at facilitating the integration or reintegration process of refugees and returnees are some of the most crucial steps for furthering meaningful cooperation. At country level, FAO and UNHCR can provide their respective contributions to a jointly agreed strategy to enhance self-reliance of refugees and returnees. This could also be furthered to include joint advocacy initiatives for resource mobilization and pooling of resources.
- ***Project implementation:*** Based on the joint needs assessments, planning and targeting, FAO can implement projects in the food security sector for the benefit of the persons of concern to UNHCR. Depending on the situation, different implementation arrangements could be agreed upon between the two organizations, and possibly also include staff secondments.
- ***National capacity building:*** Working together, FAO and UNHCR could do more to help governments and communities build food security and safety-net capacities in areas of settlement for refugees and returnees. This would include guidelines on land tenure conflict management, training material and post-conflict access to land.
- ***FAO's technical expertise:*** The technical expertise of FAO on issues concerning agricultural production, livestock, fisheries, environmental protection, land management and sustainable livelihood can help improve the quality and impact of UNHCR's projects.
- ***Gender mainstreaming:*** Rural women, including those within refugee and returnee populations, play a pivotal role in food production. The female-headed households tend to be numerous in refugee affected areas due to the migration of the men from rural to urban areas, loss to HIV/AIDS, and the effects of conflicts. FAO and UNHCR could jointly empower displaced women, and women hosting refugees and/or returnees, to meet these challenges.

- **Information sharing:** Further improvement in the area of information exchange should be pursued not only between FAO and UNHCR, but also with the donors, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs).

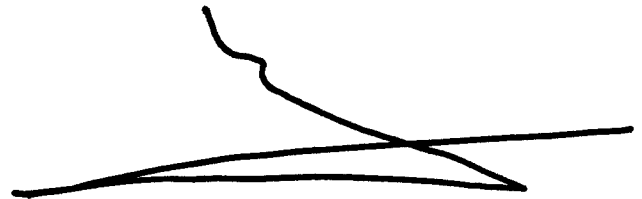
Both organizations agree that the fruitful collaboration between FAO and UNHCR can, and should, be strengthened. Stronger cooperation between the two organizations would also likely attract interest from both the humanitarian and development arms of donor countries, thus providing a more solid funding base for the respective beneficiaries of FAO and UNHCR. While some of the possibilities for enhanced collaboration between FAO and UNHCR are mentioned above, the list is by no means exhaustive, and we would like to encourage our colleagues to explore these and other areas, while respecting, both in letter and in spirit, the strategic goals and objectives common to both FAO and UNHCR.

Date: 25. II. 2005

Date: 17 FEB. 2005



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