Innovation and refugees

structure of settlements at this time was the limited knowledge of those foreign ‘experts’ as well as the ill-fitting nature of the technical ‘innovations’ they brought with them.

In some cases, the failed rural settlements of the 1960s and 1970s have become the refugee camps of today, with many practical challenges persisting. An examination of long-term Sudanese refugees in Uganda in 2006 discusses problems of soil quality and inadequate settlement plot size – precisely the same issues reported for the same population in Uganda in the 1960s. In 2010 UNHCR cited ‘lack of early planning’ as a major issue in responding to displacement, echoing the lack of soil testing and settlement planning of previous decades.

The post-war assistance approach resulted in a lack of leadership expertise in various areas and a lack of displaced community involvement that persist today. In the case of micro-finance, this has led to programme failings, although a notable adaptation – or innovation – has also been the seeking of outside support, such as UNHCR’s 2010 Memorandum of Understanding with the Grameen Bank. While a discourse of refugee capability is widely employed, much of the innovation implemented is reminiscent of post-war administration in that it is still driven by actors other than refugees themselves.

Although innovation by way of adaptation to new situations and emerging technologies is present within refugee assistance, history suggests that innovation in the case of the main livelihoods assistance practices largely does not mean the creation of something new. It is instead their structure and implementation that have changed. Focusing on refugee livelihoods with this understanding may be one of the most innovative forms of assistance yet.

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Innovation for equity in Lebanon

Luciano Calestini

Innovative approaches in Lebanon aim to address, in two very different ways, the particular needs of the most vulnerable among the refugee and host populations.

For over three years, Lebanon has been hosting refugees fleeing the violent conflict in Syria; today, there are over 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, comprising over 20% of the country’s population. The continued escalation of the crisis has required UNICEF to find new ways to respond to the vast and growing needs of the most vulnerable children and their families. New and innovative approaches have been developed to plan for and reach those who need it the most, two of which are discussed here.

The first innovation focuses on how to plan to reach the most vulnerable children in an environment where vulnerable groups are dispersed across the country. The second innovation focuses on unconventional ways to complement learning for out-of-school children in a country with more children out of school than there are children enrolled in public schools.

Mapping for targeted interventions

With large numbers of refugees spread across Lebanon, it is important to think about what geographical areas to prioritise if scarce resources are to be used effectively and efficiently. In order to identify the most vulnerable areas, in 2013 UNICEF Lebanon
developed a vulnerability map of the country in collaboration with the Prime Minister’s Office. The map, which has now evolved to highlight a range of aspects of the crisis, reflects five strata of vulnerability, inclusive of both the vulnerable Lebanese population (living on less than US$4 a day) and the registered Syrian refugee caseload – the best available data in a context where data is scarce. The resulting composite map of 1,561 localities highlights those places with the largest numbers of vulnerable people. The most vulnerable fifth amounts to 225 localities which together contain 86% of the registered refugee population and more than 66% of the vulnerable Lebanese population. Therefore, a relatively restricted geographic focus for programming allows for significant coverage of the most vulnerable populations in the country.

The mapping can also be used to drill down further to rank the most vulnerable locations within those 225 localities. For example, it is striking that half of all refugees and 40% of the Lebanese poor reside within the 90 most vulnerable localities of Lebanon, less than 6% of the total number.

Vulnerability mapping presents a new way of prioritising interventions for the most vulnerable, identifying defined geographical areas of vulnerability around which to coordinate action. Informed by this vulnerability analysis, UNICEF and its partners are using a variety of delivery ‘gateways’, such as schools and health centres, to reach Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities, an effort that will have even greater impact as others follow suit.
The Pi for Learning (Pi4L) Programme

The Pi4L pilot to give Syrian refugee out-of-school children the chance to learn skills in numeracy, literacy and technology was launched in May 2014. This programme consists of tailored courses that utilise Raspberry Pi computers to offer a scalable and affordable solution that supports children in learning basic skills.

The Raspberry Pi is a credit-card-sized ‘single-board’ computer developed in the UK by the Raspberry Pi Foundation in order to promote the teaching of basic computer science in schools. Its small size, affordable price (£25/$41) and the fact that it uses an open-source operating system means it is suitable and cost-effective for the large-scale Pi4L outreach programme.

Pi4L is a joint initiative between the International Education Association (IEA) and UNICEF Lebanon, in collaboration with Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Currently in testing phase, it seeks to provide refugee children in Lebanon with access to learning opportunities in non-formal education programmes, teaching not only basic core skills to displaced Syrian children but also fundamental computing skills, as well as child rights. Access to the internet is not required.

The Raspberry Pi can be used in classrooms and informal refugee settlements while the growing Raspberry Pi community offers resources and support for students and teachers, such as software dedicated to learning coding to create stories, games and art. Teachers and students will also have access to video exercises that can help identify learning difficulties that students may face.

More Syrians are likely to try to seek refuge in Lebanon in the coming months. Where resources are over-stretched, innovative solutions are required if needs are to be adequately addressed.

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www.unicef.org/lebanon

1. www.facebook.com/Pi4Learning and www.facebook.com/UNICEFLebanon

Innovation and new ways of working across sectors

Erik Abild

Humanitarian actors will have to adapt to a changing world but it will not be easy or straightforward. Operations are changing as a result of innovations which bring many improvements but also throw up challenges.

There is real willingness and prioritisation within the humanitarian sector to invest in innovation in terms of developing new methods and approaches. One example is cash and market-based assistance, where during the last decade humanitarian organisations have developed innovative ways of delivering cash and market-based assistance instead of in-kind goods and services.

Delivered in the right way, cash and market-based assistance can be more effective than traditional aid in terms of supporting local markets; more efficient in terms of cutting costs; and most importantly, it empowers beneficiaries to be more in control of assistance. The shift of cash from innovative to mainstream – presumably by diffusion of the understanding that cash brings advantages and opportunities – is shown by how, for example, WFP aims to have one third of its aid delivered through so called ‘digital food’ by 2015. In the Syria response, UNHCR estimates that more than 30 different agencies across six countries are using cash and voucher programming.