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JOINT PROGRAMME EXCELLENCE AND TARGETING HUB

NIGER LEARNING REVIEW

Learning from UNHCR-WFP collaboration on prioritizing food assistance for refugees, IDPs and host communities in Niger, with support from the UNHCR-WFP Joint Hub

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGETING APPROACH	3
GOOD PRACTICES AND INNOVATION	4
1. Area-based approach for refugees, IDPs and host populations	4
2. Community participation as part of mixed methods targeting approach	6
3. WFP-UNHCR collaboration, with the Joint Hub as a neutral broker	9
4. Capacity strengthening through Joint Hub technical support	11
CHALLENGES	13
1. Collaboration on the appeals process	13
2. Transitioning from humanitarian to sustainable response	15
3. Maintaining collaboration to ensure targeting is updated	18
PEOPLE CONSULTED	21
ABOUT THE UNHCR-WFP JOINT HUB	21

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DISCLAIMER

This review draws on the experience of the Joint Hub in Niger and other joint operations, as well as the experience of WFP and UNHCR colleagues. The review is informed by joint UNHCR-WFP guidance, existing research, literature and recognized best practice, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the Joint Hub team and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR and WFP. Responsibility for the opinions expressed rests solely with the authors. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by WFP or UNHCR of the opinions expressed.

INTRODUCTION

This review documents learning from the process of collaboration between the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the targeting/prioritization of food assistance for refugees, IDPs and host populations in Niger, between 2021 and 2024.

The findings presented here are based on an online learning review conducted by the UNHCR-WFP Joint Hub in September-October 2024, during which interviews were held with staff from WFP, UNHCR and the Joint Hub. The lessons learned reflect the views of the staff consulted, as well as those of the Joint Hub team.

The learning review process sought to identify what has worked well and why, and what challenges were faced throughout the process. This report aims to distill lessons learned from the prioritization process by identifying good practice, innovation and areas for improvement, in order to inform future collaboration between WFP and UNHCR in Niger as well as to inspire similar approaches in other contexts. For the Joint Hub, this review also serves to improve the quality of support it provides to WFP and UNHCR country operations.

CONTEXT

WFP and UNHCR approached the Joint Hub in early 2022 to request technical support, as the country operations were faced with the urgent need to re-target the food assistance WFP provided to refugees in Niger. At the time, Niger was hosting the largest number of forcibly displaced people of any country in West Africa, with over 400,000 refugees from Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and other countries, as well as 550,000 internally displaced people.¹

There had been a previous targeting approach for food assistance provided to refugees, implemented by WFP, UNHCR and partners in 2017 (based on the 2015 JAM), but in 2022, five years later, this urgently required updating.²

The initial focus was on assessing the needs of refugees for food assistance – however this approach was broadened to include not only refugees, but also IDPs, returnees and host populations living in the same geographic areas. Both agencies agreed that the ongoing conflict and fragile security situation, combined with the food price crisis and recurrent climatic shocks, had contributed to increasing vulnerability for both refugees and Nigerien nationals alike; with a total of 3.3 million people—13 percent of the population—acutely food insecure.³

From 2022 onwards, WFP and UNHCR in Niger worked together with the Joint Hub to conduct a joint assessment and data analysis, develop a data-driven and accountable targeting strategy which included extensive community engagement, and then successfully roll out the re-targeting of food assistance.

JOINT HUB SUPPORT

From June 2022, the Joint Hub supported the UNHCR and WFP country offices in Niger, focusing on:

- **Assessment and analysis:** supporting the design, data collection and analysis for the [Joint Assessment Mission \(JAM\) report](#) (2023), which provided information on the vulnerability of refugees, IDPs and host populations living in the regions of Tillabéri, Tahoua, Maradi and Diffa. The findings were used to inform the re-targeting approach for WFP's food assistance. The analysis was also intended as a starting point for collective reflection, with the aim of finding sustainable

¹ [Niger | Global Focus \(unhcr.org\)](#)

² Prior to the 2017 targeting exercise, WFP staff consulted reported that targeting had happened six years previously (i.e. 2011).

³ [Niger | World Food Programme \(wfp.org\)](#)

solutions to better support displaced populations and the communities that host them, in a context where humanitarian and development resources – as well as community solidarity - were increasingly stretched in the face of growing needs. However, working jointly on longer-term programming proved to be a challenge and despite intentions the data was not fully utilized for this purpose (see section on ‘Transitioning from humanitarian to sustainable response’).

- **Accountability to affected people:** the Joint Hub provided considerable technical support, both remotely and through an in-country mission (in January 2023), in order to integrate protection and accountability. A total of 72 community consultation sessions were held with refugees and asylum seekers, IDPs and host communities, as well as local authorities and NGO partners; the qualitative data was used to inform the analysis and to develop and refine the targeting approach. A joint communication strategy was also developed and rolled out, focusing on sharing key messages about the retargeting of WFP’s food assistance and how to make appeals.
- **Targeting for food assistance:** development and implementation of a common targeting strategy for food assistance for refugees, IDPs, and host populations. The new targeting strategy was implemented from May 2023 onwards, commencing with the selection of households following a combination of categorical and community-based targeting approaches (May-August). The new lists of eligible households were used for food assistance from November 2023.
- **Coordination:** the Joint Hub led weekly or bi-weekly coordination meetings (online) throughout the process, as well as conducting an in-country mission to Niger (Jan 2023).
- **Documentation and learning:** the Joint Hub produced and shared technical documentation detailing the process for targeting for WFP’s food assistance in 2023, as well as this learning review summarizing good practice, lessons learned and challenges.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGETING APPROACH

Using the JAM assessment and analysis, which provided an estimation of vulnerability levels by geographic region and type of population, the Joint Hub supported UNHCR and WFP in developing the targeting approach for food assistance. The chosen targeting method uses a combination of **categorical** eligibility criteria and **community-based** selection of households.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The same categorical eligibility criteria were used for all population groups (refugees, IDPs and hosts) across all geographic regions, based on the quantitative results of the household survey and validation through qualitative community consultations.

All households meeting at least one of the following categorical eligibility criteria were to be selected for food assistance:

- Female household head, with no other member able to work in the household
- At least 1 disabled member
- At least 1 chronically ill member
- At least 4 children under 5 years old
- Household head aged 60 years or above, with no other member able to work in the household
- Assistance as the most important income source

SELECTION OF ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS

These categorical criteria were then applied as part of a community-based selection process, inspired by the Household Economy Approach (HEA), during which the communities themselves identified and selected the households that met the agreed upon eligibility criteria. This selection process took 3-4 months (May-August 2023).

See the [WFP-UNHCR Niger JAM report \(2023\)](#) for further details.

GOOD PRACTICES AND INNOVATION

What worked well? What were the successes, good practices and innovations? Could these practices be scaled-up and replicated, either in Niger or elsewhere? And if so, under what conditions? Were there promising practices that require further testing?

For each of the four good practices identified here, this section looks at the following:

- What was the problem?
- What was the solution?
- What were the success factors? i.e. the context and pre-conditions that were necessary for this to work.
- Strength of evidence: i.e. whether this is a new/innovative practice, successfully demonstrated, or ready for replication / scaling / roll-out.
- What we learnt through the process
- What we still don't know.

1. Area-based approach for refugees, IDPs and host populations

GOOD PRACTICE

Using an area-based approach to assessment, analysis and targeting, thereby providing an equitable humanitarian response (at least in terms of food assistance, in this case) for refugees, IDPs, and host populations within a given area.

What was the problem?

In Niger, refugees, IDPs and host populations live **alongside each other in the same geographic areas**, facing many of the same conflict-related risks and suffering from similar levels of food insecurity.

WFP and UNHCR were concerned that differentiating between different population groups, based on displacement status, could be perceived as unfair and have a **negative impact on already fragile social cohesion**.

Different types of data were available for these different groups. For example, though there was census data for refugees, as they are routinely registered with UNHCR through proGres, similar registry data was not available for IDPs and host populations. While it is feasible to conduct a needs assessment (based on a representative sample survey) that covers all three population groups, it was necessary to take into account the lack of census data in order to develop a harmonised targeting strategy.

What was the solution?

- **One approach for assessing and targeting refugees, IDPs and host populations.** WFP and UNHCR decided (in August 2022) to adopt a harmonised, area-based approach, which provided food assistance on the basis of need rather than on displacement status, within a given area.
- **This harmonised approach was adopted from the outset** – determining the scope of the JAM assessment and sampling strategy, the analytical framework for data analysis and the development of the targeting strategy.
- The **needs assessment** was able to debunk the commonly held view that refugees were better off because they had been receiving assistance, while providing evidence in support of also targeting IDPs and host populations for food assistance.

- The **targeting method that was developed** combined data-driven eligibility criteria (based on the JAM assessment and analysis) with community-based selection of households that met the eligibility criteria, thereby resolving the issue of the lack of available registry data for Nigerien nationals (IDPs and host communities). In accessible 'safe' areas, WFP partner staff would verify households selected by communities, whereas in 'non-safe' areas only a sample of households would be verified, due to access constraints.

What were the success factors?

- ✓ **Availability of funding** and willingness of WFP to cover all population groups regardless of displacement status (refugees, IDPs, returnees, host population).
- ✓ **Commitment of both WFP and UNHCR** to engage in an area-based approach and allocate staff time and resources to the process.
- ✓ **Time available** in order to implement the community-based selection process (3-4 months).
- ✓ **Familiarity with community-based targeting**, both for people that were already receiving WFP assistance, and also for WFP staff who had used community-based selection for targeting of food assistance in the past and had prior experience of the method.
- ✓ **Joint Hub flexibility** in adopting the targeting method familiar to communities and the WFP country operation, though it was not a targeting approach that the Joint Hub team had previously used in other contexts.

"Our work in Niger was a beautiful example of the Joint Hub adapting to the context. When we arrived, proGres data was not working and WFP had a preference to continue community-based targeting. We were able to propose a hybrid method, building on the experience of country operations and the experience of the refugees, while also including a categorical data-driven element. We adjusted to the context." (Joint Hub colleague)

Strength of evidence for this good practice?

This practice of using an area-based approach has been **successfully demonstrated** in Niger and is ready for replication, scaling or roll-out in other contexts, providing the success factors listed above are in place.

For WFP, area-based approaches are frequently used and well established. For UNHCR, area-based approaches are less frequently applied, however when working in situations of internal displacement such an approach **aligns with organisational policy**, as stated in the [Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement](#) "UNHCR will seek to maximize opportunities to respond through area-based approaches and integrated programming that are inclusive of all relevant population groups in a given operational context. This includes situations where populations of concern live together (e.g., IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, returning refugees and IDPs), and/or with host communities" (2019, pg. 12).

What we learnt through the process

- An area-based approach is good practice but **requires considerable funding to cover all groups** in a given area and provide them with the same levels of assistance.
- **All stakeholders need to agree and commit** to an area-based approach: WFP, UNHCR, Government and donors and the communities themselves.
- In an area-based approach, **registration data availability is critical in choosing a targeting method** as different types of data will be feasible for different groups (refugees, IDPs, host populations). If registry data (such as proGres data) is not available (or of poor quality) for all groups that will be targeted, then a different method (such as community-based selection) is necessary in order to select eligible households.

- **The Joint Hub needs to be flexible** – and has demonstrated that it can be – in adapting to each context in terms of data availability, familiarity with targeting methods and community acceptance.

What we still don't know

- Did area-based targeting create a 'pull' factor for certain geographic areas, encouraging people to move into those areas in order to potentially benefit from assistance? This learning review did not collect information in order to respond to this question, but it could be relevant to consider and monitor whether assistance may create a 'pull factor' when assessing the appropriateness and feasibility of area-based approaches in the future.

2. Community participation as part of mixed methods targeting approach

GOOD PRACTICE

Using mixed methods targeting to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In the case of Niger, data-driven eligibility criteria were used in conjunction with community-based validation of these criteria and selection of eligible households.

What was the problem?

WFP and UNHCR had agreed to **one approach for targeting different groups** - refugees, IDPs, and host populations - within a given geographic area, to provide food assistance on the basis of need rather than on displacement status.

WFP and UNHCR also agreed that **targeting should be data-driven**, using rigorous, objective, quantitative data to build an evidence-based targeting strategy. However, different types of data were available for these different groups, for example, while there was census data for refugees, as they are routinely registered with UNHCR through proGres, similar registry data was not available for IDPs and host populations. It was necessary to take into account the lack of census / registry data in order to develop and implement a harmonised targeting strategy.

Communities already receiving WFP assistance were **familiar with community-based targeting** (and specifically the Household Economy Approach), as were WFP staff. Country operations were keen to continue using community-based targeting.

What was the solution?

The targeting method that was developed **combined data-driven eligibility criteria** (based on the JAM assessment and analysis) with **community-based selection of households** that met the eligibility criteria, thereby resolving the issue of the lack of available registry data for Nigerien nationals (IDPs and host communities). This targeting method was applied in certain geographic areas where forcibly displaced people were located.⁴

Community participation played a crucial role in the targeting process in Niger, taking place in two phases:

1. **Validation of eligibility criteria:** first, in the targeting design phase, communities validated the eligibility criteria developed by UNHCR and WFP using quantitative data from the joint needs assessment covering refugees, IDPs, and host communities. Amid large-scale displacement and

⁴ For further details see also [Mixed Methods for Better Targeting, Insights from the UNHCR-WFP Joint Hub](#) (2025)

prolonged conflict, these eligibility criteria aimed to establish a consistent, accepted, needs-based methodology across all three groups.

2. **Selection of eligible households:** once validated, community committees (*le comité inclusif*) in each village took responsibility for identifying the eligible households by organizing assemblies where villagers collectively determined the most vulnerable according to the agreed-upon eligibility criteria. This approach built on the country offices' previous experience with community-based targeting while introducing a unified methodology for refugees, IDPs and host communities, even in the absence of a consolidated registry for all groups. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the targeting design was strengthened, ensuring coherence, and reducing duplication of efforts.

It should be noted that the community engagement process in Niger was slightly different to the process previously used by the Joint Hub in other countries. In other operations, there was often a two-step process:

1. Qualitative data collection is included as part of a joint needs assessment (for example as part of a JAM)
2. Subsequent community consultations to validate the eligibility criteria

In Niger however these two steps were implemented at the same time, with the qualitative data collected and the proposed eligibility criteria being validated simultaneously, during the same meetings with the community. Combining these is considered a pragmatic and cost-efficient approach, however more in-depth qualitative data and increased community engagement could be achieved through the two-step process. The Joint Hub provided support on the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

To support the overall process of community participation and engagement, the Joint Hub suggested and developed a **joint communication strategy** in close collaboration with the country offices, which was used by both WFP and UNHCR. The joint strategy clarified the objectives of the planned communication activities, the communication channels to be used by both agencies and their partners and included a joint action plan as well as key messages and answers to frequently asked questions about the targeting of food assistance and the appeals process.

What were the success factors?

- ✓ **Commitment of both WFP and UNHCR** to engage in a mixed-methods approach with a strong community participation component, and to allocate necessary staff time and resources to the process.
- ✓ **Agreement to be transparent with communities about eligibility criteria**, leading to meaningful discussions with the community and feedback, enabling the adjustment and joint validation of the criteria.
- ✓ **Familiarity with community-based selection processes**, both for people that were already receiving WFP assistance, and also for WFP staff who had used community-based selection for targeting of food assistance previously. This practice was also appropriate due to:
 - **Lack of registry data** for some target groups (IDPs, Nigerian nationals), while for refugees ProGres registration data required updating
 - **Time available** to implement the community-based selection process (3-4 months)
 - **Community acceptance** of the methodology and a certain level of **social cohesion**
- ✓ **Joint Hub was flexible** in adopting the targeting method familiar to communities and WFP country operation, though it was not a targeting approach that the Joint Hub team had previously used in other contexts.

Strength of evidence for this good practice?

This practice of using a mixed methods approach to targeting that integrates a strong community participation component has been **successfully demonstrated** in Niger and is ready for replication, scaling or roll-out in other contexts, providing the success factors listed above are in place.

- **Community-based validation of eligibility criteria** is recommended good practice in all contexts and, based on Joint Hub experience, improves accuracy, transparency and acceptance of the targeting approach by communities.
- **Community-based selection of eligible households** is appropriate in certain contexts, particularly where there is a lack of registry data (or data is not up to date) and community acceptance of the methodology.

What we learnt through the process

- **Engagement with the community is a crucial step** in the targeting and prioritization process. Listening to the views of communities is essential to obtain their acceptance and buy-in for the targeting approach.
- **Engaging communities from the early stages** of the targeting process is particularly effective, as it helps in identifying potential risks, including protection concerns and social cohesion challenges. Communicating the targeting approach to communities early on in the process also helps foster transparency, support and acceptance in the community.
- **Community members can contribute with valuable insights** to improve the eligibility criteria and reduce targeting errors, by identifying households which would have been difficult to capture using only quantitative data.
- **Communities can also help in the design of stronger communication channels**, which is of paramount importance.
- **Accessible, inclusive, and responsive complaints and feedback mechanisms** can facilitate community feedback and shape a more informed, needs-based targeting and prioritization process.

What we still don't know

- **Targeting updates:** it is still not clear how (or if) distribution lists are updated, so as to respond to changes in households' situation over time or movement from one location to another.
- **Interoperability between WFP's SCOPE and UNHCR's proGres** database is not clear. Given that a harmonised approach is used for different populations, different databases should be used – proGres for refugees and SCOPE for non-refugees. However, staff consulted during this learning review stated that SCOPE is now used as the master list for all distributions, with changes in proGres therefore not being reflected in SCOPE (and vice-versa). To be further explored.

3. WFP-UNHCR collaboration, with the Joint Hub as a neutral broker

GOOD PRACTICE

Strong collaboration between WFP and UNHCR for joint assessment, analysis, targeting and communication with communities, with the Joint Hub providing an important contribution in terms of coordination and brokering a technical solution that met the needs and preferences of each agency, as well as being adapted to the context and data available.

What was the problem?

- **WFP and UNHCR faced challenges in coordinating** the process of joint assessment and targeting. Coordination support was required.
- Both agencies agreed that they had **different interpretations of what vulnerability meant** and that it was difficult to agree on a shared definition of vulnerability that would be used.
- **Both agencies acknowledged that it is challenging to agree on a joint approach to targeting** – and identify eligibility criteria – that are acceptable to both WFP and UNHCR, as well as to communities. Prior to this targeting exercise, eligibility (and a conception of vulnerability) had either been decided by communities themselves, in each village, or defined by UNHCR's 'specific needs codes' which had been used to prioritise food assistance.
- **WFP expressed challenges relating to coordinating with UNHCR**, such as a lack of clear focal points that were responsible for targeting and the hierarchical approach within UNHCR.

What was the solution / response?

- **The Joint Hub as a neutral broker**, perceived by UNHCR and WFP as a necessary mediator between the two agencies, to find a solution that meets both agencies' mandate and priorities:
 - *"For WFP, the entry point is food insecurity, for UNHCR it is protection. The Joint Hub was like a mediator, trying to iron out the differences and find a solution. They were very good mediators."* WFP staff.
 - *"The technical side wasn't easy, but it was fine. But the politics were really difficult. Sometimes we (WFP) would bring the Joint Hub in and use a technical excuse, as the UNHCR office would behave differently if the Joint Hub were there".* WFP staff.
 - One person interviewed (from UNHCR) perceived that the Joint Hub was more aligned with WFP's objectives than UNHCR's. *"The Joint Hub was not impartial, it was too much on WFP's side, there wasn't neutrality"* UNHCR staff.
 - *"Now (after Joint Hub support) there is no question about us having the technical competency. At the start we didn't know how to approach this... but now, we could do it the second time round. But the Joint Hub has a role to play in terms of coordination, neutrality, to ensure the report is approved and is not hidden away."* WFP staff.
- **Despite the political changes and security challenges** in mid-2023⁵, which resulted in many WFP and UNHCR staff working remotely for six months, collaboration between the two agencies

⁵ On 26 July 2023, a military *coup d'état* took place in Niger in which several factions of the armed forces seized power and suspended the constitution, resulting in a change in government.

continued through this period with the Joint Hub leading online coordination meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

- **Momentum and accountability were maintained through the coordination support provided by the Joint Hub** (regular coordination meetings facilitated by the Joint Hub, etc.). Coordination support from the Joint Hub was greatly appreciated by both agencies, with only one person consulted expressing reservations.
- **Targeting for food assistance was successfully implemented in 2023** and most people consulted reported that there was good collaboration between WFP and UNHCR during the period of Joint Hub engagement.
 - *“Without the Joint Hub, targeting would never have happened. The country operations had been trying to do retargeting for 3-4 years. But once we had the Hub involved, it was impossible for UNHCR to get out of it.”* WFP staff.
- However, post-Joint Hub support, it seems that this good collaboration has not been sustainable. **The quality of collaboration seems to have deteriorated over time**, with the end of Joint Hub support and turnover of key staff members (see section below on challenges, maintaining collaboration for continuous targeting).

What were the success factors?

- ✓ **An immediate and clear need to collaborate**, in this instance the need to find a technical solution to prioritise food assistance in the face of diminishing budgets.
- ✓ **A commitment to collaboration by key staff members** *“So much of this is personality driven. That became 90% of my job, just bringing people together”* WFP staff
- ✓ **Dedicated staff time** to meet regularly and share information in a transparent and timely manner is required for good collaboration
- ✓ **Leadership** for collaboration is necessary at both technical and strategic (senior management) level.
- ✓ **Joint Hub coordination support**

Strength of evidence for this good practice?

Evidence suggests that good collaboration between WFP and UNHCR contributes to a smoother and more effective delivery of joint work and this is a good practice – and global commitment – which should be replicated in other countries.

In terms of Joint Hub coordination support, in the case of Niger there is evidence to suggest that this significantly contributed to improved collaboration during the period of support, though making this sustainable and maintaining good collaboration over time has been challenging for the country operations.

What we learnt through the process

- **Good collaboration requires hard work** – a commitment to collaboration at all levels, timely exchange of information, creating space and time to meeting regularly, transparency and trust, interoperability of systems, etc.
- **Making collaboration sustainable is difficult** - while the Joint Hub can effectively facilitate this collaboration during the period of support, embedding this within country operations so that collaboration is sustainable, is a challenge.

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What we still don't know

- We don't know **if there are alternate ways – other than Joint Hub support - that would lead to good collaboration and increased trust** between WFP and UNHCR country operations. We don't know how other potential approaches would compare to Joint Hub-led coordination in terms of effectiveness, cost and sustainability with regard to joint WFP-UNHCR work.

4. Capacity strengthening through Joint Hub technical support

GOOD PRACTICE

Joint Hub's technical support and mentoring approach facilitated WFP and UNHCR staff in learning, putting into practice and integrating the skills, knowledge and mindset necessary for collaborative work.

What was the problem?

- **WFP and UNHCR required additional technical support to re-target food assistance.** While WFP staff in Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) had a certain level of technical capacity, given the scope of the exercise – and the complexity of working jointly with UNHCR – a request was made to the Joint Hub to provide additional technical support. RAM, within WFP, was the 'driving force' behind this request for support.
- **Country operations needed to strengthen their capacity to conduct joint work with the other agency.** Though this was not explicitly part of the country operations' request to the Joint Hub, people consulted for this learning review stated that it was not just an immediate need to target, but a longer-term need to have the necessary internal staff capacity to update and maintain the targeting approach.

What was the solution?

- **The Joint Hub integrated a learning and capacity strengthening approach into their technical support,** seeking to build the capacity of those staff in country offices that were willing and keen to learn new skills. This was particularly true for the work on data analysis and assessment, during which the Joint Hub's Data Analyst and Assessment Officer spent time working together and mentoring staff from WFP's RAM unit and providing feedback on technical tasks.
 - *"WFP RAM staff did a lot of the data analysis work. We (Joint Hub) would review and provide feedback, sometimes it was more work for us but it's part of our capacity building approach" Joint Hub staff.*
 - *"On the capacity building side, working with the Joint Hub was great, it felt like an exchange. Capacity building wasn't a target I set out for the RAM team at the beginning, but it was a positive side-effect" WFP staff.*
 - *"Before, we weren't really familiar with how to use JAM surveys for targeting. In other countries there's a survey and then a score. We took part in an online training course with the Hub and then a workshop, which helped us to see things clearly. Now we could do it a second time." WFP Staff.*

What were the success factors?

- ✓ Staff had **immediate need for technical support** with individuals, particular within RAM (WFP) being the driving force behind the request for working with the Joint Hub
- ✓ Staff **already had certain level of technical capacity** and so were able to build on this and integrate new knowledge and skills
- ✓ Staff were **willing and motivated** to learn alongside Joint Hub team, taking feedback on board
- ✓ **Clear commitment of senior management to collaboration** with the other agency, combined with collaborative mindset of technical staff

Strength of evidence for this good practice?

The Joint Hub's method of providing technical support – that involves a strong mentoring and learning component - has been **successfully demonstrated** in Niger and is ready for replication, scaling or roll-out in other contexts, providing the success factors listed above are in place.

What we learnt through the process

- If staff in country operations have a **knowledge / skills gap and are motivated** to learn, the Joint Hub can contribute to capacity strengthening through the provision of collaborative technical support, online learning sessions, workshops and feedback.
- This tailor-made approach to supporting staff learning **requires considerable time and resources** on the part of both Joint Hub staff and staff in country operations. The alternative would be to outsource these tasks (for example to a consultancy company), but then the capacity of in-country staff would not be strengthened in the process.
- The **Joint Hub has not fully communicated its learning and mentoring approach to country operations**, nor counted the hours spent training or monitored the impact on staff capacity. The mentoring and capacity strengthening component of the Joint Hub's work is not new but may not have been clearly visible to supervisors and senior management. There is an opportunity to make this learning approach more explicit, to monitor the changes in staff capacity and to improve our methods.
 - *"You have to make it clear that the Hub is there, but next time it's up to you - including the national staff. It has to be explicit and the Deputy Rep (in charge of Operations) has to be involved."* UNHCR staff
- **Supporting national staff:** some people interviewed suggested that the Joint Hub focused on working with international staff rather than national staff, resulting in a 'brain drain' when international staff rotate.
 - *"International staff are on rotation. Could we have invested more in the national staff, who stay longer and perhaps aspire to an international career?"* UNHCR staff

What we still don't know

- In Niger, **changes in staff capacity were not systematically monitored**. The evidence here is anecdotal, based on what people interviewed for this learning review have reported. The Joint Hub needs to get better at assessing learning needs at the beginning of the period of Joint Hub support and measuring changes in staff capacity as a result of Joint Hub support.
- We don't know if there are **other ways that staff in country operations could have learned** the same skills, mindsets and knowledge, and how other methods would compare in terms of effectiveness and cost.

CHALLENGES

What challenges were faced throughout the process? What worked less well? What could've been improved, and how? If we were to go through the process again, how might we approach it differently? This section presents three areas in which WFP, UNHCR and the Joint Hub faced challenges in working jointly – collaborating on the appeals process, engaging jointly with development actors and maintaining collaboration for sustainable and continuous targeting. Lessons learned are distilled, not only for country operations in Niger, but also for other operations in similar contexts and for the Joint Hub itself.

For each of the three challenges identified here, this section looks at the following:

- What was the problem? (or initial situation)
- What was the response?
- What factors led to this response?
- What we learnt through the process
- What we still don't know.

1. Collaboration on the appeals process

CHALLENGE ENCOUNTERED

Developing a joint WFP-UNHCR appeals process related to food assistance, rather than WFP mostly managing the appeals process on its own.

What was the problem / initial situation?

Both WFP and UNHCR agreed on the need to work together to manage appeals from households that believe they have been wrongly categorised (i.e. non-eligible households in need of food assistance).

There was agreement that the appeals process should be to some degree jointly owned by WFP and UNHCR – so that staff in both agencies could be involved in managing appeals – and the aim was to use the agencies' already existing feedback mechanisms to do this.

While the Joint Hub proposed for the country offices to strengthen collaboration on the reception and referral of appeals between UNHCR and WFP by developing a joint appeals intake and referral form (so that any appeals received by UNHCR and their partners could be quickly and reliably shared with WFP), the **country offices preferred to stick with the existing ways of working** (i.e. ad-hoc referrals by email). The agencies did not want to work with the Joint Hub to follow-up on appeals from vulnerable but non-eligible households (design exclusion errors) and preferred to focus instead on vulnerable households that met the eligibility criteria but had not been selected (implementation exclusion errors).

What was the response?

- WFP and UNHCR, with support from the Joint Hub, worked together **to assess existing processes for appeals**, processes that were already in use and familiar to communities.
- It was decided to **use these existing systems** for appeals, which provided various channels through which households could lodge their appeal. Systems included:
 - **Comité de plaintes (complaints committee)** at community level, consisting of WFP, UNHCR, NGO partner and community members

- **Helpdesks** at community level, managed by NGO partner
- **'Ligne verte' (helpline)**, separate numbers and call centres for WFP and UNHCR, with emails sent between agencies to refer cases from one to the other (including not only WFP and UNHCR, but also FAO, UNICEF)
 - **WFP's number** was country-wide, short and easy to remember, well-known to communities and frequently used for all types of complaints (leading to a high number of appeals and complaints received)
 - **UNHCR's number** was different in each region, longer and less easy to remember and thus less well-known to communities. Each sub-office had its own system (leading to a lower number of appeals and complaints received).
- The appeals process was **set-up in a timely manner**, with an open window to submit appeals, which is considered good practice.
- **There was no established process to assess and follow-up on appeals related to design exclusion errors.** The country operations did not want to work on this area and did not request Joint Hub support to manage this.
- **However, solutions were found at field level, during the community-based selection process**, to integrate vulnerable households that did not meet the eligibility criteria (i.e. design exclusion errors), or to exclude households that were eligible but not considered in need (design inclusion errors). From the few interviews conducted for this learning review, it seems that this was not a process that was explicitly designed and agreed upon by staff, and therefore it is unlikely that it was applied in a harmonised and systematic way across different field office locations. From the Joint Hub's perspective, a harmonised and transparent approach would be preferable. Some examples illustrating the approach taken in Niger:
 - **Exclusion errors:** one person interviewed explained that, as part of the community selection process, WFP and partner staff were able to be 'flexible', on a case-by-case basis, by using a broad interpretation of the 'protection criteria' (i.e. that the household has at least 1 disabled member or at least 1 chronically ill member) to include vulnerable households that do not otherwise meet the criteria. *"The protection criteria is somewhat broad, so we can be flexible if there is a chronically ill or disabled member of the family. So these are somewhat flexible interpretations, and we try to understand the family's real situation. We try to sit down with the committee and understand the family. A job we do with patience».* WFP staff.
 - **Inclusion errors:** similarly, for households that met the eligibility criteria but were not vulnerable (design exclusion errors), the community-based selection process was used to verify their vulnerability and ensure these households were *not* included on the lists. As one person interviewed explained *"If the household meets the criteria but they look well-off, for example if they have a motorbike, we check with the committee and if they are not in need, we don't put them on the list. So we take the non-vulnerable ones off the list."* WFP staff.

What factors led to this response?

- **Each organisation had an existing feedback mechanism in place**, which were used for purposes beyond just appeals for food assistance.
- **WFP staff were familiar with managing exclusion / inclusion errors through community-based targeting** and continued to do so when applying the eligibility criteria with communities.

What we learnt through the process

- **A lack of coordination and collaboration on the management of appeals** is a missed opportunity and led to less systematic and timely referrals of appeals. In addition, after follow-up on appeals had

taken place, it was unclear who was responsible (and accountable) for informing households of the decision regarding their appeal.

- **According to staff from WFP, it would have been advantageous to have a single helpline or process** (like a 'one stop shop'), with referrals between agencies, so that the follow-up of cases could be monitored in a single overarching system.
- **A functioning appeals process requires considerable resources** and this was a constraint in Niger.
- **For exclusion errors**, there needs to be a clear and agreed process to assess and follow-up on appeals from vulnerable but excluded households (both design and implementation errors) – as well as to assess their eligibility during the community-based selection process. There should be resources allocated to include them in distribution lists for food assistance, if they are considered to be in need and are prioritised for assistance.

What we still don't know

- Having an appeals process that includes **vulnerable non-eligible households** (design exclusion errors) is an important part of accountability and reflects the agencies' commitments at global level. It is not clear how the application of these global-level commitments can be reinforced at country operation level, and what leverage the agencies' Regional Bureaus and HQs may have in ensuring this is adhered to in practice.
- **Referrals between existing processes and hotlines** – how can these be managed? Some people consulted suggested that there should be an area-based approach to managing and resolving appeals (i.e. managed by sub-offices, in the field), while others suggested it needed to be at capital level, to avoid risks of fraud. At the very least, a joint intake and referral form (as was proposed by the Joint Hub) is an important first step in harmonising appeals processes and facilitating referrals.

2. Transitioning from humanitarian to sustainable response

CHALLENGE ENCOUNTERED

From the perspective of the Joint Hub, there was a lack of shared vision for the transition from humanitarian to sustainable response, resulting in ad-hoc engagement with development actors and missed opportunities to leverage data to inform this transition.

What was the problem?

When the Joint Hub was initially requested to provide support to WFP and UNHCR, the focus was on targeting of general food assistance (GFA) and was driven by RAM (within WFP), rather than being a request for finding longer-term solutions and engaging with development partners.

The Joint Hub suggested including longer-term programming in the Scope of Work and this was signed off by Country Operations, however it could be argued that the need for this type of support was not widely recognised within WFP and UNHCR. In most contexts, the Joint Hub tries to work simultaneously on targeting for basic assistance and exit strategies for this assistance, however country operations in Niger were less interested in engaging the Joint Hub's support for the latter.

What was the response?

- **The Joint Hub facilitated technical discussions on livelihoods and self-reliance** with the aim of identifying common pathways to promote self-reliance of refugees. Monthly coordination meetings were held remotely, as well as three in-person technical working sessions in Niamey during the Joint Hub mission in January 2023. With the support of the Joint Hub, the country operations developed a first draft of a joint strategic approach document (including common strategic pillars) and a draft joint action plan (documentation here [Joint Action Plan](#)).
- **Several meetings were convened with government and development actors** in Niamey (Government ministries and projects, World Bank, Italian Cooperation, civil society organisations) as part of the Joint Hub mission (Jan 2023). During these meetings, UNHCR and WFP presented the joint plan for collaboration on refugees' socio-economic inclusion and the aim was to identify possible and concrete areas for collaboration. Initial feedback from Government and stakeholders was quite positive. However, due to a lack of endorsement and commitment from senior management (which only became apparent after the Joint Hub's in-country mission), there was no follow-up and the strategy and action plan were not implemented.
- **WFP was engaged in resilience programming**, though this was not in coordination with UNHCR and not linked to an exit strategy from humanitarian assistance.
- Despite multiple attempts, **the Joint Hub was unable to properly engage with WFP and UNHCR** and continue the technical discussions on the issue of a joint approach to longer-term solutions.
 - *"Livelihoods programming is the piece that worked the least well. It's not a time-bound exercise – it's really difficult to have concrete output because these are incredibly long processes. It forced UNHCR and WFP to try and have discussions on this, but there was no real will to work together. It felt a bit forced."* WFP staff.
 - *"WFP's technical team (RAM) led the process, and if they hadn't been doing it, it wouldn't have happened. But, on a negative side, it was a very narrow focus, that left out other elements. When the Joint Hub tried to put other broader, strategic objectives on the table, the ideas got shut down."* Joint Hub staff.
- The Joint Hub felt that there was a **missed opportunity to leverage data from the joint assessment** to influence other stakeholders (Government, WB, IFIs and development actors, etc.) and to transition towards long-term solutions, not only for UNHCR and WFP programming but to influence Government and development actors as well.

What factors led to this response?

- **Lack of joint vision and institutional commitment:** there was a lack of shared vision for the transition from humanitarian to sustainable response. While at technical level within WFP and UNHCR there was considerable reflection and discussions with development actors, the lack of clear commitment, goals and involvement at senior management level meant that such an approach was not sustainable.
- **Technical focus:** joint approaches were driven by technical teams with an immediate objective of targeting WFP's GFA rather than developing transition strategies and longer-term programming. The Joint Hub's main interlocutors within WFP and UNHCR were at technical level and not at more strategic level (such as Country Director / Representative).
- **Insecure and fragile environment**, led to humanitarian approaches being broadly adopted, such as short-term funding cycles from humanitarian donors, lack of coordination between humanitarian and development actors.
- **High workload of staff** – and high-pressure environment – led to focusing efforts on the immediate need of GFA prioritisation, with little time to focus on longer-term approaches and exit strategies for humanitarian assistance.

- **Siloed approach:** even within the Joint Hub, different colleagues work on targeting and programming – which can lead to a lack of a holistic approach that clearly links the data analysis and targeting strategy to the work on longer-term programming.
- **Lack of development funding** for situations of forced displacement. In the absence of clearly earmarked funds, such as the World Bank’s IDA Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) which is active in other countries, it was not clear for WFP and UNHCR who to engage with or whether that engagement would be fruitful.
- **Competitive funding environment for WFP and UNHCR**, in which they perceive they are in competition with each other for engagement with development actors. The added value of engaging jointly with development actors was not evident to WFP and UNHCR and therefore they continued to engage with these stakeholders separately, after the Joint Hub mission.

What we learnt through the process

- **Clear commitment from Senior Management is a pre-requisite:** for the Joint Hub, we learnt the importance of involving Senior Management in discussions about targeting of assistance – and transition strategies for assistance – and the necessity of clear endorsement by management to work on both interrelated areas. Though the issue of targeting can at times appear technical in nature - and therefore technical staff (such as RAM in WFP) are often the driving force behind such initiatives, as was the case in Niger - targeting has strategic ramifications well beyond the delivery of food assistance. What is the longer-term vision and exit strategy? How can we link humanitarian assistance to development approaches and social protection systems led by the Government, WB and others? Such strategic questions necessitate leadership by Senior Management, and the Joint Hub has since learnt to engage management on these issues, though in Niger this was not thorough enough, and we were somewhat late in doing so. A clear and recognised demand from country operations and commitment to engage with development actors – including WFP and UNHCR allocating the necessary staff time and resources to do so - is necessary for the Joint Hub to have an impact in this area.
- **Engaging with development actors requires continuous presence, relationship building and longer time frames.** Learning from other contexts, such as Mauritania suggested that the in-country Joint Hub coordinator, as well as other UNHCR and WFP staff, spent considerable time building relationships with government counterparts and World Bank technical colleagues. In Niger, the Joint Hub did not have an in-country coordinator who was continuously present. While these relationships can – and should be – developed and maintained by WFP and UNHCR staff in country, the Joint Hub did not identify clear focal points for this work.
- **Need for a holistic approach from the Joint Hub:** it would have been helpful for the Joint Hub to have a clear team leader who is equally invested in all components of joint work, including engagement with development actors, in order to bring these together and be responsible for driving this forward. In Niger, the Joint Hub still had a somewhat siloed approach to humanitarian assistance (targeting for food) vs. development approaches, without clearly linking the two (even internally, within our own team):
 - *“Our Joint Hub team is like a microcosm of the two agencies, the challenges we face internally are the same as the challenges the agencies face”* Joint Hub staff.
- **WFP-UNHCR partnership still focuses primarily on delivery of food assistance for refugees.**
 - *“UNHCR is good at holding WFP accountable for humanitarian food assistance, but is UNHCR willing to expand the space in terms of the solutions mandate? Can WFP hold UNHCR accountable for the solutions mandate? The Venn diagramme of the partnership is still very much focused on food assistance.”* Joint Hub staff.

What we still don't know

- **Obstacles to working on transition strategies:** even taking into account the lack of in-depth discussions between the Joint Hub and senior management on the issue of engaging development actors, it still remains unclear why there was an apparent lack of interest from WFP and UNHCR to engage in longer-term programmatic approaches. Once Senior Management was engaged, were there other reasons beyond the high workload, and immediate need to prioritise GFA?
 - Do we need a better understanding of the planning processes, timelines, budgets and language of development partners in order to influence these?
 - Can the Joint Hub improve and clarify its offer in terms of supporting longer-term programming?
- **Use of data beyond targeting for food assistance:** it is not clear why the JAM data was not used for other purposes beyond targeting of WFP's food assistance. Why, for example, was the data not used to inform UNHCR's cash-based interventions, livelihoods programming, WFP's resilience programming, etc.?
 - Are we producing data that meets the needs of government and development partners, so we can leverage this data to inform their investments? If so, how can we better communicate this for data to be used more widely?
 - Are we producing data that meets the needs of UNHCR and WFP's programming, beyond GFA? If so, how can we better communicate this in order for data to be used more widely?

3. Maintaining collaboration to ensure targeting is updated

CHALLENGE ENCOUNTERED

Establishing shared ownership and systems (such as a joint governance body) to ensure that targeting is managed in a sustainable and accountable manner over time.

What was the problem?

- **Targeting should not be seen as a one-off exercise but rather as an integral part of the programme cycle, requiring regular updates.** By making targeting an ongoing process, humanitarian assistance can be more adaptive and effective. Regular updates, efficient appeals processes and a strong governance body will ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most, while optimizing resource allocation and maintaining community support.⁶
- **A sustainable and joint approach to targeting is necessary, and this should be co-owned by both WFP and UNHCR.** While the request for Joint Hub support in 2022 was primarily driven by the immediate need to target food assistance, the aim was also to set-up a targeting system which could be updated and maintained over time (including monitoring and re-targeting or continuous targeting). The gap between targeting approaches had been five to six years, with previous targeting exercises reportedly taking place in 2017 and 2011.

⁶ For further details see also [Mixed Methods for Better Targeting, Insights from the UNHCR-WFP Joint Hub](#) (2025)

- **Turnover of international staff is high** (often the ones with decision-making power when it comes to targeting), creating challenges for institutional memory, shared understanding and commitment to goals.

What was the response?

- **During the period of Joint Hub engagement**, targeting for food assistance was successfully developed and implemented and there was good collaboration between WFP and UNHCR. Momentum and accountability were maintained through the coordination support provided by the Joint Hub (regular coordination meetings facilitated by the Joint Hub, etc.).
- **Post Joint Hub support**, the quality of collaboration is perceived by country operation staff as lower than previously. Good collaboration appears to not have been sustainable (according to staff consulted for this learning review in Oct 2024). For example:
 - **Implementation of community-based selection process:** according to several people interviewed, WFP began implementing the targeting process alone, without UNHCR involvement, even before UNHCR considered that the criteria had been properly validated. This caused some tension between the agencies.
 - **Management of food distribution lists:** according to UNHCR staff consulted, since the implementation of the targeting process (Nov 2023) WFP has been holder of the master list for food assistance for all population groups (including refugees) so updates to proGres registration data (deaths, births, etc) are not integrated into WFP's distribution lists in SCOPE. To note, established good practice is that UNHCR maintains proGres data for refugees and produces the updated 'manifest' (distribution lists) which are shared with WFP before each food distribution.
 - **Ration sizes:** it is to be expected that there are changes to WFP ration sizes from one month to another, however according to UNHCR staff consulted, there is a lack of communication between the agencies around these 'oscillating' ration sizes and an unwillingness on the part of WFP to communicate when rations need to be decreased.
 - **Post distribution monitoring:** after Joint Hub support, WFP is conducting post distribution monitoring (in 2024) but the process is not being conducted jointly with UNHCR.
 - **Targeting updates:** there is no clear joint plan for re-targeting, and a lack of a joint governance body (WFP, UNHCR, Government) for accountability, to ensure the targeting approach is sustainable and updated regularly, or as the situation demands. According to those consulted during this learning review, every 2 years would be an ideal frequency for conducting a JAM and re-targeting, with some suggesting every 4 years.
 - **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between WFP and UNHCR** needs to be updated and re-signed (mentioned by numerous people interviewed) to facilitate ongoing collaboration, but the process has been slow.

What factors led to this response?

- **Staff turnover** in both Senior Management and other key staff involved in targeting led to a loss in institutional memory and thus a lack of recognition of the importance of updating targeting.
- **High workload, unstable and challenging operating environment as well as lack of resources** could lead to targeting updates being deprioritised once country operations considered targeting was 'done'.
- **Lack of emphasis from the Joint Hub on the need to maintain and update targeting** over time, due also to the Joint Hub's high workload and competing priorities

What we learnt through the process

- Successful targeting is often due to the **energy and dynamism of key staff members, as well as the support provided by the Joint Hub**. When these staff members leave the operation, and Joint Hub support is completed, the targeting processes – as well as WFP-UNHCR collaboration - can lose momentum.
- **A plan for updating targeting – and a joint governance body** to provide accountability- should be part of the handover from the Joint Hub to country offices.
- While joint governance bodies are created, these often fail to remain active and for country operations to remain accountable to them. As the Joint Hub, we are still **struggling to transition from a targeting process that is driven by motivated staff to one that is embedded within the systems and mindset** of country operations.

What we still don't know

- **From a technical perspective**, it is not clear how distribution lists are being (or can be) updated to reflect changes in households' situation and whether there is budgetary flexibility to manage these changes. Bearing in mind that households were selected through a community-based selection process – and that WFP distribution lists are apparently no longer linked to proGres database (for the refugee caseload) – how are household level changes integrated into lists?
- **We still don't know how to successfully incorporate accountability for updating joint targeting into the systems and mindset of WFP and UNHCR country operations**. Experience in Niger would suggest that additional institutional incentives (whether stick or carrot) would be helpful to ensure that country operations maintain targeting systems, and do so collaboratively, in line with the agencies' joint commitments at global level.
- **Increased involvement of Regional Bureaus (RBs)** could be helpful, but as the Joint Hub we haven't yet found an optimal approach to working with regional bureaus and integrating them into work at country level.

PEOPLE CONSULTED

The findings presented here are based on online key informant interviews conducted by the Joint Hub in September - October 2024. Some interviews were conducted in French, while others were conducted in English. Citations given in French have been translated for the purposes of this report.

The following people were interviewed:

Agency	Name	Role (at time of Joint Hub support to Niger, 2022-2024)
WFP	Anna Law	Head of RAM
WFP	Djibir Malamidi	RAM officer
WFP	Moctar Habou	RAM officer
WFP	Mariama Moumouni	Gender/Protection Officer
WFP	Wahabou Hassane	Programme and Policy Officer, Community Feedback Mechanism
UNHCR	Fode Baba Condé	Senior Community-Based Protection Officer
UNHCR	Amadou Adamou	Assistant Protection Officer
UNHCR	John Baguma	Nutrition and Food Security Officer
UNHCR	Moussa Alhassane	Associate Livelihood & Economic Incl Officer
UNHCR	Abdou Ado Louche	Associate CBI
Joint Hub	Jane Lewis	Head of the Joint Hub
Joint Hub	Cinzia Papavero	Senior Targeting Advisor
Joint Hub	Homaira Sikandary	Programme Policy Advisor
Joint Hub	Michel Dikkes	Protection (AAP) Officer
Joint Hub	Guillermo Rodríguez	Data Analyst & Assessment Officer
Joint Hub	Cristian Bevacqua	Livelihoods Officer

ABOUT THE UNHCR-WFP JOINT HUB

The UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub (Joint Hub) is a dynamic collaboration between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), building on a long-standing partnership between the two agencies to enhance assistance and outcomes for refugees and forcibly displaced people in some of the world's largest displacement crises.

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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



WFP
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JOINT PROGRAMME EXCELLENCE AND TARGETING HUB