

# Enhancing Protection and Managing Risks through Accountability to Affected People (AAP) and Conflict Sensitivity: Lessons from South Sudan and Uganda

WFP–UNHCR Joint Hub Country Exchange (14 August 2025)



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## BACKGROUND

As humanitarian resources shrink and refugee numbers continue to rise, both South Sudan and Uganda have moved away from status-based assistance toward needs- and vulnerability-based targeting. This change has not been easy. It has required strong communication, community participation, and a careful focus on accountability to affected people (AAP) and conflict sensitivity. In this learning exchange, WFP and UNHCR colleagues from both countries shared experiences of what worked well, where challenges arose, and how humanitarian actors and governments adapted in order to maintain protection, equity, and stability.

## South Sudan (Maban Camps)

### Context

In South Sudan, the Maban camps are home to over 217,000 refugees. With food rations reduced from 100 percent in 2012 to just 50 percent in recent years, agencies needed to move to vulnerability-based targeting, to prioritise those most in need of assistance.

Targeting criteria for food assistance included households with serious medical conditions, older persons unable to provide for themselves, people with disabilities, women at risk, and unaccompanied or separated children. Roughly half of all households were targeted under this system, each receiving partial rations.

## Risks Identified

The shift brought significant risks. Communities feared unfairness between targeted and non-targeted households, between new arrivals and protracted caseloads, and between refugee and host populations. Persistent malnutrition and seasonal floodings compounded tensions, while humanitarian staff worried about security risks.

## Risk Mitigation

To manage these risks, WFP, UNHCR, and government counterparts issued joint communications and invested in continuous community sensitization. A new appeals process allowed households to challenge exclusion decisions, and steps were taken to separate appeals handling from distribution sites to prevent conflict. Enhanced police presence, together with complementary interventions such as school feeding and livelihood programs, helped reduce tensions.

Over time, trust was built, although the experience also highlighted gaps. Stronger livelihood investments are still needed, as dependence on food aid remains high. Predictable inclusion cycles and better monitoring of non-targeted families' nutrition would strengthen accountability. Digital platforms for appeals and data management remain underdeveloped.

# Uganda

## Context

Uganda's story is similar but on a larger scale. With refugee numbers rising from 1.5 million to 1.8 million between 2019 and 2025, and with resources in decline, the government and humanitarian partners moved through four phases of prioritization. The targeting approach was based on an index, using registration data to rank and categorize families by vulnerability.

## Risks Identified

While this made assistance more targeted, it also carried risks of exclusion errors, manipulation of registration data by households, and confusion about the difference between legal refugee status and food entitlements. Delays in communication created space for rumours and misinformation, and the reduction of rations was often wrongly perceived as a withdrawal of refugee rights..

## Risk Mitigation

Uganda addressed these challenges through an accountability strategy that included strong communication with communities. A joint taskforce of WFP, UNHCR, and government representatives oversaw implementation, while community consultations ensured that community perspectives shaped the targeting criteria. A joint communication strategy kept messaging consistent, while a joint appeals mechanism gave households recourse when excluded. A conflict mapping tool further strengthened sensitivity to emerging risks.

This approach in Uganda produced some clear gains: acceptance of the prioritization process increased, trust in the data improved through quality checks, and urgent appeals could be handled through emergency pathways. At the same time, certain weaknesses persisted. Appeals windows often opened too late, communication gaps allowed rumours to flourish, and data management posed challenges with household splits and mergers. Case management approaches proved too costly for the scale of Uganda's refugee population, requiring a reliance on more data-driven solutions.

# Lessons Learned from South Sudan and Uganda

Taken together, the lessons from South Sudan and Uganda point to several cross-cutting themes. Communication is central: transparent, joint, and consistent engagement builds trust and acceptance. Appeals mechanisms are indispensable for accountability, but they must be timely, well-resourced, and accessible. Government leadership and ownership enhance legitimacy, while stronger livelihood and self-reliance strategies are needed to reduce dependency and social tensions. Finally, data credibility and protection require constant attention, both to maintain trust and to prevent harm. In both countries, conflict sensitivity proved essential in anticipating tensions and adapting assistance approaches to avoid fueling grievances.

## Further Reading

This summary captures the highlights of the exchange. For more detail, readers are encouraged to consult the full learning reviews: the Uganda Learning Review and the South Sudan Learning Review (forthcoming). Additional resources can be found at [www.unhcr-wfp-hub.org](http://www.unhcr-wfp-hub.org).

## Contacts

Thank you to the following colleagues who presented during this session:

**Mary Stella Mavenjina**, Head of Maban Field Office, WFP, South Sudan [stella.mavenjina@wfp.org](mailto:stella.mavenjina@wfp.org)

**Adeline Sozanski**, Associate Community-Based Protection Officer, UNHCR Sub-Office Maban, South Sudan [sozanski@unhcr.org](mailto:sozanski@unhcr.org)

**Gloria Nyamungu**, Community Engagement and Feedback Mechanism Officer, WFP Uganda [gloria.nyamungu@wfp.org](mailto:gloria.nyamungu@wfp.org)



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