Impact Assessment

Refugees’ Social Protection Programme,
The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Malaysia

(2010-2013)

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Acknowledgement

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1. Executive Summary

The Social Protection Fund made an important contribution to the work and mission of UNHCR in Malaysia where refugees and asylum seekers continue to face severe social, economic and protection risks. Initiated in 2009, established with the twin objective of building community capacity (in terms of resources, leadership, knowledge, skills, trust and networking) and enhancing level of self-reliance and livelihood, the Fund offers cash-based assistance to organized groups and individuals for various needs.

The programme helped UNHCR break new ground in many ways. It presented a novel approach to directly reaching out to a plethora of refugee communities that normally existed in silos and largely disconnected – socially and economically, from each other and the host communities. Furthermore, it is unique in the sense that it presents a ‘bottom-up’ approach which places the decision-making in the hands of refugees in determining what works best for their own communities, and what works best in implementing them. This directionality adds to resilience, contextual grounded-ness and involves people in their overall development process.

The evaluation found SPF to be strongly relevant to the needs of the refugees and to the mandate of UNHCR Malaysia. Cash-based assistance is an effective mechanism to infuse energy and action into self-initiated activities of the refugees. However, SPF’s financial and operational scale of operations did not match with its mandate and its interventions were mostly micro-level activity-based and lacked a strategic and transformative intervention.

Building Community Capacity

According to key informants’ interviews, field visits to various refugee centres and focus group discussions with various refugee community organizations and self-help groups, the Fund achieved moderate success towards building capacity of refugee communities. Interventions were widely ranged, from, literacy, rental assistance, day-care facilities, youth-collective initiatives, etc. one can construct that SPF has, over the course of past four years, contributed towards creation of social capital that refers to institutions, relationships, (vertical-societal and horizontal-community ties) and knowledge-base that has contributed towards quality and quantity of their social interaction and well-being.

When the programme was initiated, the primary focus and engagement of UNHCR in Malaysia were registration, documentation, and status determination while the community engagement component was relatively small. By charting new territories in terms of engaging directly with its key stakeholders, SPF created a space for wider, more interactive and deeper engagement with refugee communities that were strewn across the urban landscape.

In terms of actual impact, it is difficult to quantify or present tangible evidence due to lack of a defined baseline. Individual project reports capture activity or assistance based
success but the sustainability of those activities has been challenging to gauge. For instance, funding of rental space, which was the most common reason cited for grant assistance has been found to be a critical ingredient with secondary and tertiary ‘spillover’ benefits beyond the direct impact. Respondents also reported a strong need for community rental space as the concrete edifice served a vast number of protection needs (physical protection for meeting and organizing themselves, a newcomer assistance shelter, space to hold classes, gain skills and training etc.) and also had a tremendous impact in terms of “bringing them dignity, a sense of identity, and better bargaining power to access resources and demand equity in terms of employment wages, etc.”

For example, SPF funded-Pakistani Women Self-Help group in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur was set up in a modest home has now turned into a buzzing centre of activity acting as a school for over 30 children, family/ newcomer support/ counseling centre, handicraft training centre for many women, catering business and a home for several families with young children. Similarly, the Mon community women initiated a housing project, which is a safe shelter and also started a small-scale organic farming business.

The evaluation concludes that SPF was successful to an extent in creating and harboring an operating environment that worked towards building the community capacity of refugees and asylum seekers. It has achieved a certain degree of success in community building however, based on combination of objective measures and subjective evaluation, the approach and strategy to building communities was fragmented and not systematic.

Livelihoods and Social Cohesion

In order to gauge the impact of SPF on level of self-reliance and livelihood, it is very difficult to derive a conclusive response largely due to highly contextual circumstances in Malaysia. In absolute terms, SPF saw mixed results in achieving this objective largely due to a number of factors. Firstly, the legal, social, and political environment which remains complex; secondly, a weak ‘packaging’ of livelihood assistance which was mostly scattered around activity-based intervention rather than a more deeper diagnosis.

However, based on stakeholder interviews, several anecdotal evidences exhibited from programmes such as, language training, youth-collective, sewing, handicrafts, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training or financing shelters and productive assets like computers and machines, etc., likely contribute to self-reliance and livelihood creation. This is due to the fact that, for instance, while the programming monitoring tools capture the number of people trained, etc., due to the vast number of projects and low capacity and resources, SPF was unable to gauge the extent the trainings led to gainful employment whether in the host country or after repatriation.

Due to the expansive nature of communities and weak monitoring tools set up initially, it is very hard to gauge outcome level achievements. Nonetheless, SPF provided a cost

1 Recounted by representatives from Sri Lanka Tamil Refugee Organization and Sudanese Refugee Organization
effective, flexible programming tool and by various first-hand accounts, enhanced a sense of well being, assimilation and promoted a semblance of self-reliance by providing the right kind of tools. The availability of a credible agency that attends to their pressing needs is in itself a strong aid towards social protection.

**Evaluation Indicators**

In many cases, SPF grants have led a Community Building Organization (CBO) or Self-Help Group (SHG) to access assistance services and support which was otherwise not available or difficult to access. From a strategic lens, it may not seem as an investment in ‘durable solutions’ but of solely sponsoring of survival and life sustaining activities. However, with a relatively small level of financial grant, SPF has been able to contribute towards a number of activities that are much more than the sum of its parts.

Burgeoning operations compared to beneficiaries’ numbers and lack of adequate resources hard-pressed the Fund’s efficiency. With a weak Monitoring and Evaluation framework and tools, and with the pressure to oversee ground-level operations, its hold over its strategic vision got diluted and stressed.

Extensive interactions with refugees and CBOs/SHGs presented a clear trend of dependency on the cash-assistance. This was further clouded by the fact that due to illegal status, they cannot access alternate resources. The current NGO milieu in Malaysia remains fragmented and the programme was unable to build partnerships with various institutions. It was also difficult to conclude whether benefits of SPF’s work would accrue after its assistance is concluded. Due to these reasons, SPF does not score well on sustainability aspect.

After a multi-dimensional review of SPF – including its horizontal linkages with other UNHCR units, it can be derived that it needs to sharpen its mandate leaning more towards an overarching framework of livelihood creation feeding towards self-reliance. Financial support towards emergency and social welfare should be based on a time-bound, graduation model leaning more towards steady move towards productive assets and durable solutions that contribute to self-reliance.

The recommendation section elaborates on un-burdening SPF by offering structural and systematic support and gradually focus on building a cadre of strong NGO and implementing partners. A deeper institutional assessment and documentation of potential partners and systematic and symbiotic terms of engagement will benefit both.

The main strengthen of the Fund is that it is flexible, approachable and hands-on to the needs of its intended beneficiaries by placing them at the driver’s seat. It needs to be altered to further exemplify the need for innovative solutions pushed by UNHCR Headquarters and contributed towards ensuring equal opportunity based on vulnerability and capacity. In order to create a more lasting impact, UNHCR should re-vitalize SPF by updating its core mandate and strategic vision from quick-impact support to more durable solutions. Carry out a comprehensive assessment of existing partners and institutions and
re-map its key beneficiary profile categorized as per level of vulnerability. And finally, UNHCR should engage Government institutions in Malaysia more aggressively in pushing for advocacy in demonstrating refugees as ‘agents of positive change’ that deserve protection and present them as positive catalysts in the country’s booming informal economy.
2. Methodology

The evaluation carried out extensive key informants’ interviews and focus group discussions to construct a baseline. The availability of appropriate baseline data is always critical for performance evaluation, as it is indeed difficult to measure changes without reliable data on the situation before the intervention began.

Various tools we used to construct baseline data:

- Participatory assessment techniques are commonly used in participatory studies in which communities or groups report on their conditions, problems, and changes over time. Groups can provide estimates on things such as the raise in income, evidence of gaining better opportunities, any evidence of better academic performance or psychological development in children after participation in sports, recreational activities over time.
- Recall technique: Recall techniques ask individuals or groups to provide information on their social or economic conditions, their access to services, or the conditions of their community at a particular point in time (in this case: around 2009). However, this technique has its own limitations as it relies on memory.
- The evaluation also relies heavily on individual project files for data extraction.

Evaluation Tools

The evaluation is to use a combination of distance and in-person evaluation approach where the primary information sources will be: available programme related documentation, consultation with stakeholders and informants via phone, email and questionnaires.

The key sources of data for interpretation and analysis, which are outlined below, are:

- Document review
- Stakeholders consultations
- Focus Group Discussions
- Questionnaires
- Field-visits
- Summarising and cross referencing through tables and matrices

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders are classified among following Focus Groups:

(i) Direct Stakeholder Beneficiaries

Group A1: Groups returning for top-up funding
Group A2: One-time funded groups
Group A3: Women Self-Help Groups
Groups A4: Religion/Faith based organizations
Group A5: Children
Group A6: Youth
Group A7: Projects unsuccessful in disbursing funds

(ii) Non-Beneficiary Stakeholders: SPF Staff

Evaluation Consultant held several rounds of discussions with SPF staff in order to understand their perspective and experience in directly implementing the Fund. Apart from evaluating key indicators (effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability), the separate discussions were held to carry out a comprehensive Process Mapping of all its activities at various stages, extract lessons learnt and propose an alternate process map, M&E framework and Management structure.

(iii) Key UNHCR Staff

Evaluation consultant held a workshop with all the heads/representatives of units in UNHCR (most of whom are also members of SPF Steering Committee).

(iv) NGOs/implementing partners

A workshop was held with some of the existing NGOs and implementing partners to gauge their experience of partnering and future interest with UNHCR. Participants were from: Muslim Aid, Tune Skill, Cottage Patch, Hartford Academy, Soroptimist International Penang & Johor, Hilla Community and Salvation Army.

(v) Government Counterparts

Government is a crucial stakeholder, however, due to time and resources limitation, the evaluation could not hold discussion with the key ministries.
3. Key Evaluation Findings

3.1. Relevance

Relevance is measured against two key criteria: (i) the extent to which beneficiary needs have been acted upon during the project design phase and (ii) the extent to which the project or programme reflects the corporate goals of UNHCR.

The SPF approach is based on the understanding that by placing refugees at the center of operational decision-making, and building protection strategies in partnership with them, they will be better protected, their capacities to identify, develop and sustain solutions will be strengthened, and the resources available will be used more effectively. These are directly in line with the needs of vulnerable refugee populations in Malaysia, as well as UNHCR corporate goals. With its main objectives, viz. community building, promoting self-reliance and enhancing livelihoods, SPF engages directly with CBOs and SHGs and places their development in their hands. A snapshot of their partnership model\(^2\) (as of 2013) depicts that about 65% are CBOs, 22% are SHGs, 8% are external implementing partners and 6% are internal.

While UNHCR does emphasize durable solutions\(^3\), and several of SPF’s activities may not qualify under durable solutions *per se*, it also emphasizes adopting a progressive approach and SPF is a strong example of this. Extensive interactions with refugees also highlighted unequivocal need for cash-based assistance to meet their needs. Such being the view, it would be accurate to rate SPF strongly relevant.

3.2 Effectiveness

The impact evaluation intends to capture the social, economic, environmental, and other developmental changes that take place as a consequence of the project or programme. In the case of SPF, the complex Malaysian context is a strong determining factor on how we evaluate the success of the programme. Moreover, assessing the effectiveness of a programme requires a clear definition of the immediate objectives of the intervention and of the indicators that are going to be used to measure them. The lack of an established baseline and a monitoring framework without outcome indicators exacerbates this problem.

Respondents reported that financial assistance through SPF had a positive effect on a number of areas and while there is some empirical data that suggest the number of persons trained, or even employed after receiving training, due to a lack of post-implementation evaluation, it is hard to deduce whether those employments were gainful or truly translated to self-reliance in the longer term.

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\(^2\) 2013 SPF Planning Presentation
\(^3\) UNHCR Global Strategy for Livelihoods, 2014-2018, Page 8
It has been stated that various aspects of the SPF grant presented demonstrable effect in non-tangible terms which are related to behavioral, cohesion, community building, newcomer support, family dynamics, enabling environment for working mothers, assimilation in the local community, sense of social security, and access to information.

Besides that, SPF also grew to be an interface for UNHCR Malaysia to work directly with refugee communities. A huge amount of premium can be attributed to this direct support as it instilled confidence in communities and opened doors to more avenues.

The evaluation exercise assessed impact in the following dimensions:

*Effectiveness in Reach:*

The project meets its beneficiaries in the following ways: (i) SPF conducting periodic field visits, outreach activities to CBOs and SHGs for identifying vulnerable populations, (ii) beneficiaries approaching SPF directly, (iii) UNHCR units referring refugees to access grants via SPF, (iv) inter and intra-community social networks and information exchange.

These approaches were found to be largely effective as over the years, SPF refined its scope and reach by adopting UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity framework. Figure 1 below gives a snapshot of 2013 data distribution according to age and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Started in 2012</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>1,398</td>
<td>2,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started in 2013</td>
<td>3,335*</td>
<td>1,882*</td>
<td>1,922</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>5,266</td>
<td>9,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaggregated Total</td>
<td>4,081</td>
<td>2,534</td>
<td>2,455</td>
<td>2,332</td>
<td>1,877</td>
<td>6,664</td>
<td>11,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Ben. 2013</td>
<td>6,615</td>
<td>6,664</td>
<td>6,664</td>
<td>6,664</td>
<td>11,675</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The project figures quote about 430 projects that have directly reached out to 21,783 beneficiaries and about 50,000 indirect beneficiaries across 9 states as of early 2014.

Direct beneficiaries comprise children, women, patients, youth, unorganized communities besides the general refugee population. In terms of demographics, it is commendable that SPF has been able to reach out to the number of communities despite their size.
Figure 2 below gives breakdown of geographical reach of the Fund since 2009 across various states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Projects by Areas</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malacca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terengganu</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negri Sembilan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perak</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penang</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pahang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selangor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vast majority of respondents reported effective, non-biased and even outreach from SPF’s side. While majority of projects are geared towards rental support and skill development, both interventions have strong positive outcomes and have been instrumental in providing a host of benefits to various communities. It was also found that while certain communities such as the Chin-Burmese\(^4\) are relatively well-networked and supported by faith-based organizations, there are communities such as the Somali, Sudanese and Afghan that are in nascent stages of being established hence needing more handholding and outreach. The project is aware of this and has made steps to be inclusive in its reach to the most vulnerable groups.

**Effectiveness in building community capacity in terms of resources, knowledge:**

The SPF started with Education as one of the main component of its programme. While a dedicated unit was set up to look after Education, the Fund assisted in setting up of pre and primary level education for over 4,000 children facilitating access and continuation of education. No further data is available to comment on the longer-term impact of this intervention; however, moving this theme to a separate unit has proved to be a move in the right direction.

Several best practices have emerged where SPF coordinated members of various communities to pool in their knowledge resources and train ICT teachers form refugee communities. With over 28 ICT centres, SPF mobilizes various groups to create syllabus with various modules to further train participants. The first such Training-of-Trainees was conducted at the Malaysia Karen Organization Centre. Twenty-two ICT teachers (4 females and 18 males), from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan attended the workshop. The feedback from trainers was positive and each one of them intended to conduct similar courses for their respective communities.

\(^4\) In Malaysia, there are over 60,000 Chins (20,000 unregistered), 77,000 Rohingya (40,000 unregistered), 2000 Somalis, 150 Sudanese, and one documented Ethiopian refugee/asylum seeker.
As per performance indicators, SPF has reached out to over 50 CBOs and 30 SHGs. There is strong evidence that financial grants infuse impetus in terms of resources, which allow the members to access and build further capacity. While training and skill development platforms do show that a sizable number of trainees get jobs resulting in a rise in household income at individual level, how much this translates to community level is very hard to conclude. Similarly, while community leaders and training activities regularly reach out to build a knowledge base, it is hard to say how much of the knowledge transfer was carried out at community level.

It is challenging to directly link results from interventions to how much SPF grant led to building resource capacity of CBOs. In terms of capacity towards resources, communities still continue to be heavily dependent on personal networks and SPF grants as the nature of employment is subsistence. The socio-economic status of refugees also varies substantially, by area that is.

**Effectiveness towards Social Cohesion**

It is a complex exercise to assess and articulate levels of social cohesion of refugee communities in the Malaysian context. Social cohesion is hindered when there is lack of recognition and subsequent cooperation from the host government. Unfortunately, the situation of refugees is painted with the same brush as that for illegal migrants which makes the entire environment not suitable for social cohesion or integration. Despite these circumstances, discussions and survey results indicate a stronger sense of social cohesion as a result of SPF grants.

Assistance geared towards livelihoods and community building strongly infuses a sense of belonging and purpose to refugees and creates a positive environment for them to come together for individual and common good. From the refugees’ perspective, Malaysia is an attractive host country due to a burgeoning informal economy and relative ease in finding jobs, but safety and security issues such as detentions and arrests do a great disservice to that sentiment. Many communities also indicated the existence of religious and cultural differences between themselves and Malaysians.

What stood out is that SPF recognizes the need to fund programmes like community integration, peaceful co-existence projects, counseling for alcohol and substance abuse, neighborhood watches, cleanliness drives, community centers for HIV positive persons, youth from various communities interacting and engaging in sports activities, counseling for family-related matters, children developing sensory skills, etc.

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5 This pattern was found to be most successful in ICT trainings.
6 Due to their illegal status, vast numbers of refugees work in informal sectors such as restaurants, as household help, dishwashers, laborers etc.
7 Peaceful co-existence project is aimed at counseling for improved relationships with locals
8 Kampung Pandan
9 Youth Collective Project
10 Women and Children Care Shelter (Chin)
FGDs strongly indicate that SPF support led to better coherence in terms of decision making, managing their day-to-day undertakings, and professionalizing their management structure to adhere to UNHCR standards. For instance, according to survey respondents comprising of leaders from Rohingya, Myanmar Muslim Sri Lankan and Somali communities, direct impact was evident from numerous project management skills trainings organized by SPF in various states.

One best practice emerged in the area of social harmony. The Zo Chin refugee community in Wangsa Permai, backed by SPF, carried out a community clean-up initiative, called Gotong-Royong, with a dual purpose: to keep the neighborhood clean and help refugees display respect to locals and at the same time, to rebuild refugees’ reputation and develop a peaceful co-existence with locals. Refugee volunteers were joined by 28 volunteers from UCSI Malaysia University joining them in the community clean-up around the streets of Wangsa Permai.

Similar positive experience was also shared by Kampung Pandan that organizes regular community clean-up drives which has drastically, over the months, reduced the incidents of unpleasantness among host communities and more children mixing and playing with children from host communities, compared to before. It is worth noting here that while the cash assistance was very small (RM 3,100), it triggered a positive change, which continues beyond the grant assistance period.

The evaluation concludes that SPF assistance was effective in promoting interaction between migrants’ social relationships in their community (social capital) and helped them relate to the wider society (social cohesion).

Effectiveness towards enhancing the livelihoods and self-reliance

Enhancing livelihoods and self-reliance is a key component of SPF. Pursuit of livelihood is of paramount importance especially within the urban landscape. Earning a living is a critical ingredient in empowerment and self-reliance. The pursuit of livelihoods also restores the dignity and independence of refugees. Work provides the basis for food security and self-reliance, adding stability, prosperity and peace to the community at large.

The SPF covers income-generating projects as well as skills training programmes (tailoring, ICT, handicrafts, English language, providing trainers, etc.) Smaller grants for initiating/sustaining business are also given out to women. These are aimed at helping refugees access better income streams. Many work in unskilled jobs in the informal economy and will pick up skills that will help in gaining access to job markets, hence reducing the burden on host governments. The refugees carry these skills after resettlement for better integration socially and economically.

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11 Toy-box project
SPF has not been fully successful in this area, considering its grant size, which is relatively small. Large numbers of refugees were trained and a percentage of them found better jobs compared to before. But a closer look will reveal that while a number of grants were carried out in this arena, and many success stories emerged where refugees were able to find better jobs after training, there is little evidence to prove the extent to which it led to self-reliance. There are also many instances where business ventures started from grants but did not turn out to be successful due to a lack of adequate business planning, execution, marketing skills etc.

During interviews, SPF staff shared that they were unequipped to provide comprehensive support. Most of the time was spent on operational and management activities and SPF did not go through any mid-term technical revision of its strategy. It would not be incorrect to say that grants for livelihood creation are made using a piece-meal approach or on a case-by-case basis and not with a thorough strategy and follow-up action plan. This is again attributable to design, resources, capacity-related shortcomings further complicated by the refugees’ illegal status and the dispersed situation across the urban landscape.

However, there is a silver lining; while at the outcome there might have been limited impact, the mere venturing into a business venture, organizing the funds, decision making, negotiation, exploring potential markets and buying productive assets are all positive indicators that reflect upon refugees as not just ‘aid recipients but potential self-reliant agents of change’. Experiencing failure is a credible step towards setting the future stage for a better strategy next time.

In conclusion, a better packaging of livelihood strategy and targeted and well-researched investment decision favored towards financing productive assets would have led to better outcomes in terms of promoting livelihood and self reliance.

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**Lesson Learned: Design, Planning, M&E Framework**

- The initiators of the grant programme hit the ground running, and this resulted in them not paying adequate attention to the design, which managed to evolve structurally, over the years. From the account of colleagues behind the inception of the programme, as well as analyzing initially adopted mechanisms, it is evident from the design perspective that the SPF was hastily put together. A comprehensive monitoring, reporting and financing mechanism was lacking, and there was neither a proper needs assessment done on its targeted beneficiary population nor a commentary on how the core design will evolve over the years. This is largely attributable to a lack of resources and a structure team of full-time staff.

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12 *Sri Lankan Food Catering Business*

13 SPF grant helped 30 women from the Mizo Refugee Women Community go through skills training in creating school handbags, considered a marketable product, but it was not successful in generating income due to lack of marketing skills and tools.

14 *Global Strategy for livelihoods* (page 8)
staff that has remained unchanged over the entire span of the project.

➢ Since the project was breaking new ground, it was all the more important to do a 360 degree review of all aspects of programme design with the objective of providing scope for future evolvement. For a project with a mandate as crucial as SPF, there should have been a much more thorough socio-economic participatory assessment and a potential partner feasibility study during the inception stages. This offers an important lesson for future interventions.

➢ Furthermore, SPF would have further benefited from a mapping exercise of its targeted beneficiary population. Better mapping would have led to better targeting, hence stronger planning, management, execution, and monitoring of the grants.

➢ The interventions should have been multi-dimensional and not just activity-based. A better ‘packaging’ of interventions especially aimed at skills (fortified by marketing, business models, access to buyers, etc.) that looks beyond grant dispensing could have had a far deeper impact\(^{15}\) as it addresses the problems of livelihood and self-reliance in a more cohesive way.

3.3 Efficiency

Efficiency refers to the extent to which financial costs have been minimized when projected outputs are produced. It requires an optimum combination of human, material, and natural resources during management of the process.

Allocative efficiency: The SPF programme activities and resources are managed in an extremely cost effective way. This is evident from the fact that while their operations and coverage grew and evolved, their management structure was never revised for almost four years since inception\(^{16}\). It drew additional staff from UNHCR’s volunteer unit and interns which added to its strength, but with a light-structure, ‘boots on the ground’ approach and a modest\(^{17}\) average annual disbursement amount of approximately 900,000 RM (271,000 USD), SPF has managed to disperse this sum of money into many quick impact projects across communities.

Moreover, looking at the annual budget of UNHCR Malaysia, SPF makes up only a fraction of the budget but represents a solid approach towards organizational mandate. In terms of allocative efficiency, several factors point to a positive trend. These include the RM193 cost allocation per refugee\(^{18}\), SPF’s deep engagement with the wide range of communities on the ground and its flexible approach in terms of allocative efficiency. SPF funded projects have been worth the funds invested, judging by the number of beneficiaries they have successfully reached.

\(^{15}\) Recommendation section covers this in greater detail.

\(^{16}\) Exception of 2013 when one staff was added after a management review.

\(^{17}\) Compared to humanitarian assistance programmes of international development agencies

Lessons Learned: **Oversight and Implementation**

- The SPF team comprised a very light structure of just three full-time staff members. The oversight function and implementation tools were only put in place as the project progressed. Serious efforts should have been made to create a map of interventions – thematically rather than activity-based with each intervention placed against a benchmarked desired outcome.

**Management**

- The management structure of SPF did not evolve over the years\(^\text{19}\) despite the project coverage flourishing, as did the area of its work. While this is again tied to a lack of resources, the implications of not having adequate capacity can be particularly significant.

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**Efficiency of Operations**

As discussed in previous sections, SPF reaches out to communities from the supply faction as well as the demand faction. CBOs interviewed reported being well informed about SPF programmes, goals and processes. The programme reaches out to all refugees equally by using the Age, Gender and Diversity framework of UNHCR, and the CBOs reported confidence in SPF’s sound judgment and dealings. The project has even been instrumental in organizing what were earlier unorganized groups in order to provide adequate management skills to access grants. In terms of operational efficiency, the M&E and Assessment tools were found to be weak and evolved very late in the life cycle of the programme.

**Lessons Learned: Process**

- As per the Planning Manual of UNHCR, the agency can only get into direct (financial/transactional) relationship with refugees’ CBOs under exceptional circumstances. This augurs well for the context in Malaysia where exceptional circumstances warranted an innovative approach to reach out to strengthen the communities and self-help groups.

  While the inception document acknowledges a pattern whereby NGOs in Malaysia not only tend to focus on specific issues and beneficiaries leading to further fragmentation of interventions, they are also legally not allowed to engage with refugees or migrant populations. SPF should have carried out a participatory

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\(^{19}\) A management review in 2013 increased its full time staff from three to five and later retracted a staff making the full time employee strength at four.
assessment with existing potential NGOs/Implementing partners and perhaps compartmentalized the endeavors, which can be ‘outsourced’ and the ones where UNHCR needs to engage in directly. This would have lessened the pressure on the SPF team and resources. Identifying partners is a key lesson learnt here. In an endeavor to making it flexible and ready-to-implement, the project, opted to work around some of the UNHCR procedures related to procurement, asset/inventory management and the type of agreement to be signed with stakeholders. While developing unique solutions are encouraged, the inception team should have attempted to elaborate on those alternate arrangements and to the best extent possible.

3.4 Sustainability

Sustainability of SPF grants has been a major area of concern for SPF grants due to the sufficiency of its stakeholders. There is a credible risk that many of the interventions will cease to exist once the grant assistance is withdrawn. The major factors that hinder sustainability of SPF grants are as follows:

- Financial grants that are mostly geared towards the continuation of community rental space are the least sustainable. Due to low-income levels and subsistence level of income of refugees, and the high cost of rent in urban areas, there are no alternative assistance sources that can finance the space. A persistent concern is that withdrawal of rental support to CBO centers will lead to momentum and results being lost.

- The stipends received by community members for their contribution is an important determinant and motivation for their continued support. It is difficult to say if, in the absence of this assistance, community members will continue to work together.

- A clear and comprehensive sustainability strategy was neither developed nor was there any formal programmes where grantees can be linked to alternate sources of funding albeit paltry. In the case of the Mizo community of refugees, arrests and detentions drain a vast amount of earnings, and a weak degree of integration presents serious challenges.

- In livelihood interventions, it can be assumed to a certain degree that skills and vocational trainings imparted will remain with the trainees.

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20 It should be mentioned here that due to illegal status accorded to refugees, very few NGOs and implementing partners could actually engage with refugees. This space is primarily occupied by very few NGOs most of whom are faith-based organizations, and there is fear of further fragmentation of communities. The inception / Prodoc recognizes this challenge.

21 Discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.
Also, it is hard to ascertain the sustainability of trainings post impartment. For instance, over 70 young Myanmar refugees from 11 community IT centres and 36 persons from mobile phone repair program in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor completed the training modules and received certificates from Iverson Institute and River Bank Academy, respectively. However, no information is available on how many were able to find employment thereafter.

In conclusion, sustainability of SPF grants has been patchy\textsuperscript{22} and is more likely to be achieved in stronger communities and certain thematic areas such as livelihood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons Learned: Sustainability</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ It is also vital to weave into the programme design, opportunities for transferring lessons and ensuring post-programme sustainability. Such strategic coordination/collaboration should be built into the programme management structure, e.g. through board representation, and/or into log frame outcomes, outputs and activities.</td>
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3.5 Remarks on Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The SPF M&E was carried out more as a reporting tool than as a management tool. From 2009, a ‘freestyle’ narrative report’ started to evolve into a more structured report, though the mechanism itself is not structured or nuanced. It is more of a checklist, focusing on aspects such as payments, purchases, classes, attendance, etc. The primary reason behind this is the long list of activities under the broader themes of livelihoods, community building and social cohesion the Fund recognizes which makes it challenging to set up a standard template and indicators. The evaluation component was not built into the design of the programme at the time of inception. This makes it very hard to assess its true impact.

Interview with SPF evaluation focal point reveals that the process relies heavily on anecdotal evidence based on community interactions to carry out a basic analysis on how incomes and skills at household levels are changing.

\textsuperscript{22} The recommendations section shares some ideas on how to address this problem.
4. Recommendations based on discussions with stakeholders and UNHCR colleagues:

Recommendations for Immediate Follow-up:

1. Create a database of existing and potential partners (NGOs, Implementing Partners, Government Institutions). Request all beneficiary communities to submit a list of non-UNHCR entities supporting them. Encourage them to categorize the support they receive as: cash, training, education, productive assets, health, food etc. This will help UNHCR access a ready roster of potential partners. UNHCR may also convene a workshop of non-partisan, non-denominational NGOs and implementing partners and document their services, strengths and institutional capacity.

2. In its pursuit for durable solutions, UNHCR should look into engaging with academic centers or training institutions that are accredited by the Department of National Skills Development or Jabatan Pembangunan Kebangsaan (better known as J.P.K.) under the Ministry of Human Resources. According to statistics provided by UNHCR Malaysia, trainings conducted by these institutes leads to greater chances of both resettlement and increases chances of employability in the host or destination country.

3. Re-group current activities /interventions according to four broader themes:
   - Assistance based on beneficiary profile (women, adolescents, children)
   - Purpose-based assistance (education, evolving emergency fund, new-comer support, behavioral/soft skills, peaceful co-existence projects, sports and recreation, etc.)
   - Community Building Support (financial i.e. rent support)
   - Livelihoods (productive assets, skills trainings, stipend to trainers, etc.)

4. If agreeable by senior management, SPF should halt new grants for a brief period (1 or 2 months) to dedicate its capacities to observe a transition phase and assess its future programmatic vision in the next phase. International staff from UNHCR can be seconded to SPF to help them with this exercise. Furthermore, it could also second a staff from another UNHCR Malaysia unit to be dedicated full time to the evaluation function and to provide technical support to the SPF head in the transition phase.

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23 Australia offers up to 8 immigration points for a qualified hairdresser.
24 Ideally a technical expert well versed in the use of analytical and programming frameworks and tools that are recognized by the global community of practice, e.g., the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (SEEP, 2010).
Medium/ Longer-term Strategic Recommendations

To UNHCR Senior Management:

1. As mentioned previously, SPF should update its core mandate to lean more towards an overarching framework of livelihood-creation focusing on durable solutions. Re-vitalize\textsuperscript{25} SPF by updating its core mandate and strategic vision from quick-impact support to more durable solutions. Re-packaging of SPF’s forms of assistance will tame its scattered focus and give its vast range of issues manageability.

2. SPF, with its high visibility, can be a potential replicable model with its flexible, boots-on-the ground approach. It has strengthened UNHCR engagement with its direct beneficiaries over the years. However, its financial scale is diminutive compared to the objectives it sought out to achieve. In view of this, UNHCR should assign for greater funds to bring in more expertise and financing its renewed mandate.

3. UNHCR should foster formal partnerships with non-partisan and non-denominational NGOs and agencies in Malaysia\textsuperscript{26}. As a preparatory ground, a comprehensive institutional assessment of existing partners and institutions in Malaysia may be conducted.

4. Stronger advocacy with the Government to address their xenophobic attitude towards refugees who can be presented as financial capital that reduces the burden on authorities. The advocacy efforts should focus on de-coupling refugee issues with illegal migrant issues and presenting refugees as

5. Further to this, UNHCR should use advocacy and capacity building measures to enhance refugee access to private and public services and institutions that can boost livelihood development and self-reliance. This can be done through investing in and building the capacity of local institutions, thus allowing them to provide quality services to both locals and refugees. These may include banks and/or microfinance institutions (MFIs) that offer a range of financial services such as savings, loans and transfers; business development services providers; entrepreneurship training facilities; formal vocational and technical education and training institutions; informal skills training institutions; employment services and information providers in regard to the labor market; apprenticeship and job placement schemes; or business registration; and other institutions that can link refugee producers to markets. (Source: Livelihoods Operational Strategy)

\textsuperscript{25} Since SPF mandate is beyond social protection, perhaps a new nomenclature (for e.g.: Livelihood development and Self-Reliance Unit) can help SPF establish itself vis-à-vis other units.

\textsuperscript{26} A good start would be to look at sports institutions to strengthen outstanding programmes like the Youth Collective whose sustainability is under duress. UNHCR may also look into collaborating formally with UNICEF Malaysia on this.
6. A strong, sophisticated and outcome-oriented M&E system at programme level with clearly spelled-out mandates and instruments, and a well-designed log-frame, should be established to adequately capture the results and lessons of a complex and large regional programme. Such a system can move M&E beyond feeding information to progress reports, to be utilized as a strategic programme management tool at both SPF and the country’s UNHCR programmatic level (e.g. in relation to adjusting log-frames, work plans, budgets and programme management setup and mandates).

7. The Senior Management may also consider splitting SPF’s area of focus into two broader categories as stated below. The overall aim should be to offer time-bound assistance focused on graduation from emergency and social welfare assistance category to self-reliance and livelihood assistance category, and centered on ‘packaged’, multi-dimensional support.

   a. Livelihood Assistance (indirect): with the help of partners in financing, training, productive assets, skills development, market/ B2B linkages, e-commerce, accreditation-based vocational courses, linkages to training centers run by NGOs and the private sector’s CSR programmes. Some additional salient features of such intervention may include:
      i. NGOs and partner institutions, they should be required to ‘match’ UNHCR’s assistance to a minimum 50%.
      ii. For budding micro-enterprises, UNHCR can provide training modules such as Community-Based Enterprise Development (C-BED), which is a low-cost, flexible programme, applies innovative approach using self-facilitation and social learning to increase business skill capacities.
      iii. Tapping in willing private sector entities via their CSR modules to provide business incubation and marketing skills.

   b. Community Development and Emergency Assistance (direct): includes rental support, emergency fund, new-comer support, youth collective, persons living with HIV, peaceful co-existence, single mothers/women, daycare centers, etc.

   In view of the rising cost of living in Malaysia\textsuperscript{27} since 2009, the amount of RM 12,000 today should be inflation adjusted and a higher amount be calculated, but with a clear indication that it will be gradually phased out to focus more on self-reliance and livelihood assistance via a third-party. A small component of this category should be flexible enough to dedicate its provision of continued assistance to the most vulnerable. The Senior

\textsuperscript{27} Likely to further increase due to Goods and Services Tax applied from 2015)
Management may also decide to dissociate this function to Community Development Unit while keeping SPF focus mainly on livelihoods.

5. Concluding Remarks

SPF is an exemplary approach that underlines UNHCR’s HQ ambitious push for innovative solutions on the ground. Future SPF work should be driven by a strong programme vision and backed by an equally strong M&E framework. For this, SPF needs to create new vehicles of support which can include identifying and developing a cadre of strong partners, ‘packaging’ its grants underlined by a gradual phasing out transition, and creating an indicator-driven M&E framework that captures impact.

Quality data must be compiled to guide programme strategy; this should be derived through livelihood assessment that “builds upon people’s perceived strengths and opportunities rather than focusing on their problems and needs”. For this, one should use analytical and programming frameworks and tools that are recognized by the global community of practice, e.g., the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (SEEP, 2010).

Further to this, UNHCR will have to strongly engage with Government to push for policy environment and social or political processes that enable access to work and other livelihood opportunities, and look for alternative/possible ways in which this environment can be made more conducive to refugee livelihoods.
Annexure 1

1. Brief Description of Programme

UNHCR Malaysia’s Refugee Social Protection Fund (SPF) is an initiative designed to strengthen and empower refugee community organizations’ ability to help their members. Initiated in 2009 by the erstwhile representative Alan Vernon, SPF arose out of the need to significantly address the potential to strengthen physical and social protection for the refugee population dispersed across a large metropolitan area and mixed among the urban poor.

The primary objective of the Fund is to assist refugees in the following areas:

- Building community capacity (resources, leadership, knowledge, skills, building trust, networking)
- Enhance level of self-reliance and livelihood

The SPF operates as a fund for provision of small grants (up to RM 12,000) to refugee community organizations. To be eligible for grants, the organizations will need to register with UNHCR and meet a number of criteria which include a sound management structure (women participants included), demonstrate commitment to and experience in supporting their community.

Since its inception, SPF has funded rental for community space, information sharing, networking on employment opportunities, small scale income generating projects and livelihood support, support for self-help groups, skills exchange, peaceful coexistence projects with host communities, sports and recreation and several other projects decided on a case-by-case-basis.

2. Context and Purpose of Evaluation

According to current status reports, over 400 projects have been funded and SPF has been found to be instrumental in building more than 50 community organizations and 30 self-help groups. Beneficiaries have included vulnerable populations such as women, children, patients, teenagers and unorganized communities. The UNHCR has commissioned an independent evaluator to conduct an impact assessment of the SPF to assess to what extent the goal, outcomes and results had been achieved, and the key factors that have hindered or facilitated the success of the programme.

Based on the key findings, lessons will be drawn to provide recommendations that can help sustain the results of SPF and improve future programming for greater effectiveness.
The evaluation applies the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Given the lack of baseline data and the complex nature of the challenges that refugees face in Malaysia, it is important to acknowledge the difficulty in attributing actual impact totally to the Fund. That said, the evaluation exercise reconstructs baseline (to an extent), and based on extensive interactions with refugees and visits to their habitat and organizations, evaluation has been carried out with a focus on evidence.

3. Process Mapping and Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the existing model:

The operating procedure for SPF evolved over the years, and was shaped primarily based on the context and what worked and didn’t work.

Application of Grants:

General Remarks:

Under the overall supervision of the Programme Section of UNHCR, the SPF has brought about professionalism in how CBOs and SHGs organize, articulate their needs and seek assistance by educating them about various operating standards, administrative procedures and financial accountability frameworks. Several stakeholders interviewed expressed the view that the entire process was reasonable and educating while some reported that SPF tends to micro-manage their activities and they feel pressured to report even the minute disbursements.

SPF’s grant-making process has refined considerably over the years. The Operating Procedure, formally documented in 2013, covers all aspects programming. To their credit, the programme interacts with its key beneficiaries by reaching out to them (supply faction), as well as, soliciting proposals based on self-initiative of refugees (demand faction). The outreach efforts were found to be effective though it led to a considerable strain on management to keep up with monitoring visits.

Evaluation was found to be the weakest link largely due to stretched resources in terms of time and manpower. The assessment template is used as a baseline, and lack of effective outcome indicators makes it difficult to assess impact. The subsequent section points to certain areas where SPF monitoring and evaluation needs sharpening.

Discussions with the SPF team and members of the Steering Committee brought forth the following observations and recommendations regarding the sub-stages of the application process:

Proposals (Receipt and Presentation), post-approval stage, payments, disbursement:
Proposals should be designed according to broader thematic intervention (livelihood, protection, socially-oriented, etc.). For instance, a skills training programme should come under the livelihood theme. It should clearly specify pre-agreed indicators such as the number of persons the training programme intends to reach out to and a broad baseline of the number of persons it envisages should be employed post-training. This will give more meaning to grant allocation and present a set goal for grantees to work towards.

In-field assessments utilize a one-size-fit-all template. New assessment templates should be developed giving a 360-degree view of the situation. Strengthening the assessment framework will contribute to better targeting and delivery of services.

The discussions pointed to ineffective communication flow between various units, as there is no formalization of collaboration on shared themes. A meta-analysis of cross complementarities and synergies between various units will inevitably lead to a streamlined management of SPF.

In principle, the Age, Gender and Diversity framework is followed and there was some data available to show this distribution but no comparative analysis to show how the trends changed over the years.

The steering committee can add greater value if there is a thematic demarcation between proposals.

The Payments and Disbursement mechanism was found to be satisfactory. The SPF team adheres to all rules and modalities and works closely with the finance team of UNHCR.

The Project filing system was also found to be satisfactory. In future, UNHCR should consider exploring a computerized system to digitize grant information and track information. The maintenance of a physical file system is cumbersome and does not give a cumulative picture. A digitized system can also help generate user data in a fast and efficient way for better monitoring.

**Project Monitoring**

The periodic field visits to projects were found to be very useful as it enables direct interaction, constructive feedback to beneficiaries and partners and constant sharpening of programming instruments. However, the periodic visits do not correspond with adequate availability of staff.

SPF’s project monitoring has over the years led to a positive impact in terms of attitudinal shift in CBOs and partners to adhere to rules and norms and professionalize their conduct.
The monthly situation reports tend to be repetitive and need considerable improvement in terms of capturing the qualitative aspects of grants.

Project Support

- The FGDs concluded that there was a high degree of cooperation from SPF.
- The networking meetings for various CBOs have been discontinued given the lack of capacity. This is fine temporarily as CBOs during FGDs reported to be networking and collaborating outside UNHCR’s premises. This can be attributable to the positive outcome of SPF.
- The evaluation findings echo the challenges identified by SPF in terms of lack of a uniform training curriculum, baseline assessment to evaluate skill levels, accreditation after training and availability of skilled trainers. During the time of the evaluation, SPF is in the process of identifying and including local partners that can adopt a cluster approach to address gaps.

Evaluation

- Evaluation is the weakest link in the SPF’s operating framework. It is particularly challenging due to the varied types of projects undertaken, unique challenges attributed to various communities and lack of established instruments. The recommendation section provides some suggestions in this area.

Administration and Staffing

- The administration and staffing structure has largely remained unchanged. This has affected the efficacy of the programme considerably. The recommendation section provides some suggestions in this area.
- The Staff is supported by interns and refugee volunteers, which add value to its work and capacity.

4. Horizontal/Peer-evaluation of SPF

The evaluation team carried out focus group discussions with representatives from various units of UNHCR Malaysia and the following is a summary of the discussions:

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29 Participants were from UNHCR Malaysia’s Best Interest Determination Unit, Community Development Unit, Education Unit, Volunteer Unit, Individual Assistance Desk, Programme Unit and Employment Services Team of the Registration Unit.
SPF has indeed led to a greater degree of engagement with refugee communities in Malaysia. It is especially unique because the communities themselves are the main drivers.

SPF has not only filled the space left by the Community Development Unit and Education Unit but by reaching out directly to communities, it has created new vehicles of support and expanded the coverage of UNHCR’s assistance in Malaysia.

Various units work with SPF but the degree of collaboration varies; there is a need to formalize this collaboration by exploring how each unit can complement each other’s work and not duplicate it.

5. Limitations to Analysis

Government counterparts are crucial stakeholders in the lives of refugees in Malaysia. The Consultant was unable to contact Government agencies due to limitations of time and resources. Getting their perspective would have been beneficial, especially in light of the pressing protection risks the refugees face in urban areas.

Given the diversity and scope of SPF, the data collection steps are varied in nature and also produced in diverse formats. Taken collectively, there is an important amount of evidence relating to the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of SPF during the review period, as well as evidence regarding the factors behind impact, effectiveness and efficiency. This represents a rich picture of SPF during the evaluation period.

However, there are also several important limitations that need to be considered in relation to measuring SPF effectiveness:

Lack of baseline data: An important problem that was already mentioned is that there is no agreed estimation that could help to measure the programme’s coverage and tendencies in coverage and service provision over time.

Comparability of data: Assessment tools and reporting formats changed a lot over time. This limited any comparability between the 2008 and 2013 data sets.

Attributing results: The grant requires CBOs to put in ‘matching funds’. This creates difficulty in measuring success that is attributable to SPF grants especially when grantees report requires these achievements to be stated in aggregate figures.
Annexe 2

Annex A: Terms of Reference of Evaluation Consultant
Attached separately

Annex B: Detailed list of Stakeholders
Attached separately in excel.

Annex C: Inception Plan
Attached separately

Annex D: Guidelines and Survey Tools used for Focus Group Discussions with refugee beneficiaries (Presentation and Questionnaire)
Attached Separately

Annex D: Documents Reviewed

- Terms of Reference for Impact Assessment of SPF (July 2014)
- SPF Inception Paper, UNHCR (2009)
- UNHCR SPF Profile Presentations (2010 and 2014)
- Standard Operating Procedure SPF (2013)
- UNHCR Planning Manual
- UNDP’s Handbook for Planning Monitoring, Evaluation
- UNHCR Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity (2009/2010)
- SPF Program Evaluation (July 2010-July 2013)
- Access to SPF Filing database.
- SPF Evaluation Consultant’s Technical and Financial Proposal
- Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (UNHCR)
- Websites and online documentation available at: refugeeempower.com; unhcr.org