TARGETING STRATEGY AND DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

WHAT IT IS

Targeting of humanitarian assistance is sometimes necessary, and is often done across sectors using socio-economic criteria. Socio-economic targeting is informed by programme objectives and Vulnerability Analysis. See Part 1.1 Vulnerability Analysis in Response Analysis for more information.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Targeting is never 100% accurate. Being vulnerable from a socio-economic perspective is not a “yes or no” question; rather households and individuals fall on a continuum. Furthermore, particularly in emergencies, a household’s or individual’s economic status is very dynamic. It can change rapidly and requires regular analysis.

A targeting strategy must aim to strike a balance between the imperative to act, accuracy and affordability. Provision of life-saving assistance should not be delayed for the benefit of marginal gains in targeting accuracy. Potential accuracy risks can be mitigated at the design stage by employing multiple and complementary methods. Risks can be mitigated during implementation through complaints, feedback and appeals mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation. Making the best use of available data and collecting additional data only as needed can enhance affordability. It is also important to distinguish between, and account for, initial costs and recurrent costs of targeting.

To be most effective, targeting should engage communities throughout the targeting cycle, ensuring the views of affected communities – and particularly those of potentially marginalised and most vulnerable groups – can influence the targeting process.

Targeting of MPGs is necessarily a collaborative exercise that involves multiple stakeholders (governments, other agencies providing similar or complementary assistance, and the affected communities themselves). Roles and responsibilities for the targeting process need to be well-defined: from determining the shared vision for targeting, right through to how to operationalise the targeting strategy and ensure it is effective at achieving its goal (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. Steps in Targeting Process

Sensitisation and two-way communication throughout the process

BOX 10. SOME DEFINITIONS

Inclusion error: Inclusion in the programme of those who do not meet the eligibility criteria.

Exclusion error: Exclusion from the programme of those who meet the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility criteria: Standards by which inclusion or eligibility in the programme may be decided.

30 See Targeting in Complex Emergencies for examples of stakeholder mapping.
ESSENTIAL CHECKLIST

Map and consult stakeholders. Stakeholders’ concerns and expectations can affect the choice of objectives, methodology and strategy. It is important to define the membership and participation in the targeting working group, its Terms of Reference and decision-making responsibilities. To ensure the exercise reflects operational needs and capacities, determine the parameters of the exercise and the resources necessary (human, financial, hardware and software, logistical and time).

With the targeting working group, clarify the objectives of the assistance and its target group. If the objectives are multi-sectoral, clarify what can be achieved together versus separately to ensure the complementarity of different types of assistance. Determine the eligibility criteria (see Part 1.1 Vulnerability Analysis). Decide whether the objective is to provide a lower entitlement to a larger number of vulnerable households or a higher entitlement to fewer, most vulnerable households.

Review different targeting mechanisms and conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of different options. The SWOT analysis should include aspects of security, safety, protection, different costs, time and human resource requirements.

Decide and define the step-by-step process for identifying eligible beneficiaries. Targeting of individuals or households can be done in many different ways. These are generally classified as administrative targeting, self-targeting and community-based targeting (see strengths and weaknesses of different approaches in Table 5). The aim should be to decrease costs incurred to identify eligible households, ideally avoiding a “census” approach whereby all households must be interviewed.

Lessons learned on determining eligibility

- This step, regardless of the approach, may be the most cumbersome in a targeting process, and adequate time and resources should be planned for. This will include communications, outreach, community engagement, additional household visits and questionnaires, data management and analysis.

- Administrative targeting can be more cost-effective if registration data containing variables can be used as eligibility criteria. At a minimum, registration data can be used for pre-screening and targeting household visits. Referral mechanisms can also act as a screening mechanism.

- Using mixed methods, and not overly relying on one method, can be more manageable and cost-effective, e.g. community-based mechanisms to identify vulnerable individuals who are then interviewed using a standard household questionnaire; or criteria defined through statistical analysis, then validated by communities who then create lists of persons meeting those criteria.

Define and set up appeals and complaints mechanisms. A targeting strategy must allow for identifying those who would otherwise be eligible but don’t meet strict criteria. This is done largely through referrals, appeals, complaints and feedback mechanisms (hotlines, help desks, etc.). These mechanisms allow for reducing bias and correcting exclusion errors linked to the selected targeting approach. They may also address inclusion-related issues.

Ensure that appeals mechanisms are accountable, impartial and manageable. Appeals mechanisms should include representatives from various stakeholder groups, including the affected population. Review the complaints and appeals mechanisms and find ways to make them more efficient. Possible ways include outsourcing the work or using phone/internet-based pre-screening for household visits, etc.

Define the monitoring and evaluation plan. What is the targeting objective? Is it minimising inclusion or exclusion, or reducing “pull” factors? How will targeting efficacy be evaluated, e.g. data requirements, any additional data collection and analysis?

Exclusion errors can be more difficult to detect and quantify than inclusion errors, because by definition people who are excluded are not on beneficiary lists and may be missed by post-distribution monitoring or similar systems. Appeals and referral mechanisms are therefore important. It is also informative to assess...
not only the percentage of exclusion error, but also who is excluded. If someone has been categorised as not eligible because they are a borderline case, i.e. just on the wrong side of the eligibility threshold, that is a completely different targeting problem than the case of someone who is extremely vulnerable but has been excluded because there is a loophole in the targeting criteria or a flaw in the process.

**BOX 11. COMMON PITFALLS THAT LEAD TO INCLUSION/EXCLUSION ERRORS**

- **Reliability of data**: Do not use too many self-reported, non-verifiable criteria, such as coping mechanisms.
- **Accuracy of criteria**: Remember, criteria should directly relate to the economic nature of cash, otherwise they risk targeting the wrong person with the wrong intervention.
- **Use a mix of criteria**: Relying too much on one criterion, such as female-headed households, can result in significant inclusion (and exclusion) errors.

---

**Do No Harm/Do More Good**

An effective targeting strategy relies on much more than just criteria. Good targeting involves policy dialogue; communication and awareness-raising with stakeholders, including affected populations; the logistics of implementation; and a plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness not only of the criteria but of the whole strategy.

- Consult protection colleagues on the proposed targeting process to get feedback on contextual vulnerabilities, and to ensure the process is inclusive/supportive of marginalised groups or people with specific needs.
- Identify and assess people with specific needs or protection risks, and refer them to other assistance if MPGs are not relevant for them.
- Consider including those considered to be “borderline” vulnerable, especially when they are engaging in negative coping mechanisms that might decline with cash assistance.
- Experience shows that without clear and regular information-sharing, there is the risk of misunderstandings that can lead to an unmanageable volume of complaints, and in the worst cases to violence. Some actors are concerned about giving away the “secret” of eligibility criteria, as they fear it will enable potential recipients to manipulate enumerators and provide false data. A good communication strategy will avoid this. Involve communication experts from the beginning.
- Sometimes pure community-based targeting may be inappropriate or unfeasible, but this does not mean that communities cannot participate. Define other contributions that communities can make, as in Box 12 below.
### BOX 12. WAYS COMMUNITIES CAN PARTICIPATE IN TARGETING WHEN PURE COMMUNITY-BASED TARGETING IS NOT FEASIBLE OR APPROPRIATE

1. **“Ground-truthing”** or developing definitions of what it means to be vulnerable, and who is vulnerable, in a given situation and community. This can include validating indicators or criteria that have emerged from statistical analysis or expert taskforces. Feedback from the community can help to determine whether people agree with the targeting approach (and therefore whether it will work in practice or will generate large numbers of complaints); how questions on specific indicators should be asked; and whether the proposed approach will miss any important factors in vulnerability or vulnerable groups, etc.

2. Testing questionnaires and other data-collection methods, in advance of a large-scale survey, to identify and improve any questions that might be sensitive or unclear.

3. Pre-screening by community representatives of cases that have appealed after being excluded during the first stage of targeting, as seen in practice in Jordan.

4. Ensuring two-way communication between the community and the agencies about the overall targeting approach, particularly any changes in process or criteria, such as a switch from blanket to targeted food assistance, or the prioritisation of the poorest (a major change from protection categories). Some stakeholders suggested that the very high volume of appeals following the first targeting exercise in Lebanon were partly due to poor communication beforehand.

### BOX 13. TARGETING OF MPGS USING PROXIES FOR INCOME AND EXPENDITURE IN UKRAINE

The NGO Consortium in Ukraine worked with the Protection Working Group and the Shelter Cluster to determine appropriate criteria for targeting cash assistance. The NGO Consortium did not have any household-level data or any capacity to do a sample survey to determine criteria through statistical means. Instead they based their targeting criteria on advice from experts, i.e. the “Delphi” method. These experts used three inter-related vulnerabilities to determine criteria:

**Personal vulnerabilities:** Disability, pregnancy, chronic illness, age (elderly), and/or high expenditure due to a large number of dependents, specifically children (more than three) and few income earners (single-headed households). The assumption was that these households would be unable to earn enough income to support themselves or their families.

**Socio-economic vulnerabilities:** No or lack of regular income, lack of assets, specifically a home, and lack of social capital or access to support from friends and relatives.

**Shelter-related vulnerabilities:** These were based on similar emergencies with urban displacement and loss of housing. Criteria included no or substandard shelter, living in collective shelter (versus independent living), lack of occupancy contract or risk of eviction, substandard water and sanitation (outside waste disposal and crowding).

Using protection outreach teams, a household questionnaire was implemented that rated the responses (low, medium and high) to a series of questions related to the three vulnerabilities. If the household/individual rated high on at least two vulnerabilities they were eligible for cash assistance.

---

31 Ibid.
FOR THE RESPONSE PLAN

Describe the target group in simple language and estimate numbers if available. For example, “MPGs will target Nepal earthquake victims falling under the established poverty line” or “MPGs will target destitute displaced people in urban environments in Ukraine”.

Describe any predictable changes in target group based on changing vulnerabilities, e.g. “Winter grants for the most vulnerable living at high altitude”.

Explain the methodology behind the targeting in simple language, e.g. methods for identifying economic vulnerability will include community-led wealth ranking, and will be verified by agencies using a scorecard based on asset ownership, including livestock.

Describe any complementary assistance being provided to the same target group, and efforts to harmonise targeting criteria. This can include how sector-specific criteria can be combined with economic criteria, e.g. economic insecurity plus food insecurity indicators for complementary food assistance (see Box 13 for an example of MPGs and shelter interventions).

Outline any exclusion criteria, or criteria used to determine “graduation” from the MPG programme, e.g. households with a pair of oxen or milking cow, households perceived to be well off.32

Detail how to practically conduct targeting step-by-step. Include who will implement household questionnaires (if applicable), manage beneficiary information, determine and generate beneficiary lists, and manage appeals processes (see Annex 3 Standard Operating Procedures: Appendix B on Targeting Step-by-Step for an example).

State how often targeting criteria will be reviewed and describe any method employed to verify whether targeting methods are effective and criteria are accurate, and both are being used correctly in determining eligibility.

Targeting strategies for MPGs have benefited from much experimentation with different methods. See Table 5 for some strengths and weaknesses analysis of targeting methodologies.

RESOURCES

Cash transfer programming in urban emergencies: a toolkit for practitioners. See Annexes for targeting tools

WFP Targeting in Emergencies. See the Annex for additional analysis of strengths and weaknesses of different methods

UNHCR and WFP MENA Targeting Review. A summary of issues and lessons being learned.

WFP Assessing the effectiveness of community-based targeting

Cash in Emergencies Toolkit (IFRC)

**TABLE 5. Different methods for identifying eligible beneficiaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Administrative targeting:** Agencies or people external to the community select households or individuals using standard observable or measurable criteria or indicators, such as asset holdings or other objective socio-economic characteristics. | • Done by a (normally) neutral external party.  
• Limited or no influence of the internal community power structures (reduced elite capture).  
• Limited or no pressure on the individuals of the community.  
• Can be unbiased and transparent.  
• Can be effective in excluding non-target groups, especially when used at household and individual levels. | • Criteria defined by outsiders, not always understood by the communities.  
• Lack of ownership and exclusion of the affected community.  
• High administrative costs, including data collection.  
• Time consuming.  
• Reliability and accuracy of data is entirely dependent on the external agency and quality of the individual work.  
• Difficult to standardise or verify when information is poor.  
• Risk that the indicators do not reflect true vulnerability, leading to exclusion errors.  
• Risk of stigmatising people if criteria are not protection-sensitive (HIV/AIDS, IDPs). |
| **Geographic targeting:** Geographic targeting in an emergency refers to the identification of administrative units, economic areas or livelihood zones that have a high concentration of economically-insecure people. | • Identifies the most vulnerable areas to prioritise targeting decisions.  
• Can be used alone as a quick-and-easy targeting method when more in-depth approaches are not feasible, e.g. in conflict environments that are difficult to reach.  
• Uses existing vulnerability data and other secondary data. Can be cost-effective. | • Existing population estimates are often unreliable and may distort results.  
• For best results, secondary data should be cross-checked with primary data and “ground-truthing”.  
• When used exclusively, can lead to large inclusion errors.  
• Can exclude pockets of economically-insecure people. |
| **Self targeting:** The individual concerned identifies him/herself, sometimes according to some kind of externally imposed criteria and sometimes purely through his/her own self-identification. | • When projects are able to absorb all who want to participate, there is little risk of corruption or bias in selection.  
• Low administrative costs related to targeting.  
• Selection is transparent. | • Good information analysis is necessary to know what conditionalities and transfer size will help the intended people to self-select.  
• The project must be able to take everyone who wants to be involved. |
### Community-based Targeting:

The community identifies its most vulnerable members through a participatory process (at least in theory). In practice, this may be done through local leaders or institutions, i.e. it is not necessarily participatory in the sense generally understood by aid workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communities usually have and can further develop a better understanding of vulnerability and need.</td>
<td>• Requires communities to be well-defined and have self-knowledge. Only works where there is sufficient community cohesion; as such, may be inappropriate in urban or displacement settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Criteria defined by “insiders” and as such is understood and owned by the community.</td>
<td>• Social pressure on those representing the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• End result is better accepted and owned by the community.</td>
<td>• Abuse of power, elite capture and favouritism within the community may result in bias (e.g. exclusion of the relatively powerless).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Internal, pre-existing community-control mechanisms are engaged.</td>
<td>• Criteria defined are endogenous to the community and comparisons cannot be made between communities (e.g. different camps in one country).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helps to empower and build community capacity through participation.</td>
<td>• It is difficult to standardise or compare targeting criteria between different communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In the long term, community-based targeting can reduce costs to the organisation.</td>
<td>• Initial start-up of CBI systems needs training and advocacy at the local level; this requires staff time, which at the initial stages can be costly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Careful monitoring is required to ensure fairness and cross-checking of targeting decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Maxwell et al (2006) and WFP (2009)*