Build on what communities already have

Refugees, inclusion & livelihoods

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Retrospective learning edition: the period above is the experience discussed, not an earlier publication date.

A new project is rarely entering an empty market. Earlier investments can provide a starting point, but a group, agent network or warehouse still needs a workable operating arrangement.

IAM’s layering approach in resilience zones

IAM’s layering brief describes building on existing farmer groups, village-agent networks and aggregation facilities associated with humanitarian and government investments. It connected private firms with local actors and co-invested in entry costs.

Documented activities included links between local seed businesses and research, input, credit and buyer services. The brief also describes aggregation partners and last-mile distribution in Karamoja and refugee-hosting areas. It is an account of complementary interventions, not a causal estimate of layering’s additional effect.

What the Activity did

1. Mapped existing structures and convened relevant actors before investment.

2. Connected producer organisations and service networks with commercial partners.

3. Co-invested in entry activities and coordinated practical problem-solving.

Evidence boundary

Programme implementation evidence. The existence of a commercial partner does not demonstrate that every household can participate or that humanitarian assistance can safely end.

What this means for future design

UMSDN editorial interpretation

UMSDN's design interpretation starts with an inventory of functions, not simply assets. A warehouse may exist but lack maintenance, reliable access or an enforceable management agreement. An agent may have skills but no dependable revenue. A group may have been trained without having a committed buyer.

Before building something new, ask what existing arrangement could be repaired. Check ownership, access rights, operating costs and incentives. Speak to people who use the asset and people who do not. An asset described as available by one organisation may be practically inaccessible to a different group.

Layering also raises a sequencing question. A household facing severe constraints may still need direct support while a service market develops. A private firm's willingness to enter is evidence about its business proposition; it is not evidence that every intended participant can afford the offer. Test participation conditions and monitor harm during transitions.

For coordination, write down who performs each function and what happens when one partner's funding ends. Keep the obligations realistic. Agreements should cover maintenance, service quality, payment and recourse, not merely attendance at meetings. Evaluate the combined arrangement and be explicit about which component's additional contribution remains uncertain.

The question for discussion

When should a programme repair an existing market arrangement rather than finance a new asset or delivery structure?

Try this with your team

Choose a farmer group, agent network or aggregation facility. Record what exists, who controls access, its present users, recurrent costs and the missing connection. Compare repair, partnership and replacement before selecting an option.

Read the source. Share your view.

Early evidence of successful layering in resilience zone

FtF IAM implementation learning brief. Programme partners retain credit for their interventions; the design interpretation is UMSDN editorial analysis.

https://www.dai.com/uploads/2000_IAM_Layering_Brief_Final.pdf

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