



Using the Self-Reliance Index to adapt organizational processes and programming





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This report was prepared by Alli Gillespie, Dr. Ilana Seff, and Dr. Lindsay Stark. It was reviewed by Kari Diener, Ned Meerdink, Simar Singh, and Dale Buscher.

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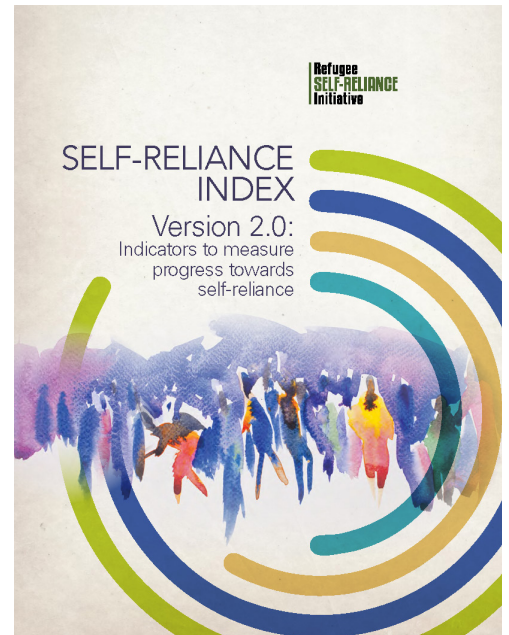


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About the Self-Reliance Index

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) developed the Self-Reliance Index (SRI) as the first global tool to measure the progress of refugee populations toward self-reliance. Composed of 12 domains, the holistic tool has now been used with a range of populations across contexts, including urban and non-camp-based refugee communities, internally displaced groups, rural- and camp-based refugees, economic migrants, and host communities. The SRI is currently being utilized by over 50 agencies in more than 25 countries and is available in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, and Swahili. The SRI was developed both as a tool to assess refugee households' progress towards achieving self-reliance and as a tool to inform programming.

To promote improved programming, this brief draws from key informant interviews conducted with several partner agencies in various contexts to highlight potential ways in which SRI data might inform changes to your organization's operations.



About Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is an approach to service provision that incorporates changes to programs, processes, and policies based on continuous learning and response to evolving environmental factors. Evidence has shown that such an approach is pertinent in emergency and humanitarian contexts wherein complex conditions and resource availability can shift rapidly.¹ Ideally, organizations will use what they learn from SRI data to better understand households' needs and to improve services in pursuit of more effective and sustainable self-reliance outcomes. The following sections review potential strategies that organizations can implement using SRI data to improve program design, strengthen referral networks, refine monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and advocate for resources to better support households.

1. USAID. Applying Adaptive Management to Livelihoods in Emergency Settings: Challenges and Opportunities. Published online 2022. https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Applying_Adaptive_Management_to_Applying_Adaptive_Management_to_Livelihoods_in_Emergency_Settings_Challenges_and_Opportunities_Livelihoods_in_Emergency_Settings_Challenges_and_Opportunities_0.pdf

1. Adapting Program Design

The SRI provides valuable data to inform adaptive management of program and service design. SRI data can provide a snapshot of how current programs and services align with the level of need across the SRI's various domains and guide the inclusion of new services or the prioritization of existing services. Practitioners can also use the SRI score to determine thresholds for various types of programming; for example, one agency determined that only households with SRI scores between 2 and 4 would be eligible for economic inclusion programming, while households with scores below 2 were identified as needing acute assistance.

USER INSIGHTS

"Information from this tool helps us determine the different needs of people, and to then incorporate that information into our education, financial planning and different topics related to our programs." -*Program Manager, Colombia*

"[We will use the data] to identify the actual needs of [households...] and if we have new projects, we can rely on the data collected from the SRI to inform programs or what interventions could help [households] to improve their self reliance." -*MEAL Assistant, Lebanon*

"So obviously, every failure you have within [the graduation approach] increases the cost of that methodology, which is demonstrated to work. [...] But, you know, I think that is [not only] dependent on how you set your graduation criteria, but also on the quality of your programming. And so, I think anything that helps us to identify where something is not working, gives us the opportunity to see why and to try and find solutions. That's how I'm hoping we can use the SRI." -*Markets Advisor, Syria/Turkey*

Suggested Strategies

- 1 **Employ SRI score as eligibility criteria** for graduation programming, or comprehensive interventions which include social protection and empowerment, financial services, and skills or livelihoods training meant to foster sustainable support for those with the most acute or extreme needs.
- 2 **Adjust organizational budgets or initiative program development processes for different services** based on demonstrated clientele needs and gaps revealed when using the tool (for example, if food access is an acute concern for households, direct funding toward immediate food distribution coupled with longer-term livelihoods skills programming).
- 3 **Identify community level needs to guide prioritization of resources and services**, such as forming a community advisory council at the program design stage or establishing an accountability mechanism to guide implementation.
- 4 **Add complementary services to what is already offered.** For example, if the organization focuses on livelihoods training but client domain scores indicate an acute need for medical care, consider partnering with a local health clinic to provide services.

2. Adapting Referral Systems

Beyond providing insight into internal program design and prioritization, the SRI can guide and improve agencies' external response by illuminating cases in need of referral. For example, if the agency using the SRI specializes in protection, and employment domain scores in the community indicate the need for more livelihood opportunities, the agency can improve efforts to collaborate with local businesses or strengthen referral relationships with organizations providing economic programs. Informants noted that the SRI helped them to connect respondents with relevant services outside of their agency, promoting more holistic self-reliance support.

USER INSIGHTS

"So the SRI in general, will enhance the knowledge of my team to know how they should deal with each and every referral they receive...and they will see that if we do referrals in the right way and we connect people to the right channels, the index will get higher and they will start to score [better] on each of their [domains]." -*Camp Manager, South Sudan*

"The SRI helped me and the rest of the team to come across a lot more cases that needed to be referred to other NGOs or local authorities, such as those that needed all health referrals. This tool can help us to refer cases to the appropriate resources based on their current situations." -*Migrant and Refugee Psychologist, Colombia*

"What we did with SRI after the assessment was that, when we found or we identified some of the families that needed some healthcare attention, or even education for their children or their kids, we made referrals to other NGOs, because [our organization] does not provide medical care, and so we referred to the different authorities we have in Colombia." -*Program Manager, Colombia*

Suggested Strategies

- 1 **Break down programmatic silos.** For example, by creating platforms to bridge humanitarian interventions and development efforts to jointly address refugee response.
- 2 **Understand programmatic gaps and strengthen holistic care coordination** by mapping existing services and referral pathways.
- 3 **Foster strategic communication via engagement** with existing multi-stakeholder platforms to share lessons learned and to triangulate knowledge between private sector, government, humanitarian, and development actors.
- 4 **Monitor referral access and quality.**

3. Adapting Monitoring Indicators and Impact Measurement

In addition to facilitating linkages across services, the SRI promotes the improved quality of services and measurement of impact across contexts (e.g. camp, urban, rural, active conflict, post-conflict, etc.). Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) Practitioners in various contexts shared how they used the SRI as a continuous assessment tool to measure programmatic impact for households more comprehensively across time. For organizations providing services in multiple field locations or regions, the SRI can also provide insights into how programmatic needs differ based on what other local services and resources are available.

USER INSIGHTS

“We used to administer our tools after [households] have received a service to measure the outcome of the service received, whether the [household] was satisfied and if logistics were good. Now, we are having a continuous assessment tool, starting with the baseline to know [households'] situation before receiving our intervention and then to assess the situation after our intervention. Now, we are measuring the impact of our services, not direct outcomes like was the counseling good, were the logistics okay, but we are going more in depth with [households]...such as how their housing situation has changed and their coping mechanisms.”

-MEAL Team Leader, Lebanon

“...it was very interesting to see that [households] from some of the locations were actually doing well compared to other areas. [Households] were actually more self-reliant in some locations than others and this actually highlighted the theme of integrated programming. Because the [households] we are working with in two or three different sectors were scoring higher than those working with just one sector. So that kind of gave us the evidence of what we were thinking.”

-Meal Specialist, South Sudan

“[We assess] the households every six months, and so we get to monitor their progress and can then tell when somebody is exiting, or when somebody has dropped. If they were moving well, and then all of a sudden, their scores begin going downwards, then we do know that something is amiss. And then we go back to the different domains and see what areas are pulling their scores down. So, it does help us to identify areas that need more strengthening or capacity building.”

-Child Protection Program Manager, Kenya

Suggested Strategies

- 1 **Incorporate SRI data** into monitoring efforts to promote continual program adjustments and improvements.
- 2 If initial monitoring with SRI shows promising results, consider **implementing a more robust evaluation** to measure program impacts over time and to build the evidence base for intervention effectiveness.
- 3 **Expand the scope of self-reliance measurement** in your organization by using the SRI as an indicator of change across all programmatic sectors.
- 4 **Use the SRI to analyze how sector-specific programming impacts other domains of self-reliance** and generates cascading effects. In other words, assess how changes in one domain may affect changes in another (for example, access to secure housing may foster a sense of security and stability that enables an individual to pursue employment opportunities.)

4. Adapting Community-Organization Relationship Building

The SRI User Guide and enumerator training emphasize that administration of the tool is meant to be conversational, rather than a question and answer session with households. The intention behind this approach is to build rapport with households by facilitating open dialogue about their needs, available resources, and the sustainability of those resources in order to connect them with relevant support and promote their dignity and self-reliance. Fostering authentic relationships between agencies and the communities they serve is central to building trust and mitigating power imbalances, and informants used the SRI as a tool to build these connections.

USER INSIGHTS

"I think [clients] are a bit more confident giving us information that is comprehensive because some clients are open to try to let their stories be heard. And when you have this set of questions, they actually feel that someone is trying to get to the bottom of their issues, and something can be done. It is also good to hear human stories and I think it is one thing that they appreciate, and they feel that someone is coming to them and listening to the stories." -*Refugee Response Livelihoods Manager, South Sudan*

"What has changed is that we get to know a little bit more about [households], their situations, their families, about what they are going through from different perspectives...[households] felt closer to [our organization]. Because we were showing more interest in different areas that we had not asked about before." -*Program Manager, Colombia*

"We do a bit of intense follow up the first six months when somebody is identified. So, for instance, those who are scoring lower and lower here, [...] anyone below 2.7 is considered unstable, and so we'll need intense follow up compared to someone who scores above 2.7, who then may need an occasional contact within a month. I would say that we are constantly in touch with them and checking in. And then the assessment is repeated at the end of the six months, and then we get to know whether we are moving on the right track, or we need to do something." -*Child Protection Program Manager, Kenya*

Suggested Strategies

- 1 Use SRI interviews to facilitate stronger rapport and trust-building.
- 2 Conduct community-based need assessments while also tailoring services based on individual household needs.

5. Adapting Advocacy Efforts

Organizations and practitioners can use data from the SRI as evidence to advocate for increased funding, resources, and media coverage to support households. Additionally, decision-makers in agencies can use SRI domain and index scores strategically to steer the creation of new referral pathways, services, and programming, as well as guide host country policy advocacy priorities. Key informants appreciated the SRI for providing robust evidence of client needs to more effectively champion and guide the distribution of vital resources.

USER INSIGHTS

“So for us, the SRI results were very beneficial data in front of us that we would use in different forums, to donors and our advocacy and the collaboration and coordination with different partners around us.” -*Camp Manager, South Sudan*

“I think that for [donor], the jury’s still very much out on whether [the graduation approach] is an approach that they should be supporting. And this is really where I see the SRI’s ability to be really powerful. Because we can demonstrate progress quarter on quarter, and we can also then use the SRI to determine graduation.” -*Markets Advisor, Syria/Turkey*

“It will be very interesting to see the final report and share it with our donors for them to see this has been what needs to be done, because I believe a lot of donors have been putting a lot of money into certain operations but there is nothing concrete that has been actually showing that this is the need. I was happy with that and I am happy to use the SRI tool to create more advocacy and be able to channel resources where actually there are much needed, based on what I can see on the ground.” -*Refugee Response Livelihoods Manager, South Sudan*

“We were able to increase advocacy for our livelihoods programming. We said, we have this raw data, and the findings are very interesting. We actually told UNHCR that...basically with this kind of score that we’re getting from [the SRI]...there is a need to fund livelihoods...as well as increase startup tips for vocational skills training students. Because the issue of employment came out strongly and it contributes to other factors, where you find people are selling food, their assets to get food. Because people don’t have options for livelihoods. So this is basically one thing we were able to tell UNHCR, and I think it was good for them to listen to us, because we have the tool to show that this is something that we are hearing. So in the media, we were able to advocate more for that based on what we saw from the SRI tool.” -*Refugee Response Livelihoods Manager, South Sudan*

Suggested Strategies

- 1 **Situate SRI data and analysis as vital evidence** to influence the decision-making of senior management, donors and funders, and local and global policy-makers.
- 2 **Foster longitudinal partnerships with researchers** to understand and address community needs and bolster evidence for improved advocacy across time.

6. Adapting Organizational Orientation Toward Strengths-Based Models

Using the SRI to adjust program design, strengthen referral networks, monitor and measure comprehensive service impacts, build rapport with households, and advocate for sustained resources all promote an orientation toward assistance that is focused on household strengths, community-centered, and aligned with many refugees' aspirations toward self-reliance.

USER INSIGHTS

"So, it is shifting the perspective from vulnerability to self-reliance." -*Program Manager, Syria*

"We are beginning to use it as a basis for making decisions. So, who gets support. What I [have] observed during the years we've been piloting it, is that the SRI seems to be stronger and [...] picks out or focuses a lot on the resilience, the capacity, the strengths of the families. And so, you see a lot of positivity, or there is more that is positive as compared to the tool that we have been using [...] and so I think the SRI is a little more comprehensive. It looks at resources beyond just finance. The other resources, which then pushes the scores up for families, because once you notice other things contribute to the family moving forward, then, it does help." -*Program Manager, Child Protection, Kenya*

"So when I look at the SRI and I compare with the tools that we have, this one looks more superior. We reduce the levels of, you know, subjectivity. [...] Beyond that, you also are looking at some other elements that we were not so keen on, are things like the connectedness, the social networks, community connectedness, or the connectedness of the individual to the rest of the community. So we have that with the SRI." -*Urban Program Coordinator, Kenya*

Suggested Strategies

- 1 **Shift agency perspective** from a vulnerability-based model into a strengths-based, self-reliance model.
- 2 **Use the SRI to identify and leverage household strengths and assets** and to build skills that lead to the sustainability of self-reliance.
- 3 **Promote the provision of assistance** as a means to self-reliance.
- 4 **Use the SRI to show donors how current programming is acting as a barrier** to sustainable self-reliance outcomes.
- 5 **Adjust organizational terminology** to reflect orientation towards self-reliance (for example, "household" or "program participant" instead of "beneficiary", "assistance" instead of "aid").

