LIVELIHOODS SOLUTIONS FOR PROTRACTED REGIONAL CRISES

Post-Conflict Agriculture Livelihoods Recovery Strategy In Homs Governorate and Livelihoods Programming for Homs' Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon

Summary of findings

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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Introduction

After 10 years, the Syrian conflict continues to be the source of the largest refugee crisis in the world, resulting in 6.6 million Syrian refugees worldwide, 5.6 million of whom are residing in countries near the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, 6.7 million people are internally displaced across the Syrian Arab Republic. The humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees have been further exacerbated by multidimensional economic, health and political crises that undermine the ability of host countries to adequately respond to those needs, while addressing rising domestic levels of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity.

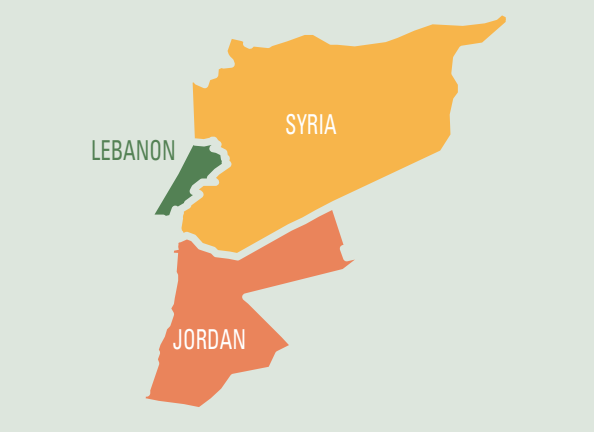
Durable solutions are limited. The possibility of resettlement in a third country is shrinking, while voluntary repatriation remains insignificant (a total of 38,235 self-organized refugee returns in 2020) owing to the challenging legal, political, security and economic realities that persevere in the Syrian Arab Republic. In this context, it is crucial to support tailored temporary economic inclusion, strengthen the capacity of local institutions in providing equal access to basic services for Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities, and simultaneously improve the conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic to facilitate early recovery and resilience building that prepare the ground for an inclusive, voluntary and safe return with dignity and safety. Promoting resilience programming and effective institutions while improving access to livelihoods and supporting community-level technical capacity through an area-based approach is best positioned to support early socioeconomic recovery, enhance self-reliance, and provide context-based solutions for the protracted Syrian displacement.

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) launched a regional initiative entitled 'Guiding the restoration of conflict-sensitive agriculture livelihoods for Syrian refugees'. The initiative specifically targeted agriculture livelihoods because, throughout history, agriculture has played a pivotal role in sustaining the livelihoods of Syrians. Before the conflict, the sector employed half of the populationand contributed around 20 per cent to GDP in 2011, far more than any other sector. The Syrian Arab Republic had strategic self-sufficiency in wheat and other crops, which positioned it to export diverse food commodities to neighbouring Arab countries and Gulf States. The conflict, however, severely damaged agriculture productive assets, and led to a severe loss of agriculture livelihoods and an alarming level of food insecurity. The agriculture sector, in terms of food security and livelihoods, is a main targeted sector by the international community to support IDP and refugees' economic inclusion and resilience in a protracted situation, in particular in Jordan and Lebanon, the countries with the most refugees per capita globally. The enabling environment for refugees' employment in the agriculture sector in both countries offers low protection risks and does not generate significant socioeconomic tensions with the host communities.

The initiative consisted of three different subprojects. The first was the 'Post-conflict agricultural livelihoods recovery strategy for Homs Governorate', which examined how agricultural livelihood assets in Homs, which were severely damaged during the conflict, might be restored through a value chain approach to support early recovery and resilience at a sector level, and create a conducive enabling environment to reduce livelihood barriers for self-organized return. The second and third subprojects were the 'Understanding livelihood solutions under protracted forced displacement' case studies, which observed the livelihood situation of Homs' refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. The three subprojects used somewhat different methodologies, produced varied findings, and subsequently offered a range of policy recommendations aimed at improving livelihood programming and solutions for Homs refugees and their host communities in Jordan and Lebanon.

The rationale used in the agriculture initiative considers that studying the situation of a specific refugee population (in this case Homs' refugees) in host countries, and linking it to a livelihood restoration plan at the governorate level in their place of origin inside the Syrian Arab Republic, will help inform and shape livelihood programming and propose context-specific solutions that can equip Syrian residents, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees with the assets required to improve their resilience and self-recovery.

From a policy perspective, the initiative aims to provide an empirical example of livelihoods solutions in conflict countries and in a forced displacement context. To develop durable solution strategies targeting regional migration crises within the multidimensional approach of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), it is important to understand in a protracted situation how specific livelihoods programming (such as agriculture livelihoods in this case) are meeting specific local economic needs to support local communities (including communities in host countries), while equipping farmers and refugees with better skills and knowledge. The hypothesis considers that refugees are expected to utilize skills gained to improve their temporary economic inclusion in the host country, on the one hand, and to re-build economic sectors and diversify them in their country of origin when they decide to voluntarily return, on the other. Presenting context-based empirical solutions helps policymakers design informed programming that reduces the vulnerability of both refugees and host communities, and improves post-conflict resilience and early recovery.



Why Homs? Homs is the largest governorate in the Syrian Arab Republic and had the third largest population prior to the conflict. Agriculture is a main economic sector and employed a significant portion of the population (around 26 per cent in agriculture and 20 per cent in agriculture-related sectors). Around half of the total population has been displaced during the conflict. The conflict has severely damaged agriculture productive assets. In June 2020, the official number of registered Syrian refugees from Homs in Lebanon was 215,000, accounting for 24 per cent of total registered Syrian refugees in the country. In Jordan, the official registered number was 105,998, accounting for around 16 per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The return rate to Homs remains insignificant.

Why Lebanon? Lebanon hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees per capita worldwide. In September 2020, the total number of registered Syrian refugees was 879,529. The recent political instability and severe financial crisis have increased the vulnerability of both Syrian refugees and their host communities with unprecedented levels of poverty and unemployment. Around 80-90 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are experiencing some degree of food insecurity, and over 23 per cent of the Lebanese population has become extremely poor.

Why Jordan? Jordan hosts the second highest number of Syrian refugees per capita globally. The total number of UNHCR-registered refugees was 661,390 in October 2020. The Government of Jordan estimates around 1.36 million Syrian refugees are present in the country. With no foreseen political settlement for the Syrian conflict, refugees are trapped in a fragile environment with limited sustainable solutions. A recent assessment estimated that 35 per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan lost their jobs owing to the pandemic, as opposed to 17 per cent of Jordanian nationals.

01. Methodology

An integrated and multidimensional methodology was utilized to capture the empirical reality and the contribution of all stakeholders. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Value Chain Approach were both used as primary tools to understand the context of agriculture livelihoods and propose policy recommendations that influence macro- and micro-interventions aiming to promote early recovery, resilience and efficient delivery of services. Both tools are widely used to understand the dynamics of livelihood programming for refugees in protracted regional crises.

In Homs, the study's methodology relied on agricultural statistics and primary field data collected at the subdistrict and village level. The pilot covered an area with a 20 square kilometre radius, taking Homs city as a starting point. It included Homs, Taldo and Al Rastan districts, and all the villages of Al Qusayr district up to the Syrian-Lebanese border. The data were collected during the spring of 2020. Fourteen focus group discussions were held with the participation of various stakeholders in the agriculture sector. Field observations were conducted on agricultural markets, agricultural production collection and storage centres, agricultural input shops, a feed plant, a public sector poultry establishment, a private poultry farm, a cattle, sheep and poultry farm, a honeybee farm, and a fish farm. Around 70 key informant interviews were held with various agriculture stakeholders (public, private, non-profit, cooperatives). These activities helped in selecting value chains that have a competitive advantage, and identified challenges facing agricultural early recovery and resilience in terms of crop production and animal husbandry. Based on a set of criteria, five main agriculture value chains were selected and mapped (potatoes, tomatoes, apricots, cattle, and medicinal and aromatic plants). Interventions at the value chain level were identified and prioritized.

In Lebanon, the methodology consisted of a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyse primary and secondary data. The secondary data review looked at available studies, assessments, evaluation reports, projects documents, and web portals describing and detailing agriculture livelihoods programming targeting Syrian refugees between 2017 and 2019, with a focus on projects under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). It helped to prepare the primary data review and inform the selection of studied areas in Lebanon. The primary data were collected through 22 key informants interviews (KIIs), nine focus group discussions (FGDs) with Lebanese farmers and Syrian refugees from Homs, and a survey with 110 registered refugees originating from Homs who participated in agriculture livelihoods projects.

In Jordan, the methodology also consisted of a mixed-methods approach for data collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. The secondary data were collected from the Jordanian Response Plan (JRP) in addition to assessments and project documents. The review covered projects implemented between 2017 and 2019. The primary data consisted of 21 KIIs, eight FGDs with Jordanian farmers and Syrian refugees from Homs, and a survey conducted with 80 Syrian refugees whose main profession in Homs was agriculture and who have also participated in food security and livelihoods interventions in Jordan. KIIs and FGDs were conducted through face-to-face interviews. The studied areas had the highest concentration of Syrian refugees in Jordan coming from Homs, and included Amman, Al Mafraq, Zarqa and Irbid.

In Jordan and Lebanon, consultation meetings were conducted to discuss and validate the findings of both studies. Various stakeholders participated, including government officials, United Nations agencies, academia, international non-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and agriculture experts. Recommendations were considered in the final drafts.

02. Homs Findings

A. Impact of the conflict

The agriculture sector in Homs was heavily damaged by the conflict. Cultivated land dropped by 12 per cent and animal husbandry by 50 per cent. Both have declined agriculture and animal production in the governorate by 45 per cent. This was mainly the result of the destruction of several public irrigation schemes and the dumping of 20 per cent of private wells. Theft of irrigation pumps in addition to drip and sprinkler irrigation systems, the damages in livestock farms and agro-processing plants, lack or unavailability of agriculture production inputs, outdated agriculture machineries and the inability to upgrade and repair them have been the main drivers for the decrease in production. For instance, farmers were not able to maintain/serve their fruit orchards owing to limited access to agriculture inputs and to markets. Field observations showed that a good number of fruit orchards were cut to use as firewood for heating and cooking in the besieged areas. Poor feeding and weak veterinary services led to considerable damage to the livestock sector. Herds were either slaughtered owing to a lack of feed or smuggled to neighbouring countries. Poultry production and rearing has also declined for the same reasons.

Furthermore, public institutions and unions that used to provide administrative, regulatory and technical support to the agricultural sector witnessed a considerable decline in the services provided as supporting functions for various agriculture value chains. Access to agriculture inputs and energy required for agriculture machineries became limited owing to the increase of input prices after the devaluation of the Syrian pound. This has significantly increased production costs and reduced agriculture income. Lending from the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, agricultural subsidy funds and modern irrigation funds declined significantly. Rural and agricultural development projects and land reclamation projects were suspended. The role of cooperative societies in supplying subsidized inputs also significantly declined.

The impact of the conflict on production and institutions has resulted in a significant decline in agriculture employment. Subsistence agriculture flourished to cover basic food needs.

B. Aftermath of the conflict

Despite the conflict and the displacement of a significant share of the population in Homs, around 88 per cent of agricultural land continues to be cultivated. Farmers have adapted by replacing traditional agricultural systems, which depended on irrigated crops and summer vegetables, with rainfed winter crops that do not require as many services and maintenance cost. Farmers began planting wheat, barley and medicinal and aromatic plants, resulting in a decline in economic returns from agriculture by 60 per cent compared with irrigated agriculture. Nonetheless, such activity provided an acceptable level of income to cover daily needs, and provided livelihood opportunities in displacement areas.

After the liberation of Al Qusayr in 2013, and national reconciliations in other parts of the governorate, security was totally restored in 2018. The government

prepared a vigorous proposal for infrastructure rehabilitation (roads, irrigation networks, markets) to encourage IDPs to return to their places of origin. Public agriculture institutions resumed pre-conflict services to farmers, such as cash loans, livestock vaccination, common treatment, in line available resources. They also provided grants for family farming and rural women's empowerment.

International and non-governmental organizations launched emergency support initiatives to promote livelihoods based on an early recovery approach, and to enhance the stability of the affected population, with a special focus on young people, women-headed households, and persons with disabilities. Support was also provided through small-scale investments, the rehabilitation of public utilities and services (drinking water, debris removal, sewage rehabilitation, schools, and health centres), and the provision of household food baskets.

Despite the ongoing efforts of various stakeholders, many farmers remain hesitant to return to their places of origin, not only because of the damage done to the agriculture sector, but also because of their inability to cover the expenses of repairing houses and restoring damaged assets. Rehabilitation of agriculture infrastructure is still limited, public agriculture services offer minor assistance, and the number and amount of agriculture credits declined in parallel with a sharp increase in the price of agriculture inputs. Field observations and discussion with local authorities indicated that around 20 per cent of IDPs returned to their places of origin. Around 30 per cent of IDPs are willing to return once infrastructure and services are further restored. Another 30 per cent are unable to make the decision, as stated by local authorities. The remaining 20 per cent have no plans to return in the foreseen future. The return rate of IDPs remains low in general. To prevent any violation of property rights, only those who have a security permit and property documentation are allowed to return, as per government rules. Furthermore, rebuilding and maintenance are only allowed after obtaining required permits, which also applies to the entry of production inputs from Lebanon. IDPs also do not trust the information they are receiving about the conditions in their places of origin. Many are concerned that the humanitarian assistance provided by international and local organizations will be suspended. Those who fled the country without proper documentation are concerned about security procedures if they decide to return.

C. Agriculture weaknesses across selected value chains

The analysis of selected value chains showed cross-cutting gaps and weaknesses in the agricultural sector, some of which were present before the conflict, while others resulted from the conflict. The dominance of traditional agriculture practices, scarcity of water resources and the inefficiency of main irrigation systems, the decline in irrigated land owing to the destruction of several public water networks, increases in land fragmentation which increased production cost, limited integration between plant and animal value chains, and the lack of capacity of cooperative enterprises in providing collective production and marketing services for members based on members' economic participation were identified as the main weaknesses. The efficiency of extension and research services in improving knowledge and prioritizing agriculture competitiveness is limited. At the downstream side, market opportunities and infrastructure are fragmented and do not help in building competitiveness. Main weaknesses include the absence of coordination in production to meet market demand through a contractual process, the absence of marketing institutions that help in guidance and linkages, the dominance of conventional post-harvest units (sorting, cooling), the lack of professional processing facilities to absorb various agriculture grades and add to their values, the absence of specialized institutions for market regulation, food standards setting, normalization of specifications, and the high percentage of food losses owing to inappropriate post-harvest practices and bad transportation.

D. Policy recommendations

To facilitate early recovery, livelihoods, and resilience building in the agriculture sector in Homs post-conflict, the rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructures, and restoration of public irrigation schemes is essential and should be prioritized. Restoring effective support services and diversifying them at the community level, particularly in the area of agricultural extension, research result transfer, and access to credit, are also essential.

To mitigate inefficiencies of the agriculture sector in Homs, it is imperative to create an integrated marketing system that organizes supply, demand and pricing, and links production and marketing through a resilience building lens. This is essential to improve competitiveness of value chains, reduce food losses, and achieve quality standards. Furthermore, to reduce agricultural production cost, it is recommended to convert all irrigated lands to pressurized modern irrigation, and promote the use of renewable energy systems at the community level (solar pumps, biogas). Supporting an enabling environment to establish processing, drying, sorting, and packaging centres is also vital for the governorate, and should be led by the private sector. Reforming the cooperative sector to supply agriculture services for members based on good governance and members' economic participation through a business model approach across the different elements of value chains is strategic for early recovery and should be piloted.

In addition, the investment environment for small and medium enterprises in rural areas must be improved to attract new investments and enhance the establishment of specialized companies in the areas of marketing, agricultural machineries, and food processing.

Based on these recommendations, several projects were proposed to restore agriculture livelihoods in Homs governorate including:

- Establishment of the Agricultural Services Centre for Value Chains;
- Irrigation system improvement and the conversion of open irrigation canals to pressurized systems within the public irrigation system;
- Development of wholesale and specialized markets;
- Establishment of medicinal and aromatic collection, drying, sorting and packaging centres;
- Production of potato seeds through in vitro techniques;
- Establishment of specialized markets for rural products and industries;
- Establishment of vegetable seedlings and medicinal and aromatic seed production units;
- Establishment of a food processing units for specific value chains;
- Revision of the agriculture research strategy and extension service model.

03. Lebanon Findings

A. Nature of livelihoods programming

Findings of secondary and primary data showed that agricultural livelihood interventions targeting Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Lebanon between 2017 and 2019 covered all Sustainable Livelihood Framework assets (physical, social, natural, financial and human) with various levels of support. A few projects worked on policies, institutions and processes. Interventions tended to be scattered at different points of the value chain, with the greatest support dedicated to the production phase, and targeting small farmers and women's cooperatives.

Physical assets: Projects involving physical assets worked, for instance, on building and rehabilitating irrigation canals, and opening and cleaning agricultural roads. Most projects were based on cash-for-work and food-for-assets modalities. Several projects supplied preliminary training sessions before starting implementation of physical work. These projects provided short-term employment for Syrian refugees and host communities.

Social assets: Most projects attempted to promote social cohesion between refugees and their host communities. Many people interviewed during the study mentioned how project activities introduced them to neighbours who became their friends, and how time in training or working sessions provided a break from family tensions. The extent to which this social cohesion created room for economic cooperation was not captured by the study. Some projects supported women's cooperatives by linking them to local markets, or by subsidizing seasonal labourers recruited among Syrian refugees.

Natural assets: Projects working on land reclamation, sustainable landscape management and reforestation were directly involved in building natural capital. Syrian refugees and host communities rehabilitated agricultural terraces and planted and cleaned forests. Many Syrian refugees considered this short-term employment beneficial mainly for the cash incentive to cover their basic food needs. It did not provide new skills or knowledge to improve temporary access to the job market in Lebanon or when they return to Homs. The disconnection and lack of complementarity between short-term income generation and skills improvement reflected the limited socioeconomic benefits of such interventions for refugees. On the other hand, these projects increased the cultivated area for many Lebanese farmers and reduced fire risk in forests.

Human assets: Most interviewed Syrian refugees and host communities participated in at least one livelihood training or food-for-training programme. These comprised knowledge sharing and skills transfers by experts on different agricultural production systems. Homs refugee trainees stated that most agricultural topics were quite interesting and new to them, but relayed that most training programmes had more theoretical than practical sessions, and that the training, due to budget restrictions, was planned for short periods that did not help in gaining sufficient skills. This modality of skills development to access food in a protracted crisis has limited potential to facilitate short-term employment through a market system approach. It poses risks of organizations falling into a training-centred trap with weak linkages to the job market.

Financial assets: All projects provided financial incentives for refugees and host community participants. Only a few offered small grants to only

Lebanese participants. The survey and information provided by different project implementers showed that financial incentives through different modalities (food-for-training, food-for-assets, cash-for-work, livelihood training) are the main motivator for Syrian refugees' participation, rather than their interest in training topics or acquiring new skills. Financial incentives are essential to cover the food gap, which appeared to be the main objective of many organizations. Such programming in a protracted crisis has limited potential for transitioning to market-based solutions.

Policies, institutions and processes: Under the Food Security Sector Working Group and Livelihoods Sector Working Group, a number of implementing organizations support different ministries, public institutions and national non-governmental organizations to improve labour and working conditions. Despite their efforts, the chewich or focal point in each refugee settlement has significant power to decide who works, when and where, and who joins project activities. This monopolization creates protection risks and undercuts working conditions, with the chewich taking a percentage of daily wages from those who end up employed. Before the Syrian conflict, the chewich used to manage the labour supply in various labour-intensive agricultural systems in Lebanon. This responsibility was extended to participation in project activities after the conflict began.

Value chain: Analysed projects worked on almost all agricultural value chains, depending on agro-ecological zones and primary production systems, with a focus on labour-intensive ones such as potato crops and greenhouse vegetables. Training sessions covered many topics, including ploughing, grafting, cultivating, harvesting, packaging and traditional preserved food production known as mouneh. Only a few projects were able to establish linkages at all levels of value chains, from input supplies to the field/farmer to the market/consumer. There was little evidence of successful initiatives that developed value chains and generated long-term employment for both Syrian refugees and host communities. Training and short-term employment for assets building to cover food gaps, both of which were dominant in livelihoods programming, did not play a measurable role in developing value chains, neither through a skilled labour supply nor through the provision of essential services addressing value chain bottlenecks.

B. Situation on the ground

Overall analysis showed that emergency, short-term, humanitarian-focused agricultural livelihood projects are predominant in the response to the protracted displacement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and lack linkages between training and job placement. There are significant gaps in long-term sustainable livelihood, employment and inclusive agricultural development interventions. Excessive livelihood training activities have resulted in some duplication on the regional and value chain levels, and overlaps among different implementers. Livelihood indicators, used at a national scale to monitor livelihood interventions, require some rationalization to better capture real short, medium and long-term impacts. Most agriculture projects still have a humanitarian face after 10 years of forced displacement, leaving little room for sustainable livelihoods and temporary economic integration or resilience building in host communities. This is mainly the result of short-term relief funding and donors' priorities, which continue to be covering household basic needs, notably access to food. Refugees are still highly dependent on humanitarian assistance with no foreseen durable solutions, and extremely vulnerable to shocks.

Despite two working groups implementing activities linked to the agriculture sector at the national level, the Food Security Sector Working Group and the Livelihoods Sector Working Group, it is not clear in the period under review (from 2017 to 2019) how the actions of various key actors were integrated and structured into a coherent, coordinated approach to project design, implementation and impact measurement. Secondary reviews and consultations showed that an updated coordination modality was established in

2020. Accordingly, a detailed analysis covering the coordination mechanism is recommended.

The culture on the ground has also created significant barriers for an inclusive livelihoods promotion environment. There is continuous tension and feeling of competition, rather than collaboration, between Lebanese farmers and Syrian refugees. The farmers often provide unfair wages to Syrian workers, in particular women, due to the informal aspect of the sector and the lack of worker protection. Furthermore, there exists an unfavourable political and legal framework imposed on Syrian refugees, which allows them to work only in construction, agriculture, and environment-related jobs. This limits the job opportunities for refugees, noting that many, especially young people, are not interested in agriculture.

Regarding factors that encourage or limit the ability of Homs refugees to get involved in agricultural activities after voluntarily returning to Homs with safety and dignity, findings showed that the most important encouraging factors are their agricultural background and the existence of large-scale agricultural lands in areas of origin. The most important barriers are damaged agricultural infrastructure (such as wells and irrigation canals), lost agricultural lands (burned/destroyed orchards and/or occupied lands), economic and financial challenges that might make the revival of production and/or new investments difficult, and political instability. Syrian refugees in focus group discussions noted that reinforcing their knowledge about the production techniques of different value chains might help them in the future, even if they could not use this knowledge to find employment in Lebanon. This explained why Syrian refugees preferred to continue participating in current short-term employment and training-centred livelihood programmes to cover their basic food needs as they waited for new conditions to offer better solutions.

C. Policy recommendations

To prepare the ground for sustainable agricultural livelihood solutions benefiting Syrian refugees and their host communities amid the protracted crisis in Lebanon, as well as Syrians who decide to voluntarily return to Homs when the conditions become favourable, livelihood interventions can incorporate the following strategic objectives:

- Value chain development: Target and develop competitive value chains with economic and food security potential, and work jointly to cover all phases of the value chain in an integrated and balanced way to increase productivity and facilitate access to markets; and select value chains with a competitive advantage in Lebanon that can play an economic role in the main places of origin of Syrian refugees (Homs, Rural Damascus, and Aleppo, for instance);
- Beneficiary selection: Update and improve the profiling and selection procedures for beneficiaries to ensure inclusivity and improve efficiency;
- Local production and local consumption: Introduce local sourcing of agricultural and food products that meet quality standards and are affordable to improve food security and increase income for farmers and women's cooperatives; and support unions of cooperatives and the private sector in the downstream side of interventions (processing and post-harvest) to pull targeted value chains;
- Partnership and coordination: Encourage advocacy and institutional support, especially for national organizations implementing livelihood projects, and ensure complementarities between humanitarian and resilience-based support; and establish improved coordination among relevant stakeholders from project design through monitoring and evaluation;
- Project timeline: Balance short-term and long-term interventions to guarantee sustainability;

- Systematic and harmonized approach: Integrate the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework into projects at the design and evaluation levels, and introduce economic impact assessments for large-scale projects to measure their efficiency;
- Private sector engagement: Adopt a market-system approach that involves the private sector, and encourages investments in import substitution and technological innovation;
- Territorial development: Introduce local and regional development mechanisms for specific territories and their agricultural value chains.

04. Jordan Findings

A. Nature of food security and livelihoods programming

The study results showed that food security and livelihoods interventions targeting Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan between 2017-2019 covered most sustainable livelihood assets (physical, social, natural, financial and human) with various levels of support. Few projects worked on the level of policies, institutions and processes. As for the value chain approach, interventions tend to be scattered at different phases of the value chain, with the largest support dedicated to the upstream side in various agriculture systems.

Human assets: Projects focused on capacity-building and skills development to improve human assets. This covered a broad spectrum of topics, mainly including training in life skills (communication, conflict resolution, leadership); in specialized vocational programmes under various productive agriculture, industrial and technical occupations, such as vegetable production, water conservation, hydroponics, fodder business, carpentry, furniture, jewellery, mosaic, sewing, and mobile phone maintenance; entrepreneurial skills (cost and profit analysis, marketing mechanisms, financial project management, basic accounting); and enhancing access to ICT technology. Findings show that capacity-building improved the skills of refugees and Jordanians, but did not facilitate their access to temporary or permanent jobs. The direct impact was the benefit from the financial contribution, which covered gaps in access to basics needs, in particular access to food.

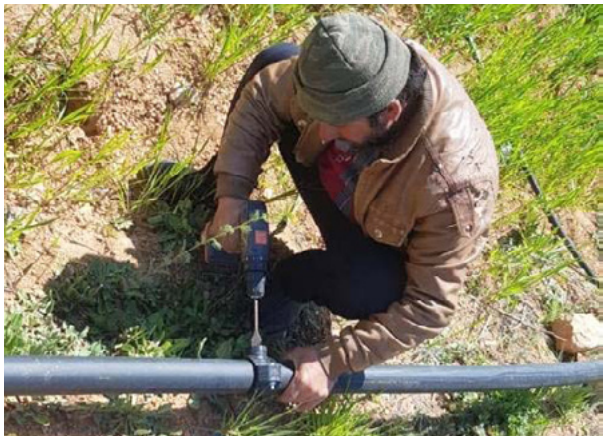
Financial assets: Most programmes attempted to increase financial assets by engaging refugees and host communities in cash-for-work or cash-for-training activities. Refugees and Jordanian participants received around 12-15 Jordanian dinars per day from cash for work activities, and an average of 7 dinars per day for participating in trainings and capacity-building. Under both initiatives, social security contributions were also covered. In some interventions, in-kind food assistance and transport were provided. The paid training period ranged from several days to several weeks, depending on the topic and nature of interventions. Access to grants was facilitated for a low number of refugees who aimed to formally set up their small businesses. Access to loans was also limited. Findings showed that the nature of financial assets did not help refugees in accessing the labour market and reducing their financial dependency on humanitarian aid. The interventions have mainly helped refugees in improving their knowledge in different topics and filling household food gaps during the project period.

Physical assets: Physical assets were provided in the form of tools and equipment to participants at training courses or cash-for-work activities. Examples of distributed tools include kitchen utensils, shaving tools, sewing machines, and tools for handcrafts. Most of these tools had a family-use scale and could to a certain extent cover the needs of close relatives. Coupled with a lack of access to grants and loans, tools were insufficient to help refugees or host communities in starting and running a new business, in particular for food processing projects with the startup cost to access quality raw material. As for agriculture physical assets (irrigation canals, agriculture roads), positive impacts were highlighted by the host community regarding the direct benefits reflected in accessing markets and irrigation water.

Natural assets: Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities were engaged in cash for work

interventions to maintain and protect natural resources, water bodies, irrigation canals, and reforestation sites. In addition to that, land reclamation interventions have increased arable land. Both types of interventions (protection of natural assets and their expansion) contributed directly to improving the environmental and agriculture context in the targeted regions. The scale of interventions requires additional assessment to understand the overall economic impact.

Social assets: Most interventions aimed to promote social cohesion between Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities through joint activities. This has drastically reduced and eliminated tensions present when refugees first moved to Jordan. Social cohesion and setting the ground for win-win situations was instrumental in avoiding protection risks for refugees.



Policies, institutions and processes: Only few of the projects reviewed provided support to various ministries and public institutions, national non-governmental organizations and improved working conditions. Work permits formalized access to the labour market by adhering to national systems and empowering local structures (like agriculture cooperatives) to better play their role in mitigating the negative impact of the Syrian conflict and creating an inclusive enabling environment.

Value chain: The value chain approach was not considered a main market-system approach to promote employment, and the efficiency of agriculture production and livelihood projects targeting Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities under a protracted situation. Some projects targeted specific value chains (eggplant, grapes, apples); however, food security and livelihood interventions did not help significantly in pushing or pulling these value chains.

B. Situation on the ground

Jordanian farmers appreciated the nature of agriculture livelihoods projects. In some cases, projects managed to directly increase their income, with the gained physical assets reducing cost and increasing productivity. Projects also created business opportunities for farmers to address needs in a specific value chain. Cash-for-work or cash-for-training created short-term job opportunities. This reduced rural unemployment and contributed directly to the food security of remote areas.

Farmers who were members of a cooperative society said that several interventions provided tailored capacity-building to cooperatives and helped improve their services, thus making them more productive. Farmers also benefited from capacity-building on different agriculture practices, and from marketing skills development. The benefits of this are reflected in improved quality and quantity of production, and reduced waste through better post-harvest practices. Jordanian farmers also confirmed that the building of agriculture assets and joint participation in trainings has contributed to creating an enabling environment for social cohesion between refugees and farming communities.

These outputs are directly linked to local economic development, and represent the foundation of a structured development process. However, the sustainability of these outputs depends on additional funding, because few sustainable interventions were captured. These positive outputs were not assessed at a macro level (group of villages) to understand the economic angle under a protracted situation. The

absence of economic impact assessments makes it difficult to claim tangible sustainable outcomes.

The reliance on Syrian refugees in the agriculture sector in Jordan comes second to that of the skilled Egyptian labour force. Farmers stated that the skills development livelihood interventions targeting refugees did not properly help them in gaining a skilled agriculture job (pruning, fertilization planning, pest management). Low-skilled agriculture activities continued to be the main service of the majority of the Syrian refugee labour force. The financial contribution gained from participating in the cash-for-training covered the revenue gap between the skilled and un-skilled labour supply. Accordingly, there is no evidence that skills development through cash-for-training contributes or will contribute to the development of specific value chains in Jordan.

The majority of refugees interviewed throughout the study believe that the agriculture sector is the most important sector for securing their livelihoods. The other economic sectors were not as important to them. For most of the refugees, the most important livelihood challenges are limited work opportunities, dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, absence of an official institution to take care of their interests, unavailability of health insurance, lack of social security, and fear of working without an official work permit.

In this context, many of the surveyed participants wished to participate in cash-for-work programmes, professions and technical training, projects empowering Syrian women and supporting small and micro enterprises, and soft loans provision to the most vulnerable families. With most of the already implemented projects tackling these priorities, the study acknowledges that current agricultural livelihood activities already address many of refugee needs. More work should be done, however, on empowering and including Syrian refugee women in future livelihood projects. Moreover, these priorities provide temporary jobs restricted to the projects' timeframe. This is convenient for refugees to ensure they cover their basic needs, but will keep them dependent on aid.

Food security and livelihood projects improved income and access to adequate and healthy food through cash-for-work and training interventions. Training in life skills and communication, as well as psychosocial rehabilitation, improved the collective mental health of refugees, increased social cohesion, and reduced tension between refugees and host communities. Some survey participants said that they would apply the skills they learned when they returned to Homs. Nevertheless, the projects did not help refugees access permanent jobs. Access to grants to establish small businesses was very limited and should be considered as a priority in future planning.

When it comes to their return to Homs, it was evident that most refugees did not want to return at the moment because of the unstable security conditions, lack of livelihood assets, fear of the unknown, and the loss of relatives and neighbours. Many also lost not only their homes but also their farms and infrastructure, such as water wells, irrigation canals, pumps, and agricultural tools and equipment. However, very few refugees do not wish to return at all, even if conditions improve.

C. Policy recommendations

To prepare the ground for livelihood solutions benefiting Syrian refugees and their host communities in Jordan, as well as Syrians who decide to voluntary return with safety and dignity to Homs governorate when conditions become favourable, agriculture and non-agriculture livelihood programming are advised to incorporate the following strategic objectives.

- Accelerating the transition from humanitarian assistance to context-based economic development programming: There is a growing acknowledgement that the current humanitarian funding and nature of programming focusing mainly on skills development are either insufficient or unsustainable under such a protracted crisis. Programming should consider more development-

oriented approaches to improve the resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities, and to decrease their dependency on humanitarian assistance over time. The positive legal framework adopted through work permits supports this transition. Incorporating this legal framework within programming is essential to tackling core upstream and downstream challenges in major targeted sectors;

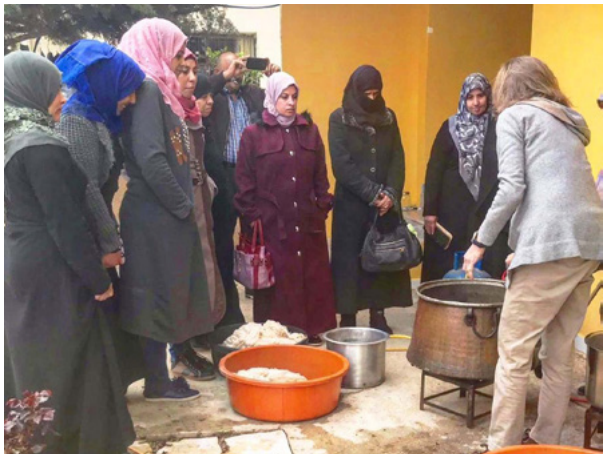
- Improving structured coordination mechanisms: Coordination between food security and livelihood working groups under the JRP should be more structured to combine and complement efforts through a phased-out approach. The JRP platform presents a positive enabling environment to pursue inclusive coordination and distribution of efforts, while avoiding programme duplications in the same region. This is a prerequisite to accelerate the transition from humanitarian assistance to development-oriented programming;
- Increasing access to credits: There is insufficient financing available for Syrian refugees to establish small and micro enterprises. Microfinance institutions should be supported to facilitate tailor-made access to credits through necessary guarantee mechanisms that could be used as collateral by various donors;
- Creating incentives for businesses to formalize employment through a social-preference tax reduction: Many businesses prefer not to formally declare Syrian employment to avoid related taxation and the difficulty of processing paperwork. The Government of Jordan may install a social-preference tax reduction for businesses employing vulnerable Syrians and Jordanians in remote areas. This would encourage businesses to report on employment, and get a preference tax rate that would cover their duties to the Ministry of Labour. This should be done while respecting an acceptable percentage distribution of employment between Syrian refugees and Jordanians;
- Supporting job matching institutions and initiatives: Skills development must be complemented by job placement services to help match and address market demands in a structured bottom-up approach. Digital transformation plays an important role in this aspect and should be promoted, including by creating e-platforms to link trained refugees with businesses. These trained participants should understand the downstream needs and be exposed to the available choices that have the highest potential for temporary or permanent employment;
- Emphasizing on-the-job coaching as a pre-requisite for success: Skills development and businesses initiated are best supported when on-the-job training is offered through professional coaches to ensure market bottlenecks are addressed in an efficient manner. Supporting the initiation of clusters is important to build the social capital and enhance knowledge sharing. This guarantees the success of market-oriented entrepreneurial activities within a conductive-enabling policy environment;
- Conducting economic impact assessments: Economic impact assessments and cost-benefit analysis should be conducted for large-budget projects to identify lessons learned and understand the return of investment of food security and livelihood programming implemented under protracted displacement (number of jobs created/maintained);
- Enhancing gender-sensitive programming: Social and cultural restrictions affecting women's participation in livelihood opportunities for both Syrian refugees and Jordanian communities should be addressed. Enabling mechanisms in terms of facilitating safe access to training and providing childcare services are highly encouraged;
- Prioritizing a sector-based approach relevant to the country of origin: It is important in future livelihoods programming to prioritize a list of common market-based needs between the place of origin and the host country. This facilitates livelihoods solutions in host countries and helps refugees to take part in livelihood restoration plans when they decide to voluntary return with safety and dignity to their place of origin.

05. Conclusion and regional policy recommendations

Durable solution prospects for the Syrian conflict are limited within the regional political context, and the situation of IDPs and Syrian refugees inside the Syrian Arab Republic and in host countries is expected to further deteriorate due to the devastating socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, resulting in unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty for both Syrian refugees and host communities. Coping with additional challenges requires a short-term vision focused on addressing basic needs, while catering for an early recovery mid-term vision that avoids trapping refugees and host countries into a vicious cycle of humanitarian aid dependency that limits resilience and economic prospects. The international community and host countries need to properly evaluate livelihood solutions to understand how, under the current crises, livelihood policies and programming should be revised to address new challenges, while offering temporary solutions at the regional level. Policy options should strive to turn refugees' presence into an opportunity for local development without jeopardizing host communities.

The findings of the three studies conducted under the agriculture initiative help to frame a contextualized and inclusive process for regional livelihood development under protracted forced displacement. Improving access of a specific population of refugees to a livelihood that is relevant to the host country and their place of origin facilitates durable solutions in the short and medium terms. To prepare the ground for this approach, regional policy recommendations should complement national policies and need to consider the following:

- Promoting regional value chains: The Mashreq region, which hosts the bulk of Syrian refugees, has common integrated agriculture value chains that can be selected and supported to promote local economic development and nutritious diets that address unemployment and increased levels of food insecurity;
- Exchanging knowledge and learning processes: Spreading successful initiatives at the regional level is strategic to facilitating replication and reducing the overall cost of the crisis. For instance, supporting Lebanon to better understand the impact of a good enabling environment through the facilitation of work permits adopted in Jordan could open new opportunities in new sectors that can help Lebanon mitigate the impact of the current crisis;
- Developing institutional skills: Livelihoods design, planning, and implementation requires specific technical and empirical background and expertise that are rarely available within national non-governmental organizations. Improving the capacity of national non-governmental organizations to better respond to livelihood challenges at the community level is instrumental to designing sustainable interventions. Combining knowledge and



efforts at the regional level helps disseminate best practices and reduce implementation challenges, in particular when interventions are planned to provide long-term service provision;

- Providing multiyear regional resilience funding: Promoting early recovery, resilience building, and livelihoods development requires multiyear national and regional funding, focusing on sectoral interventions that need to reach the value chain level;
- Adapting the nature of livelihood programming: The international community needs to focus on resilience-oriented programming, based on interventions that provide urgent needs while addressing the root causes of vulnerabilities. The process of adaptation should provide more sustainable and long-term alternatives that complement cash-for-work or cash-for-training approaches that are currently widespread in livelihood programming;
- Measuring regional impact assessment: It is important to understand and measure how humanitarian and development funding is playing a role in activating regional economies, and to assess the extent to which regional assistance complements public expenditure to address the ongoing crises.
- The proposed regional recommendations are aligned with the strategic objectives of the Regional Refugees Response Plan (3RP) and consider European Union priorities for the Syrian conflict.

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