



Syria Humanitarian Updates

December 2008



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Syria:

The humanitarian situation in Syria is still affected by two major disasters both manmade disaster (Refugees from Iraq) and natural disaster (The worst drought that hit Syria since four decades).

Refugees

UNHCR continued its assistance operation for refugees from Iraq in cooperation with partner agencies in the sectors of food, education, health, psycho-social support and protection. Distribution of food and non-food items supplied by UNHCR and WFP for 175,000 refugees ended in November. This distribution was to cover a four month food ration from July to October and non-food items consisting of hygienic kits, sanitary materials for women and children. Regrettably there was a disruption in supply of rice, and some 47,677 individuals did not receive their rice ration. It is hoped that situation with rice supply will be resolved soonest. 13,346 families representing 38,234 individuals benefit from monthly financial assistance provided through the ATM cash cards. Heads of households receive approximately US\$100 (SYP5000) per month, with an additional US\$10 (SYP500) for each dependent.

Partnerships

In November UNHCR finalised formal partnership with the Ministry of Health and Higher Education. Under these new frames, state hospitals providing specialized medical care for Iraqi refugees will receive equipment, medical supplies to support their capacity to provide medical care to an increased number of patients. In addition, 148 Iraqi refugee students received scholarships to continue their education in universities of Syria.

NGOs

Two more NGOs (Action Against Hunger, Spain and Terre des Hommes, Italy) signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, allowing them to start assistance programmes for Iraqi refugees in Syria. Up to now there are twelve international NGOs which are fully accredited to work with Iraqi refugees.

Al Tanf camp

Heavy rain on the night of 28 October resulted in flooding at the two camps for Palestinians from Iraq stranded at the Syrian-Iraqi borders, causing tents to be inundated. While UNHCR was able to send new tents, mattresses, plastic sheeting and blankets to Al Tanf on the next day, it is estimated that the tents of over 100 families were destroyed in Al Walid on the Iraqi side of the border, where assistance always takes longer to arrive.

In November, gravelling and levelling works were undertaken in Al Tanf camp in response to the site destruction caused by the flood.

UNRWA has established a tented school at al-Tanf and organizes educational support activities at al-Hol, has provided technical training for Tanf and al-Hol youth in Damascus during the summer, provides dental, physiotherapy and various social and relief services to the refugees at the two mentioned camps. Regarding the refugees who have entered Syria in an irregular manner, UNRWA provides for education, health and relief services. In addition, a Child Friendly Space has been established in cooperation with UNICEF for refugee children in the Damascus area. Palestinian refugees from Iraq also benefit from the Agency's social services at the community centres.

Governorate of Al Hassakeh

In cooperation with the Governor of Hassakeh 1,200 refugees who entered Syria prior to March 2003 and do not fall under the assistance criteria for the on-going food assistance programme received basic and complementary food items. This group of refugees appreciated this assistance.

At the request of the governor of Hassakeh, UNHCR provided assistance to help people suffered in the drought of the last summer in the north-east of Syria. 10,000 blankets, 5,000 mattresses, 900 tents, 15,000 kitchen sets, 15,000 jerry cans for water and 665 jerry cans for kerosene, 1,669 lanterns and 30,430 pieces of underwear were transported and handed over the Governor's office for distribution.

Drought

Syria is currently experiencing the worst drought within the past four decades. This natural disaster is overlapped with the global increase in food prices; it combined with the local price increase of fuel, which affects the rural population's ability to have fresh water and deteriorated their health situation. The Government estimates the number of families suffering direct severe impact of the drought at 150,000 families (up to 1 million people); predominantly herders and subsistence farmers, put at risk of rapid loss of livelihood and increased malnutrition. The impact has been felt so dramatically throughout the country that the Syrian Government approached the UN Resident Coordinator requesting mobilization of emergency funds from UN agencies and the donor community. The request is quite uncharacteristic of the current political administration that usually considers raising public alarm as potentially destabilizing to national security. However, that request and the drought flash appeal did not have positive reaction from the traditional international donors.

CERF funded WFP, FAO, and UNICEF's projects. The total amount is 1,966,521 US \$. In addition, FAO responded by providing USD 500,000 and Spain USD 538,088 to support destitute farmers, Denmark provided 52,145 US \$ to UNICEF. CERF secretariat gave Syria another opportunity for submitting new projects to enhance UN response to drought.

FAO team has conducted a post-distribution monitoring mission during the period 23-26/12 to the two affected provinces of D-Ezzor and Ar-Reqa. During our meeting with the community and the Distribution Committees they realize that rain started in these two provinces at a moderate rate of 7mm, which is better than last year, same time, but much less than the annual average level.

There are local efforts being done in the field of literacy whereby 30 groups of illiterate women are taking part of a community initiative. These women were about to complete their programme and each woman would have received as a prize of 300 kg of wheat flour. However the programme is not completed due to the migration of some of the villagers seeking employment income.

Moreover, the drop out of school was reported in the visited area of Abu-Khashab/ D-Ezzor, at a high rate mostly girls who are kept at home for domestic assistance and labour work. This was caused due to lack of food to sustain the population while attending their land or herds until the next season.

Moreover, it is vividly clear that integrated intervention is important to achieve a higher impact. While FAO has been able to provide the important element of agriculture production (seeds) ensuring a better harvest and working towards provision of animal feed, provision of food aid and water resources (currently SL 75-100/barrel) are timely important to

complement the efforts to sustain the rural community (farmers and herders equally) and ensuring less damage to the social structure mostly women and children who are suffering the most.

Risk Reduction & Disaster Management

As part of UN efforts to have a role in the national capacity building, UNDP in cooperation with GoS and group of international Experts in Disaster Management launched The National Center for the Coordination of Disaster Management. The Center has four areas of cooperation in disaster management:

- The annex of the Sub-regional Cooperation among Arab countries for disaster management.
- National capacity-building project in the area of disaster reduction and management.
- The Comprehensive Program aimed at building institutional system and support for disaster management in Syria
- The National Urban Observatory recently established by the Ministry in cooperation with United Nations Development Program and in coordination with UN-HABITAT