

Water conservation solutions in Jordanian host communities as part of the response to the spillover of the Syria crisis

Through a generous grant from the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and building on UNDP's field presence and technical expertise, a **project is under implementation in Jordan to strengthen water management in the governorates of Mafraq, Irbid, Zarqa, Jerash and Ajloun** –some of the host communities with the highest concentration of Syrian refugees.

In 2010, Jordan was among the three most water scarce countries in the world, struggling to meet the water demand of its 7 million inhabitants. Following the vast influx of refugees since the start of the Syria Crisis, the government must now provide water to a population of over 9 million people. **Water security is thus among the most urgent priorities of the Kingdom.**

In areas heavily populated by Syrians, the **demand for water resources has increased by as much as 40 percent**. In some northern governorates, the per-capita share of water has plummeted by 27 percent. Given the rising demand for water, the Jordanian government has increased reliance on groundwater resources, which are currently exploited at a ratio of 159 percent over their average safe yield. As a result, the quality and quantity of the aquifers are also decreasing.

Although the **influx of refugees has certainly placed further strain on Jordan's water resources**, other factors must also be considered. Climate change and variability, mismanagement of resources by water utility companies, unsustainable irrigation in the agricultural sector and sharing surface water resources with neighboring countries have also contributed to Jordan's water shortage.

This situation requires a multifaceted approach, tackling water scarcity from different fronts. The Government of Jordan, in partnership with countries from the region and beyond, has already taken important steps to increase water supplies. The most ambitious project in this regard is the **Red Sea–Dead Sea Canal** which should provide additional potable water through desalination plants. Much can also be done on the demand side, by reducing domestic demands for water and promoting conservation solutions.

Over the past years, UNDP and the international community have worked alongside the Government of Jordan to define and implement interventions to help mitigate the impact of the Syria crisis. As a result, the \$7.6-billion **Jordan Response Plan 2017-2019 (JRP)** was developed, **calling for further collective action to respond to the protracted humanitarian and development challenges**.

The water and sanitation (WASH) sector is one of the eleven priority sectors identified in the JRP, and the third in order of financial requirements (around \$834 million over three years). **The WASH component of the JRP aims to enhance water and sanitation infrastructure in host communities; strengthen sewage treatment facilities; rehabilitate and improve water distribution networks;**



improve WASH conditions in schools; and support wastewater reuse.

The project OFID-UNDP project aims to bring about positive change both in the supply and demand of water resources, by **installing water harvesting and grey water systems and conducting awareness campaigns to make Jordanians' water usage more efficient**. As Sara Ferrer Olivella, UNDP Country Director in Jordan, has noted:

“by installing these water-saving systems we are not only supporting communities to cope with the impact of the Syria crisis, but we are laying the foundations for a more sustainable and water-efficient future for the country”.

UNDP and OFID are not alone in this effort. The Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) is supporting the implementation of this project by helping to identify the most water-stressed towns and by bringing in their expertise and lessons learned in similar initiatives. In addition, **three NGOs** (Royal Scientific Society, Future Pioneers for Empowering Communities and Royal Society for the conservation of Nature) were selected to undertake the ground work given their close ties in the local communities.

With different players involved and five governorates to be covered, coordination is key to maximize synergies and avoid overlapping of efforts. At this stage, thanks to their knowledge of the territory, the NGOs are working to identify the best locations to install the **water-saving equipment which will benefit a number of public institutions such as schools, mosques, churches and municipal buildings**. Once the systems will be operational, awareness sessions for local communities will be conducted to maintain and efficiently use the grey water treatment systems and water harvesting stores.

With the spillover effects of the Syria crisis affecting the entire sub-region, the collaboration between OFID and UNDP goes beyond this project. As part of its broader regional support to address the challenges brought about by the Syrian conflict since 2011, OFID has also extended financial support to assist UNDP in its ongoing response to manage the incremental quantity of municipal solid waste in Lebanon, which currently hosts around 1.5 million Syrians.

A regional approach to achieve Sustainable Development in the Arab States

“Leaving no one behind” has been echoed in almost all sessions of **UNDP Regional Conference on “Development challenges and priorities in a changing Arab region”** held in Amman on 22-23 May 2017. The 170 representatives from governments, regional institutions, civil society, UN agencies, youth and women groups gathered in Jordan to discuss UNDP support, called for inclusiveness to be the underlying principle for any development intervention in the Arab States.

The region is characterized by increasing fragility and vulnerability, suffering from a convergence of rising poverty, conflicts, economic fragility and high unemployment rates especially among youth and women. **However, these challenges come with opportunities**. With **60% of the population under 30 years of age**, the region has significant demographic resource to tap into to achieve a leap forward in its development.

Furthermore, **the increasingly cross-country, sub-regional, and region-wide nature of development**



challenges invite further collaboration across the Arab states region. And this is where the UNDP Regional Programme for Arab States comes in, fostering networks of key stakeholders, solidifying partnerships with regional institutions, complementing country-level efforts and building a regional knowledge base.

The event was opened by HE Minister Imad Najib Fakhoury, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in Jordan, and by Mr. Mourad Wahba, UNDP Regional Director for Arab States, who both emphasized that the Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals constitutes the main framework for national policies and strategies and provides an opportunity to strengthen the participatory approach at the central and local levels.

“We are in the process of formulating a regional programme for UNDP in the Arab States for the next four years, which will be based on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals” explains Mr. Wahba.

During the conference, one of the key concerns expressed by participants were the high levels of unemployment affecting youth and women in the region. Addressing this challenge requires a **comprehensive approach that goes beyond the economic side of the labor market, but it should also consider social and religious aspects.** Also, a better education system can play an important role. According to HE Saidam Sabri, Minister of Education in Palestine, **education should be revised to equip the students with skills that better match labor market needs.** This requires **knowledge-based economic transformation that features innovation and entrepreneurship** supported by technology as well as research and development. To maximize the result of this complex equation, **deepened economic integration and increased trade can foster inclusive growth**, provided that the right value chains are supported.

“It’s time to scale up efforts for youth development, so that they can become economically, politically and socially empowered, and play a more active role in sustainable development” HE Fakhoury said during the conference.

As many participants pointed out, conflict and occupation in the region do not only have a detrimental effect on development today but also in the future. Governance deficits, namely exclusion and corruption, have been one of the drivers of conflict. **Re-establishing peace requires focusing on fostering political compromise, and transform that compromise into actual reconciliation and reintegration** at the level of local communities. **Prevention is key when it comes as violent extremism**, tailoring measures and interventions to the different nature of conflicts, and engaging with religious leaders, institutions and to foster social cohesion both in conflict and non-conflict settings.

There is no one recipe for this, **but anti-corruption and integrity are an entry point for broader governance reforms** –as noted by MP Ghassan Moukheiber who has been in the driving seat of many anti-corruption laws in Lebanon. For maximizing these efforts and ensuring long-term sustainability, it is important to **promote and institutionalize mechanisms for active participation of citizens in policy- and constitution-making processes.** It is, again, about inclusion.

Although women represent half of the population, concerns were raised that the region has the world’s highest Global Gender Gap. This is certainly due to the persistence of formal and legal discriminations, but it was also particularly emphasized that **societal and cultural barriers still prevent women from participating in the political and economic life.** For example, as a recent UNWOMEN regional survey indicates that most men support a wide array of traditional attitudes that uphold inequitable masculinities and support the historical gender division of men as providers and women as caregivers.

Finally, the countries in the Arab region also face long-term climate risks, especially those related to water scarcity and disasters as we are unfortunately witnessing these days in Yemen and Somalia for example. **Resource constraints challenge us to think of climate resilience innovatively,**

especially with regards to water-food-energy nexus. Increased climate financing and better governance of natural resources are important to facilitate access to water, food, and energy and new employment opportunities also to the most vulnerable.

The proposed entry points and recommendations emerged from the discussion will guide the formulation of the regional programme for Arab States for the period 2018-2021. As noted by Mr. Wahba in his opening remarks:

“The regional programme we are formulating now complements our work at the national level by leading on the type of work that is best done at the regional level: generation and sharing of innovative ideas and critical knowledge, strengthening partnerships with regional institutions, and fostering regional and South-South cooperation. Together these three strands of work are intended to make UNDP a more effective partner for development at the regional and national levels”.

OFID and UNDP join forces to address the environmental impact of the Syria crisis in Lebanon

The Syrian conflict is arguably the most tragic humanitarian crisis of our time. Since 2011, half of the country's pre-war population—more than 11 million people—have been killed or have fled their homes. There are currently more than 4.96 million registered Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. This situation puts the resilience of both the refugees and the host communities to test, pressuring natural resources, basic services, and the economies of affected countries.



The Government of Lebanon estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million Syrians, at a ratio of one in five people to its population and with an approximate loss of \$13.1 billion. Overall, 85% of registered displaced persons or refugees live in the most vulnerable, most poor regions in Lebanon, in which 67% of the population live below the poverty line and in certain villages the displaced Syrians outnumber local residents. The country's public services and infrastructure, poor and dysfunctional even before the crisis, are now under severe strain as a result of the refugee influx.

To support Lebanon with this protracted crisis, the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), joined forces through a generous grant from OFID, and building on UNDP's field presence and technical expertise; **specifically to address the public health and environmental shock caused by the incremental quantity of municipal solid waste. In particular, garbage collection expenditures by municipalities increased by 40%**, while the near absence of solid waste management facilities has led to an increase in open unsanitary dumping of waste throughout the country. Recent estimates indicate that there are **nearly 900 open dumpsites scattered throughout Lebanon.**

This massive impact on already weak basic services, natural resources, and the general environment remains a priority concern for local residents. This can also generate intercommunity issues, such as in the case of **the pollution of the Litani River which is increasingly being reported by municipalities as generating tensions.** One such example is the village of **Ghazzeh in the West Bekaa** region that has some 6,500 Lebanese inhabitants, while the municipality indicates that nearly 30,000 Syrian refugees are currently hosted in this village. Due to the absence of sufficient

and functioning municipal solid waste management facilities, **the municipality currently disposes of its waste in an open unsanitary dumpsite that poses numerous environmental and health threats.** This dumpsite has now increased tremendously in size and it is estimated to have reached an area covering 7,000m².

The OFID-UNDP project focuses on improving the solid waste management in Ghazzeah village, specifically to rehabilitate and remove the open unsanitary municipal solid waste dumpsite. One of the two cells for waste disposal has already been constructed, and the entire waste from the unsanitary dump was moved there. **The excavation work started on the construction of a second cell in its vicinity and it will be operational soon.** The project, undertaken in close coordination with the municipality of Ghazzeah and the Ministry of Environment, will also be providing the municipality with equipment to support in waste collection. The intervention also includes an awareness raising component on waste separation and recycling, to ensure long-term sustainability and strengthen the resilience of communities.

In addition to this project, OFID has also extended financial support to assist UNDP in its ongoing response to the impact of the Syrian crisis in Jordan, addressing the problem of water scarcity, which is among the top challenges facing the country. Since the Syrian crisis erupted in 2011, OFID has partnered with many implementing agencies and relief organizations to mitigate the impact of the ongoing hostilities and the resulting displacement and influx of refugees, both within Syria, and in the most affected neighboring countries and host communities.

Enhancing the role of women in SDGs implementation

Under the partnership between Arab Women Organization (AWO) and UNDP's regional project "Mosharaka" on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and gender equality, a special session on the "Role of Women in Sustainable Development" was held on the 16th of May 2017 in Cairo, Egypt. The session was part of the 2017 Arab Sustainable Development Week organized in partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations and the Egyptian Ministry of Investment Cooperation.



The session built up on the joint work by AWO, UNDP, UN Women and the League of Arab States which led to a high-level conference on "Women in the Arab region and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in 2015. This session was an opportunity to follow up on some of the key action points from the conference and share governments' lessons learned on SDGs implementation and involvement of civil society organizations.

For example, the representative from the Ministry of Justice in Iraq presented Iraq's experience in integrating women into peace, security, and legislation. The Vice Minister of the Egyptian Ministry of Planning, Monitoring, and Administrative Reform, provided a briefing on a thorough review of laws and legislative frameworks from a gender perspective.

One of the key speakers, Ms. Hibaaq Osman –founder and CEO of the regional NGO Karama –underscored the importance of engaging civil society organizations in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to Ms. Osman, civil society can complement the efforts of national institutions and international organizations through their strong knowledge of and linkages with the territory.

The session was chaired by Ambassador Mervat Tallawy, Director General of the Arab Women Organization (AWO), and moderated by Zena Ali-Ahmad, Deputy-Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States.

Ambassador Tallawy noted that sustainable development is a golden opportunity for countries to prioritize their efforts on achieving gender equality and promoting women's empowerment. Zena Ali Ahmed reiterated the commitment of UNDP to work hand in hand with regional organizations on advocating for the application of a gender lens during the implementation of the SDGs.

Trade as an engine of sustainable development

Trade plays a significant role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Arab region. To achieve detail understanding of the potential of trade for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNDP and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), have activated a **Trade and SDGs Working Group (WG)** in early 2017. The WG, which held its first meeting on May 9-10, is composed of experts from the public and private sector, academic institutions, and UN agencies.



The main objective of the group is to **analyze the contribution of trade to the SDGs in Arab countries** with focus on trade in agriculture, trade facilitation and supply chains/value chains and multi-sector impacts from works on trade facilitation to the region. The project results from a partnership between UNDP and Sida with a view to formulating recommendations on the role of trade in achieving the SDG, particularly through better economic and trade competitiveness, higher intra-Arab trade and deepened Arab economic integration.

The first meeting of the WG was opened by the Director of LAS Arab Economic Integration Department, representing the Head of the Economic Sector HE Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali. The meeting was co-chaired by Rima Younes Khatib, Deputy Director of Foreign Affairs at Central Bank of Lebanon, and Margareta Davidson-Abdelli, Counsellor of Sweden Embassy in Cairo. The WG analyzed the linkages between trade and SDGs in the light of development theories, discussed progress on regional economic integration and brainstormed on potential new policies to foster regional trade. **The formulation of indicators to support the monitoring of SDGs implementation was also part of the agenda of the WG.**

From a preliminary analysis, **Arab economic integration contributes to the prosperity and development** in the Arab countries by bringing about more business opportunities and employment. The group emphasized that it is **important to leverage new technologies, like digital economies, and promote knowledge societies** to provide women and youth with greater opportunities to actively contribute to the economic and social life of their societies. An **enhanced role of businesses and industries** in the formulation of public policy is also imperative to facilitate trade and investment.

The chairs noted that additional attention should be placed on **trade in services, energy and e-commerce as accelerators for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups, and engines of job creation** –key for growth, social stability and inclusiveness.

Can journalists promote social cohesion in the Arab region?

Brought together by the regional project “Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab States (PSCAR)”, 16 journalists and media experts met in Beirut on 24 April to discuss how journalists can play a role in promoting social cohesion in the region.

Large sections of the Arab society feel excluded and marginalized, identities of many women, youth, minorities and religious groups are being challenged, and means for citizens’ participation in the social and political life are limited. Within this context, the propensity for violence, conflict and polarization is heightened as people and groups demand to be heard and push for changing their own or their group’s status quo. Yet, we live in a world where technology, information and media flows are increasingly shaping perceptions and attitudes. At a time when extremist groups have succeeded in using a wide range of platforms to advocate for their own manipulative narratives, it is important to join efforts to advance the role of journalists and media in building a more inclusive society that celebrates diversity, pluralism and identity. However, the role that the media should play in giving platforms and voice to bridging narratives and how the journalists should perform their duties, professionally and ethically, is contested. As pointed out by Liliane Dawood, Former BBC and OTV anchor, there is a tradeoff between the journalist’s role in representing the line of the newspaper on the one side, and –on the other side –criticizing certain actors or giving voice to marginalized groups. Certainly, journalists have the power to change public’s opinions and mindsets. This power can be leveraged to raise awareness on the importance of building cohesive society and developing ties that overcome divisions and prevent exclusion. Yet, as noted by Thaer Ghandour, Journalist and TV Producer, “this power is also a responsibility which journalists should be aware of and which should be carefully used”.

To support journalists in defining how best they can promote social cohesion in the region, UNDP in collaboration with Thomson Reuters Foundation, is in the process of finalizing a pilot manual for media outlets, journalists and media training academies. This manual aims to serve as a tool to try to identify a mechanism for journalists to promote social cohesion and provide suggestions on how media outlets can contain polarization and violent extremism. It also aims to guide journalists on how to report on various issues, especially those perceived as socially and culturally sensitive in a manner that might contribute to enhancing social cohesion across the countries and region. The handbook will provide an overview of the Arab media landscape, examining the structural conditions that underpin the performance of the media as well as exploring the positive role that media outlets and journalism can play within that environment.

The draft manual was presented to the participants, which provided their feedback on how it could be revised and enhanced. Once finalized, the manual could be used to train journalists across the region by presenting case studies that present and explain how social cohesion issues have been appropriately or wrongly handled by a series of articles in well-known media outlets. The case studies specifically target issues related to ethnic and religious discrimination, relationship between refugees and host communities, perception of women in the Arab region, and violent extremism.

This event is part of a broader effort by UNDP, with PSCAR, to establish a regional network of journalists and media committed to strengthen social cohesion in the Arab States region.



The K4D Global Partnerships Conference features the work of the Arab Knowledge Project

With best practices and lessons learned from the Arab region, the Arab Knowledge Project (AKP) contributed to the discussion of the Knowledge for Development Global Partnerships Conference, which took place in Geneva on 3-4 April 2017. The conference is an annual event that aims to review and enhance knowledge management practices in the field of sustainable development, and present a new agenda to strengthen knowledge societies and economies for development.



The conference was organized by the UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and Knowledge Management Austria (KMA), witnessing the participation of more than 250 participants from different countries, led by a select of experts and professionals in the areas of knowledge and development.

Dr. Hany Torky, Chief Technical Advisor of the AKP, and Mariam Itani, researcher at the AKP, participated in a panel discussion on Knowledge for Development (K4D) practices in multi-sectoral environments. The session looked at identifying key challenges and best practices to promote knowledge for development within the global context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The panel discussion was an opportunity for AKP to present its achievements over the past years, culminated with the launch of the Arab Knowledge Index 2016 and the Arab Reading Index, as well as a mobile application and an e-platform with advanced data visualization tools. The extensive work carried out on knowledge within the context of the Arab region -made possible by the longstanding collaboration with the Mohammad bin Rashid al Maktoum Foundation –allowed AKP to gather solid information on the key challenges and best practices in the area of knowledge and development.

Some of the key challenges that were mentioned and discussed included the poor availability of reliable and quality data; absent or weak legal framework to support knowledge sharing and reporting; limited interest in sponsoring knowledge activities and low engagement of policy makers and stakeholders. All issues that AKP thoroughly analyzed in its work, continuously stressing the importance of knowledge in achieving sustainable development at the Arab and global levels. During the conference, the Joint Inspection Unit launched its flagship 2016 Report of the “Knowledge Management in the United Nations System,” and the “Agenda Knowledge for Development” was presented by Andreas Brandner, from KMA. This Agenda, initiated by KMA and supported by a global community of thought leaders, offers a new, holistic view of the challenges and opportunities related to knowledge and provides orientation to all stakeholders in the field of development.

Leading journalists gathered in Beirut to discuss data journalism

Enhanced open data facilities and increased provision of statistics in the Arab region offer journalists a new source of “interesting and new stories” that can contribute to unravelling societal controversies, highlighting political and economic marginalization and injustices, and offering

readers an engaging platform on policy debates around key development issues. Recently, journalists in the Arab region are paying more attention to the power of data as an investigative tool and as a driver of a promising platform. However, only few initiatives in the Arab region have been launched to offer data-driven content or what is referred to as “data journalism” to the readers compared to the rising trend in Europe, Africa and Latin America.

The Arab Development Portal (ADP) in collaboration with Raseef22 organized, on 30 March 2017 in Beirut, the first Media Focus Group Meeting on Data Journalism, bringing together 20 journalists and data journalism experts from 10 Arab countries, Europe and the USA. Participants discussed the status of data journalism in the Arab region, exchanged experiences and best practices, and identified the needs of data journalists to fully reap the potential of data revolution and new technologies. The increased interaction between journalists and several other fields such as design, computer science and statistics was a topic that was continuously addressed throughout the presentations and interventions. “Newsrooms used to only have journalists. This is not the case anymore. Journalists now sit side by side next to programmers, designers and data analysts to produce a single report,” said Alaa Batayneh from AlJazeera Labs. Batayneh also talked about the emergence of data journalism and how it succeeded in establishing a wide base of followers. The main challenge of data journalism in the Arab region says Lina Ejeilat, co-founder of 7iber, is access to data, “we do have access to reports enclosing data, but we don’t have access to raw data.” However, that was not the only concern of Kais Zriba from Inkyfada, “we have relative access to data in Tunisia, but to what degree can we trust it?”. The discussion also highlighted best practices and positive experiences. Eva Constantaras from Internews gave five tips to set up a sustainable data journalism teams, “don’t reinvent the wheel, start with the data you have, start with the question not the data, it is about the story not the visualization, and don’t do it alone.” Moving forward, the participants emphasized the importance of developing data journalism in the region by investing in enhancing access to data through strengthening the relationship with data producers and supporting data portals, offering capacity building to journalists in different areas, and developing open source visualization tools that are tailored to content in the Arabic language. At the end of this insightful day, and as summarized by Dyfed Loesche from Statista, “a genre that is truly digital, wherever it goes, data journalism will be part of the future.” But it is not about the numbers only, “journalists should present statistics that allow people to find themselves in the story” concludes Mona Chalabi from The Guardian.

