



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRENGTHENS THE RESILIENCE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

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Country: **Jordan** | Principal organisation: **SEEDS**

ABSTRACT

Strengthening the resilience of Syrian refugees in Jordan empowers them to secure their land-based livelihoods, and to acquire farming skills for securing their food security and family incomes. SEEDS has established an informal refugee camp that gives Syrian refugees an opportunity to engage in agriculture and secure their land-based livelihoods. They have brought together

Syrian and Jordanian communities, creating safe social spaces for dialogue, cohesion and knowledge sharing. The program aims to address economic vulnerability, placing local communities at the forefront of Jordan's response to the Syrian crisis, with a long-term view of strengthening the resilience of the refugees.

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AREAS

- COMMUNITIES, INDIGENOUS & RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND RIGHTS
- RURAL LAND GOVERNANCE
- PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

SKILLS

- ESTABLISHMENT AND STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

BACKGROUND

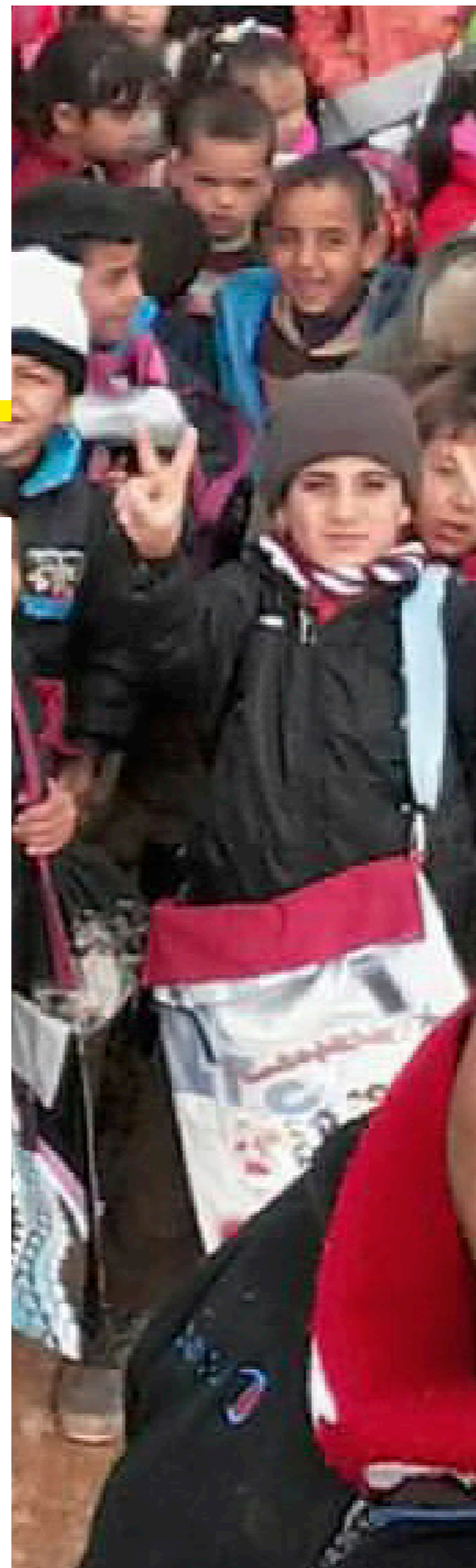
The war in Syria has resulted in an influx of refugees and asylum seekers into Jordan. Since the beginning of the war in 2011, Syrian families have been forced to flee the country and seek refuge in neighbouring countries, including Jordan. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) established refugee camps in Jordan, including the Al Za'atari camp in 2012, to house asylum seekers and refugees as they arrived from Syria. Close to half a million people have passed through Al Za'atari camp, where the Jordanian government and UNHCR provide social services to the refugees.

THE CHALLENGE

As the Al Za'atari camp grew, it became apparent that the camp was turning into a permanent settlement. Although humanitarian assistance has acted as a buffer, securing livelihoods in Al Za'atari has remained difficult for refugee families. The World Food Program (WFP) states that in 2018, less than 1 in 4 (23%) Syrian refugees were food secure. This has presented socio-economic challenges to families living in the camp, as seen with the UN's WFP reducing its food aid to the camp.

Other challenges faced by refugees include socio-political tensions within the camp, between traditional leaders and self-appointed street leaders who profit from the chaos. This has resulted in protests and fights in the camp, a fertile breeding ground for crimes.

As the war rages on, and with no immediate possibility to return to Syria, refugee families are seeking longer-term solutions that allow them to take charge of their futures and to secure their own livelihoods. Whilst UNHCR has provided basic support to the refugees, some refugees are leaving the camps to seek economic activities that allow them to secure their own livelihoods and basic needs such as education, water and sanitation.



OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

After registration at the UNHCR camp, refugees have an option to either remain at the camp, or depart. If they depart from the camp, they bear the responsibility of providing food, housing, medical care and education for their families. To strengthen their family incomes and livelihoods and to ensure security for their children, especially girls, some families have moved out of Al Za'atari camp.

SEEDS has worked with these refugee families to assist them to take charge of their lives. SEEDS is a community-based organisation that seeks to empower local communities, including women and youth to develop their communities and secure their livelihoods.

SEEDS has established an unofficial refugee camp where families who were facing challenges in Al Za'atari have moved. The unofficial camp is located on a farm, where the refugees practice agriculture as a way of securing their livelihoods.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

The camp managed by SEEDS has given the refugee community an opportunity to determine and strengthen their livelihoods. The refugee community is able to provide secure land-based livelihoods for their families in a dignified manner. They are producing enough food to feed the community, and have access to other amenities of life such as safe water, electricity, access to clinics and education for their children. They are also trading their farm products at local markets, improving incomes and livelihoods of the refugee community. As a result, the refugees are food secure and have strengthened their livelihoods.

THE GOOD PRACTICE

IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS



1

IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS. SEEDS has established an unofficial refugee camp on a farm that they received as part of a donation. The farm is located six kilometres from the Syrian Border. At the camp, refugees have identified farming as an economic activity that can assist them to secure their livelihoods. 270 families of an average of six people per family have moved into the camp. With limited resources, the refugee community and SEEDS set up tents that served as pre-schools for children, clinics for pregnant women and Mosques for community members. They have also electrified the camp and created a clean water network between residences, and have replaced the irrigation pipes that were previously used as domestic water pipes. Previously, children attending school at the main (Al Za'atari) refugee camp had to walk 7km to the school. However, with kind donations from friends of SEEDS, a car has been availed to the camp, which takes the students to and from school.

2

FARMING FOR LIVELIHOODS. Farming has presented itself as a solution to the challenges faced by refugees who have left the Al Za'atari camp. The refugee community is producing their own food. They farm fruit and vegetables, mainly tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon, peaches, apricots and grapes. They have been industrious, and have managed to improvise and improve their farming technologies. For instance, the community has transformed an old van donated to the camp into a harvester that they use to enhance their fruit harvesting process.

3

SHARING OF FARMING BEST PRACTICES. The richness of the refugees' traditional knowledge cannot be over emphasised. SEEDS has encouraged interactions between the refugees and local communities to foster knowledge exchange. The refugee community has used their traditional and customary farming knowledge to strengthen organic farming practices at the camp.

4

ART PROJECTS FOR CHILDREN. Children have gone through art classes, where they are encouraged to imagine their futures. In the beginning, most children had images of war, and aspired to be soldiers and fight in the war. At the end of the programme, a lot of them have changed their outlooks on life. They aspire to be different professionals, including doctors.

5

COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION. All of SEEDS's efforts aim to build the refugee community's ability to reintegrate into the Syrian society when the war ends. As such, SEEDS is working with the refugees, the local Jordanian communities and volunteers to strengthen the refugees' agricultural skills and capacities that they will use in future. More importantly, SEEDS has encouraged the "golden triangular" approach- a three-way mutual learning cycle between the Syrian refugee community, the local Jordanian community and SEEDS.



3

THREE FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

1

Refugee communities are often depressed, stressed and traumatised. It is essential to encourage them, especially children, to reimagine their lives with a more positive outlook on life, giving the communities another opportunity to rebuild their futures.

2

Resource mobilisation is essential for the management of a refugee camp. Most of the donations that SEEDS received were in-kind contributions such as land for farming, a van, and wheelchairs for women and men with physical disabilities, and irrigation equipment. Volunteers and the private sector are important partners who can assist to bridge the resources gap.

3

It is also essential to encourage participatory decision-making by including members of the refugee community in the community leadership committee. They are closer to the people and fully comprehend the challenges that the community is facing.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to note that some refugees intend to relocate to their countries at the end of the war. This requires that they rebuild their communities and country at the end of the war. Furthermore, refugee camps seldom provide permanent accommodation and socio-economic solutions for the refugees. The temporary nature of refugee camps makes it difficult for the communities to create and invest in lasting solutions in their host nations.

SEEDS learned that is best to invest in empowering the communities to be self-sufficient, and put at their disposal land and other resources necessary for them to manage their communities, secure their incomes and land-based livelihoods.

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