

## The “Agricultural and Livestock Support for Syrian People”, Programme led by the CIHEAM-Bari

Today, the Mediterranean is facing complex challenges and trends of multiple origins, from political conflicts and institutional changes to climatic and socio-economic alterations. In addition to the Syrian conflict, these instabilities are causing protracted forced displacements both within and across Mediterranean countries as well as towards Europe. According to the last UNHCR Report, about 12 million Syrians were displaced in 2016, that is, about half of the total Syrian population.

At the same time, several Mediterranean countries are also transit countries for migrants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2015, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries were hosting around 13 million migrants, with peaks of 2 and 3 million for countries like Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon (IOM, 2017).

Forced migration is often linked to various man-made stresses and emergency or post-emergency situations. In these contexts, the international community mostly intervenes by providing immediate relief to populations hit by a crisis or a shock. In these cases, relief and humanitarian aid are in fact the main purpose of the support and assistance provided by donors. For example, in 2016, Syria ranked first in the global list of recipient countries of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) with 8.8 billion dollars received, of which 8.2 billion dollars allocated for humanitarian aid (OECD, 2018).

Since the 1980s, international donors are aware that a “grey area” exists between humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development processes. This is why the concept of Linking Relief to Rehabilitation to Development (LRRD) has been put forward, in order to ensure that short-term emergency measures are coherent with medium and long-term sustainable development. Of course, the translation of this principle into practice requires strong coordination between all the actors involved in emergency and post emergency interventions.

In this context, early recovery actions focused on increasing resilience and sustainable self-reliance of populations conducted in full collaboration with national and local authorities could at the same time ensure recovery from shocks (conflicts for example), build an enabling environment with suitable conditions necessary to re-launch the development process. This is the approach adopted by the CIHEAM-Bari in the framework of the programme “Agricultural and Livestock Support for Syrian People”, co-funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation and the British Department for International Development (DFID). Launched in 2015 and

still ongoing, this Programme is aimed at strengthening the resilience of rural communities by enabling households to improve their food security and livelihood.

The Programme is based on the concept that agriculture is a key economic sector for local communities and for Syria. It can be the starting point for the stabilisation and reconstruction of the country. Supporting agriculture has clearly shown to be a valid instrument to increase agricultural production and consequently food availability in the local market. Strengthening agriculture generates employment and income, mitigates migration flows and eventually gives hope for the future of Syria.

Building on this, since 2015 “Agriculture and Livestock Support for Syrian People” has been actively supporting Syrian rural communities to improve their capability to face and adapt to a new war-shaped economy, providing agricultural and livestock inputs and services, strengthening the skills of local communities and creating income generating opportunities for women.

All activities are developed addressing the specific needs and problems of farmers, breeders and women in close collaboration with the Local Council Administrations (LCA). The Programme works through a network of local technicians who play a pivotal role in ensuring a direct dialogue with rural communities, considering their needs and hereby identifying the necessary actions to be implemented. The strong link with LCAs and local associations (women and technicians) encourages reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups by enhancing dialogue, agricultural work and economic exchanges.

Classified by the OECD in 2017 as one of the top 50 projects worldwide for “Better Programming to Deliver Comprehensive Solutions to Refugee Crises”, this Programme has led to the following outcomes:

- Increased production efficiency: farmers are investing in their farms/agriculture;
- Improved Farming System: increased diversification of production systems;
- Increased significantly the number of animals in the programme areas;
- Decreased the local market price for wheat and meat;
- Decreased animal and crops diseases;
- Increased the knowledge and capacities of farmers and technicians;
- Strengthened the perception of LCAs in the communities.

The approach adopted by this Programme has allowed the achievement of outstanding results, including the strengthened resilience of rural communities. In fact, several beneficiaries have declared that thanks to the support provided by the programme their farms are productive again and they do not have to migrate. The Programme has also paid great attention to rural women. Due to the war, many of them have become the main breadwinner for their family. The Programme has strengthened women’s self-esteem by engaging them in economically profitable activities identified and set-up based on the context’s sustainable livelihood. Continuous follow-up and technical assistance have been provided to women and ensured by the local Programme technicians. A particular effort has been made to include the most vulnerable women in economic activities.

Another feature of this Programme is the Revolving Fund methodology that consists in providing inputs and services to farmers and breeders that co-participate in the costs, paying 70% of the price. The collected money is re-used to purchase additional inputs to be distributed to the beneficiaries. This allows to substantially increase the number of beneficiaries and to incentivise the local economy, because whenever possible, inputs are purchased on the Syrian market. Since 2015 the Revolving Fund has collected and reinvested around 2.9 million dollars.

This Programme - that builds upon the expertise lessons learnt by the CIHEAM-Bari in more than 100 rural and coastal development projects implemented over the last 30 years – is an example that can be adapted and implemented in other contexts to increase the resilience of local vulnerable rural populations coping with man-made or natural shocks and crises.

CIHEAM-Bari ([www.iamb.it](http://www.iamb.it)).