

Meeting Minutes

Location: Online MS. TEAMS Meeting, Damascus, Syria

Date: 15/07/2021

Time: 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Agenda:

1. Welcome remarks,
2. Introduction of new FAS coordinator (**Jameson**) - 3 mins,
3. Key updates on the 2021 HPC Timeline (**Mohie**) - 5 mins,
4. Update on the SHF Allocation and Status – (**Coordinators / OCHA**) – 10 mins,
5. Updates on the planned inaugural Agriculture Working Group (AWG) Syria HCT Hub – (**Jameson**) 5 mins,
6. 2020/2021 Agriculture Seasonal Performance – (**Jalal FAO**) – 10 mins,
7. New subsidized price for Diesel and bread bundle and its implications on Food Security – (**Mohie**) 5 mins,
8. Updates on the Euphrates Water Scarcity and Crisis – (**Mohie / Jameson**) – 10 mins
9. Planned IM and Data Collection Tools Training – (**Moteb/Ruba**) – 5 mins,
10. AOB and wrap-up – 5 mins (**Mohie**).

Participants:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| i. AKF - INGO | ix. OCHA - UN Agency |
| ii. AVSI - INGO | x. PARCIC - INGO |
| iii. COOPI - INGO | xi. PUI - INGO |
| iv. EPDC - NGO | xii. RESCATE - INGO |
| v. FAO - UN Agency | xiii. SARC - NGO |
| vi. GOPA - NGO | xiv. SSSD - NGO |
| vii. IFRC - INGO | xv. WFP - UN Agency |
| viii. NRC - INGO | xvi. ZOA - INGO |

Name of coordinators chairing meeting:

1. Mohie Alwahsh – FAS Coordinator (WFP)
2. Jameson Zvizvai – FAS Co-Coordinator (FAO)

1. Introduction of new FAS coordinator:

- The meeting started with an introduction of new FAS coordinator who welcomed all participants and gave a brief of his working experience and new role. This was then followed by a quick round of self-introductions by all participants.

2. Key updates on the 2021 HPC Timeline [\[Download\]](#):

- The update on the 2021 HPC timeline was made by the FAS Coordinator who highlighted that by the 15th October 2021 OCHA will be expecting the CLA-approved HNO 2022 (narrative) sector chapter inputs. By the 31st October, the 2021 HNO 2022 (narrative) draft will then be circulated by OCHA for feedback from sector coordinators.
- By mid-November 2021, the HNO 2022 (narrative) will then be circulated for strategic level feedback, followed by initiation of GoS consultations.
- There are discussions with WFP VAM assessment teams and OCHA to see how FSA 2021 data may be incorporated into the HNO 2022.
- Mohie highlighted that the HRP 2021 is still under review and further consultations are happening and the sector will keep the partners informed.
- Jules from WFP VAM team gave an update about planning on FSA 2021 and mentioned that they had meetings with the Planning and International Cooperation Commission (PICC) PICC and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) to accelerate the approval process and planning for a timely FSA 2021. PICC gave a green light that the FSA 2021 can go ahead and VAM team is currently working with CBS to finalize internal arrangements, budgeting, sampling and review of the questionnaire. Within the next two weeks WFP VAM team expects everything to fall into place so that by August 2021 training and data collection can kick-off. This time the data collection and training will happen simultaneously, and training will start in one governorate then immediately followed by data collection in that specific governorate and the team will then proceed to the other governorates.
- Jalal from FAO asked about the Technical Committee for the HNO key indicators, particularly on when it will take place. Mohie indicated that the sector coordinators will share the timeline with FAS partners and and Technical Committee once they have better clarity on this matter.

3. Update on the SHF Allocation and Status:

- The FAS co-coordinator (Jameson) updated the participants about the 1st SHF Standard Allocation that was launched on the 13th of June 2021, with a submission deadline set for the 27th June 2021.
- He mentioned that the total fund allocated was 37,000,000 USD with 8,000,000 USD allocated to FAS. But there was also another multi-sector envelop of around 2,000,000 USD which was looking at supporting the wheat value chain in Dar'a.

- Basically, 16 proposals were reviewed by the Technical Review Committee (TRC) which set between 30 June and 7 July 2021.
- The review process was successfully completed and OCHA will be communicating with partners in the coming days.
- Lama from OCHA highlighted that partners are expected to receive the final decision in the coming week and if partners face any problem with project approval, they are advised to approach the sector coordinators and OCHA.
- Salam from NRC asked if there is possibility to consider the Eid holiday in the SHF timeline because most of INGOs are off for the whole week and Lama confirmed that holidays have been taken into consideration.

4. Planning for convening the Agriculture Working Group (AWG) Syria-Hub:

- The FAS co-coordinator highlighted that the sector started work on convening the AWG for Syria HCT hub a few months ago and the AWG will be initiated under FAS.
- AWG's focus is to facilitate harmonization and "scaling up" of on-going agriculture-related responses and enhancing resilience and the primary food production as well as the "technical soundness" and "effectiveness" of agriculture interventions.
- Jameson highlighted that the AWG will provide a platform for coordination, discussions on technical aspects on agriculture related interventions, interaction and technical guidance on agriculture programming. In addition, the AWG will also facilitate cross-learning and exchange of technical information and knowledge among partners. The AWG seeks to primarily enhance the effectiveness and impact of our agriculture components of the HRP.
- Jameson indicated that to date 10 organizations / members have expressed their willingness to participate in the AWG. The inaugural meeting will be held tentatively on the 29th of July 2021. Those willing to join the AWG, please send an email to Moteb and Ruba sector IMOs.

5. New subsidized price for Diesel and bread bundle and its implications on Food Security:

- The FAS coordinator (Mohie) highlighted that effective 11th July 2021, Government of Syria (GoS) announced a price increase of diesel from SYP 187 / liter to 500 / liter (an increase of 167%).
- The GoS also announced an increase of bread price, with a bundle now costing SYP 200 from SYP 100 / bundle (an increase of 100%). Mohie indicated that these increases was basically double the initial price and would really result in limited to access bread for most vulnerable families.
- WFP, FAO and the sector is closely monitoring the situation as the price increases will have knock-on effects on food security and agriculture activities during summer and winter (Diesel).
- Mohie and Jules mentioned that WFP is doing regular price monitoring and we have to wait for the assessment outcomes to see how this affects food security in terms of expenditure and if some HHs are

willing to reduce some other cost for the increased fuel and bread. An update will be shared with FAS next month.

- Samer from SSSD highlighted that the price increases would also have a significant impact on project cost and staff salaries, and this could result in budget increases. Jameson highlighted that the sector does encourage partners to include this aspect in the risk analysis and risk mitigation measures in their various proposals and ongoing interventions. The issue of market price volatility is of particular concern and sector partners should closely monitor this aspect and put in place mitigation measures.
- Soura from RESCATE, highlighted that the price increases will have negative impacts on the whole supply chain, production and entire cost of project implementation. The increase of prices and salaries will cause distortions in the market prices and we hope VAM will consider this the market price fluctuations in their regular monitoring and assessments. In addition, we should think of cash because some criteria may change because the increase of salaries of government employees (50% increase). This point of cash will be discussed more in details with CWG and the sector partners will be updated about the outcomes of this meeting.
- Oula from FAO mentioned that FAO does regular monitoring of various agriculture inputs and commodities, covering 35 sub-districts and releases a monthly market bulletin which is circulated among FAS partners.

6. Agriculture Seasonal Update - 2020/21 by Jalal (Food Security Officer – FAO) [[Download](#)]

- Jalal (FAO) provided some seasonal outlook for the 2020/2021 agricultural season. His update covered agro-climatic conditions and key observations, areas of cultivated crops, agricultural production, agriculture input availability and he also elaborated some of the key adverse effects on agricultural production during the just ended 2020/2021 season.
- In terms of Precipitation, the 2020/2021 season witnessed a delay in rainfall onset for two months. However, heavy rainfall was recorded in the first dekad¹ of November 2020 in most governorates and exceeded the rates in Ar-Raqqa and the coastal and southern governorates and this was better than last year but not as good as needed. Moreover, In December 2020, precipitation was good in the coastal governorates, acceptable in the southern governorates and northern regions of Hasakeh, Aleppo and Idleb while it was less than long-term average in Ar-Raqqa, Eastern Aleppo, Hama, Deir-er-Zor and Badia.

¹ Dekad – This represents 10 consecutive days in a month and one month is comprised of 3 dekads i.e. first, second and third dekad.

- Overall, the rainfall average in December 2020 was less than last season and this had a negative effect on the vegetation of winter crops especially for wheat and barley, and this affected tillering and crop establishment and hence subsequent productivity of the mentioned crops.
- In January 2021, precipitation was weak in Ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, south of Hasakeh and Badia, while it was acceptable to good in the rest of the governorates. Overall, the rainfall average was lower than the long-term average (LTA) in Ar-Raqqa, Deir-er-Zor and Badia.
- In February 2021, precipitation was acceptable in the southern and coastal governorates and weak in the rest of the governorates, especially in the northern governorates. Overall, the rainfall average in February 2021 was less than last season.
- In March 2021, the rains were good in the coast, particularly in Quneitra, Ar-Raqqa, west of Rural Damascus and Idlib, while it was weak in the rest of the governorates and that affected the growth of crops especially wheat and barley. Overall, the rainfall average was lower than the long-term average.
- In April good rains fell in the coastal governorates and Quneitra, while it was weak in the rest of the governorates, especially in Deir-ez-Zor and the Badia, which did not witness any precipitation noting that the rainfall stopped after the 1st dekad of April.
- In May, there was no precipitation at all in any of the governorates. This means the rainfall stopped earlier by at least 50 days compared to the normal cessation which adversely affected wheat and other crops and livestock.
- In terms of temperature, Despite the drop of minimum temperatures and the occurrence of night frost in some areas and for limited days, with exception of November 2021 (was around the average), the maximum temperatures were high and higher than LTA for the rest of the months and in all governorates, especially in the northeastern governorates. This resulted in severe moisture stress on the crops and increased evapotranspirational losses.
- In terms of NDVI: In February, March and April 2021, Jalal highlighted that the vegetative growth of crops was greatest. In April 2021 the values of vegetative growth and biomass were less than LTA, especially in Hama, the northeastern and southern governorates. The values were lower than LTA by 50% in most regions of Hasakeh, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor and by 30 – 40% in Aleppo and southern governorates. The pasture was very low this year and less than LTA, which affected livestock and increased the demand on fodder and this resulted in a significant increase in the fodder price.
- In terms of the area of cultivated for barley and wheat, Jalal highlighted that the planted area of wheat for the current season is more than the area of the previous season, by up to 11%. As for barley, it is less than last season by about 7%. The area planted to other crops for the current season are very close to the previous season. Most of these crops were adversely affected by critical climatic conditions which resulted in low production.
- In terms of availability of agriculture inputs, Jalal highlighted that there was a general lack of fertilizers, coupled with an acute shortage of fuel, especially diesel, in most governorates. This slowed down most agricultural activities

and operations and the whole supply chain of agriculture inputs. Diesel fuel is very important for pumping water to provide supplementary irrigation for crops and for mechanization. There is also a shortage of veterinary services and feed especially for poultry.

- In terms of prices, Prices of agricultural production inputs continued to rise during 2020-2021 season, through the periodic monitoring of the agricultural inputs prices carried out by FAO. For example, there is an increase in feed prices in the local markets (October 2020 to April 2021) by an average of 166%, especially for hay and barley fodder.
- In terms of adverse factors, Jalal highlighted that there was:
 - i. Disturbance of temporal and spatial distribution and decreased rainfall in most governorates,
 - ii. Rainfall interruption, especially delayed onset and early cessation of rainfall accompanied by high temperatures.
 - iii. Reduction in the level of water from wells and lakes, as well as a decrease in the flow of the Euphrates River.
 - iv. Desert locust spread in some governorates during April and May, and Other pests (field mouse, weed infestation),
 - v. Scarcity of energy resources (electricity, diesel, gasoline and gas) and its negative impact on agriculture,
 - vi. Low availability of agricultural production inputs, low quality and high prices, led farmers to use less than the recommended standards.
- All of the above factors, in addition to very limited funding of the majority of farmers, it is expected to lead to a decrease in productivity of crops (*and possibly livestock*) for the majority of farmers.
- The co-coordinator also indicated that based on the critical insights made by FAO, combined with the increase of prices for bread and diesel mentioned by Mohie and the evidence of an erratic 2020/2021 seasonal performance due to the low rainfall and other underlying factors, it was indeed that these are early warning signs of potential worsening food security. Jameson highlighted that there was need for the sector to scale up more support towards food and agriculture assistance, advocacy on the need for more funding to roll out the much needed interventions. The sector should continue striving to sustainably unlock some of the challenges that might drive most of the crisis-affected families into food insecurity.

7. Updates on the Euphrates Water Scarcity and Crisis:

- Jameson highlighted that the Euphrates River originates from eastern Turkey, and flows into Syria and Iraq and contributes significantly to the irrigation, hydropower and drinking water supply, with 70% of that water going towards irrigation and crop and livestock production.
- Due to the low rainfall received in 2021, there was currently reduced water flow from 500 cubic m/sec to just above 200 cubic m/s and and this water shortage along the river basin is and will definitely impact agricultural

production and threaten food security, particularly small scale farmers who rely on the water from the river. Jameson further highlighted that this challenge will not only affect FAS but will overlap and result in increased needs across various sectors including WASH, Health and others.

- FAO, WFP and sector partners, including other sectors such as WASH, ERL etc, are monitoring the impact of the reduced water flow, and there was a meeting held in July 2021 with other sector coordinators to brainstorm on the Emergency Response Planning and Needs to quantify the level of support and prioritize eligible actions that can address the water scarcity issue.
- The meeting also looked into what capacity Syria HCT has in place collectively to respond to the needs and impact emanating from this crisis. An email has been sent to FAS partners recently to check if there is any plan to respond to this water scarcity crisis. On other hand, the NES forum NGO is also conducting an assessment and analysis and discussions are ongoing regarding measuring the impact and also possibility to see what efforts can be done from their side. As FAS we are following up on this in terms of how the planning can be better coordinated.
- At this stage OCHA, Syria HCT and the NES GNO forum, including WoS and regional OCHA will be having follow-up discussions to find agree on a how the coordination can be handled for the Euphrates river.
- The reduced water flow is compromise extraction of water from the Euphrates, particularly the strainers which are no longer able to efficiently draw water from the river due to reduced water flow. The reduced water flow has negatively impacted the functionality of the various pumping sets. FAO water experts and engineers are conducting a rapid assessment to assess how many small scale farmers' livelihoods could be potentially impacted and how many pumping sets would need rehabilitation and this report will probably be out by the end of July or early August 2021.
- FAO is also conducting an assessment on the 2020/2021 crop production and concrete technical recommendations and strategies to address challenges impacting agriculture (food production) will be well elaborated in the report which is going to be released in August 2021.

8. Planned IM and Data Collection Tools Training:

- The sector IMOs are planning for an intensive data collection tools training on the 28th of Jul 2021. An email with planned agenda will be sent to FAS partners including the registration form in order for partners to nominate candidates for the training a week before the training.
- Nominees need to register using the link which will be sent via email together with planned agenda.
- Jameson wanted to check if all partners were reporting on the 4Ws and on time. Moteb indicated that all FAS partners were participating in 5Ws on a monthly basis before the deadline 23rd of each month.
- **AOB:**

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:10 am and the date for the next meeting will be communicated in due course.