MEETING MINUTES

Location: Four Seasons Hotel, OCHA Meeting Room 624, Damascus, Syria
Date: 16/07/2020

Agenda
1. Introduction of FAO Agriculture-based Livelihoods Coordinator & TOR
2. Key Sector Updates
3. Update on SHF Standard Allocation
4. Agriculture Seasonal Performance
5. Round Table by Partners-Key Priorities and Challenges
6. AOB

Participants
Aga Khan Foundation, TDH Italy, ADRA, ONG Rescate, ICRC, COOPI, AlTamyez NGO, Oxfam, FAO, WFP, ACF, OCHA, Dorcas.

Chair: Kenneth Anyanzo and Jameson Zvizvai (Sector Coordinators)

1. **Introduction of FAO Agriculture Based Livelihoods Coordinator**

   **Overview**
   - The Food Security Sector Coordinator, Kenneth introduced the new Agriculture Based Livelihoods Coordinator Jameson Zvizvai based in FAO and gave him the opportunity to provide brief highlights regarding his ToR.
   - The Agriculture Based Livelihoods Coordinator indicated that his main focus will be to strengthen the coordination capacity and delivery of Agriculture-based Livelihoods Programmes within Syria including technical and operational support to partners.
   - The Agriculture Based Livelihoods Coordinator is currently working from home but will travel to Damascus in the coming days.
   - The Food Security Sector Coordinator, Kenneth requested members to direct all queries related to Agriculture-based livelihoods to Jameson and all other matters to himself but ensure to copy both colleagues in all correspondences. This will ensure that partner queries are given attention at all times irrespective of the absence of one of the coordinators.

   **Reactions/Feedback/Action points from members**
   - No reactions apart from warm welcome messages from sector partners.
2. **Key Sector Updates** ([Download](#))

**Overview**

- During the reporting period, the FAS reached 3,891,701 with food baskets and other forms of supplementary food assistance through both in-kind and cash/vouchers. Another 236,736 beneficiaries were supported with various forms of agriculture and livelihoods assistance including the provision of agriculture (i.e. crop and livestock) inputs, rehabilitation of infrastructure, small-scale food production, vocational training and provision of services.
- SHF standard allocation has been launched with the sector allocated an envelope of $9 million out of a total allocation portfolio of $40 million.
- FAS has compiled feedback to questions/areas of clarification posed by the government regarding the sector HRP chapter and sent to sector lead agencies and OCHA for further action.
- Discussions regarding the HPC in particular the planning for assessments to inform the HNO have started. FAS is in consultation with government regarding approval to conduct Food Security Assessments (FSA). The design of data collection tools completed while consultations still ongoing on the methodology. More details will be communicated in due course.
- Key challenges during the reporting period included delays in the submission of 4W data, data quality issues, accessibility especially in the south and the current economic crisis which is increasing vulnerability to food insecurity as well as constraining the capacity of partners to smoothly deliver humanitarian assistance.

**Reactions/Feedback/Action points from members**

- One partner raised concerns regarding clarification on the selection of locations to be prioritized under the SHF. The sector coordinator deferred the discussion to the next agenda topic which fully covers the SHF.

3. **Update on SHF Standard Allocation** ([Download](#))

**Overview**

- The overall objective of the SHF is to contribute to the three HRP objectives which relate to providing life-saving assistance, prevention and mitigation of protection risks and improve resilience through enhanced livelihood opportunities.
- In terms of the overall allocation strategy, SHF duration is for a maximum period of one year covering locations highlighted in both OCHA and FAS specific prioritization locations. Key activities will cover life-saving assistance as well livelihoods initiatives.
- Sector members can apply under the main sector envelop of $9 million and also under the multi-sector envelop of $4 million for example for those who are interested in supporting multi-purpose cash transfers.
- Partners were advised to take note of the key tips provided during the meeting, read the allocation strategy and all other guidance provided.
For those who eventually receive the award, the sector coordinator highlighted the need to adhere to the workplan, continue coordination with the sector and partners and continuous reporting on activities implemented and funding levels.

**Reactions/Feedback/Action points from members**

- How should partners prioritize locations during SHF proposal development. Locations under OCHA list as well as sector specific locations will be considered. However, priority will be given to locations identified by the sector as these have the highest gaps in assistance.

- What direction should appealing agencies take in submitting their proposals when it comes to certain types of projects which may be expensive to implement for example high cost of livestock. According to the Sector Coordinator, partners need to take into consideration cost efficiency and feasibility of projects proposed within current operational environment.

- For partners planning to distribute seeds, the national guidelines indicate that purchase of wheat seed should only be done through GoSM and yet some donors have indicated that they will only support independent seed procurement. Partners requested for support in addressing this constraint. FAO Agriculture Livelihoods Coordinator indicated that further consultants would be undertaken with FAO technical team and appropriate feedback will be sent to partners.

- FAO Agriculture Livelihoods Coordinator also indicated that partners should refer to the guidelines already shared and any additional clarification needed can be sought after. The Food Security Sector Coordinator indicated that all partners intending to apply for Agriculture-based projects need to consult technically with the Agriculture-based Livelihoods Coordinator and FAO.

- Clarity was sought by members regarding the requirement to provide 8 months of continuous assistance and if this will be a prerequisite under the current SHF allocation. The Sector Coordinator indicated that while this is an operational requirement, different funding streams can be used to cover the 8 rounds. The SHF allocation is hence seen as one of the funding streams in addition to others hence can cover less than 8 rounds.

- Clarity was sought regarding the need to focus on livelihoods activities and if this will be the focus of the allocation. The Sector Coordinator clarified that the allocation will focus on all activities as indicated in the strategy paper i.e. immediate life-saving and livelihoods responses. In the previous year, there was limited focus on livelihood activities hence the intention is to ensure that more partners express interest in this area under the current call.

- OCHA focal person advised partners to focus on avoiding duplication and take into consideration COVID-19 when preparing their proposals. Partners were also advised to take opportunity of the allocation to support resilience building programmes.

- Given the very high levels of vulnerability in the country at the moment, every single intervention irrespective of the duration will go a long way in supporting beneficiaries hence this should be taken into consideration when administering the standard allocation.
Overview

A presentation was made on the agriculture seasonal performance by FAO with the following key highlights;

- Total area cultivated under wheat is close to previous season while that under barley is slightly above that of last season. Barley harvesting was reported to be completed while that of wheat was still underway with almost 80% completed as per the available information.
- MAAR estimates that the harvest for the current season will be close to that of the previous season.
- Incidences of frost were recorded between March and April particularly in Rural Damascus, As-Suwayda, Quneitra and Homs and high temperatures especially Hama, Raqqa and Aleppo. This had a negative impact on crops especially wheat (impact grain filling and grain weight) and fruit trees.
- About 4,500 hectares of wheat and barley were flooded in Raqqa, Hasakeh, Hama, Homs and Tartous.
- Livestock death (i.e. dozens of SHEEP) were also reported in Al Badia due to torrential rains,
- The fires occurred on a large scale during the current season, but less than last season. About 55% of the area burned was wheat, 41% barley and 4% other crop and fruit trees. It is known that the causes of fires are varied, but the heavy growth of herbs and crops (i.e. vegetation) due to the good rainy season aided to increase fire incidences.
- The Livestock sector faces many challenges, the most significant challenges being; high feed prices, especially poultry feed; weak supply and high cost of veterinary services for Ecto (external) and Endo (internal) Parasites; difficulty in accessing all natural pastures as before and increase in fodder prices; spread of some diseases, especially Lumpy skin affecting cattle.
- Covid-19 has had both direct and indirect impacts on agriculture production. The Livestock sector (especially poultry) has been greatly impacted, especially agriculture-related input and output markets.
- Agricultural labor and most agricultural-based livelihoods have also been impacted mainly due to; restricted and slow access to fields to implement farm operations; high cost of transporting agricultural produce and farming inputs; closure of the livestock markets and slaughterhouses; difficulty of flocks reaching natural pastures and the high feed prices.
- The devaluation of the Syrian currency has further exacerbated the challenges faced in the agriculture sector in terms of input supply and prices, reduced quality of inputs, closure of businesses and drop in purchasing power affecting demand for products.
- The presentation concluded by indicating that while agriculture is a key source of employment and one of the critical sectors of the Syrian economy, it has been seriously impacted by the protracted crisis, devaluation of the Syrian currency and limited funding. The sector needs more financial support to enhance the role of the agricultural in ensuring national and household food security.

Reactions/Feedback/Action points from members

No major reactions and feedback from the partners.
5. Round Table by partners-Key Priorities and Challenges
   - In the interest of time, the Sector Coordinator made a proposal to reach out to partners at a later time regarding priorities and challenges.

6. AOB
   N/A