

**Meeting Minutes:** Food and Agriculture Sector (FAS) Monthly Meeting (Aug 2022)

**Location:** Hybrid (Face to face at 4SH Damascus and Online MS. TEAMS Meeting, Damascus, Syria)

**Date:** 24/08/2022

**Time:** 02:00 PM – 03:15 PM.

## Agenda

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### Organizations of Participants:

i. AAH (ACF) – INGO	x. OCHA - UN Agency
ii. ADRA - INGO	xi. Oxfam – INGO
iii. AVSI - INGO	xii. PUI - INGO
iv. COOPI – INGO	xiii. SARC - NGO
v. ECHO - Donor	xiv. TDH - INGO
vi. EPDC - NGO	xv. UNHCR - UN Agency
vii. FAO - UN Agency	xvi. UNRWA - UN Agency
viii. FCA - INGO	xvii. WFP - UN Agency
ix. IFRC – INGO	xviii. ZOA - INGO

### Name of coordinators chairing meeting:

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

3. Ruba Khanji – FAS Gender Focal Point - Presenter.
4. Moteb Marei - FAS IMO – Presenter.
5. Dima Najjar – FAS Comms & Reporting Officer.

## 1. Opening remarks and key sector updates:

- The FAS coordinator started the meeting with an introduction to all participants in person and online.
- **HPC 2022:** Following the latest HPC timeline updated, final HNO 2022 FSA chapter should be submitted by November 2022 including the updated PiN for FSS in Syria. MSNA assessment findings should be shared by September 2022, and workshop to be arranged by OCHA for sharing the initial findings (tbc).
- **SHF allocation:** FAS TRC is conducting the review for proposals submitted under SHF FAS 2022, for both priority 1 and priority 2, either as standalone or multisector. Important to note that 21 proposals were submitted under FSA SHF 2022.
- New TRC has been formulated after consultation with partners.
- **Assessment & Monitoring:** FSA training has started in HCT locations, planned assessment during September and October 2022.
- **Water Crisis response plan:** The sector will also be updating the water scarcity response plan at WoS, and include funding required/gap for water response plan within 6 months timeline (July to December 2022), FSS to submit the final plan by August 24th.
- **WoS FSS Agriculture and WASH workshop:** The FSS and WASH cluster is planning to conduct a joint workshop for 2 days in Amman, to share experiences on climate change and to discuss the water scarcity and relevant water conservation best practices. Different presentations from multiple agencies and INGO's will take place, Partners will also join to join from NWS/NES and HCT hubs to contribute to the discussion, also to enhance inter-sector objectives and best practices in Syria.
- **Sitrep2: Repercussions of the Ukraine crisis on food security in Syria:** The conflict in Ukraine has plunged global food and energy markets into turmoil, raising high food prices even further. These increases have an impact on markets in Syria, which limit people's access to food. As well as, simultaneously increase operational costs for FSS partners in Syria, constraining its response at a time when people need it most. WoS Food Security Sector is monitoring the impact and repercussions of the Ukraine crisis on food security in Syria, working with FSS partners including any recent updated assessments / findings collected by partners.

## 2. Update on the SHF 2022 1<sup>st</sup> Standard Allocation [\[Download\]](#):

- FAS TRC is conducting the review for proposals submitted under SHF FAS 2022, for both stand alone and MS. Important to note 21 proposals were submitted under FSA SHF 2022.
- New TRC has been formulated after consultation with partners.

- 21 projects were submitted under FSA standalone and FSA MS.
- 3 days FAS TRC process for all projects and technical inputs were shared with SHF.
- SHF met with all sectors to agree on one methodology for MS projects submitted scoring and clearance.
- SHF to inform sectors on feedback and which projects need further multi-sectors review.
- SHF to inform partners after a consultation process are completed.

### 3. Food Security and Agriculture Situation in Syria:

- **Drivers of food insecurity - reduced purchasing power:** The impact on the economic situation is rising, WFP's standard reference food basket has increased by 36 percent much of the increase coming soon after the start of the crisis. For instance, the basket increased by 24 percent between February 2022 and March 2022. Specifically, notable increases since February 2022 (start of the Ukrainian crisis) were observed for vegetable oil (up 55 percent), wheat flour (up 38 percent), sugar (up 32 percent) and rice (up 23 percent).
- **Water scarcity and worsening economic situation impact of concern** specifically on the 1.9 million people (10 percent of the Syrian population) found to be on the edge or at risk' of falling into food insecurity according to the last conducted FSA-FSLA.
- Syria continues to suffer from multiple and complex socioeconomic difficulties, the protracted crisis, now in its 11th year, is exacerbating food security and livelihood needs for many families across the country, further eroding the resilience and recovery prospects, the following indicate additional food security and nutrition concerns:
  - ❖ Assessed families with no option but to consume less nutrient-rich and cheaper foods to meet their basic food needs, which can have serious impacts on the nutritional health, growth and development of younger children.
  - ❖ Hidden hunger to increase , from previous FSLA, as one in eight children are reported to be stunted in Syria,
  - ❖ Pregnant and lactating women (PLW) also showing higher rates of food insecurity as they struggle to meet the micro-nutritional needs.
  - ❖ Adult women and men are specifically strained and impacted by food insecurity as they frequently engage in adverse coping mechanisms to ensure that their children have enough food to eat. Elderly and children are more likely to suffer the impacts of food insecurity as a population group.
- **Key Drivers of Food Insecurity:**
  - Economic crisis / Weakened Domestic Currency, Economic Sanctions, Market Price Volatility, Change / Water scarcity, Conflict/protracted displacement
  - The above drivers lead to: Reduced purchasing power, Poverty and limited employment options, significant losses in agriculture production (particularly under rainfed systems), High cost of fuel

- continues to affect the capacity of vulnerable farmers to provide supplementary irrigation, for both winter and summer crops.
- The above consequences are leading to constrained access to agriculture-based livelihoods, increased reliance to adverse coping strategies (rCSI, LCSl etc) and an overall drop in local or domestic food production.
- **Unprecedented 2<sup>nd</sup> Consecutive Agricultural Season:**
    - The two previous agriculture seasons performed poorly, resulting in increased losses in agriculture production,
    - **Climate change** continues to affect Syria and the intensity and severity of extreme weather events continues to rise. Syria is experiencing unusual or erratic rainfall patterns that continue to affect crop and livestock production.
    - **Water scarcity and limited access to irrigation water:** Water is a critical input for crop and livestock production. The prevailing water scarcity and limited access and capacity to provide irrigation water, is hampering agricultural output. The water scarcity is most likely linked to climate change, as mentioned above.
    - **Energy supply:** most farmers do not have access to adequate energy following the onset of the Syrian crisis. Most farmers and families have to rely on diesel generators which are quite expensive and not accessible to most farmers, including the fuel running costs..
    - The slowdown in the supply chain for agricultural production inputs, following the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, could also be affecting Syria, particularly for nitrogen, potassium and phosphate fertilizers.
  - **The Weather Anomalies - RAINFALL:**
    - In the 2021/2022 agricultural season, there was a general late onset of the season. The low rainfall amounts and uneven spatial and temporal distribution affected the time of planting, crop establishment, tillering, vegetative growth, particularly for wheat etc.
    - More so, there was an early cessation of rainfall, and this affected the critical growth stages of wheat and barley crops, especially grain filling and ripening..
  - **The Weather Anomalies - NDVI:**
    - Vegetative cover for past 2 consecutive seasons was generally lower than Long Time Average (LTA);
    - The pastures were severely degraded during the past 2 consecutive seasons due to poor rainfall and water scarcity.
    - Most livestock keepers / breeders had to rely more on fodder and crop residues, amid limited supply and high prices.

- There were reports in some governorates, of some breeders selling off part of their herd at low price to cover the feed needs for the remaining stock.
- **Wheat Production:**
  - Wheat production for 2022 could be similar to the previous season (+/- 1.1 million MTs)
  - Last season, estimates indicated 1/3 of LTA (estimated 1.05 million MTs).
  - National production of wheat for the 2021 - 2022 agricultural season has not been officially announced to date, by Government,
  - However, initial indications in general, indicate that the production was lower than LTA, especially due to failure of most rainfed planted areas.
- **Challenges and Concerns for 2022:**
  - ✓ **FOOD SECURITY LIKELY TO WORSEN:** Reliance on negative coping mechanisms, Food-based coping strategies (rCSI), Increased debts and dependence on remittances, Significant cereal gap in GoS (i.e. Wheat), which then leads to:
  - ✓ **A 'POTENTIAL' BLEAK 2022 / 2023 SEASON:** Limited access to wheat seed (limited saving from past seasons), lack of financial resources for planting in 2022 / 2023 season and the prevailing water scarcity, may affect prospects for the 2023 harvest and overall cereal output.
  - ✓ **LIVESTOCK-BASED LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS UNDER THREAT:** Day-old chick prices have risen significantly, poultry feed is mostly imported and expensive, viability of sheep and poultry production remains under threat and there is likely going to be an animal feed crisis in next 2 – 3 months.
- **Recommendations:**
  - ✓ **Food Assistance** targeting vulnerable and crisis-affected farmers and other food insecure families, - To meet basic and immediate food needs,
  - ✓ **Provision of critical agriculture production inputs** for rainfed and irrigated wheat production – Targeting vulnerable and affected farmers (i.e. affected by the 2 poor consecutive seasons) - Certified wheat seeds, and fertilizers,
  - ✓ **Conditional Cash Assistance** to vulnerable and affected farmers – Supporting land prep, harvesting and operational costs (irrigation, harvesting, labor and transportation).
  - ✓ **Increased focus on Fodder Production,**
  - ✓ **Context-specific Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) training** - Sustainable use of natural resources
  - ✓ **Rehabilitation of Irrigation Systems and Wells,** including possible initiatives for local rainwater harvesting – Targeting strategic agriculture locations.
  - ✓ **Promoting Alternative Energy Sources** – Solar Powered Irrigation Systems (SPIS) where fuel is expensive or unavailable.

- **Feedback & Comments from Partners:**
  - ✓ On the CSA, seed for the seasonal crops (i.e. Wheat and Barley) are mostly controlled by the government, through the General Organization for Seed Multiplication (GOSM). There was a suggestion from OXFAM that the sector could focus on providing adapted seed varieties, which can mature under changing climate (i.e. short duration crop varieties). Participants wanted to know how such climate smart varieties could be promoted. ? The sector team will check with FAO on how sector partners could contribute to this effort. An option is for sector partners to target other crops such as legumes, since wheat is officially controlled by GOSM.
  - ✓ The sector will circulate plus or minus 15 CSA approaches that partners may consider, but the approaches are location and context-specific. FAO has been working on scaling up spineless cactus for livestock feed. Spineless cactus is rich in fiber and is more tolerant to water stress. Also, there are other approaches: like adopted varieties of crops such as legumes, wheat barley, and climate smart irrigation techniques and systems. For irrigation systems, these need to be informed by initial natural resource assessments.
  - ✓ Sector partners also asked for recommendations on non-rainfed irrigated areas that could be targeted under joint response among a group of partners. The sector mentioned that they would consult with the CLAs and with OCHA as well. Sector partners also asked to secure a fund for such projects. The sector coordinators mentioned that such resource mobilization and advocacy continues, through highlighting sector priorities and also including this aspect and others, in the allocation strategy papers for the annual SHFs.
  - ✓ Partners also asked if there are any meteorological stations that could be used for drought tracking and benefit farmers on early warnings. The AWG mentioned that MAAR is covering that aspect through its early warning unit.

#### 4. Update on HCT Communication efforts and planning:

- **Achieved and Current:**
  - ✓ Established a communication strategy that includes priorities for FAS. Mapping of target audiences and appropriate channels, and the way for the communication process.
  - ✓ Major events calendar: Preceding discussions with HCT team on major events calendar was created which communications planning be based upon.
  - ✓ Sharepoint media hub: an online folder on Sharepoint (media hub has been created in order to ensure all materials relevant to communications are available in one space and easily accessible.
- **Planned:**

- ✓ Communications Workshop: HCT has indicated the need to have a communications workshop with partners, which will outline the joint communications process and way forward (tentatively in October 2022).
- ✓ Communications activities and materials based on HCT calendar.

**5. Round table, key updates/requests from sector partners:**

- ADRA team started electronic food vouchers in August in Homs. The team completed six rounds using paper vouchers, the last two rounds they used electronic vouchers, the seventh distribution is also finalized and the next one also will be using electronic vouchers. The project is funded by SHF.

**6. AOB:**

- ❖ Partners to share any agenda points that should be included in the next meetings, likely to be held in October 2022.
- ❖ Sector team will follow up with SHF to update partners on the 1<sup>st</sup> Standard Allocation for 2022.
- ❖ Reporting on the monthly 5Ws timeline will be updated in order to receive the data earlier from partners, the sector will send a note on that to partners.

The meeting ended at 03:15 PM and the date for the next meeting will be communicated in due course.