Food Security Sector Working Group
Minutes of Meeting

Location: World Food Programme Country Office, Beirut- Lebanon

Date: 20/08/2019


The Food Security Sector (FSS) Working Group held its regular monthly meeting with the participation of the organizations that subscribed in the food security sector ContactHub mailing list.

Discussion

The meeting was co-chaired by the MoA and Ms. De Gregorio, the FSS Coordinator, welcomed all participants to WFP premises, exceptionally for this meeting due to the unavailability of the MoA meeting room. Then, she presented the Agenda of the meeting, which included:

1. Presentation on the 2019 preliminary results of the Vulnerability Assessment of the Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) by VAM WFP Team
2. Introduction of the activities of the NGO FSSWG co-chair for the coming six months by ACTED
3. AOB

Before starting to present the VAStyR results, the FSS Coordinator informed the participants that from now on two NGOs, one international (ACTED) and one national (Safadi Foundation) will be co-chairing the monthly FSSWG meetings as follows: ACTED from August 2019 till January 2020 and Safadi Foundation from February 2020 till August 2020. In addition, they will be part of the FSS core group including MoA and the co-lead Agencies (FAO and WFP).

1. Presentation on the 2019 VASyR preliminary results by VAM-WFP Team

Ms. Catherine Said delivered a presentation on the main preliminary results from the VASyR carried out during April-May 2019, survey conducted during the same period every year to allow comparability of results.
The preliminary results presented were related to the following sections: demographics, economic vulnerability, food security, coping strategies, main sources of income, main sector of work, protection, child labor, shelter, eviction and mobility, education and health.

The main trends highlighted in the economic vulnerability section correspond to an increase observed in poverty level (+5 percent points compared to 2018) and an increase of Syrian Displaced Households living below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) of USD 2.9 per person per day with +4 percent as compared to 2018. The governorates showing results below the national average are Akkar, Baalbeck-Hermel and Bekaa.

Another relevant figure was that of debt showing an increase of Syrians Households contracting debts (+5 percent more than in 2018) as the mean debt per household increased by USD 100 (USD 1,115 compared to USD 1,015 in 2018) with Bekaa and Nabatiyeh having the highest number of debt per household. Borrowed money is used for buying food, paying rent and health care and medicine.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that an increase of 50 percent was observed on the debt repayment meaning borrowing money to repay debt. The main sources for borrowing money are friends or supermarkets.

As for the households’ expenditures, they include buying food (44 percent), paying for rent (15 percent) and for health (12 percent), noting that expenditures on food increased by 4 percent compared to 2018 with bread and pasta being the main food items purchased (24 percent) followed by fruits and vegetables (15 percent) and dairy products (10 percent).

The Food Security trends show an overall decrease of 2 percent since 2018 and food insecurity remains correlated with economic vulnerability. The share of the marginally food insecure households increased by 5 to 6 percent points. The highest food secure households were recorded in Beirut (21 percent) and in Mount Lebanon (12 percent).

Furthermore, an improvement in food consumption was observed as 75 percent of households have an acceptable food consumption score (67 percent in 2018) and the number of meals per day remains stable for children (3) and for adults (2.2). The highest food consumption improvement for households was recorded in Nabatiyeh (94 percent), followed by Bekaa, Baalbeck-Hermel and South governorates averaging 80 percent.

With regard to the livelihoods coping strategies, displaced Syrian households continue to apply negative coping strategies with 57 percent of them adopting crisis coping strategies (an increase of 6 percent point compared to 2018). The main increase occurred in households selling their productive assets which increased by 50 percent compared to 2018 and households reducing their non-essential expenses namely on health and education.

It is to be noted that households are spending more on food out of their total expenditures. In addition, there was an increase of 8 percent points of households reducing their meals portion size.

The VASyR preliminary results showed that the main sources of income are informal credits and debts, WFP assistance and construction whereas the main sectors of work were identified as construction,
agriculture and other services respectively. However, results showed that people working more in the agriculture sector were reported in Akkar and South governorates followed by Nabatiyeh.

The VASyR results highlighted as well that 1.5 percent of children between the age of 5 and 17 were engaged in labor with a peak recorded in Beirut with 3.2 percent. Child labor takes into consideration 26 hours spent in paid activities per week or 22 hours spent in households’ chores weekly. In addition, 23 percent of children were reported to work during school hours in 2019.

Other VASyR sections were also presented and included protection, shelter, eviction and mobility, education and health, the main results could be found in the attached presentation.

The main discussions following the presentation suggested the importance of including further details related to the child labor specifically in the agriculture sector and to tackle the child labor concerns taking into consideration as well the potential hazards to which children are exposed when working.

The VAM team explained the way sampling has been drawn adopting the same methodology as previous years and highlighting that it is a random sampling and the sample frame is taken from the population list provided by UNHCR database.

An additional suggestion was raised whether it would be possible to add a question on the source of the Syrian households’ assets.

The results presented were preliminary and as such cannot be disseminated at large. The VAM team announced that next steps for the VASyR would include sharing the information online allowing in-depth analysis for users, comparisons and trends and having thematic maps in addition to the possibility of having analysis by governorate.

Finally, a general recommendation from participants was to share the VASyR questionnaire for 2020 between all partners and sectors to get their comments and amend the questionnaire accordingly if deemed relevant taking into consideration that the VASyR is not an evaluation but an assessment. Consequently, reflections on the VASyR can be added to the Research Questions of the FSS.

2. Introduction of the activities of the NGO FSSWG co-chair for the coming six months by ACTED

The second presentation was delivered by Mr. Joseph Nakhle, on behalf of ACTED, the International NGO co-chairing the FSSWG for the next six months.

The presentation was articulated around ACTED three core program pillars: (i) Co-constructing effective coherence, (ii) promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, and (iv) responding to emergencies, and building resilience.

Mr. Nakhle presented the main activities related to climate smart sustainable agriculture with the aim of improving productivity, water retention and storage, enhancing and diversifying agriculture production and increasing access to diversified and nutritious food for highly insecure families in Akkar.

Furthermore, ACTED achievements related to the Cooperatives Support Project were also presented and they included the provision of financial support through sub-grants, the establishment of linkages with the private sector and the provision of technical capacity-building. It is to be mentioned that 7 women and women-lead cooperatives were targeted in Hasbaya, Tyr and Marjeyoun districts.
The supported cooperatives were mainly those working in beekeeping and olives sectors allowing them to develop and strengthen their capacity to be self-reliant and deliver more services in a sustainable manner.

In total, 53 cooperatives were supported with organizational and institutional trainings and 37 cooperatives provided with sub-grants with USD 4,500 for each with an opportunity to receive two sub-grants. Mr. Nakhle stated that advocating and raising awareness activities were on going.

The last ACTED field of work presented was that related to Cash for work and Food for assets.

227 individuals benefitted from cash for work activities in Akkar including river cleaning, reforestation, community outreach for water conservation and improved solid waste management in addition to landscape regeneration for 11 ha of land.

3. Any Other Business (AOB)

The FSS Coordinator informed the participants on the following:

- The establishment of the technical working group on value chains in agriculture which will hold bi-monthly meetings starting on 24 September 2019;
- Revisions for the FSS interventions regarding the Environment Markers activities are being done in consultation with the Ministry of Environment Task Force;
- The LCRP Mid-Term Review second draft is expected to be available by end of August 2019 and the final draft by September 2019. It will be presented through a multi-stakeholders workshop;
- The revised FSS log frame is expected to be validated by mid-September and will be circulated until then among the WG for further review and comments;
- The Research Questions for the Food Security Sector were shared with the Inter-Agency coordination Team with some revisions made and they will be circulated among the FSSWG. It was suggested to include the current evaluation of the WFP livelihoods programme. In this context, it was highlighted that high priority research questions have critical programmatic implications in the context of the upcoming LCRP planning process for 2020 and that evidence and knowledge gaps can prevent any humanitarian or development intervention from achieving its intended results.
- The FSSWG meetings at regional level will start with Beirut and Mount Lebanon WG planned on 29 August 2019. Venues will be at WFP offices at governorate levels and the objective is to be closer to the field for issues related to emergencies and contingency planning and implementation. It is to be mentioned that at each field level, an NGO co-chair will be elected.

Action points

- Partners to update their lists in the Contact hub (through the UNHCR portal) in order to identify the active ones;
- Partners to upload relevant documents on studies or assessments on the UNHCR portal
- Research efforts need to be coordinated and prioritized, to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary research;
- Explore the possibility of setting up a sector research committee
• Identify which existing surveys could be used to collect additional data that would help answer questions;
• The updated FSS Environment Marker Activities document to be re-circulated again;
• The planning process for 2020 LCRP will begin shortly and the FSSWG will be kept informed.

Next WG meeting will be on 11 September 2019, because of Ashoura falling on 10 September.