

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY – 19TH AUGUST



LOREN, 33, DEPUTY COORDINATOR, WHOLE OF SYRIA REGIONAL HUB

A committed humanitarian community member, gifted by her journey as a young woman and refugee, from volunteering in camps to humanitarian response coordination.

A smile, sparkles in the eyes, her feet caressed by the gentle waves, she stands and faces the horizon. We are in Beirut. Down the Corniche, straight on the rocky beach, where fishermen try their luck for the night, children play in the background. As there is no electricity in the entire town, families gather on the seaside, hoping to grasp some fresher air until sunset and long into the night. And here we join the crowd, after an intense three-day retreat with the Whole of Syria Food Security and Livelihood Sector teams. This is the image of Loren which remains with me – this brief lapse of time when the Deputy Coordinator took a deep breath, and I could see as the concentration faded, a young woman, passionate, vibrant who could hardly resist jumping into the sea. “You see, where I am from, we had this river. Pristine water. Fresh. So fresh. This is where I learnt how to swim and whenever I see water – anything, a lake, a river, the sea – I simply cannot resist the urge of jumping in. I may not be the strongest swimmer, but I can, and I love to swim!” She smiles. I can tell there is so much more in this comment, I can sense the longing sweet and sour memories. So, I ask. Where is it that you come from?

Loren has experienced the life of the affected populations she is now serving. And so, as she interviews young women and families, she can easily relate to the challenges and dire conditions entire populations are currently languishing in, struggling just to be alive. When time came in 2016 for her to leave her town and family, she found herself living in a refugee camp. She soon understood the rules of the camp, the risks, the challenges – and her life took an interesting turn when she met the humanitarian community for the first time. Frontline workers actively supporting refugees with food assistance, as well as livelihood support. Humanitarian staff who noticed the sparkle in her eyes and her willingness to learn and to make a difference. People she felt had the same passion her own father had for helping others. As he worked in the health environment, he had always pushed for her to be educated and prompted to use her knowledge to provide assistance. Therefore, it came natural to her, when given the chance by the humanitarian staff in the camp where she lived, to volunteer and make herself useful anytime she could. She helped with translations, distributions of food and commodities and eventually even was asked to coordinate partnerships in the camp. Six months later, she was able to go back home, and she decided to pursue her studies. As she studied for her engineering degree, specializing in agriculture and livelihoods, she continued to volunteer for INGOs emergency response in the area, as a team leader for the WASH sector. In 2019, when she found herself forced to leave the region again and seek asylum, this could have been a decisive blow to a promising humanitarian



career: she felt back to square one, on the move again, with dire prospects of subsistence. However, she moved forward and continued to work for the WASH working group. In 2021, she eventually was offered the Deputy Coordinator Position at the Whole of Syria Food Security and Livelihood Working Group. The position felt closer to her heart, not only because of her own experience but also in line with her studies.

As Syria enters its 11th year of conflict, Lauren is turning 33 only.

A young woman. A refugee. Many labels, many preconceived ideas. She managed to overcome all and build her own path in a very complex culture system and in a war-afflicted country. The past decade has brought the country to severe crisis levels in terms of conflicts, insecurity, as well as alarming levels of food insecurity. This combined with her personal family history could have discouraged Lauren; but it did not. Quite the contrary.

As the FSS deputy coordinator, she is always out in the field. Still, each field mission leaves a mark, even the easier ones. She mentions how she feels when simply standing in the fields: people are not able to produce any substantial food, due to the level of insecurity, but also to climate shocks. As of last year, Syria has been facing one of its worst water scarcities, as rainfalls were low and the Euphrates saw its water levels severely declining, leaving entire population with close to no access to both drinking and irrigation water. Each visit to farmers whose crops were missed, to families who are pushed closer and closer to poverty and beyond – each visit multiplies her commitment to advocate for funds and resources to address the level of needs she and her team are facing. Her engineer's mind is relentlessly looking for solutions and alternatives to provide the affected population with improved access to livelihoods inputs, in addition to food assistance. She and her team are already conceiving workshops and capacity building, based upon FSS colleagues' expertise and experiments in other regions of the country. Ideas and solutions which we hope will resonate with the allocation of adequate resources.

When asked about her most difficult memory, her smile leaves room to a bitter look. She remembers that day. That village. Families liberated from ISIS domination were being interviewed and registered as returnees. Entire destinies on hold in front of her eyes, entire families showing signs of the war, displacements, and despair. She remembers the widowed women, left alone to raise children in utterly dire conditions. She remembers how difficult it was to reach the village and those women who so desperately needed assistance. But the food security partners made it: they distributed emergency kits and she felt she finally was where she was meant to be. This

gave her the feeling of being invincible, just the way those families were. Faced with the worst challenges, their optimism for a better future remained.

As the FSLWG continues to support and guide partners to food and emergency assistance, as well as essential livelihood support, **Loren has at heart to also promote opportunities for youth, women and overall, for social cohesion.** She is convinced no one should ever suffer prejudices related to a particular status or label and she is willing to foster initiatives to reintegrate the most vulnerable into society. She chose to believe in harmony and peace, despite how life has not always shown her its best perspectives – a choice she stands by every day.

On this particular day of World Humanitarian Day, we have chosen to highlight the story of Loren – a story many colleagues in the field will relate to. A story we must not forget, as every person our teams in the field are assisting today is potentially the humanitarian community of tomorrow. And no matter what the future entails for them, they deserve empowerment and inspiration.

About the Food Security Cluster (FSC)

The FSC has been established in 2011 to coordinate the food security response during a humanitarian crisis, addressing issues of food availability, access, and utilization. Co-led by FAO and WFP, the FSC is committed to saving lives through the coordination of the food security response in major emergencies. Effective coordination is only possible through close cooperation with partner organizations. The FSC provides guidance at the country level that supports a broad base and timely response.

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About the Whole of Syria Food Security Sector (WoS FSS)

The Food Security Cluster/Sector Whole of Syria works through three hubs in South Turkey (Gaziantep), Syria (Damascus), and Jordan (Amman), while also linking with key actors operating from Iraq. While each hub delivers on core cluster/sector functions, WoS is responsible for conducting the overall analysis of Needs, Response, and Gaps; linking hubs on different operational and technical issues and providing an overall service to the Whole of Syria-related activities.

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