



## Briefing note

October 2021

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is leading international efforts in the fight against hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information. It helps developing countries and countries in transition to modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices to achieve good nutrition for all. FAO Lebanon Programme is aligned with FAO's global Strategic Objectives. Lebanon was among the first countries to benefit from a FAO Country Office to strengthen the Organization's programmes on the ground. Established in 1977, the Office seeks to promote harmonious and sustainable development of the agricultural sector along with the national agricultural policy, in consultation with relevant ministerial departments.

## Land reclamation

### Sector context



Lebanon is a small country with several agro-ecological zones and agriculture arable land estimated at 231 000 ha. The most fertile and productive lands are located in the Bekaa Valley, the Plain of Akkar and the thin strip of coastal plains. In other hilly and mountainous regions, most of the slopes have been carved into agriculture terraces for centuries. Mountain agriculture is characterized by small holdings sustaining poor farmers and a large number of households for whom agriculture is a secondary source of income.

Land reclamation and terracing are considered as cultural heritage, a key traditional know-how in soil and water conservation and a major infrastructure in controlling soil erosion and land degradation on mountain slopes. The diminishing development of such erosion control measures due to high costs and weak financial capacities of farmers has forced many small holders to abandon their land.

Agriculture plays a significant role in Lebanon's national economy. It is a source of income for about 20 percent of the population and employs 9 percent of the total workforce. It employs more than 169 000 farmers (MoA/FAO, 2012), whom 29 percent are located in the North, 22 percent in Mount Lebanon and 18 percent in the Bekaa.



## Challenges in Lebanon

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Since March 2011, the conflict in Syria has resulted in massive influxes of displaced Syrians in Lebanon, increasing the number of refugees to 30 percent of the country's population. This has had a detrimental impact on the socio-economic and environmental situation in Lebanon, which was already strained even prior to the crisis. A large percentage of displaced Syrians are located in agricultural areas. This constitutes a heavy burden on the Lebanese host communities. With the decline of humanitarian assistance due to shortages in donor funding, many displaced Syrians are forced to seek employment opportunities to sustain their basic needs and must compete with these vulnerable host communities.

Most farmers live below the poverty line of USD 4 per day, and about 20 percent of the heads of households engaged in agriculture are categorized as extremely poor (living with less than USD 2.40/day). This was the case prior to the recent economic and financial crises Lebanon is facing on top of the COVID-19 pandemic. This contributed to a worsening situation. Lebanon is considered to be a net food importer with local production satisfying only 20 percent of total consumption, making the country vulnerable to international food price fluctuations and to currency devaluation. This is evident during the current economic and financial crisis, during which the Lebanese Pound lost more than 90 percent.

The agriculture and construction sectors have traditionally been dominated by unskilled Syrian labourers. It is estimated that agriculture usually absorbs about 80 000 seasonal Syrian workers. Therefore, promoting private investments and growth of small-scale Lebanese farmers, by investing in labour-intensive on-farm infrastructure (land reclamation and water reservoirs) for instance, will address the needs of the farming host communities by providing access to funds, and will create both temporary and sustainable livelihood opportunities for the displaced Syrians and for unskilled Lebanese workers from the host communities.

## FAO interventions, response and impact

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FAO revived agricultural livelihoods through investment in small-scale farmers' agricultural infrastructure while creating temporary jobs for unskilled workers and sustainable yearly seasonal work opportunities for displaced Syrians and Lebanese host communities. They have, thus, contributed to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

This has been the case in two projects so far. The first was "Promotion of agricultural livelihoods and employment through investment in land reclamation and water reservoirs" funded by the Netherlands and implemented in close collaboration with the Green Plan/ Ministry of Agriculture. Building on the successes of this first intervention, another project funded by the European Union "Enhancing resilient livelihoods and food security of host communities and Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon through the promotion of sustainable agricultural development" continued the investment support of on-farm infrastructure.

FAO was able to:

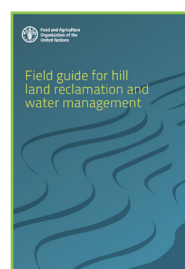
- build the capacity of the Green Plan, the mandated institution in Lebanon to support investments in land reclamation and land development;
- publish the "Field Guide on hill land reclamation and water management", which is a reference guide for all the players in the field;

- support 1 273 vulnerable Lebanese farmers, of whom 21 percent are women, reclaiming 454 ha of abandoned and bare lands, increasing the water storage capacity by 165 793 m<sup>3</sup>, and planting 49 857 fruit trees;
- create 92 929 work-days for unskilled labour through the supported investments, benefiting more than 11 457 unskilled labourers, 64 percent of whom are displaced Syrians;
- generate sustainable seasonal work employment for more than 92 000 days per year for about 2 500 workers, of whom 16 percent are women and 53 percent displaced Syrians; this is projected to increase in the future to more than 195 000 days of work per year of seasonal labour once all the established orchards enter into full production;
- open a new call for applications through the EU funded project, where about 4 400 applications were received; 895 will be supported by the project; and
- assist the Green Plan and the International Labor Organization (ILO) to mobilize more funds to support supplementary on-farm infrastructure works.

## Related videos and publications



[Investing in agricultural infrastructure  
Promoting livelihoods and  
employment](#)



[Field guide for hill land reclamation and  
water management](#)



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