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EMERGENCY AGRICULTURAL ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE DROUGHT-AFFECTED SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ALEPPO GOVERNORATE

November 2019

SDGs:



Countries:

Syrian Arab Republic

Project Codes:

TCP/SYR/3701

FAO Contribution

USD 500 000

Duration:

9 November 2018 – 8 November 2019

Contact Info:

FAO Representation in Syria

FAO-SY@fao.org

Implementing Partner

Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR).

Beneficiaries

1 850 vulnerable farming households (11 100 people) affected by recent drought and current crisis in Syrian Arab Republic.

Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

There is no CPF in the country yet, owing to the security situation and the ongoing crisis.



BACKGROUND

Already weakened by the current crisis, which is in its eighth year, the scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian and recovery needs in the Syrian Arab Republic remains exceedingly high, as a result of the combined impacts of crisis and the recent drought, which severely affected the agricultural sector. Indeed, wheat production in the 2017/2018 winter season, the only major crop growing season per year, was the lowest since 1989, and about 30 percent of the pre-crisis average of 4.1 million tonnes (2002-2011). Given the poor cereal harvest in 2017/2018, seed was very likely to be in extremely short supply for the coming season, starting in October 2018. The drought affected the main wheat production areas of Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and Hama governorates, which account for about 96 percent of the total national wheat production. Against this background, the project aimed to reduce the vulnerability of drought and crisis-affected households to food and nutrition insecurity, by providing support to life-saving quick-impact agricultural interventions. The project focused on Aleppo Governorate, which is one of the major wheat production areas in the country, and severely affected by the recent drought.

IMPACT

The project significantly enhanced the crop production capacities of 1 850 vulnerable farming households (11 100 people) affected by the current crisis and recent drought in Aleppo Governorate, thus contributing to overall improvement in food security in the governorate.

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The project fully achieved the envisaged target of supporting 1 850 drought-affected farming households in Aleppo Governorate, enabling them to restore their activities in cereals production, by providing adequate resources, combined with skills development.

As a result of the support provided, 1 850 ha of land, comprising selected areas affected by drought and important for wheat production in the governorate, were cultivated with wheat. It is estimated, based on the average production in the country, that 3 700 tonnes of grain will be produced. This amount will meet the wheat product (particularly bread) needs of about 18 500 people (about 3 000 households) for a year (based on average wheat products consumption per capita per year in Syria, which is 200 kg). These numbers are to be confirmed by the impact assessment that is currently being carried out.

A total of 370 tonnes of good quality certified seeds (which were from local varieties adapted to local conditions) were procured and distributed to the farmers' households (200 kg for each household). Each beneficiary planted an area of one ha, which was estimated to produce about two tonnes, thus reaching the average good productivity in the targeted areas.

The project provided a training programme for the beneficiary farmers throughout the growing season, which increased the farmers' knowledge and technical skills to improve their production. The programme was designed to provide updated information to the farmers, based on FAO concepts and on feedback received during previous similar training programmes. The training topics were selected to provide knowledge to experienced farmers on how to resume production under the current challenges of climate change and the Syrian crisis, and included conservation agriculture, Save and Grow, Good Agricultural Practices, irrigation and Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and post-harvest and crop management, among others.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN

The project was implemented in line with the time of the cropping season; and the training was implemented throughout the growing season, with each topic addressed in line with the growth stage.

The project design, coupled with good planning, resulted in the successful implementation of the project, in terms of timing, the provision of resources; and kept within the available budget.

In addition, the project design considered the socio-economic context of the targeted geographical areas, thus minimizing risks to the lower level. The risk matrix was continuously updated to take into account the volatile security situation and potential challenges.

FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

An impact assessment on the training programme on wheat production has been initiated, as part of the detailed evaluation of the project mentioned above. It is recommended that a more updated design be discussed and agreed on with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) and farmers' representatives.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Capacity development

There are still many areas, in terms of policies, which need addressing to enable the seed multiplication sector to meet the current challenges, in order to sustain the project achievements. The skills and knowledge gained by the beneficiaries during the project, based on FAO concepts, will strengthen the sustainability component. In addition, the contribution of the beneficiaries themselves to the training programme and implementation of the project has created good partnership among the local communities for future plans.

The project falls under the FAO resilience programme approach for FAO Syria. FAO has already designed a theory of change, with plans to scale up similar interventions to transfer to the affected population, to enable it to become more resilient to food insecurity. However, the main challenge remains that of securing funds to support national institutions for the sustainability of the project.

2. Gender equality

The project focus was to restore wheat production in the drought-affected areas in the governorate. Wheat farming is usually practised by men; however, harvesting and weed control are carried out by women. The support targeted the most vulnerable drought-affected farmers, with priority given to women-headed families. The selection of trainees took into consideration gender balance, in order to empower women by strengthening their access to information and knowledge.

3. Environmental sustainability

The wheat seeds provided by the project were from local varieties adapted to local conditions. The promotion of organic fertilizers and sustainable water management, as well as conservation agriculture, are all factors that contribute to mainstreaming environmental sustainability.

4. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

All FAO interventions are designed based on the Right to Food; the project contributed to achieving this right for the targeted households.

The project supported work employment opportunities for the targeted farmers, by providing them with the necessary inputs to resume their activities.

5. Technological sustainability

As mentioned above, FAO concepts were introduced during the project. These concepts are very flexible and can be used in the targeted communities.

The training component, technical follow-up on the progress of the season, as well as the considerable expertise of the farmers, will enable the targeted beneficiaries to proceed on their own.

6. Economic sustainability

As mentioned earlier, this project was part of the resilience programme approach for FAO Syria. The successful implementation of the project, and the clear demonstration of the needs and potential of the sector have resulted in mobilizing more resources.



DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ❑ Interim report on project implementation. Rural Women Empowerment Department (RWED). March 2019. 6 pp.
- ❑ Training materials (land preparation, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, wheat crop services, and conservation agriculture).
- ❑ Brochure on project scope and objectives. Rural Women Empowerment Department (RWED) 2019. 1 p.

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Expected Impact	Improve food and nutrition security of households affected by recent drought and current crisis in Syrian Arab Republic		
Outcome	Enhance crop production capacities of 1 850 vulnerable farming households affected by the recent drought in Aleppo Governorate in Syrian Arab Republic		
	Indicator	Number of targeted households reporting production/productivity increases	
	Baseline	0	
	End Target	1 850 vulnerable farming households (11 100 people) to produce 3 700 tonnes of grain, reaching the average good productivity in the targeted areas (about two tonnes/ha)	
	Comments and follow-up action to be taken	<p>The project managed to support the planned targeted drought-affected farmers (1 850 farming households equal to 11 100 people) with 370 tonnes of good quality wheat seeds. Through this support, 1 850 ha of land were cultivated with wheat. It is estimated, based on the average production in the country, that 3 700 tonnes of grain will be produced. This amount will meet the wheat product (particularly bread) needs of about 18 500 people (about 3 000 households) for a year (based on average wheat products consumption per capita per year in Syria, which is 200 kg). These numbers are to be confirmed by the impact assessment that is currently being carried out.</p> <p>The beneficiary farmers were severely affected by the drought that hit Aleppo Governorate during the cropping season 2017/2018. They lost most of their production, and thus had no resources to obtain good quality seeds. The project helped them to obtain seeds for the cropping season 2018/2019, and therefore to continue their production activities.</p> <p>As mentioned above, a detailed evaluation of the project has been initiated, at the impact level, to assess the increased production/productivity, as a result of the combination of the distribution of inputs/provision of resources and the capacity building of affected farmers, and to draw lessons learned.</p>	
Output 1	Increased crop production capacity of 1 850 farming households in major wheat production areas hit by drought in Aleppo Governorate		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of households provided with resources to protect and start rebuilding livelihood assets	1 850 households	Yes
Baseline	0		
Comments	The project fully achieved the target of reaching 1 850 households in Aleppo Governorate, enabling them to restore their initial activities in cereals production, by providing adequate resources, combined with skills development. Each beneficiary planted an area of one ha, which was estimated to produce about two tonnes.		
Activity 1.1	Finalize the identification of project intervention areas together with counterparts and service providers		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The identification of geographical areas covered by the project interventions was discussed with counterparts and service providers, in consultation with the local communities' representatives. The selected areas were those affected by drought and important for wheat production in the governorate.	
Activity 1.2	Select the vulnerable households to be targeted by the intervention, through beneficiary selection committees		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	<p>The selection process of the vulnerable households entailed considering a set of criteria that had been elaborated and agreed on during the formulation process.</p> <p>The selected farmers were chosen based on FAO vulnerability criteria, and were among those affected by the drought in the cropping season 2017/2018. The farmers would have access to a maximum of one ha of land.</p> <p>The selection was done based on FAO criteria agreed on with the MAAR. The selection process was conducted through a committee, including a local leader, a farmers' representative, extension staff and a representative from the implementing partner, under the supervision of the FAO resilience officer in Aleppo Governorate.</p>	

Activity 1.3	Finalize and formalize agreements with preselected service providers following FAO technical and procurement rules	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	The service providers were selected based on technical knowledge, accessibility to the targeted locations, and previous experience with the United Nations. Based on these criteria, the RWED was selected to conduct the distribution of inputs. The Letter of Agreement (LOA) was finalized and signed with the RWED.
Activity 1.4	Procure and transport 370 tonnes of good quality certified seeds	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	370 tonnes of good quality improved seeds were bought from the General Organization for Seed Multiplication (GOSM), the sole vendor for wheat seeds in the country. The varieties distributed were: Cham 3, Cham 7 and Bohouth 9, which were selected based on local varieties adapted to the local conditions and farmers' preferences. The seeds were transported to the targeted locations by the RWED, as per the signed LOA.
Activity 1.5	Distribute 370 tonnes of good quality certified seeds to 1 850 farming households in Aleppo Governorate (200 kg for each household)	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	The 370 tonnes of seeds were distributed to the 1 850 farmers' households (200 kg for each household). The distribution process took place at distribution points that were established at the village level.

Output 2	Increased access of targeted farmers to improved farming and post-harvest handling techniques, skills and practices		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of households targeted that received agricultural inputs and training sessions	1 850 households	Yes
Baseline	0		
Comments	<p>The project provided a training programme for the targeted farmers throughout the growing season. The programme was designed to provide updated information to the farmers, based on FAO concepts and on the feedback received during previous similar training programmes. The training topics were selected to provide knowledge to experienced farmers on how to resume production under the current challenges of climate change and the Syrian crisis.</p> <p>An impact assessment on the training programme on wheat production has been initiated; it is recommended that a more updated design be discussed and agreed on with the MAAR and farmers representatives.</p>		
Activity 2.1	Select implementing partners to deliver the training topics designed by FAO (will be covered by another project)		
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.1	Comments	The RWED was selected to conduct the training programme, using their network of trainees from the General Commission for Scientific Agriculture Research (GCSAR) and the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Damascus.	
	Develop a training curricula on the following training topics: Good Agriculture Practices, Climate Smart Agriculture, Save and Grow, pest and disease management, soil management, composting, good practices for seed production, harvest and post-harvest management		
Activity 2.2	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A training curriculum was developed to cover the main technical topics of the project, such as conservation agriculture, Save and Grow, Good Agricultural Practices, and post-harvest and crop management.	
Activity 2.3	Finalize and formalize agreements with preselected implementing partners		
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.3	Comments	An agreement was signed with the RWED to act as implementing partner for the project. The technical, administrative and logistic capacities of the implementing partner were considered during the selection process, in addition to the regional networking and the capacity to reach project areas for interventions, and good knowledge of the socio-economic context of rural areas.	
	Prepare training material and submit to FAO Syria and Lead Technical Officer (LTO) for clearance before the training		
Activity 2.4	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The material was developed by FAO Syria and the RWED, and cleared by FAO before the training took place.	
Activity 2.5	Design and implement training agenda throughout the various growing stages of wheat		
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.5	Comments	<p>The training was implemented in three stages. During each stage, a total of 185 farmers were trained by the technical staff who had received Training of Trainers (ToT) training from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Damascus and GCSAR staff. The ToT training targeted five persons on the same topics mentioned below, with a session on knowledge transfer to farmers (with language to be used at farmers' level). The three stages were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the first stage took place between January and February 2019. The main topics were land preparation, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, wheat crop services, and conservation agriculture; – the second stage was held in March 2019. The main topics were fertilization, irrigation and IPM; – the third stage was in May and February 2019. The main topics were post-harvest activities, advantages of straw, reducing the loss of production, and storage and processing of wheat. 	

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