

ACTED's Approach to Landscape Regeneration & Sustainable Agricultural Practices in Lebanon



Lebanon is currently host to over 1.1 million refugees. The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis has exacerbated pre-existing constraints in the country, leading to increased competition over existing resources, affecting local service delivery and increasing tensions between refugees and host populations. The current **high levels of unemployment among Lebanese host populations** (23%), and **overdependence on food vouchers** as the main source of income for Syrian refugee populations (54%) combined with other pre-existing socio-economic and political constraints **puts Lebanon at risk of a food crisis**.

Indeed, the results of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) 2015 showed that while food was the largest expenditure share of refugees (45%), reduced expenditure on food was cited as the most used coping strategy by 85% of Syrian refugees as they begin to exhaust their assets. Furthermore, the food security of Lebanese populations has several spatial constraints and varies widely across the country. For example, the aforementioned REACH report found that **Akkar had the largest portion of households with a poor food consumption score**, with this region

being a host to over 8.2% of the 11.1% of households having a poor FCS nationwide.

At the same time, Lebanon has seen a pattern of **unsustainable land management practices**, especially ones that emerged during the civil war that continue to erode the country's natural resources. This includes unplanned urban growth, causing urban conglomerates to extend beyond their boundaries into areas of unique environmental significance (ex: Fnaideq in Akkar), rampant road construction over mountain ridges and other sensitive areas affecting land cover, and unregulated real estate boom, triggered in part due to the large destruction of infrastructure by the 2006 war.

In addition, Lebanon also faces **resources constraints that have been exacerbated by the increasing population pressures** due to the refugee influx. For example, although Lebanon is in a fortunate hydrological position, there is still a risk of water scarcity in many areas. There are several factors that contribute to this including (1) discrepancy between seasonal supply (peaking in winter) and demand

(peaking in summer) (2) Low water storage (only 6% of the total resources), (3) high rates of losses to the sea due to topography, and (4) deficiencies in surface water and groundwater management. This is compounded by the regional variations in the water management systems across the country, with little or no management systems in Akkar due to lack of resources. Moreover, agriculture is the largest consumer of fresh water sources: 61% of water usage in Lebanon is for irrigation, a need which is exacerbated due to poor water retention in agricultural lands.

ACTED's Approach

In this context it is important to conduct interventions that support the agricultural sector in Lebanon in order to improve the food security of vulnerable populations, while at the same time keeping in mind resource constraints in the country and undertaking interventions that are **sustainable, ensure improved management of natural resources and are resilient to impacts of climate change**. ACTED's approach is to provide holistic solutions through geographic-focused interventions, incorporating elements that address challenges to both micro-, meso- and macro-level production. This approach is based around an understanding of ecosystem services, or the study of relationships between organisms and their environment, and is expected to make the most efficient use of non-renewable and on-farm resources while integrating natural biological cycles and controls, sustaining the economic viability of farm operations and enhancing the quality of life for farmers and their communities.

Landscape Regeneration: The first level of intervention focuses on an **innovative and integrated**

approach for regenerating depleted landscapes through water retention, reducing rainwater run-off, loss of top-soil and erosion, which simultaneously enhances biodiversity. This includes the use of agro-forestry techniques, which is a land use management system in which trees or shrubs are grown around or among crops or pastureland, combining agricultural and forestry technologies to create more productive, profitable, and sustainable land-use systems notably on the slopes and hillsides around water retention ponds.

Collaborative landscape design for improved production and processing: A second level of intervention looks at introducing farmers to Sustainable Agricultural Practices, through which they can take maximum benefits of their lands while causing the minimum disturbances and building up the land potential from depleted landscape to a fully productive one. These works would include planting of locally-appropriate trees, shrubs and high value agricultural products thus making lands more productive while at the same time contributing to enhanced agricultural production through a careful selection of the most suitable species, in terms of value and water availability among other factors. In addition, this level of intervention seeks to support the establishment of pilot-spin off enterprises that create value added products from the introduced crops.

The Home-Based Production Systems Phase is intended to complement the community level interventions with household level interventions aimed at improving food security for vulnerable households. To do this, ACTED and its partners identify community outreach members who support community residents in the set-up of household gardens and development of home-based biofuel



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production systems; these members mentor residents throughout the course of the project to ensure success of household production schemes and conduct nutritional awareness/household economics sessions for the target households to improve FS.

Piloting the Approach

As of January 2016, ACTED launched a pilot of the approach with initial funding from EuropeAid in the Akkar area, however additional funds are still required for the pilot phase. This area was targeted as it displayed acute needs and potential, notably due to the high dependency on agriculture as a source of income (despite agriculture contributing to only 5.5% of GDP nationwide). Moreover, according to a 2010 agricultural census, Akkar has both the highest share of agricultural lands as well as the highest percentage of farmers in the country.

Through this pilot, ACTED will enhance the qualities of about 80 hectares of land in Akkar for landscape regeneration, provide support to at least 100 farmers through the training hubs established as well as 5 micro or nano enterprises through training and

market linkages, and 350 households will receive training and materials for home-based gardens and/or biofuel production.

Measurement, Evaluation, Assessment and Learning (MEAL)

In addition to ACTED's independent monitoring and evaluation of the pilot project, the final phase of ACTED's approach, **Research and Evidence Building**, is intended to build a research base to study the impacts of the various approaches proposed through this intervention.

ACTED is partnering with the University of Balamand, a reputable Lebanese University with extensive experience in this sector and in governmental policy. The University of Balamand will be supporting ACTED in a project impact evaluation and a comparative study with other similar initiatives, to identify lessons learned and best practices, the publication of a research paper, and dissemination of main findings to stakeholders in order to facilitate replicability of the project.

Who We Are

ACTED has been working in Lebanon since 2006 and has an established country office in Beirut as well as a field office in Akkar. With 9 expat staff and over 100 national staff, ACTED has been working closely with local authorities and civil society stakeholders at the community level in implementing priority humanitarian interventions such as cash assistance through the Lebanon Cash Consortium (LCC), WASH projects including disease monitoring and infrastructural and behavioural response, and Shelter interventions incorporating multiple modalities for shelter rehabilitations. More recently, ACTED has launched several long term development activities such infrastructure rehabilitation, agriculture, livelihood development and support to state and non-state actors for improving service delivery and social stability through collective development planning.

What We Do

ACTED delivers support responding simultaneously to emergency and development needs through a community driven approach which focuses on engagement and capacity building of local civil society and local authorities, with the aim of promoting accountable governance and civic engagement. Through this support, ACTED's strategy in Lebanon aims to bring the most vulnerable Lebanese and refugee households to minimum living standards, while working towards sustainable improvement of local communities' coping capacity.

In 2015, ACTED provided WASH and Shelter support to over 1,300 households in Lebanon, installed over 140 water tanks, 7 communal tanks, conducted hygiene promotion sessions to over 35,000 people, formed, trained and supported over 18 committees and distributed hygiene and baby kits to over 800 vulnerable families. Moreover, 200 women have benefitted from vocational trainings and information sessions on protection issues as well as in-kind support allowing them to have additional income generation opportunities. ACTED is also currently providing capacity building activities to 5 CSOs and local authorities from 9 municipalities, including a range of trainings from financial management and fundraising, to conflict mitigation and women's empowerment, apart from providing capacity building in solid waste management to 5 municipalities. Additionally, with funding from DFID and ECHO, ACTED has provided multi-purpose cash assistance worth over 1.18 million USD to 1,520 families.



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For more information about ACTED's work in Lebanon, visit: <http://www.acted.org/en/lebanon>

