



Sep 2016

Introduction

Since 2011, the conflict in Syria has had a **devastating effect on nearly all sectors of the country's economy**. With 4.8 million Syrians having fled, and another 6.6 million having been displaced by violence, the impact of the conflict on individual households alone has been staggering. According to the 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, **13.5 million Syrians remaining in the country are in need of humanitarian assistance, with 8.7 million in need of assistance to meet their food needs**. On a national and community level, the impact of the conflict on productive capacity has been similarly destructive.

To analyze the impact of the conflict in Syria on food security and livelihoods and to guide strategic planning, **the Whole of Syria Food Security Cluster, with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Regional Food Security Analysis Network (RFSAN)** conducted an assessment throughout Syria aimed at understanding the challenges faced by households and communities, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The results of the assessment serve as a reminder of the continued **trend towards diminished livelihoods opportunities and greater food insecurity** as the conflict has become protracted. Analysis shows that livelihoods further eroded throughout the year prior to the assessment, with households reporting lower wages, fewer high-quality income-generating opportunities, increasing debts, and a need for aid that exceeds what is currently provided. In spite of these pressures, a majority of households were assessed to be food secure, a status due in large part to humanitarian aid and the deployment of multiple coping mechanisms. **Households engaged in agriculture were significantly more food secure than those that were not**; however, the effects of the conflict and market conditions pose long-term threats to their ability to remain engaged in agriculture as well as to Syria's agricultural productive base as a whole.

Key Findings

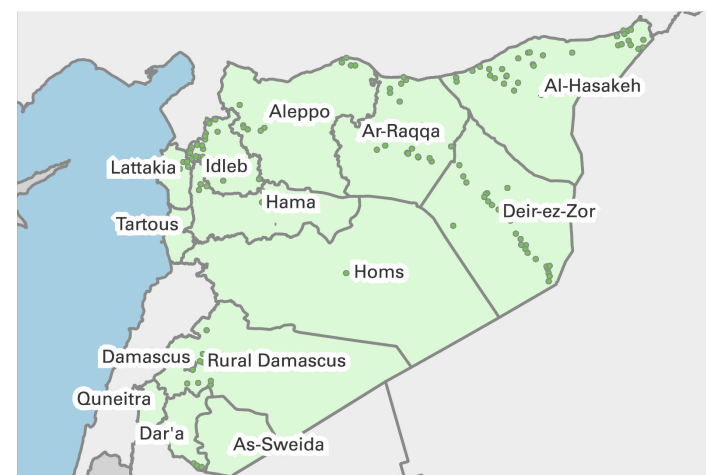
- Livelihoods opportunities have been decreasing.
- Households have become more vulnerable to food insecurity.
- Households engaged in agriculture were often more resilient.
- Many households abandoned farming and herding.

Methodology

The assessment used a mixed-methods approach drawing upon **household-level interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews**. Household-level findings are based on **1,995 interviews** conducted in December 2015 and January 2016 that took place in 150 communities across eight clusters of villages that reflect agro-ecological and livelihood zones. Within these clusters, communities as well as households were randomly selected for interviews. In total, interviews were conducted in 10 governorates, 24 districts, and 46 sub-districts.

In addition to household data, **focus group discussions** (FGDs) and **key informant interviews** conducted in October and November 2015 provided qualitative and contextual information. In total, 45 FGDs were held in randomly selected communities (30 gender-segregated livelihoods FGDs and 15 agricultural FGDs). Key informant interviews with agronomists and experts on agriculture in 25 communities provided additional sector-specific information.

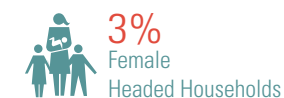
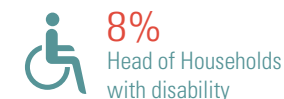
Access and logistical constraints prevented geographically representative coverage throughout Syria, and household-level interviews were primarily conducted in areas not controlled by the Government of Syria. As a result, household-level findings are indicative of broader trends but not representative.



Displacement



Household Demographics



Livelihoods

34%
HH incurring Debt in the past year

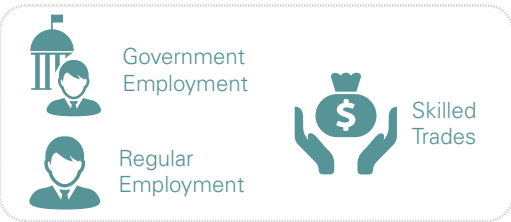
45%
Agricultural and livelihoods inputs, as reason for Debt

Average Debt **197,000 SYP**
(495\$)

Average income **60,578 SYP**
(152.3\$)

At the time of the assessment, the **vitality of livelihoods had deteriorated significantly** from the previous year, with households reporting lower incomes, mounting debts, fewer income-generating opportunities, and a high use of coping mechanisms. Approximately **80% of households reported that their incomes had fallen** over the previous year, with nearly 60% reporting that the reduction had been significant. During the same period, **34% of households took on additional debts**, with average amounts owed equivalent to more than three months of income (197,107 SYP or 495 USD). In nearly half of cases where households had taken on debt, it was to pay for livelihood or agricultural inputs, while another 16% reported it was to pay for household bills and expenses.

Increasing Sources of Employment/Income



Decreasing Sources of Employment/Income

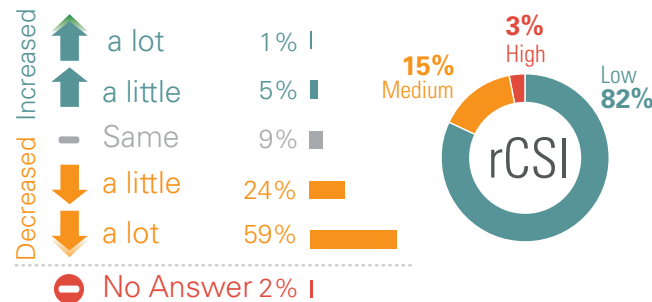
Falling incomes corresponded with significant shifts in livelihoods and employment driven by **diminished opportunities for professional occupations and skilled labor**. Remittances have increased in importance as has income derived from informal work (e.g. fuel trade and gathering of wood).

Agricultural wage labor, the largest source of employment income among households interviewed, **grew as a primary source of income** despite the fact that agricultural activities have been decreasing overall. Falling demand for such work as well as the seasonal nature of jobs available pose particular challenges to households dependent upon wage labor. Accordingly, one of the top challenges these households face is the drying up of income streams during the winter months.

Falling demand for labor has depressed wages and increased the strain on individuals and families. Not being able to cover their cost of living, households have been moving towards **higher-risk jobs**, while vulnerable groups **are engaging in low-paying and low-skill** activities.

Households reported a frequent use of coping strategies, particularly crisis livelihoods strategies such as selling productive assets, removing children from school, and selling seed stocks. This suggests that these households have already exhausted less extreme measures and are at high risk of becoming food insecure.

Income Trends (Past Three Months)



Livelihoods Challenges



Not enough income in **winter/work** is unstable
No **jobs** available in **profession**

Income does not cover **cost of living**

Employment Challenges



Not enough work in **winter**

Unstable work

Income does not cover **cost of living**

Recommendations

- Livelihood-supporting assistance across the whole value chain to improve agricultural production, foster resilience, and to ensure that households with borderline food security status do not further deteriorate.
- Target programming specifically towards women and female-headed households as well as other vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.
- Develop and expand access to microfinance to allow households to replace lost livelihoods with new income-generating activities
- Assist households in moving from indebtedness to productive investments through financial education and savings management.
- Support in transitioning out of low-paying, dangerous jobs to mitigate pressures to join armed groups
- Provide cash-for-work activities to improve agricultural productivity, such as repairing irrigation infrastructure that has been damaged.
- Increase assistance during winter months when costs for NFIs, such as fuel are highest, and streams of income are lowest

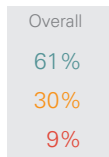
Food Security

The household survey showed that overall, **61% of households had acceptable food consumption scores (FCS)**, with 39% falling below this threshold: 30% reported borderline scores and 9% reported poor scores.

In focus group discussions, participants identified **female-headed households, households with disabled or chronically ill members, and child-headed households** as the groups **most vulnerable to food insecurity**. Although the sample size in the household survey was too small to indicate overall trends for some of these groups, the data available appears to confirm most findings from the focus group discussions. For example, 21% of female-headed households reported poor food consumption scores. Despite reporting incomes that were similar to the population as a whole, IDPs were more likely to have poor food consumption scores (12%), as were households with disabled or chronically ill heads of household (15%).

Food Consumption Scores

- Acceptable
- Borderline
- Poor



Hunger in households



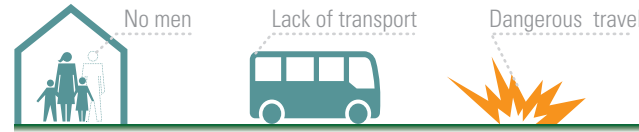
- 84% Little to no
- 13% Moderate
- 3% Severe

Food consumption scores were markedly higher among households engaged in agriculture; only 26% of households engaged in livestock production reported borderline or poor scores and only 32% of households engaged in crop production reported borderline or poor scores. Notably, 63% of households that abandoned agriculture in the past year reported acceptable food consumption scores; however, these households were more likely to report poor food consumption scores (15% vs 5% amongst households still engaged in agriculture), suggesting that abandoning farming may have severe consequences for some households.

Food comprised households' largest category of household expenditure, followed by fuel and electricity costs, healthcare, and debt repayment. On average, households **allocated 57%**



Reasons for being unable to access the market



percent of their overall expenditures to food in the month prior to the survey.

Accordingly, **the vast majority of households surveyed (94%) reported being able to access markets.** These households overwhelmingly reported relying on food that they purchased themselves from markets in the week prior to the survey. The 6% of households that were not able to access markets, tended to cite dangerous travel conditions, transportation, and a lack of male family members as reasons for lacking access; women and female-headed households in particular, appear to have the greatest difficulty.

After markets, households' **own production** was the **second most common source of food** that households consumed in the week prior to the survey. Rates of consumption of food items produced at home were highest for milk products, cereals, and eggs, with 15-25% of households citing their own production as the source of these foods in the week prior to the survey.

Access to Aid	Required	but not received and received	67%
	Not Required	and not received but received	6% 1%

Overall, **humanitarian aid was the third most important source of food** that households had recently consumed in the week prior to the survey; however, the frequency differed significantly depending on individual food items. For example, approximately 12% of the households that reported consuming pulses indicated that they obtained them through food aid rather than through purchase or their own production. A small proportion of households (approximately 4%) reported that they

consumed cereals and grains, eggs, and oils and fats they obtained from food aid. Overall, approximately one-quarter (26%) of households received some amount of food aid in the month prior to the survey; however, **two-thirds (67%) reported** that they required it, but did not receive any aid. Only a small proportion (less than 1%) reported receiving food aid even though they did not require it.

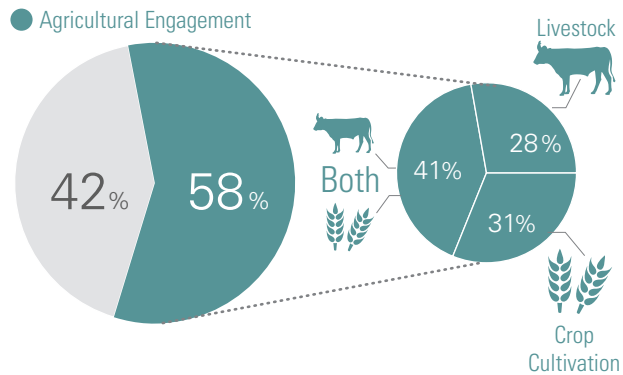
The role that aid plays in food security as well as the importance of markets are worth analyzing further. High levels of access to markets reported in the household survey may also belie other challenges. These include relying on markets that are distant or in insecure areas or markets that are poorly stocked or dependent upon smuggled goods. **Increased transportation** and transaction costs mean that households may **not have access to items in markets** when they are available.

Recommendations

- Target livelihoods interventions towards households in moderate and severe food insecurity situations to enable them to engage in income-generating activities / microenterprises.
- Improve monitoring and early warning systems to better track the many households at risk of falling into food insecure categories.
- Conduct value-chain analysis of food commodities to assess constraints and opportunities given the current context.
- Design interventions to simultaneously address basic food/livelihood needs while reestablishing local productive capacities to ensure that markets remain functional and accessible to local populations.
- Prioritize activities aimed at promoting agricultural production and livelihoods opportunities amongst households already engaged in agricultural wage labor.
- Support local producers and sellers through the use of cash and vouchers for food aid to sustain already widespread use of markets.
- In areas where markets are functional, limited in-kind support to the most vulnerable households may still be necessary to meet the hunger gap and prevent deterioration of the food security context in both the IDP and host communities.
- Small-scale agriculture, including encouraging gardens (micro gardens and homesteads), may make important contributions to household food security and dietary diversity.

Agriculture

The assessment revealed a number of trends with regard to agricultural livelihoods. On a whole, **households involved in crop production and livestock herding were more resilient and more likely to report higher food consumption scores, larger incomes, and lower use of coping strategies.** However, households engaged in agriculture face a number of pressures that place their ability to remain involved in crop production and herding at risk.



More than half (58%) of households interviewed were engaged in agriculture (either crop production or livestock or both) at the time of the assessment; 31% of them were engaged in crop production, while 28% in livestock production. 41% of households were engaged in both crop and livestock production. A relatively **large proportion of households reported having stopped crop production (10%) and livestock production (11%)** in the year prior to data collection.

On average, **households engaged in agriculture had higher incomes than those that were not.** For households involved in livestock, monthly incomes were 2,001 SYP (5.03 USD) per month more than those that were not; among households engaged in crop production, monthly incomes were 14,559 SYP (36.58 USD) higher. Households that gave up agriculture, by contrast, earned 19,003 SYP (47.75 USD) less per month than the overall households on average.

The **positive effects of agricultural engagement** were also apparent in **food consumption patterns**, with 74% of households engaged in livestock having acceptable food consumption scores, versus 52% of those that were not, and households engaged in crop production 12% more likely to have acceptable food consumption scores than those that were not.

Households engaged in agriculture generally owe to their higher levels of food security to their **ability rely on their own food production** as well as access to multiple sources of income. Along these lines, approximately two-thirds (64%) of households engaged in agriculture named primary sources of income that were not directly associated with farming or herding. Accordingly, livestock or crop production may serve as an important supplement to other livelihoods opportunities, improving purchasing power and food security in the face of depressed wages and increased costs.

Women are heavily involved in agricultural activities in many areas assessed, and even though the work is often unpaid, they are directly contributing to household livelihoods. In farming families, women are often involved in land preparation and weed control; in herding households they are engaged in

selling livestock products as well as feeding and caring for animals.

Households that **gave up crop production or livestock herding** in the year prior to the assessment had markedly **lower incomes** than those that were able to continue. While many had acceptable food consumption scores, they appeared more prone to more severe food insecurity, with 15% reporting poor food consumption scores.

Households engaged in both crop production and livestock appeared to be more resilient and have higher incomes as well as food consumption scores. While households engaged in crop production exclusively had markedly higher incomes than those that did not, their food consumption scores were only marginally higher. Similarly, households engaged in livestock production reported relatively high food consumption scores but incomes that were below average.

About **15% of the households abandoned livestock or crop production over the past year.** Pensions, working on others' farms and other occupations became their main income source.






	Overall	Livestock		Crop production		Abandoned Agriculture (15% of total)
		Engaged (40%)	Not engaged (60%)	Engaged (42%)	Not engaged (58%)	
Food Consumption Scores						
● Acceptable	61%	74%	52%	68%	56%	63%
● Borderline	30%	21%	36%	27%	32%	22%
● Poor	9%	5%	12%	5%	11%	15%
Average income						
SYP	60,578	62,579	59,231	75,137	49,947	41,575
USD	152.3	157.2	148.8	188.8	125.5	104.5

Despite the benefits of continued engagement in agriculture, it is becoming more difficult for households to do so. One of the key findings of the assessment was that **agricultural livelihoods are under immense pressure, and households have been forced to abandon crop and livestock production**, or scale back their engagement dramatically due to the unavailability or expense of key inputs. Households that reported giving up crop cultivation in the previous year named the unavailability or high price of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and water as their main reasons for ceasing production. For households that had previously held livestock, similar forces were also at play, with shortages or high costs associated with veterinary services being the most commonly named factors.

In most cases, **households that have remained engaged in agriculture have drastically curtailed their production of key crops as well as their livestock holdings.** For example, in the year prior to the assessment, the number of households cultivating potatoes and pulses fell by over 50%, while the percentage of households planting barley fell by nearly 40%.

Overall, households reported **drastic reductions in flocks and herds. Overall poultry holdings dropped 94%** during the two years prior to the assessment, and sheep, cattle, and goats dropped by approximately 50%. In many cases, this was due to

Changes in Livestock

Livestock	Percentage of HH Holding	Overall Number*
 Sheep	39%	-51% ▼
 Poultry	38%	-94% ▼
 Cattle	30%	-48% ▼
 Goats	21%	-47% ▼
 Horses, Mules, Donkeys	8%	-64% ▼

*Percentage change in aggregate livestock holdings over the past year


Changes in Crop Cultivation

Crop	Percentage of Household Cultivating	Percentage Change*	Main Challenge
Wheat	31%	-16% ▼	Changes in value change and buyers of wheat
Barley	15%	-38% ▼	Lack of demand for livestock; poor rains
Olives	11%	-18% ▼	Lack of access to mills
Vegetables	11%	-15% ▼	Broken connections between processing facilities, traders, and farmers
Pulses	7%	-49% ▼	Lack of agrochemicals; market changes
Potatoes	2%	-53% ▼	Lack of adequate storage and processing capacity

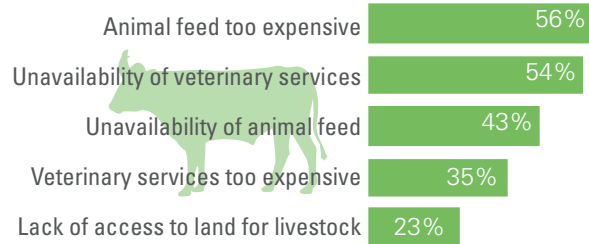
*Percentage change in HH cultivating specific crops during the past year


Recommendations

- Support livelihoods activities aimed at restoring agricultural infrastructure.
- Support the production of crops that farmers have shifted their attention to until access to land, inputs and services has improved.
- Increase the productivity of the current number of animals held by livestock owners.
- Provide quality agriculture inputs for the winter and spring seasons such as high-yielding and early-maturing variety seeds.
- Support the keeping of small livestock such as chickens, goats, and sheep.
- Intensify small-scale urban and peri-urban agriculture activities that require low external inputs.
- Target subsidies for wheat production to allow initial volume required to set up distribution networks and lower initial costs.
- Provide technical capacity and extension services as well as inputs such as seed and fertilizer and veterinary support to make up for the breakdown of state support systems.
- Address constraints related to infrastructure, input supplies, marketing, and transportation to enhance value chains for vegetable, wheat and fruit production.
- Increase land area under production for cash crops to provide employment opportunities and stimulate agriculture-based markets.
- Invest in greenhouses and agriculture projects that give households income streams during winter months and supply markets with fresh vegetables.
- Build capacity of local institutions, particularly community-based organizations and local councils, to better prepare them to handle disasters and shocks.

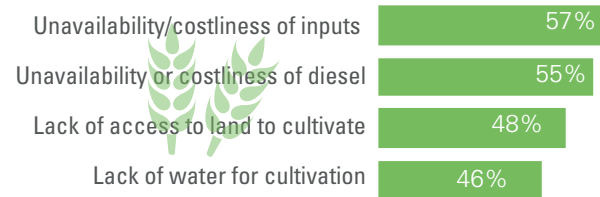
 **11%** Households That Kept Livestock, but no Longer Do

Reasons for no longer holding livestock



 **10%** Households that Engaged in Crop Production but no Longer do

Reasons for no Longer Holding Livestock



households cutting their herds and flocks dramatically, while retaining only a fraction – often two or three animals -- of their previous holdings. For example, while poultry farmers interviewed had average flocks of 303 animals two years ago, the average flock sizes of 16 at the time of the assessment. Such dramatic reductions were often the result of large-scale farmers ceasing production, but smaller farmers have also been affected; median poultry holdings, for example, went from 25 to 15 animals over the same period.

In addition to the pressures on agriculture listed above, focus group discussions and key informant interviews revealed a prevalence of long-term changes in land use. Households that have abandoned agriculture altogether have reallocated their land for other uses or sold their livestock. **Conflict and fires have reduced the land available for grazing, while households have taken over state-owned pastures and other communal lands and converted them into rain-fed farmlands.**

Changes in land use have been accompanied by a shift in cultivation practices that include planting crops several times during the agricultural season and **replacing traditional crops** with ones that have become more profitable less resource intensive. For example, in focus group discussions and key inform-

ant interviews, farmers discussed switching to crops that require less water and high-cost inputs, cultivating cash crops, or limiting production to their own household’s consumption needs. Similar pressures could be seen with households engaged in livestock. In focus group discussions, participants reported the consumption or sale of livestock that would normally have been used for income, while in some cases, livestock had been sold and moved to neighboring countries.

Costly inputs that often need to be imported and may be unavailable, make **agriculture too expensive for many households to sustain**. Despite the fact that agricultural wage labor has become the main income source in many communities, the relatively **high costs of daily labor has also prevented farmers from harvesting their crops.**



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations