

PRESS RELEASE: Embassy of Japan, UNDP and UNHCR conduct a joint field mission to Qabb Elias, Bekka.



Photo: UNDP

On September 19, 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Embassy of Japan conducted a joint field visit to Qabb Elias, Bekaa. The purpose was to monitor the impact of Emergency Grant Aid, of US\$ 2 million, provided by the Government of Japan to UNDP and UNHCR in response to the needs of host communities and the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This visit coincided with the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants that was taking place in New York.



Photo: UNHCR

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, over one million Syrian refugees have been registered with UNHCR

in Lebanon. Approximately 35 per cent of the registered Syrian refugees reside in the Bekaa and Baalbek/Hermel Governorates. Since the beginning of the crisis, the population in Qabb Elias, 11,244, has more than doubled with the addition of 22,600 Syrian refugees. This has resulted in a substantial increase in pressure on local infrastructure, which was already strained prior to the crisis.

“Amid the protracted crisis, we need longer term solution that benefits both refugees and host communities. In a bid to strengthen the linkages between humanitarian aid and development cooperation, the Government of Japan announced the Emergency Grant Aid to Lebanon one year ago. Today, we are witnessing the result of the assistance.”, said H. E. Seiichi Otsuka, the Ambassador of Japan to Lebanon.

With this funding, UNDP completed the construction of 11km of cement irrigation canals which ensure efficient water distribution to the agricultural lands. This has resulted in a 60% increase in the supply of water with the net impact being a 30% increase in agricultural production. This will benefit Lebanese farmers and lead to more opportunities for Syrian refugees who provide the main source of labour. Moreover, 500 local farmers were trained in business development and on the benefits of forming cooperatives (that include access to insurance and health coverage). The project directly benefitted 1,100 Lebanese and 800 Syrian refugees.

“Japan’s contribution carries an important message of solidarity to the community of Qabb Elias, which hosts a large number of Syrian refugees whose livelihood depends largely on agriculture. The new 10.5 km irrigation canal will allow for a significant increase in production and will expand economic opportunities for both Lebanese and displaced Syrians, fostering social stability and peaceful coexistence. UNDP is honored to be a partner of Japan in this important project”. Luca Renda, UNDP Country Director

The delegation inaugurated the irrigation canal and met a group of farmers who are benefiting from the project. The production of beneficiary farmers will now become more diversified including crops such as apples, peaches, peas and zucchini. In addition, they will no longer rely on water trucking and diesel motors to irrigate their land therefore providing significant savings.

“The Lebanon Host Communities Support Project (LHSP) has a key role in contributing to the social stability and livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities to overcome the burdens of the Syrian crisis since 2013. This project was identified as a priority by the local community, stakeholders and the municipality of Qabb Elias, through the Maps of Risks and Resources (MRR) applied by LHSP.” Said Suheir El Ghali, LHSP National Coordinator at the Ministry of Social Affairs

“The project supported the agricultural sector in the Bekaa by encouraging farmers and enrooting them in their land especially that the Bekaa region is rich with arable lands that provide quality produce to all of Lebanon.” She added.

“Qabb Elias hosts around 30,000 displaced Syrians, and more than 30 camps, which weighs heavily over the social and economic sectors of the village and its residents. The project will increase irrigated crops over rainfed ones and this will help the economy and increase the income of the farmer which makes it an economic and social project and will benefit the Bekaa region. Today with the new irrigation canals, summer crops have increased and our lands have enough water.” Said Jihad Al Mouallem, Mayor of Qabb Elias Municipality

“We used to suffer from water loss. Now with the new cement canals, water reaches our lands in 5 minutes rather than 2 hours.” Said Bilal Hussein Ferro, Water management committee

H.E. Seiichi Otsuka visited one of the seven community centres that UNHCR was able to support with the Japanese assistance. The centre in Qabb Elias Community Center offers a safe space for Lebanese and Syrians to gather, attend language classes, skills training, and receive psychosocial support.

Through a country-wide network of community centres, UNHCR provides community and social services to vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees, thus fostering resilience of all communities affected by the Syria crisis and social cohesion between these communities.

Mireille Girard, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon, said “The generous support provided by the Government of Japan has allowed us to sustain essential services and activities for vulnerable Lebanese and refugee communities in the most affected areas of the country.” She added “Community centres such as the one we have just visited offer Lebanese and refugees a place to meet and develop skills, bringing them closer together”.

The contribution of the Government of Japan, has allowed over 10,000 individuals to access community centres in North Lebanon and the Bekaa. Attendees benefit from informal skills training, social and recreational activities and other learning activities such as language courses and basic literacy and numeracy. The most vulnerable also receive psychosocial support.

During his visit, H.E. Otsuka also met with outreach volunteers, who are crucial in providing up-to-date information on available assistance to the widely dispersed refugee communities and refer vulnerable cases to services. The contribution from the Government of Japan has also supported the outreach activities carried out by these volunteers.