



IFAD/J. Spaull

Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty in **Syria**

Rural poverty in Syria

Poverty affects 11.4 per cent of all people in Syria. It is more common in rural areas, where 62 per cent of the country's poor people live, but is most severe and most widespread in the north-eastern part of the country.

The latest assessment of rural poverty in the country, conducted by IFAD, found that half of Syria's poor rural households depend on wages for their livelihood. One third of poor rural people cultivate crops and raise livestock to obtain an income. The incidence of poverty is lowest among the 20 per cent of rural people who rely on mixed or multiple sources of income. Half of the households in Syria own land, but 70 per cent of these smallholdings are less than 3 hectares.

IFAD's poverty assessment found that the availability of drinking water is a concern for many people in rural areas. Also, fewer girls than boys are enrolled in schools, and women bear a heavy workload that combines household tasks with productive activities in agriculture.

In rural areas, almost 50 per cent of the labour force is employed in agriculture. Overall, about 25 per cent of young men (20-24 age group) are unemployed, with the result that many Syrians migrate to Lebanon to find work.



In 2004, the livelihoods of about 56 per cent of poor rural people depended on agriculture, a sector characterized by low productivity and an irregular demand for labour. More than 77 per cent of poor rural people were landless, though they had other assets such as cattle, sheep or other animals.

Poverty is prevalent among:

- tenant farmers and small-scale farmers
- small-scale herders
- labourers with no access to land
- unemployed young people
- rural women, particularly women who are heads of households

Households headed by women are often dependent on irregular or insecure sources of income, such as money sent home by migrant family members, and they are particularly vulnerable to external economic shocks. Families with large numbers of children and widows with children are more likely to be poor.

The north-eastern region is the poorest and most deprived part of Syria. Poverty rates in other parts of the country declined between 1996 and 2004, but the incidence and severity of poverty increased in rural areas of the north-eastern and coastal regions.

The numbers and proportions of landless people have increased steadily over the last three decades throughout the country, but the increase is particularly high in the north-east. Poverty is most severe and most concentrated in the three economically depressed eastern provinces of Deir Ezzor, Hassaka and Raqqa.

The main causes of rural poverty in Syria include:

- small and fragmented nature of farms
- water shortages and the drying up of groundwater wells, coupled with persistent droughts
- lack of access to credit and markets
- lack of appropriate technology

Other causes of poverty include:

- illiteracy, which affects about 28 per cent of rural adults
- large number of landless people, whose skills are limited
- high rate of rural population growth
- large proportion of young people and the growing number of new entrants to the job market
- lack of a suitable microfinance system responding to the needs of rural poor people; this limits employment opportunities and inhibits the development of on-farm and off-farm enterprises to create new jobs

Eradicating rural poverty in Syria

The government's strategy to reduce poverty in Syria is set out in the Tenth Five-Year Plan 2006-2010. The plan offers a programme for economic transition towards an open and competitive economy. Its goals are to boost economic growth, increase employment, alleviate poverty and ensure social justice. The government's plan also emphasizes the need to create employment opportunities, particularly for poor people and for unemployed young people.

In the agricultural sector, the plan promotes the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and income-generating activities, and the sustainable use of natural resources to obtain socio-economic benefits and food security. It encourages industrialization and marketing agricultural products to increase the value added to them. The plan also supports the modernization of production by developing research and extension activities. It does this while emphasizing the need to ensure water security by focusing on the protection and rational use of water.

In addition to IFAD, the government's major partners in agriculture and rural development include other United Nations agencies, regional finance institutions such as the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, OPEC Fund for International Development, and the Italian and Japanese Governments. Germany and the Netherlands are active in the water sector and the European Union provides grants for institution building, private sector development and vocational training.



IFAD's strategy in Syria

Projects: 7

Total project costs: US\$474 million

Total IFAD approved loans:
US\$126.2 million

Directly benefiting: 368,400 households

Since 1982, IFAD has supported seven projects in Syria with loans totalling US\$126.2 million for projects with a total value of US\$474 million. The organization has also provided a number of grants, including technical assistance grants to support women's empowerment.

IFAD works in partnership with the government, other donors, NGOs, local institutions and civil society organizations. It finances initiatives which enable poor rural people in Syria's agricultural settlement areas to improve their incomes and living conditions.

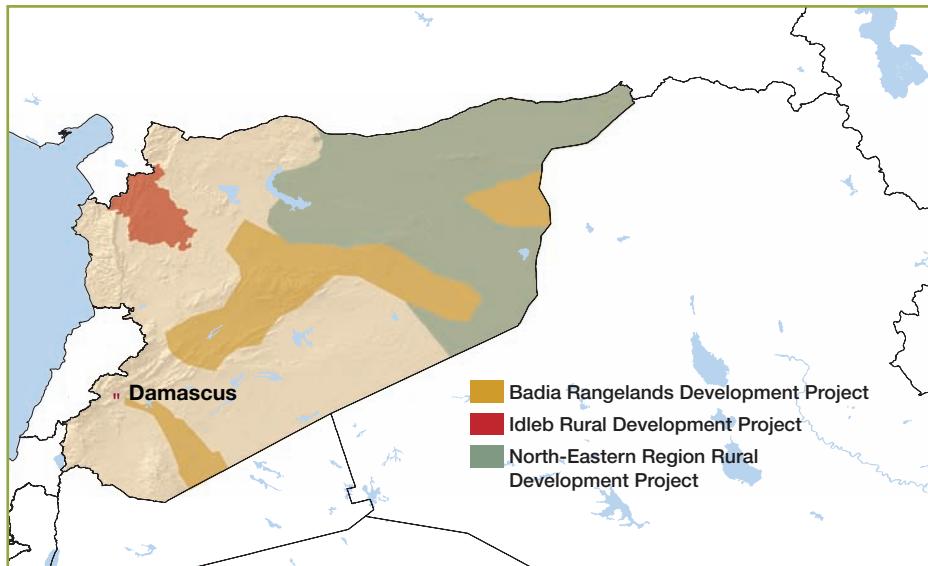
IFAD is working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and its interventions endeavour to reduce poverty and promote gender equality and environmental sustainability.

The main aims of IFAD's strategy are to:

- enable the rural poor to improve and ensure sustainable management of land and water resources
- promote sustainable rural financial services and pro-poor rural small and microenterprises
- strengthen the capacity of the rural poor and their organizations through participatory and community-driven development approaches

Through these goals IFAD continues to orient its activities in Syria towards building up inclusive, sustainable institutional systems for natural resources management, the creation of jobs and income generation. Future interventions will be based on the development of irrigated and rainfed agriculture, the improved management of natural resources, enhanced agricultural research and the extension and promotion of microfinance for income-generating activities. Such activities will be complemented by encouraging pro-poor investments and developing pro-poor policies and relevant innovations.

Ongoing operations



North-Eastern Region Rural Development Project

The project addresses the growing stress in Syria between available natural resources and the demands on these resources from a rapidly increasing population. Its aims are to reverse the country's severe water shortage and improve irrigation use. It supports the government's efforts to improve the socio-economic well-being of poor rural households and conserve natural resources in the economically-depressed provinces of Deir Ezzor, Hassakeh and Raqqa. Project participants include poor smallholders, tenant farmers, landless people, rural women and unemployed young people.

The principal objectives are to:

- increase household income and food security
- increase employment and empower poor rural communities
- improve participatory management of natural resources, especially water
- promote a sustainable microfinance system
- establish partnerships with the private sector for exports of high value and organic products

Project activities focus on:

- improving communities' capacity to organize and manage their own development through community-based organizations such as water users' associations, and providing community members with the technical and managerial capacity to improve their living standards
- supporting the government's programme to increase and improve irrigation and conserve water. This will be done by empowering smallholders to reap the benefits of the programme, promoting optimal use of groundwater and water harvesting, and developing advanced water-use technologies
- improving poor farmers' access to the services and technology they need to increase productivity and raise their incomes
- providing support for the development of small enterprises and microenterprises through a sustainable microfinance system and advisory services

Total cost: US\$58.1 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$20.1 million

Duration: 2008-2015

Directly benefiting: 190,000 households

Cofinancing: OPEC Fund for International Development (US\$17 million)



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The project supports the establishment of an irrigation water management policy development unit within the Ministry of Agriculture. This unit is to create a sustainable and fully participatory system for water management, and to facilitate the formation of water users' associations.

Among the project's innovative features are:

- promoting sustainable access to financial services
- introducing a market-driven, business-oriented approach to agricultural production that links private exporters to producers through contracts with farmers' associations
- promoting participatory water resource management through water users' associations

Idleb Rural Development Project

Total cost: US\$44.9 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$17.6 million

Duration: 2003-2010

Directly benefiting: 42,000 households

Cofinancing: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (US\$18.2 million)

The project focuses on community development and land reclamation by supporting activities that can improve peoples' livelihoods and by facilitating the clearance of rocks from large areas of useable land. The project's main goal is to improve food security and income levels for farmers and rural women in 140 of Syria's poorest villages. People in the project area will participate in their communities' development through an innovative, bottom-up process that features village development committees. To improve poor people's access to rural financial services, the project supports the establishment of sanduqs, which are informal, community-based microfinance institutions. Through sanduqs, poor rural people, and particularly women, can get credit to cover the cost of reclaiming land for agriculture and to start income-generating ventures.

Project activities include:

- reclaiming 20,000 ha of land by de-rocking
- establishing about 12,000 ha of orchards
- providing extension service and improving links between research and extension

- supporting water conservation measures. This includes building 25 small earth dams, the rehabilitation of 14 wells and the protection and rehabilitation of springs for irrigation
- expanding farmers' access to markets by helping them identify new market niches and establish linkages with potential buyers
- supporting village development committees to encourage participation
- financing the establishment of sanduqs
- promoting processing and marketing opportunities

A technical grant from the United Nations Development Programme supported microfinance activities.

Badia Rangelands Development Project

This is the first large-scale, fully participatory development project in the Badia rangelands and is an integrated effort to preserve and improve the living conditions of the Bedouin community. The project's main aim is to rehabilitate an area totalling about one third of the Badia rangelands and re-establish its productive capacity. In the past, the Badia's natural resources supported the activities of Bedouin herders and their households, enabling them to provide for their needs. But as the steppe land became increasingly degraded through over-use and other factors, herders' incomes diminished drastically and their living conditions deteriorated.

The project encourages herders in traditional and newly-formed associations to work together to make the rangelands more productive and protect the environment.

Activities include:

- rangeland development through reseeding and planting
- livestock development through improved herd management, improved feeding and veterinary services, and the genetic improvement of animal breeds
- improvement of rural infrastructure such as water supplies and rural access roads
- community development to strengthen local institutions, foster participation and improve the literacy levels and socio-economic status of women

A CARE grant supports the participatory approach by financing training for herders and programme staff. A grant from the Italian Association for Women in Development supports activities fostering business opportunities for rural women.

Total cost: US\$104.9 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$20.2 million

Duration: 1998-2010

Directly benefiting: 16,800 households

Cofinancing: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (US\$65 million)



Completed operations

Coastal/Midlands Agricultural Development Project

Total cost: US\$117.2 million

IFAD loan: US\$20.4 million

Duration: 1996-2006

Directly benefiting: 69,000 households

Cofinancing: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (US\$58.6 million)

Jebel al Hoss Agricultural Development Project

Total cost: US\$29 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$11.9 million

Duration: 1995-2006

Directly benefiting: 23,000 households

Cofinancing: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (US\$6.7 million)

Southern Regional Agricultural Development Project - Phase II

Total cost: US\$42.3 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$18 million

Duration: 1993-2001

Directly benefiting: 17,600 households

Cofinancing: Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (US\$12.1 million);

United Nations Development Programme (US\$900,000)

Southern Regional Agricultural Development Project

Total cost: US\$76.3 million

IFAD approved loan: US\$18 million

Duration: 1983-1987

Directly benefiting: 10,000 households

Cofinancing: United Nations Development Programme (US\$2.2 million);

World Bank: IBRD (US\$22 million)

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Building a poverty-free world

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) works with poor rural people to enable them to grow and sell more food, increase their incomes and determine the direction of their own lives. Since 1978, IFAD has invested over US\$11 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries, empowering some 340 million people to break out of poverty. IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome – the UN's food and agricultural hub. It is a unique partnership of 165 members from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), other developing countries and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

For further information on rural poverty in Syria, visit the Rural Poverty Portal:
<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org>



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October 2009