Impact of the Crisis on Education

The impact of the Syrian crisis has been felt by all sectors and the education sector is no exception. The 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview indicates that an estimated 1.75 million children and youth are out of school and an additional 1.35 million children are at risk of dropping out. In addition, one in every three schools has been damaged, destroyed, or otherwise made inaccessible due to occupation by displaced families, the military, or armed groups. The majority of the remaining schools are overpopulated and hence even current levels of enrolment represent a major challenge to an already fragile system.

The Start of School Meals in Syria

The school meals programme was launched in Syria in August 2014. The initial pilot consisted of 1,500 vulnerable pre-primary and primary school children in Tartous governorate. By the end of 2014, the programme was supporting 77,000 children across Tartous, Aleppo and Rural Damascus governorates and by the end of the academic year 2014-15 approximately 164,000 children were assisted. Due to the prolonged crisis, access remained an overarching challenge. Nonetheless, WFP along with the Ministry of Education conducted capacity building trainings for teachers and principals across Syria to facilitate the implementation and the scale-up of the programme. Additionally, WFP also provided food assistance to UNICEF supported summer clubs and more than 80,000 children were reached.
The school meals programme aims to encourage enrollment and regular attendance while improving the nutritional intake of schoolchildren. The programme has witnessed a significant scale-up in a complex humanitarian context. In close collaboration with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and within the overall framework of the No Lost Generation initiative, WFP targets 750,000 children in 2017 in more than 1,000 schools, daily providing fortified date bars (80 grams) supplemented with a carton of fortified milk to pre- and primary school children.

In March 2017, WFP initiated a pilot project to provide fresh meals in schools in Aleppo city. The meals, consisting of one sandwich and a piece of fruit or vegetable providing over 500 Kcal daily meal, are prepared by 20 Syrian women employed in the initiative. The bread used for the sandwiches is produced through contracted local bakeries using fortified wheat flour provided by WFP. WFP covers all the associated costs, including the salaries of the women employed.

WFP also targets 50,000 children through an out-of-school programme designed to encourage attendance at accelerated learning sessions supported by UNICEF in order to facilitate a re-entry into mainstream education opportunities. Under this programme, families are provided with a cash-based transfer with a value of USD23, based on attendance, enabling families to buy fresh food items at selected retailers.

Through the ongoing high altitude airdrop operation to the besieged city of Deir Ezzor, WFP delivered 20 mt of fortified date bars for about 10,000 children across 15 schools in October 2016. This was the first time ever that WFP was able to deliver date bars to the besieged city under the school meals programme since it was launched in 2014. The date bars were produced in Jordan and packed to withstand the impact of the airdrops.

Local Production of Date Bars

In late 2015, WFP began supporting local manufacturers to increase their capacity to produce date bars, to cover the programme’s requirement through local procurement. In 2016, the transition towards locally produced fortified date bars was progressively scaled up, contributing to enhanced local capacity and improved food value chain. In 2016, WFP bought almost half of its fortified date bars through two local suppliers, reducing the lead time and ensuring consistency with local taste preference. This enabled WFP to establish a more reliable supply and contributed to the livelihoods of 241 people employed by the two suppliers, about 70 percent of whom are women. Additional employment is anticipated throughout 2017 as a result of the increased demand by WFP.

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