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Working with markets and the local government whilst responding to the WaSH needs of the Syrian crisis

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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Working with markets and the local Government whilst
responding to the WaSH needs of the Syrian crisis**

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BRIEFING PAPER 2294

The Syria crisis presents many challenges but more interestingly opportunities to respond differently than our usual WaSH response. Oxfam's experiences both in Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza and Syria have enabled us to build relationships and alliances with key market actors to either provide water via a voucher based system, and or through direct operational activities with the local water authorities installing reverse osmosis systems, large scale generators, control panels and submersible pumps. This paper therefore provides an overview of these experiences in the hope of building and replicating this further across other agencies, and other middle income, and urban crises.

Syrian crisis context

Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. More than 220,000 people have lost their lives as a result of the Syrian conflict. Nearly 4 million people have fled their homes and are living in neighbouring countries including Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan. As the crisis nears its fourth anniversary in March 2015, more than half the Syrian population (internally displaced within Syria) is in need of humanitarian assistance (10 million people). More than three million Syrians have registered with the United Nations High Commission of Refugees, who is leading the regional emergency response. But hundreds of thousands more await registration.

The majority of the Syrian refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan initiated the first official refugee camp in July 2013, which is called Za'atari accommodating 90,000 refugees, making it the country's fourth largest city. Thereafter a new camp, Azraq opened in 2014 to accommodate 120,000 refugees yet today there is 13,960 refugees. A good majority of the refugees stay with relatives in the host neighbourhood, or rent accommodation within the host population, which is challenging given the inflated rental prices, the uncertainty of how long they can stay there for, equity of services and the lack of formal employment opportunities. Meanwhile in Lebanon, there are no official refugee camps so families have established makeshift camps or find shelter in derelict abandoned, unfinished buildings within the host population. Challenges here include land tenure, access to services (water, health care, and education), and inflated costs related to basic needs (e.g. tankered water, rent, food, seasonal clothing and household needs).

Oxfam's WaSH response

Oxfam's WaSH response is operational in three different countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Syria) all of which are uniquely different, ranging from being one of the main WaSH actors in Zaatari refugee camp, to responding to the informal settlements (IS) in the Bekaa and North Tripoli to responding to small-medium-large scale urban water supply projects in Syria in collaboration with the local water authorities. This has required a different mind set, an array of different WaSH competencies and an emerging response which required one to adapt appropriately and effectively given the middle income, and urban and the different stakeholders to coordinate with.

Lebanon

Oxfam has reached more than 250,000 vulnerable people in Lebanon in Northern Tripoli and the Bekaa valley. Our response has been characterised by distribution of hygiene kits, and winterization kits, water trucking, construction of bathing units and latrine facilities. More recently our reach is broadening its focus on WaSH policy, which is further supported in practice by a municipal piped water supply scheme in the Bekaa valley supporting both the refugee and host population.

Jordan

Oxfam currently works in five of the twelve districts in Za'atari, supervising water, sanitation, hygiene promotion, solid waste and the construction and community management of the WaSH blocks (areas for bathing, laundry, and toilets). Our recent efforts have been on the design for the upgrade of the water distribution system to household connections, and the phase out of the water trucking. Uniquely this refugee camp shall be the first where the response has included household connections – so in short Za'atari shall no longer be a refugee camp but another city to come. Outside of the refugee camp, the Oxfam team are also targeting the many refugees that prefer to remain in the host neighbourhood, ranging from cash for basic needs and/or rent, distribution of water tanks, vouchers for water, and hygiene promotion activities.

Syria

Oxfam's response inside Syria is quite different to Jordan and Lebanon as our focus is on rehabilitating the damaged water supply infrastructure close to what one has in the UK, which typifies the context of the middle income, and urban context. Oxfam's response has included the equipping of water systems with generators, submersible pumps, cables, water tanks, and even the supply and installation of a reverse osmosis system in a governorate which has been cut off by their bulk water main and has had to utilise their local water source (typified with high hydrogen sulphide, conductivity and temperature).

Briefing paper objective

The objective of this briefing paper is to present how our response to the Middle East crisis has evolved over time from the typical norm of distribution *in kind* assistance, to examining the opportunities stemming from the local market with a WaSH lens, plus the merits and challenges of working in Syria itself. A great deal of lessons can be drawn from this experience – i.e. to be different for the future, and build on our competencies and relationships when collaborating with the private sector, and local Government when responding to middle income, and urban crises.

An evolving market based response

Market based programming has been pivotal to the food security response programmes for several years now, and the WaSH practitioners are catching up on their methodologies, their response analysis and recommendations.

Simply WaSH practitioners need to more proactively carry out a snap shot appraisal of the local market and understand how the market functions, who are the market actors – informal, formal, small-medium-large, how the different vulnerable groups access them, their enabling environment, the pre conditions etc.

The EMMA methodology has been the kick-start for us WaSH practitioners to initiate our niche and competencies in a market based response. The term EMMA stands for *Emergency Market Mapping Analysis* toolkit¹. This involves a combined analysis of the market environment, the market chain, the key infrastructure, inputs and services, and in doing so this understands the different power dynamics, the gaps, the enablers and moreover the potential response modalities. Oxfam have carried out several EMMA's examining the water system in Jordan, Lebanon (specifically the Bekaa valley) and Gaza.

WaSH market based response

Post EMMA in Jordan, Lebanon and Gaza our responses have built on the analysis and recommendations of the EMMA's.

In the case of **Jordan and Lebanon** rather than continuing with the *in kind* distributions of hygiene kits, and providing service contractors for water trucking Oxfam's response is now based on a voucher based programme. Our target population now receive *commodity vouchers* for hygiene kits where they redeem at

¹ EMMA toolkit

selected traders in their community. Oxfam carried out a review of the traders to examine their stock levels, flexibility to expand, the quality and prices of products etc. This commodity voucher has proven successful as it provides them choice, stimulates and promotes the local market, links the market trader and consumer, and is less onus on the NGO away from the cumbersome task of distributing through bulk *in kind* distributions.

In the instance of drinking water – there are no simple answers for a refugee from say Aleppo in Syria. Pre conflict the Aleppo communities were used to two taps in their household, one for domestic duties and one for drinking water, which the later had been treated in a more sophisticated manner by reverse osmosis. For example, refugees from Aleppo living either in Jordan or Lebanon are now faced with the challenge of buying tankered water for domestic duties, and or replying on the municipal water network, which can be intermittent, or they buy bottled water from reverse osmosis filling stations for drinking water. This all costs money and a challenge when you are faced with many costly expenditures ranging from rent, to food, to clothes, to water etc.

Thus rather than continuing with the water trucking, and creating a parallel NGO market system the EMMA findings provided some insights in developing a water voucher based programme, where households are provided with a booklet of water vouchers to redeem at the bottling stations in and around Amman (Balqa and Zarqa governorate) in Jordan. While in Lebanon the vouchers were redeemed via the water trucking operators from the public boreholes in the Bekaa valley. This offered better targeting, equity of water distributed, supported the existing local market actors, build a rapport and relationship between the market actor and consumer. A debate often is how one assures the quality control? The voucher based initiative is merely a different modality than *in kind*, and WaSH practitioners like ourselves carry out routine monitoring both of the quality and quantity of water received, plus active support to the market trader through capacity building initiatives, and / or donation of items to improve their function and performance.

In the context of Jordan and Lebanon, one of the limitations is their storage capacity – so the voucher based programme is supported by an *in kind* distribution of household water tanks (500-1,000 litres).



Photograph 1. Water bottling station in Zarqa, Amman, Jordan²



Photograph 2. Water trucking hydrant in Zarqa, Amman, Jordan³

In the instance of **Gaza**, the EMMA examining the water system served as a useful tool to inform both their existing response and preparedness; contingency measures. Gaza city is equipped both with the municipal water network, and private water vendors equipped with reverse osmosis treatment systems. The later provide wide across the city either through tankers or their bottling stations.

The crisis in Gaza is fragile and protracted, and collectively the humanitarian community have equipped the Gaza population with a smart card system, which equip them the choice and access to food at pre selected market traders. The WaSH practitioners have had a long standing relationship both with the Palestinian Water Authority and the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in exercising support to the rehabilitation of water and sewerage infrastructure, but also with the private water vendors equipped with

² Water Market System (EMMA in Jordan) (2013)

³ Wildman, T & Brady C (2013)

reverse osmosis treatment. The EMMA study presented an extensive map all of the market actors (informal, formal, small – large, who they targeted etc.) which proved to be a huge asset both for the supposed normal times in Gaza, but also during the military *Operation Protective Edge* in July 2014 where there was 7 weeks of bombardment, rocket attacks and ground fighting resulting in the deaths of over, 2,200 people. Our efficiency and effectiveness during the response to *Operation Protective Edge* was enabled due to the fact that Oxfam had strong relationships with the water market actors (i.e. had their phone numbers, known number of trucks, their quantity of water per day etc.) – all which were an outcome of the EMMA, but also they have carried out such activities before. Yet during the bombardment the practicality of collecting a voucher was challenging, thus the *in kind* distribution did play a role. Since the military strikes have ended the voucher based programme has re continued and gone back to the full mode. Thus, the indirect and direct support to the market actors, the alliances and relationships formed before the recent conflict provided huge asset to the response.

An evolving response in cooperation with the local authorities

Responding within Syria is a challenging environment for the humanitarian community. For Oxfam and the WaSH community in Syria, cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Water Resources, and their respective water authorities (e.g. Damascus (city and rural) Water Authority, Hama Governorate Water Authority) is pivotal to our response.

However, this has not been an easy task as both Oxfam and MoWR have needed to devote a great deal of time in understanding how one functions, and our ways of working etc. This required time and due diligence has played a major role to the success of our response, though there has been the challenges with access, customs, international sanctions, the technical competency and availability of contractors etc. Yet, through a dedicated understanding of the priorities, the menu of options, the capital and operational costs – Oxfam, with MoWR have managed to equip many of the damaged water systems in Aleppo, Hama, Damascus, Idlib with either generators, submersible pumps, cables, water tanks, and designed, construction and the commission of a reverse osmosis system.

Specific to Jordan and Lebanon in what we have seen, but this is not specific to these in the Middle East, is the lack of awareness of water conservation, often the lack of trust in the municipal water system thus leading to the acceptance and common practice in buying drinking water.

Given the terrain of the conflicts ranging from IS across Syria and Iraq, Ukraine – one will need to build more competencies, and effective operational models when working with the local Government both in the preparedness and the operational response plans.

Lessons – whilst improving access with sustainability

Whilst responding to the Syria and Gaza crisis, one can draw on many lessons gained with the overall objective of improving access and in a sustainable manner. The lessons range from the following:

- A detailed market based assessment and analysis of a ‘market system’ (in our case water) provides huge insights of the different market actors, and how the consumers access this. Thus rather than building a parallel system e.g. via an in-kind modality, one build on the existing structures, norms – thus providing choice, dignity and stimulation of the market.
- The process of undertaking an EMMA does take skill and time – especially when some of the market systems can be rather complicated, including a range of informal and formal actors, and different coping mechanisms across the different wealth groups. But don’t be put off by this as it is broadly common sense, and follow the core logic of how water gets from the producer to the consumer.
- The provision of commodity/value vouchers requires a complementary approach between the WaSH, logistic and fiancé functions – to ensure that the check and balances are made when examining the market actors stock levels, quality, price, quality assurance etc.
- Whilst working in insecure environments such as Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon it is critical to know your audience well and they understand you. The extensive stakeholder mapping carried out by both the managerial and the technical functions of Oxfam worked dividends, and the continuum of engaging with the Ministry of Water Resources in Damascus enabled us to uphold our work in Syria itself – ranging from a reverse osmosis system in Hama, to generators and submersible pumps in Damascus and Aleppo. Yet, one needed a dedicated team at the higher level to have these representative discussions for such authorities as MoWR to understand the ways of working of Oxfam, which one did.

Conclusions

In summary, whilst responding to middle income and urban crises, WaSH practitioners should examine the local market from day one to see if there is the enabling environment to support and respond through local market actors, and provide the targeted assistance either through a cash or voucher (conditionality or value) modality. In conjunction or separately, coordination and cooperation with the key government structures is instrumental to our response in such contexts as Syria, Gaza and Jordan – which require somewhat different a skill set, and operational activities to say rural Africa.

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