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DEVELOPMENT PROJECT— SYRIA 10070.0

Support to Small Farmers and Herders on Marginal and Degraded Lands

Number of beneficiaries 190,200

Duration of project Four years

Cost (United States dollars)

Total cost to WFP 11,317,716

Total food cost 8,839,394

Total cost to Government 21,641,934

Total project cost 32,933,650

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Note to the Executive Board



This document is submitted for approval by the Executive Board.

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal point indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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Should you have any questions regarding matters of dispatch of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact the Supervisor, Meeting Servicing and Distribution Unit (tel.: 066513-2328).



Executive Summary



The project addresses issues of rural poverty and household food insecurity, degraded natural resources and gender inequities.

Its activities will be implemented on marginal agricultural lands and on degraded rangelands of the Syrian steppes known as the Badia. A vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) exercise for Syria has narrowed the targeting of WFP assistance to areas and communities of very poor and food insecure subsistence farmers, small-scale herders and rural women.

The project will benefit 190,200 persons, who will receive WFP food rations. Of these, 38,040 small-scale farmers and herders, including 22,270 rural women, are identified as direct beneficiaries participating in project activities.

In accordance with decision 1999/EB.A/2 of the Executive Board, WFP focuses its development activities on five objectives. This project addresses Enabling Development policy objectives: 2 (enable poor households to invest in human capital through education and training); 3 (make it possible for poor families to gain and preserve assets); and 5 (enable households that depend on degraded natural resources for their food security to make a shift to more sustainable livelihoods).

The project will enable poor farmers to create sustainable assets through rehabilitation and conversion of their farmlands to higher-value tree crops. It will support farmers in establishing fish farms on their unproductive saline land, assist small herders in restoring the vegetation of their rangelands and contribute to enhancing the skills of poor rural women through basic literacy and vocational training, which will enable them to initiate income-generating activities.

The strategy for implementing the project will be based on close cooperation with the Government, partnership with United Nations agencies, and active beneficiary participation. Special measures in support of women's empowerment will be adopted to ensure that women are represented at decision-making and managerial levels and are involved in all aspects of project implementation.

Draft Decision



The Board approves development project Syria 10070.0—Support to Small Farmers and Herders on Marginal and Degraded Lands (WFP/EB.3/2001/9-A).



PROBLEM ANALYSIS

1. Syria is a low-income, food-deficit country (LIFDC). Its economy is largely dependent on agriculture, oil production and trade. The dominant agriculture sector remains underdeveloped, with roughly 80 percent of cultivated land dependent on rainfall. The sector provides 30 percent of employment and accounts for the largest share of the female workforce in the country.
2. The population of Syria, estimated at 16.5 million in 2000, is four times the 1960 level and is expected to exceed 24 million by 2020. About 50 percent of the population is rural, but urbanization rates are increasing. Almost half the population is under 15 years of age, leading to a high dependency ratio.
3. Syria has a fairly good potential for sustained economic growth. In 1999, the per capita gross national product (GNP) was US\$1,010. In recent years, however, several factors have been responsible for the decline and stagnation of the economy. The instability of the Middle East peace process continues to discourage international investors and is undermining government efforts to privatize and modernize the economy. The country's oil-exporting capacity is constrained as a result of increasing extraction costs and depleted reserves. Regional disparities, growing unemployment and high poverty rates in rural areas are additional strains on the economy.
4. In 1998/1999, the country suffered a major drought that continued through the 1999/2000 season. The drought had serious implications for the food security of farmers in low-rainfall areas and the nomadic population of the steppes known as the Badia. The herders suffered a dramatic fall in income and had to liquidate assets in order to meet their immediate food requirements.
5. To address regional disparities and reduce poverty rates throughout the country, the Government has launched special programmes for the development of economically disadvantaged areas. These include the Green Belt Project (GBP) and the Badia Development Project (BDP). These projects, which will be supported by WFP, aim at rehabilitating the economic base of small farmers living on marginal lands and of herders in the adjacent Badia.
6. The project area spreads over 9 of the country's 14 provinces and includes more than 150 settlements in the Badia. The marginal low-rainfall areas known as the Green Belt are concentrated in a narrow band bordering the Badia; they are only 2–20 km wide and cross a limited part of each of the provinces.
7. A VAM exercise was conducted in conjunction with the appraisal mission (see Annex III). The preliminary results of that exercise reveal that the most vulnerable regions are in the Badia and on the marginal lands of the Green Belt, which is where the proposed WFP project will be implemented.
8. These regions are characterized by isolation, relatively high poverty rates associated with food insecurity in terms of access and availability, a weak health and social infrastructure and a degraded natural resource base. They are inhabited mainly by poor subsistence farmers owning less than 5 ha of land and small herders with fewer than 100 sheep. Most live below the poverty line, with average monthly incomes not exceeding US\$50. Rates of malnutrition are worryingly high, and it is estimated that 40 percent of children under 5 there suffer from moderate or severe stunting, and 10 percent suffer from wasting. Over 50 percent of the population in these areas does not have access to safe water and 72 percent does not have access to adequate sanitation. These figures were corroborated in two socio-economic surveys in selected rural localities in the project areas,



conducted in March 2000 with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

9. The studies indicated that surveyed households comprising mainly subsistence farmers were spending about 70 percent of their income to meet food consumption needs. Phasing out national food subsidies resulted in additional increases in household spending. Only bread, rice and sugar are now subsidized. These commodities are available at government outlets and bakeries in urban areas and rural towns. In the project area, however, the outlets are often quite far from where people live and transportation is difficult. Merchants transport subsidized bread to remote villages and settlements, but a higher price is charged in these cases and the bread is often stale by the time it arrives.
10. Women bear the brunt of rural poverty, as reflected in the provinces covered by the project, where literacy rates are as low as 15 percent and fertility rates often exceed seven children per mother. Agriculture remains the only source of employment for women. Most women in these areas lack the appropriate skills and knowledge to improve their performance and engage in financially viable activities.
11. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable in terms of self-reliance and food security. In the provinces covered by the project, about 15 percent of households are headed by women. An increasingly large proportion of households are temporarily headed by women while husbands and sons migrate for work. This is particularly true for rural families in low-rainfall areas, where farming is limited and men are frequently migrating in search of employment.

Previous WFP Assistance

12. The present WFP portfolio comprises two projects valued at US\$31 million. Projects, 2746.03, Assistance to Fruit-tree Planting in the Green Belt, and 2418.04, Assistance to Reforestation and Rangeland Management, are implemented in different geographic locations in the five agro-climatic zones. Both projects are scheduled to terminate in December 2001.
13. The main objective of the two ongoing WFP-assisted projects is to improve the overall condition of poor subsistence farmers and landless workers. The current phases of the projects include activities that are more in line with WFP's Enabling Development policy priorities and its Commitments to Women. Training components were introduced to improve the skills of rural women and to allow them to initiate income-generating activities through a microcredit scheme.
14. The proposed project introduces an integrated approach fully compatible with Enabling Development priorities, whereby activities will be grouped under three main components, to be implemented under a single management structure. The principal aim is to help subsistence farmers and herders in the targeted areas and to enable them to develop the economic potential of their assets and skills in order to improve their overall living conditions.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Long-term Objectives

15. The long-term objectives of the project are to:



- establish sustainable livelihoods and ensure the food security of poor rural households living in semi-arid farming areas; and
- contribute to the effective integration of rural women into mainstream socio-economic development.

Immediate Objectives

16. WFP assistance will contribute to meeting the immediate consumption needs of poor, food-insecure households while helping to create lasting household assets. The project focuses particularly on enabling small farmers and herders, who depend to a large extent on degraded natural resources for their food security, to maintain and preserve their assets and shift to more sustainable livelihoods through improving the physical resource base. The project will enable poor rural women to invest in human capital through education and training.

Objective 1

17. The first objective is to assist small-scale farmers in marginalized low-rainfall areas and the Euphrates Basin in shifting to more sustainable farming activities and consolidating their assets.

📍 *In Low-rainfall Areas*

Outputs

18. An area of 24,000 ha in the Green Belt and Jabal Al Hoss will be reclaimed and converted to farmlands with higher-value tree crops. Of these, 19,200 ha will be implemented under the GBP and 4,800 ha will come under the IFAD-financed Jabal Al Hoss Project.
19. Main works to be carried out by family labour in the first year consist of clearing the rocks and debris from the land after completion of heavy mechanized reclamation of the farm, to be followed by terracing and wall-building to prepare the land for planting. In the second and third years, farmers will be planting and watering tree seedlings, pruning and weeding. Planting barley between trees will also be considered, depending on the appropriateness of soils.

Outcomes

20. Some 10,000 small-scale farmers will rehabilitate unproductive farms in low-rainfall areas, consolidating and improving their land assets. The land-improvement and fruit-tree programme will provide an opportunity for farmers to enhance the value of their land and increase their income from it.

📍 *In the Euphrates Basin and Adjacent Areas*

Outputs

21. In areas where farmland is no longer cultivable because of salinity, 300 small-scale farmers and landless labourers will develop 300 fish-farming enterprises. Farmers owning land that has become saline will be given assistance to excavate ponds, while about 150 landless workers will farm in sections of canals and major drains.



Outcomes

22. Some 300 poor and landless farmers will be engaged in fish farming, learning new skills and benefiting from a newly introduced income-generating activity.

Objective 2

23. The second objective is to provide the opportunity for poor illiterate women and girls in rural and nomadic communities to acquire basic literacy, so that they can qualify for learning new higher skills and gain access to the project development activities.

↳ Literacy

Outputs

24. Some 750 basic literacy classes, 250 per year, each of nine months' duration, will be held in remote rural areas and the Badia.

Outcomes

25. About 15,000 poor women living in rural areas and in the Badia would benefit from the basic literacy programmes, particularly in terms of improving self-reliance and reducing their sense of marginalization. The programme would increase their awareness of their roles and legal rights in relation to ownership and access to resources.
26. Completion of a basic literacy course will qualify women to participate in skills enhancement and vocational training.

↳ Vocational Training

Outputs

27. Vocational training, 50 courses per year, totalling 150, will be held in selected localities for three months per year. The courses, for 3,000 trainees (1,000 per year), will cover subjects related to reproductive health, environmental awareness, home economics, food processing, agriculture and basic veterinary skills.
28. Specialized hands-on training for 2,040 unskilled nursery workers (680 per year) will be held in 57 fruit-tree nurseries of the project areas. The training will be about seeds and seedling treatment, grafting and pruning.
29. Some 12 special training courses in enterprise skills and loan management will be arranged for rural women, who will receive small loans to undertake income-generating activities.

Outcomes

30. Three thousand women acquiring awareness and new skills will be able to participate actively in farming and herding activities on equal terms with male household members.
31. Two thousand forty unskilled nursery workers will acquire special skills, qualifying them for better-paying jobs in the private sector.
32. Two hundred poor rural women, heads of households, will be undertaking income-generating activities, which will help to improve overall household incomes.



Objective 3

33. Objective 3 is to establish reserve grazing areas in the Badia for the poorest herders, who lack the resources to purchase or transport feed and water to their sheep, and assist them in rehabilitating grazing land by reintroducing indigenous fodder shrubs.

Outputs

34. Grazing reserve areas will be established for 50 poor households in each of the 150 settlements of the Badia. Each settlement will have a reserve area of approximately 1,000 ha, making for a total of 150,000 ha of grazing areas to be established by the project. The reserve areas will be re-seeded or replanted with community participation and assistance and guidance from the Badia Directorate.
35. Grazing associations will be formed for each beneficiary group and reserve area. Formal agreements for usufruct rights will be signed by the beneficiary herder, local authorities, officials and settlement representatives. In return for the rights, the associations will agree to abide by the Badia Directorate stocking rate and management recommendations.

Outcomes

36. Seven thousand five hundred of the poorest herders in the Badia, 50 herders per settlement, will have sufficient forage in normal years without having to migrate or buy feed.
37. At approximately 150 locations in the Badia, groups of small herders will have management responsibility for defined areas of formerly open-access rangeland. Through their grazing associations, targeted herders from among the poorest households in the Badia will be able to ensure regulated management of the pastures and availability of forage on a sustainable basis.

ROLE AND MODALITIES OF FOOD AID

Functions

38. Food aid in this project represents an enabling and a motivating factor for small farmers, herders and rural women.
39. WFP food aid serves as an incentive for small food-insecure farmers who are undertaking a novel form of cultivation under circumstances of low and irregular rainfall and in the absence of alternative sources of adequate income.
40. Food aid represents a significant income support during the conversion process, enabling farmers and their families to devote themselves fully to the tasks of developing permanent planting while reducing the burden on their limited cash resources.
41. Food aid will tide over these farmers during the critical reclamation and planting period, when it is important to get the trees started properly.
42. For small herders in the Badia, food aid will act as an incentive for them to join grazing associations and participate in establishing and protecting reserve areas near their settlements.
43. For women and girls attending literacy classes and vocational training, food aid will be an important incentive for them to join the courses and attend regularly. Food aid will



compensate their families for loss of labour within the household and time taken from farming and herding activities.

Food Inputs and Commodity Justification

44. A standard daily ration for a family of five will consist of 1,400 g of wheat flour, 100 g of oil and 150 g of pulses. Full family rations will be provided on a quarterly basis to farmers, herders, women receiving hands-on training in nurseries and women involved in income-generating activities.
45. Women and girls attending literacy classes and vocational training courses will receive a family ration consisting of wheat flour only. The level of the daily family ration will be 1,665 g, equivalent to 50 kg per month. This will facilitate handling operations and commodity distributions at the project level, particularly in schools or centres far from the beneficiaries' homes.

Category	Male	Female	Feeding days
	(number of beneficiaries)		
Fruit-tree farmers	8 000	2 000	10 800 000
Fish farmers	270	30	162 000
Herders	7 500		5 400 000
Nursery trainees		2 040	306 000
Women's income-generation		200	72 000
Literacy trainees		15 000	4 050 000
Vocational trainees		3 000	270 000

46. Local market values of the full monthly family ration of three commodities and the reduced family ration of one commodity are estimated at US\$21 and US\$16, respectively. These figures represent about 40 percent and 30 percent, respectively, of the average monthly income of poor households in the project areas.
47. Food commodities have been selected taking into account local food consumption patterns, the income-transfer value of the food ration—ranging from 20 to 40 percent of the estimated average monthly income of farmers and herders, including the incomes of those engaged in off-farm activities—and the absence of commercial food outlets in the project areas.
48. Project beneficiaries, including women, will actively participate in the distribution of food commodities. Committees or units will be formed at the village and settlement levels, where women farmers will be represented. The committees will review lists of registered beneficiaries and ensure the proper handling and distribution of WFP food rations.

PROJECT STRATEGY

49. The project strategy will be based on close cooperation with the Government and coordination among the partners on targeting the poorest and most food insecure populations in the areas identified by VAM analysis, on participation and on women's empowerment. Implementation of project activities will be based on a decentralized management structure.



Implementation Strategy

✧ *Institutional Framework*

50. The project will be implemented under the overall responsibility of the State Planning Commission (SPC) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR). The Government will allocate resources and staff and secure institutional and technical backstopping.
51. MAAR will be responsible for managerial and technical implementation of the fruit trees, the Badia components and vocational training. A project management unit (PMU) will be established in the Directorate of Agricultural Affairs (DAA) of MAAR, and the director of DAA will be the project manager. The project manager will be assisted by a deputy project manager and a technical and administrative staff. The PMU will be directly in charge of all operational matters related to the WFP-assisted project, including food logistics operations.
52. The PMU will coordinate project activities of the provincial directorates of MAAR and will provide management support and advice to units involved in the project at the local level. The General Women Union (GWU) and the Ministry of Culture (MOC) will be responsible for the basic literacy courses for rural women in villages and settlements covered by the project. Local branches of GWU, in cooperation with MOC inspectors, will ensure adequate implementation of this activity, keeping records of enrolment, attendance, drop-out rates and graduation.
53. Given the multiplicity of partners involved in this project, it is necessary to put in place effective coordination mechanisms. For this purpose, a National Project Review Committee (NPRC) will be established under the aegis of SPC. It will include the project manager, the deputy project manager, the Badia director, the director of the Extension Services Department of MAAR, the head of the Gender Unit in the Extension Services Department, representatives of the GWU and MOC, and the WFP representative. The NPRC will review implementation and address emerging problems.

✧ *Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping*

54. The VAM focal point in the country office in Syria will work with the PMU in defining indicators for targeting communities in the project areas and for selecting beneficiaries. This exercise must be undertaken before the project starts. During the first year of implementation it will be based on the VAM model for Syria. The exercise will use eight variables related to food security and poverty: land productivity, length of growing periods for orchards and rangelands, area irrigated, access to land, access to roads, meat slaughtered per capita, malnutrition and stunting and illiteracy among women.

✧ *Beneficiary Participation*

55. Farmers will be involved in fruit-tree and fish-farming activities in some form of cost-sharing arrangement with the Government. PMU staff and agricultural extensionists at the district level will initiate intensive consultations with farmers in the project areas. They will also discuss steps to be taken, the support to be given to farmers and farmers' expected contributions.
56. As the consultation process with beneficiaries and reclamation and rehabilitation phase (mechanized work) of the project may take some time, it will not be possible to enrol all the selected farmers in the first year; 5,000 will be registered initially and another 5,000 in the second year.



57. The basic literacy classes and vocational training will be an opportunity to mobilize young girls and women and help them break their social isolation. They will be able to interact with the social workers of GWU and agricultural extensionists and discuss issues of common concern or participate in social activities.
58. Forming small herders into groups or associations to establish communal grazing reserves will be crucial for developing and maintaining productive rangelands in the Badia and for creating assets. As a first step, the Badia Directorate will use recent livestock census data to identify herders with fewer than 50 head of sheep in each of the 150 settlements. Through a process of contact dialogue and follow-up, staff from the Badia Directorate and extensionists will discuss with the intended beneficiaries and relevant local authorities the importance and benefits of grazing associations and will prepare with the herders the details of the work to be undertaken.

Measures Contributing to Women's Empowerment

59. Project officials are fully aware of the role women must play in the project. With WFP support, they are adopting measures that would result in positive changes for the women participating. There will be a larger representation of women on the National Committee on Food Aid Projects, including a representative of GWU and the head of the Gender Unit in the Extension Services Department of MAAR.
60. Women participating in project activities while husbands or male breadwinners are seeking temporary employment outside the area will be registered as direct beneficiaries and will be entitled to WFP assistance. Women in nomadic settlements will be encouraged to join the grazing associations and to participate actively in establishing and protecting the grazing reserve.

Food Logistics

61. WFP commodities will be shipped to Latakia or Tartus, or by land through international border entry points. Government agents will be responsible for customs and other clearances. Commodities will be transported to central warehouses in Latakia, or directly to provincial warehouses, whichever is more efficient. The PMU will arrange for transport and distribution of WFP commodities in the provinces according to distribution lists and requirements in each beneficiary province. The Government will cover all costs related to internal transport, storage and handling (ITSH) of WFP commodities.
62. The Government Cereals Bureau will take delivery of WFP wheat flour consignments at the port of discharge and will release equivalent quantities from the provincial mills according to programmed project needs. Pulses and vegetable oil will be distributed directly to project beneficiaries.
63. Food distributions will be made on a quarterly basis. Provincial project authorities will prepare beneficiary lists in advance of the quarterly distribution and will receive the PMU's authorization to withdraw commodities according to the quarterly need. As far as possible, the project authorities will make distributions in beneficiary villages and settlements in order to minimize transport costs paid by beneficiaries.

Generated Funds

64. No funds will be generated in this project. The funds generated from previous WFP-assisted projects SYR 2418.04 and SYR 2746.02 will be transferred to this project and will constitute a valuable resource in support of women's income-generating activities.



65. A savings fund sub-committee of the NPRC will be established at SPC. It will be responsible for reviewing and approving the annual expenditure plan submitted by the PMU and monitoring the overall fund performance. Authorization to disburse funds will remain under the signature of the Minister of State for Planning Affairs.

Phasing Out

66. The project will be implemented in remote rural areas, which have been severely affected by the recent drought. WFP assistance is targeted to very poor food-insecure farmers and herders who have had very little opportunity to create assets on a sustainable basis. Substantial investments are still needed to rehabilitate and develop these marginal areas. Under current circumstances, a comprehensive phasing-out strategy cannot be envisaged. WFP will, however, continue within the VAM framework to monitor socio-economic conditions of beneficiaries. Based on the findings of this exercise, which will include at least two participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), WFP will consider phasing out from some of the activities. Government capacity to increase its support for targeted populations will help to determine the continuation of WFP assistance.

BENEFICIARIES AND BENEFITS

67. The project will support 38,040 persons, of whom 22,270 are women, identified as core beneficiaries participating in the project; 190,200 persons, including project beneficiaries and their families, will benefit from the project and receive WFP assistance (see Annex I).
68. The main group of direct beneficiaries consists of 10,000 small-scale farmers. Farmers will be selected on the basis of their possessing a farm not exceeding 7 ha, their dependence on farming as a main source of living and their permanent residence in the area. At least 20 percent of farmers should be female heads of households or main breadwinners.
69. Some 7,500 households from 150 settlements in the Badia will benefit from the reserve grazing component of the project. Only the poorest herders owning fewer than 50 sheep will be selected. Priority will be given to those who are ready and willing to take part in a participatory range-management system.
70. About 15,000 illiterate women from rural communities and settlements in the Badia will attend literacy classes; 3,000 women from poor rural households will receive vocational training. These women will be selected from remote localities in the Green Belt and Jabal Al Hoss and from distant settlements in the Badia. Priority will be given to girls and women of 15–40 years old.
71. About 2,040 poor women working in the fruit-tree nurseries will be given hands-on training to enhance their skills. Priority will be given to single female heads of households or main breadwinners who have been working on unskilled tasks in the nurseries and who have completed one full basic literacy course.
72. Overall, the project will contribute to the agricultural development and environmental protection of marginal lands and will help restore the productivity of the much degraded rangelands of the Badia.

Anticipated Effects of the Project on Women

73. The project has been designed to enable women to participate actively in the development opportunities of the project. Women constitute 58.5 percent of direct



beneficiaries, including 20 percent of women beneficiaries who, as heads of households, will be selected to participate directly in fruit growing, fish-farming and livestock-raising. The basic literacy and vocational training activities are exclusively targeted to young girls and women.

74. Women in the project area are fully involved in most activities normally carried out by men. Given the current high rates of seasonal migration, women take additional responsibilities for all work on their farm or with the herds.
75. The measures adopted under the project to support women's involvement are expected to strengthen their access to assets created and provide them with opportunities to improve their living conditions. The training activities specifically targeted to women will help break their social isolation, develop their skills and contribute to their empowerment.

PROJECT SUPPORT

76. The Government will be allocating US\$21.6 million for the project from its own resources. The funds will be drawn from national and regional development programmes such as GBP, BDP and the National Literacy Programme and earmarked to specific activities supported by WFP. It also covers internal transport costs of WFP commodities and related handling operations at the project level.
77. An estimated US\$260,869 in generated funds from ongoing projects terminating in December 2001 will be carried over to this project and used to cover additional expenses related to literacy classes and vocational training.
78. Co-financing with IFAD will be limited to activities undertaken by poor farmers and herders and poor rural women who will be receiving WFP assistance. These activities, which will be implemented under the IFAD projects, include the rehabilitation and tree planting of over 4,800 ha in the Jabal Al Hoss and vocational training for 450 girls in the Badia. Estimated costs to IFAD are US\$3.6 million and US\$15,000, respectively.

Monitoring and Evaluation

79. The PMU will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of project activities. A comprehensive M&E system covering the three components of the project will be established. The Extension Services Department of MAAR will assist the PMU in monitoring physical achievements of the project; the provincial branches of the GWU and MOC will monitor implementation of the literacy courses and related training. The VAM focal point in the WFP country office will be associated with this exercise. WFP will undertake an independent evaluation of the activities towards the end of the project.
80. Data and information based on selected performance indicators and disaggregated by gender will be collected at the village level by extension workers or technical staff according to checklists. Monthly monitoring reports on enrolment, attendance and achievements at literacy and training courses will be prepared by the provincial branches of the GWU and submitted to the PMU. Progress implementation reports on project inputs, outputs and achievements, based on the quarterly monitoring from the provinces, will be prepared by the PMU every six months and sent to the country office in Damascus.
81. During the course of the project, at least two PRA exercises will be conducted by social economists to assess the effect of the project on beneficiaries and to examine changes in farming and grazing patterns.



PROJECT FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

82. The project was prepared in close cooperation with the Government of Syria. It incorporates elements of two project proposals—post-drought rehabilitation of rangelands in the Badia and support for planting fruit trees—that were presented to WFP in April and September 2000. Given that the two projects are located in geographically adjacent areas and will be implemented by MAAR, WFP and the Government agreed, for all practical purposes, to merge activities into one project and to include a cross-cutting component for the training of rural women. The revised proposal was appraised in May 2001.

Technical Feasibility

83. The mission ascertained that the Government had the necessary technical know-how and the qualified staff to carry out most of the project activities. Additional technical support will be provided by implementing partners and through locally recruited consultants.

84. Water for irrigation is a critical factor in establishing new trees in the lower-rainfall areas. It is recommended that farmers give the trees supplemental irrigation for three years after planting. The Government has made the necessary investment to increase water availability in the project areas. Geological surveys have been completed and ten new wells will be installed in the coming year.

85. For the fish farming activity, the mission noted that the Department of Fisheries Resources (DFR) in MAAR has experienced staff who have already worked with fish farmers. They have been trained under a technical assistance project supported by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and will be able to provide the necessary know-how. Fish farming has not yet been carried out on an extensive scale in the Euphrates Basin, so it is recommended that this activity be viewed as a pilot project supporting 300 farmers only.

86. The rangelands in the vicinity of the Badia settlements are so depleted that range reinforcement using seeds and seedlings is the only way to restore productivity within a reasonable period. The techniques for direct seeding, broadcasting and transplanting seedlings are well proven in the Badia. The seeds and seedling nurseries are already planned or in production and the machinery for direct seeding is in place or ordered.

87. The literacy course is based on practical teaching methods aimed to provide elementary learning skills for working adults who have never had any schooling. The course contents and textbooks have been produced by MOC, with technical inputs from UNESCO and UNFPA. The course focuses on reading comprehension, basic writing and calculation.

88. The successful completion of the nine-month basic literacy programme is conditional for enrolment in vocational training courses. As mentioned by the extensionists, there has been a marked shift away from traditional skills such as sewing, weaving and knitting. Women are more interested in learning new skills related to their field of work and community needs. Most of the courses to be supported by the project will therefore focus on agriculture and new farming methods, advanced nursery skills, veterinary care, first aid and family health.

Economic Viability

89. The mission noted that investments in planting fruit trees would be relatively high for poor farmers despite the fact that the Government subsidized the activity in several ways. Investment costs will vary, depending on the types of trees selected and other farmer



inputs. The first instalment of the loan obtained from the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, which would cover about 80 percent of the total costs, will be repaid after the sixth year.

90. It is expected that in most cases farmers will have to supplement farm income with external funds in order to make their first loan payments. Olive trees will begin to bear fruit only after 9–10 years, pistachios after 9–11 years and almonds after 7–9 years. Farmers said they were willing to take up seasonal employment in order to repay their loans and were satisfied that they had established assets that promised a sustainable source of income after several years.
91. Marketing outlets for fruit products in the project area are currently poorly developed. However, consumption needs are likely to increase with population growth, and the development of tourism. In the coming decade, additional yields from fruit trees are likely to be absorbed and marketed locally.
92. For the Badia rangelands, the short- and medium-term sustainability of the range improvement will be reasonably assured by formal agreements whereby the grazing associations abide by the stocking rate and management recommendations of the Badia Directorate. Economic benefits will be in terms of adequate year-round forage for herders, preventing recourse to purchasing feed or paying for cereal stubble in marginal areas.

Social Viability

93. The project will be implemented in remote areas where villages and settlements are scattered and far from main roads. Households, particularly those headed by women, in these isolated communities may be difficult to reach. There may be resistance by targeted beneficiaries to communicate with project staff and to participate in the proposed activities. This is more likely to be the case in the distant villages and dispersed settlements of the Badia.
94. Project staff and GWU social workers should make special efforts to reach women in remote localities and ensure that classes are held in public premises within walking distance of nearby settlements or villages. MOC gave assurances that mobile classrooms would be made available in any locality where at least 30 students were enrolled; a cash incentive will be paid to teachers posted in these areas.
95. The improvement and protection of rangelands depends largely on the willingness of herders to form grazing associations. In order to overcome herders' reluctance to change the current grazing patterns, project staff will encourage the herders to join grazing associations through which exclusive user rights will be guaranteed. The project staff will also provide the necessary inputs and extension services. Food aid will be an incentive for the poorest herders to form their own grazing associations in order to ensure participatory management of the reserve.

Environmental Considerations

96. Protection of the environment is a priority government objective. Following two years of severe drought, planting fruit trees in marginal lands and rehabilitation of degraded rangelands constitute the principal means for improving soil fertility and reducing desert encroachment.
97. Some of the farmlands to be planted with fruit trees are currently under barley and some are uncultivated. Conversion from barley to orchards will have some negative impact on the availability of grain and crop residues for livestock, but the area under fruit trees is very small compared with that of barley production. Once developed, these marginal lands



are likely to be better cared for and managed than at present, and it will be in farmers' interests to prevent soil erosion.

98. Risks of wind and water erosion can be minimized by the current practice of planting the lines of trees at ninety degrees to the prevailing wind direction on flat land and along the contour on sloping land.
99. The Badia rangelands, particularly in the vicinity of settlements, are in such bad condition that any form of attentive management is likely to be beneficial.
100. Improvement in range condition over time, as the re-seeded and replanted areas become more vigorous and extensive, should accommodate any increase in flock sizes.
101. The shrub species to be re-seeded and replanted are indigenous. Re-establishment of the vegetation will re-create suitable habitats for small birds and mammals and improve rain infiltration, thereby reducing run-off and soil erosion.

DISINCENTIVES, DISPLACEMENT AND DEPENDENCY

102. The 1998/1999 drought severely affected Syria's production of cereals, meat and fruit. The Government is now increasingly relying on imports to meet the food requirements of the population.
103. In 1999, according to data provided by MAAR, 1.3 million tons of cereals, 529,000 tons of pulses and 71,000 tons of vegetable oil were imported. In 2000, cereal imports increased to 1.6 million tons while vegetable oil imports declined slightly, to 60,000 tons.
104. WFP will supply 30,711 tons of wheat flour, 1,680 tons of vegetable oil and 2,519 tons of pulses. The largest amount of commodities to be supplied in the third year of the project will be 10,569 tons of wheat flour, 584 tons of vegetable oil and 875 tons of pulses. In terms of annual imports, these food aid shipments represent 0.6 percent of wheat flour, 0.9 percent of vegetable oil and 0.1 percent of pulses, and will not result in any market displacement or a disincentive to local production. WFP food will be distributed in areas where none of the donated commodities is produced.
105. The risk of creating dependency on food aid is therefore minimal, and the food aid will be delivered for a limited period.

COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

106. The project is consistent with the decision taken by United Nations agencies in Syria to adopt a common approach for their programmes, which would focus on the most economically disadvantaged and marginal areas of the country.
107. WFP has been an active member of the United Nations country team that prepared the Common Country Assessment (CCA) report and is co-chairing with FAO the committee for rural development and food security. The CCA report was completed in December 2000 and shared with the Government. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is being prepared.
108. Based on CCA recommendations, United Nations agencies in Syria will be supporting integrated rural development projects targeted to the poorest rural populations in economically disadvantaged areas. Most of the activities will focus on capacity-building,



education, health and credit. Coordination of future activities is being pursued within the United Nations coordination system with a view to implementing joint action and projects.

109. WFP will participate in an integrated rural development project in the Jabal Al Hoss area near Aleppo, which is financed by several United Nations agencies. Within this component, WFP will work closely with IFAD in the rehabilitation of degraded farm lands and will support training activities to be undertaken by the project. This pilot experience of common approach and joint cooperation among United Nations agencies in Syria could be used as a model and replicated in other parts of the country.
110. In the context of this project, WFP will cooperate with FAO in establishing grazing reserves in selected settlements in the Badia, and with IFAD in supporting poor herders' rehabilitating the rangelands and the provision of vocational training to poor rural women. WFP will support a special literacy programme for girl school drop-outs, implemented by UNICEF and GWU in selected localities in the project area.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

111. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve, subject to availability of resources, US\$11.3 million, representing all direct operational costs of this Development Project.



ANNEX I**PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN**

	Quantity (tons)	Average cost per ton	Value (dollars)
WFP COSTS			
A. Direct operational costs			
Commodity ¹			
– Wheat flour	30 711	220	6 756 464
– Vegetable oil	1 680	700	1 176 000
– Pulses	2 519	360	906 930
Total commodities	34 910		8 839 394
External transport			1 815 322
Other direct operational costs			24 000
Total direct operational costs			10 678 716
B. Direct support costs (see Annex II for details)			
Total direct support costs			639 000
TOTAL WFP COSTS			11 317 716

¹ This is a notional food basket used for budgeting and approval purposes. The precise mix and actual quantities of commodities to be supplied to the project, as in all WFP-assisted projects, may vary over time depending on the availability of commodities to WFP and domestically within the recipient country.



ANNEX II

DIRECT SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS (<i>dollars</i>)
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Staff

National General Service staff	174 000
United Nations Volunteers (UNVs)	258 000
Temporary assistance	6 500
Overtime	6 000
National consultants	2 000
Staff duty travel	28 000
Staff training and development	7 000
Subtotal	481 500

Office expenses and other recurrent costs

Rental of facility	50 000
Utilities (general)	7 500
Office supplies	5 500
Communication and IT services	37 500
Equipment repair and maintenance	7 000
Vehicle maintenance and running costs	11 000
Other office expenses	5 000
Subtotal	123 500

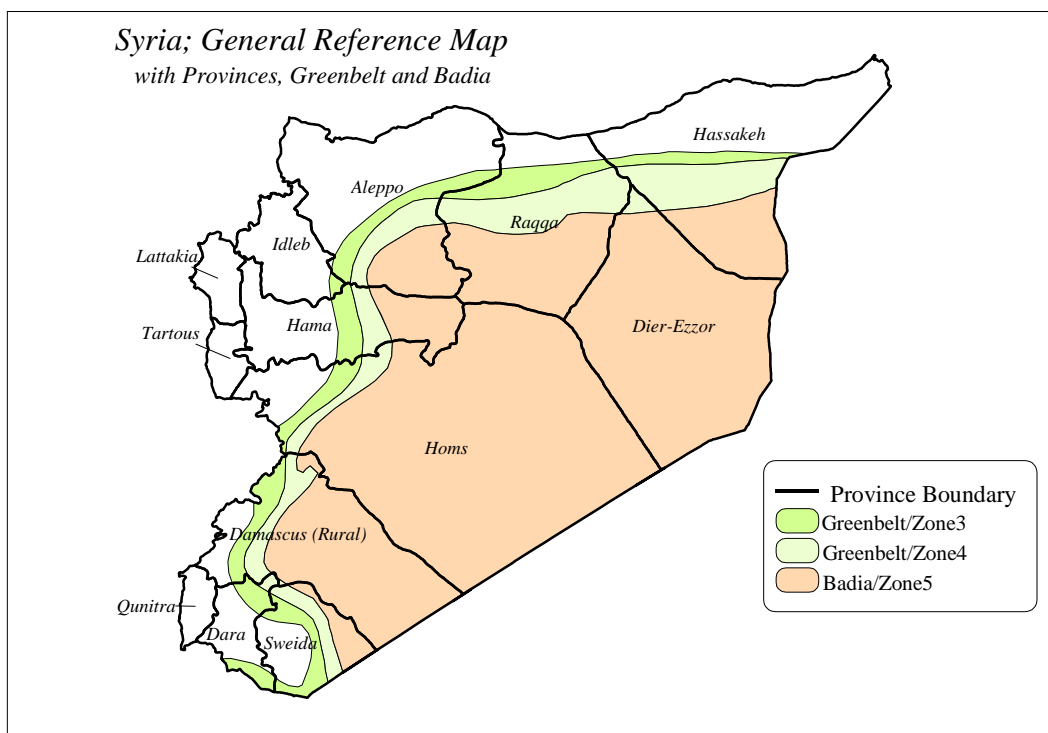
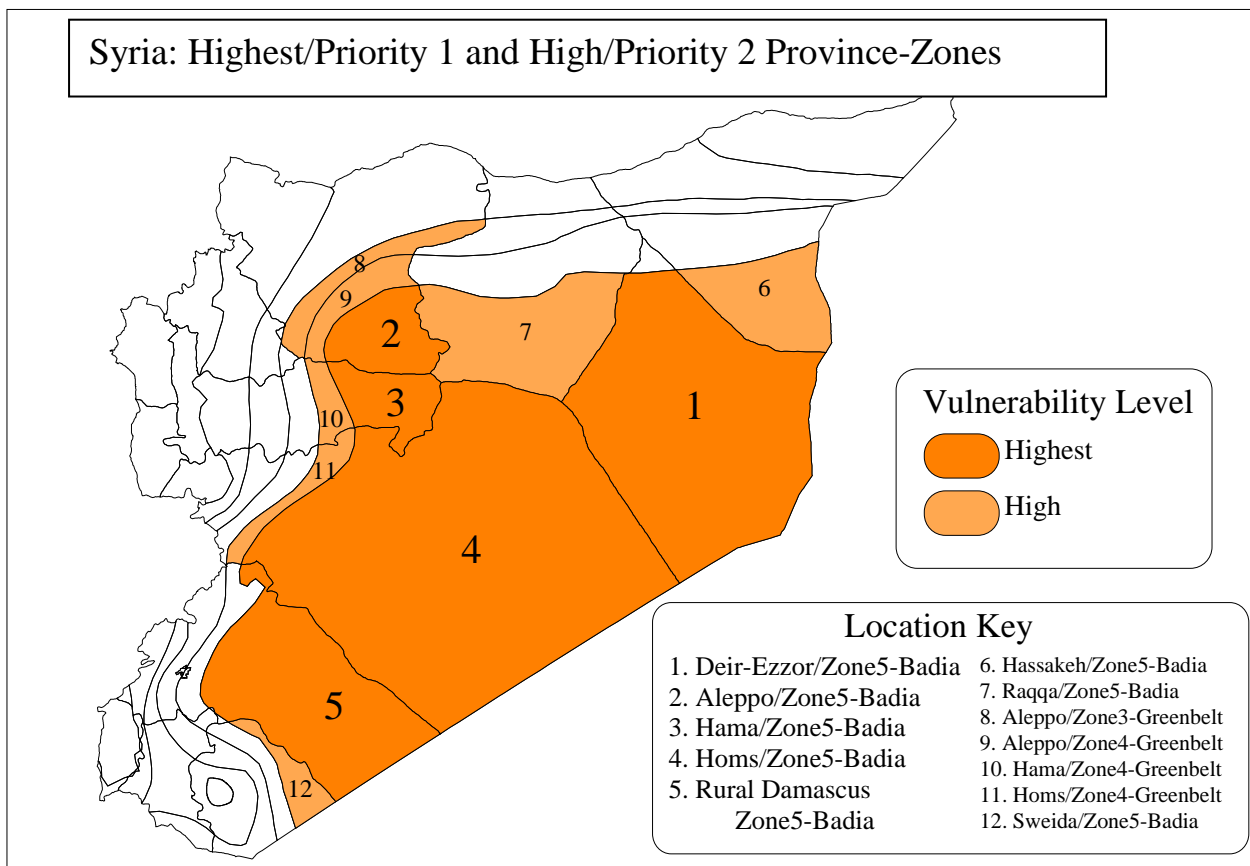
Equipment and other fixed costs

Furniture, tools and equipment	6 000
Vehicles	20 000
TC/IT equipment	8 000
Subtotal	34 000

TOTAL DIRECT SUPPORT COSTS	639 000
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ANNEX III



The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Food Programme (WFP) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its frontiers or boundaries.



ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

BDP	Badia Development Project
CCA	Common Country Assessment
DAA	Directorate of Agricultural Affairs
DFR	Department of Fisheries Resources
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GBP	Green Belt Project
GNP	Gross national product
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
GWU	General Women Union
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ITSH	Internal transport, storage and handling
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MAAR	Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform
MOC	Ministry of Culture
NPRC	National Project Review Committee
PMU	Project Management Unit
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SPC	State Planning Commission
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAM	Vulnerability analysis and mapping
WHO	World Health Organization

