SYRIA

Distribution of food and blankets

PROJECT CLOSURE REPORT

Closure Date : 12th February 2015
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1. INTRODUCTION

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<td><strong>Duration of Project</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Implementation Period</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Name of Partner(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Name of Funder(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Budget</strong></td>
</tr>
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1.1. Project summary

The situation in Syria is dire and a lot of humanitarian assistance is needed throughout the country. Al – Yarmouk in particular is closed off to the outside world and is in critical need for assistance especially in food aid. The country went through a winter storm in early January which also increases the need for winterization assistance.

This project is a short term project that focuses on a one-time distribution of food and blankets in Damascus, Syria. The project is challenging as entering Syria is a challenge on its own and the unstable security situation is a high risk.

There are two items that are distributed in this project which is the food parcel and blanket. Each family receives one unit of each item. The food parcel contains 24 items and can feed a family of five for 15 days.

The project was completed within 2 weeks from 28th January to 12th February 2015. The first two days were for preparation of team deployment (after initial approval for entry from the Syrian government which was done a month earlier), the team was deployed to Syria from 30th January to 7th February 2015 which majority of the activities were completed. Preparation of final report and debriefing was done from 8th February to 12th February 2015.

The deployment of MERCY Malaysia team to Syria was done through participation in Al – Marhama convoy which is led by Rashad Al – Baz, Coordinator of Miles of Smiles. The convoy also worked closely with Syria Trust for Development (from now on will be termed as Syria Trust).

The distribution was successful and was completed within the week of the team’s deployment in Syria.
1.2. **Reason for closing the project**

The project is closed as the items were successfully distributed to the beneficiaries in Damascus, Syria during the team’s deployment there.

1.3. **Highlights and innovations**

This is a short term project that focuses on a one-time distribution. MERCY Malaysia’s team participated in Al – Marhama convoy due to the difficulties for INGOs to enter Syria legally. The convoy is led by Mr Rashad al-Baz who is also a Coordinator for Miles of Smiles, an NGO that we have partnered previously in Gaza, Palestine. One-time projects into Syria in the future can follow this similar process as Al – Marhama convoy has a strong capacity in delivering the objectives of its mission. Mr Rashad al-Baz is also the same person who helped for the entry of MERCY Malaysia’s team into Gaza, Palestine in October 2014.
2. PROJECT PERFORMANCE

2.1. Performance against objectives

Objective 1: MERCY Malaysia team entering Damascus

The team successfully entered Damascus, Syria and safely exited Syria legally. The team received approval from the Syrian government. Al – Marhma convoy and therefore MERCY Malaysia, worked closely with Syria Trust for Development which is the biggest local NGO in Syria and plays a dynamic role in civil society development in Syria. This organization has the support of Asma al-Assad, the first lady, as its Director. The Syria Trust for Development is the organization that facilitated in the process of entry into Syria where each member of Al-Marhama convoy entered Syria as a guest and does not require any visa. The entry into Syria was very smooth and hassle free. It is also important to note that Syria Trust Fund for Development is also responsible for the arrangement of security, logistics support as well as distribution design for most of the part during Al – Marhma’s convoy.

Objective 2: Distribution of 1,000 units of food parcels and blankets

Al-Marhama convoy in total distributed 2,500 food parcels and 1,000 blankets. This amount includes the 1,000 units of food parcel and 1,000 units of blanket from MERCY Malaysia.

Procurement process went smoothly. Al – Marhma convoy plays a huge role in it as the items were procured and prepared for MERCY Malaysia per our team’s arrival by the
The items were ready for immediate distribution. Our team inspected the quality and packing of the relief items and it reaches our expectation.

The blanket costs USD 23 each (USD 25 inclusive of logistic cost). Each food parcel costs USD 50. The food parcel can feed a family of five for 15 days. The items in the food parcel are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuna</td>
<td>Can</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Indomie</td>
<td>Pack</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardines</td>
<td>Can</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Corned beef</td>
<td>Can</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese squares</td>
<td>Pieces</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Macaroni</td>
<td>800 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full milk powder</td>
<td>400 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>200 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil</td>
<td>1 liter/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>800 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn oil</td>
<td>1 liter/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lentil</td>
<td>1 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarine</td>
<td>1 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bulghur</td>
<td>1 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Za’tar</td>
<td>Pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Foul</td>
<td>1 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato paste</td>
<td>Pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>1 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halwa</td>
<td>800 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>5 kg/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>450 gram/pack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Pack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1.5l/bottle</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>Kg</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution arrangement was made beforehand and the team was informed earlier on the areas where the items will be distributed. All the areas are in Damascus although most of them are on the borders to other municipalities. Al-Marhama convoy distributed to the places as stated in the table below. During the distribution for al-Yarmouk, Charitable Foundation for Palestinian Refugees assisted by providing volunteers to load and unload the relief items.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>AREA OF OPERATION</th>
<th>DETAILS OF RESPONSE (BY AL MARHAMA CONVOY) TO DATE</th>
<th>NO. OF BENEFICIARIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Feb</td>
<td>Ad-Dhwella</td>
<td>Food parcels</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Feb</td>
<td>Muhajireen</td>
<td>Food parcels: Delivered through Charitable Association for Palestinian Relief</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Feb</td>
<td>El Wafa</td>
<td>Food parcels: Delivered through Charitable Association for Palestinian Relief</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Feb</td>
<td>Charitable Association for Palestinian Relief</td>
<td>Food parcels</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Feb</td>
<td>Yalda</td>
<td>Food parcels and blankets</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution process was not smooth which is not due to failure in arrangement but due to the instability of the security situation in Damascus. Details of the challenges are explained in the next section.

**Objective 3: Assessment on health needs**

MERCY Malaysia met with the stakeholders as well as did site visits during the stay in Damascus. MERCY Malaysia had discussions with UNOCHA and WHO as well as Department of Refugees in Syria.

**Meetings**

1. UNOCHA: Rima Ali, Humanitarian Affairs Officer

UNOCHA briefed MERCY Malaysia of the situation in Syria in general and the humanitarian assistance that are currently ongoing. The UN is using the sector approach for the Syrian response. 14 INGOs are working throughout Syria. UN agencies are allowed to partner with local NGOs but INGOs can only have MOUs with Syrian Arab Red Crescent or with line ministries. IMC and Mediair has MOU with Ministry of Health. The usual practice for INGOs to work in Syria is firstly to register with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). The immigration processes will follow through and the organization will have to work alongside Syria Arab Red Crescent.

Security level in Syria is L3. Distributions of relief items are usually done interagency and done either directly, crossline or cross border.

UNOCHA finds the method that MERCY Malaysia uses (through Al – Marhama convoy) as one of the exception methods and should be looked into as it may offer as another alternative for other organizations to work in Syria especially because Al – Marhama convoy is working with Syria Trust. UN encourages us to work closely with Syria Trust if we are able to.

UNOCHA shared the reports and contacts of the organizations and sector leads which enable easier access to information.
2. WHO: Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative for Syria

Currently, there are 8 organizations that are working in Syria in health sector and IMC plays a major role in the sector. The health sector meets at least once in two weeks. Among the programmes are conducted by WHO are distribution of medicine, vaccination and malnutrition programmes.

Elizabeth has shared WHO 2015 plans, the reports for their programmes as well as reports by other organizations in the health sector. MERCY Malaysia is working closely with Elizabeth on future plans.


There are 13 Palestinian refugee camps in Syria. Before the war, there were 560,000 Palestinian refugees registered in Syria and about 130,000 unregistered Palestinian refugees were residing in Syria as well. Syrian government has allocated SYP 32 m for development of refugee camps.

Locations
Assessment on health needs was assessed with special attention to the nutrition needs. Dr Norzila, plays an important role in this assessment as she assess the situation during the distribution. The assessment could not be done in vigour as the security situation does not allow the team to be able to do surveys or a lot of interviews. Majority of the assessment is done through observation and conversation with mothers and children. The assessment is divided into the areas where MERCY Malaysia did its distribution.

1. Al Yarmouk Camp

Yarmouk Camp is a Palestinian Refugee Settlement since 1948. Just before the war, the population of the camp is 180,000 Palestinian refugees. In the end of December 2012, the Syrian government started closing off Yarmouk camp as the insurgents started to enter the area. The camp was closed with a very limited amount of resources that are able to enter causing a devastating humanitarian crisis as people are starved to death from July 2013 to March 2014. However, with international pressure the camp was opened for humanitarian relief access and relief was able to be given from March 2014 to December 2014. UNRWA plays a significant role in food distribution during this period. The situation changed again in December 2014 as conflicts started to heighten again in the camp with more than 10 insurgent groups residing in the camp. The camp was inaccessible since then. Food supply has been very limited. The camp needs 400 food parcels daily in order for the whole citizen to be able to get enough food. However, since December 2014, only 30 food parcels were distributed. UNRWA is still not able to access the camp as well. The Department of Refugees Syria reported that currently, only 14,000 refugees are staying in Yarmouk. 40 per cent of the refugees that left Yarmouk went into other refugee camp around Syria while the other 60 per cent are staying with host families or makeshift shelters around the cities.
The team’s attempt for food distribution into al-Yarmouk camp itself was not successful. This is due to the critical security situation in the area. MERCY Malaysia’s team as part of Al – Marhama convoy entered Yarmouk camp on 2nd February after the failed first attempt on 1st February. However, the team encountered a critical situation where the team were in between the insurgent group and the Syrian Government Army and were briefly trapped in the crossfire. No injuries were sustained by any of the member but the situation is definitely too risky for the team to do a proper distribution.

MERCY Malaysia’s team at the entrance of Al-Yarmouk Camp with relief items

2. Al Dhwella

Al Dhwella is a neighbourhood in central Damascus. There are a total of 800,000 people staying in the neighbourhood. 6,000 of them are in the beneficiary list of Syria Trust. Syria Fund has been working in this neighbourhood for the past year and this beneficiary list is created to identify the population that needs assistance in the area. Those in the list are mostly (about 80 per cent) internally displaced population and Palestinian refugees that are displaced in Syria. The IDPs are usually from Dara’a, Homs, Del Alzour, Raqqa and Hassaqa. They are usually staying either with host families or in schools. The population size in al-Dhwella had increased of about 30 per cent since the start of the war due to the migration of the IDPs.

From the observation of the team, the majority of the beneficiaries’ looks healthy and the children also look healthy. They are lacking of food supply but not to the instance that is life threatening. The people are able to seek for healthcare from hospitals around the area and the children are able to attend schools.

Al – Marhama convoy distributed 500 food parcels in Al –Dhwella. Syria Trust made the arrangement for the distribution and it went on smoothly.
3. Yalda

Yalda is a neighbourhood situated West of Yarmouk Camp in Southern Damascus. Yalda is also closed off to public and majority of the area were bombarded and there were a lot of buildings that have collapsed and destroyed. The entrance to the camp is guarded by the Syrian Government Army on one side and the Palestinian armed group on the other side.

The initial findings for the assessment is that the children in Yalda are underweight and some looks like they have stunted growth although not confirmed as full assessment was not able to be completed. The recipients of the food parcel and blankets are Yarmouk camp residence that is seeking refuge in Yalda. They have not received any food items for the past two months. Some reported that they have to eat grass to sustain them. There are a limited number of shops that sell food items but the prices are five times higher and the huge majority of the people there do not have any money or income to but food.
Al Marhama convoy’s relief items are the first to arrive in the particular area of Yalda in the past two months. Security is not very stable in the area but at least the Palestinian armed group is willing to allow aid to be delivered to the civilians. The situation however is not certain and due to the vulnerability of both the armed group and civilians, security risk is still very high. The people are desperate for assistance and are not afraid to turn to violence to get assistance.

(Left) Beneficiaries lining up for relief items; (Right) Azam and Hapis with a beneficiary

2.2. Performance against outcomes

Not applicable as it is a short term project and does not contribute to a particular outcome

2.3. Performance against schedule

All relief items were distributed during the allocated time frame. There were a few days delay for some distribution but still within the schedule.

2.4. Performance against budget

The cost of the relief items was similar to the proposed budget. The mission expenses meanwhile is much less than expected and team had an extra USD 10,000 to procure relief items for another area identified during this visit. The coordinator of Al – Marhama convoy agreed to arrange for the distribution and food parcels will be distributed to a Syrian/Palestinian refugee camp in Ber Elias, Bekaa, Lebanon which consists of 60 families. The distribution will be arranged in the end of February and a separate report will be issued when the distribution is completed.
3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

3.1. What worked well?

1. Partnership

Partnership through participation in Al – Marhama convoy is crucial in the success of this mission. Al – Marhama convoy has strong working relationship with Syria Trust that smoothen the processes of doing humanitarian work in Syria. Syria Trust entrusted a representative, Dr Aboo Umar from the Office of the President, the whole time during the visit which provides an easier accessibility through the streets of Damascus. Immigration process was easy, fast and smooth and team saw no hiccups in the arrangement. Syria Trust also arranged for security throughout the team’s stay in Damascus.

2. Team composition

The team composition is complete for an assessment/distribution mission. Team member have their specific tasks and are interrelated which created a good team dynamic. This team composition can be duplicated for similar missions in the future. The team consists of a team leader that gives direction to the team; an EXCO member that provides a strategic guideline and focus for the mission, an ROD officer to do reporting and administration arrangements, a communication volunteer that can provide with good photos and stories to be shared externally, and a logistician cum security volunteer that ensure the security of the team.

3.2. What could be improved?

1. Security

Although having a representative from the Office of the President makes it easier for the convoy to move through checkpoints, it also limits the movement and restricted the information sharing between team members and the beneficiaries.

Security is also not stable at the point of distributions such as in Yarmouk camp where al-Marhama convoy fell in between the fighting. The coordinator has arranged for a secure location through which the Syrian Government Army has suggested for the location. However, more steps can be taken to ensure a more secure environment for the convoy members such as arrangements for the relief items to get into the camp first and list of beneficiaries should be ready before the relief team arrives.

2. Data collection

Initial data collection such as the population data was not prepared before the distribution. This can be improved as team can contact the leader of the community to request for the information to be shared before the distribution to enable a more efficient distribution.
3. Distribution methodology

The distribution method that was practiced in Yalda has a lot of room for improvement. The coupon system that is practiced is a good start but should be expanded. Crowd control was poor and special attention should be placed on participation of community members in crowd control and distribution.

4. Food parcel

The food parcel was too heavy for individuals to carry and there were too many lose items that they have to carry on top of the box (4 items in total). The box was too heavy for a common person to carry and therefore was not appropriate.

4. CLOSURE ACTIVITIES

There are a few activities that will need to be completed in order for the project to be properly closed:

• Excess funds of USD 10,000 will be used for the distribution in Ber Elias, Bekaa, Lebanon.

• The arrangement for the distribution in Ber Elias, Bekaa, Lebanon needs to be finalized and documents proving the distribution needs to be collected.

• A CD with all the pictures for the mission will be shared by the mission member.

• A continuous assessment and engagement with stakeholders will be done. A short /medium term response plan for Syria will be drafted and sent for approval by the EXCO.

4.1. Recommendations

Not applicable