

Baseline Assessment of Skills & Market Opportunities for Youth in Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan

A SUMMARY REPORT

Silatech
Young People...Enterprise...Employment...



CARE INTERNATIONAL IN JORDAN, AMMAN, 30 JUNE 2015
SUPPORTED BY SILATECH



The crisis in Syria has forced around four million Syrians, most of them women and children, to flee the country, with approximately 629,128 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan.¹ More than 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan reside in its cities and towns, while the rest live in three official refugee camps in northern Jordan. Azraq Refugee Camp, opened in April 2014, is home to 20,000 of these refugees; over half of them are children below 18 and 45% of working age.

This report presents the results of a study commissioned by CARE International in Jordan and Silatech to understand the skill supply and assess livelihood opportunities for youth in Azraq Refugee Camp, aiming at guiding future income generation activities in the camp, including the start-up of viable refugee-led livelihood activities in a planned market area.

Conducted during May-June 2015, the study included more than 200 individual and household interviews, focus group discussions with more than 100 participants in Azraq Camp, as well as an in-depth review of the Azraq Camp livelihood program, i.e., the Incentive-based Volunteering (IBV) Scheme, which is the only mechanism in Azraq Camp for registering job-seekers, facilitating recruitment and tracking the status of their placement in IBV opportunities.

Background & Findings

Demand for work in Azraq Refugee Camp is very high. At the time of the study, camp residents had no access to livelihood options in the camp other than the IBV opportunities. After running daily errands and attending to household needs, the working-age population in the camp (18-59 year olds) has little to do to occupy their time. Camp residents arriving from Syria have little to no savings or belongings, and those who had lived in hosting communities prior to relocating to the camp were likely to have been living under great financial stress and in debt, according to CARE assessments.

Food assistance in the camp is provided in the form of 20 JOD in credit per person per month. This can be used to buy food from the camp's sole distribution point (operated by the supermarket chain Sameh Mall). Bread is distributed daily and rationed at four pieces of bread per individual, and non-food items such as hygiene items or gas canister refills are provided on a bi-monthly basis.

1 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>

All camp residents interviewed expressed that this aid is insufficient to cover their needs. In addition, the Syrian population in general places great value on productive work; the lack of opportunities for work in the camp is resulting in feelings of boredom, helplessness, and perceived injustice, driving many families to leave Azraq Camp in search of a better life.

Key Observations

While by no means sufficient to meet camp residents' demand for work, the IBV scheme has begun to address a major economic gap. Today it provides around 440 skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled positions for the camp population. With the rotation policy, available positions have so far succeeded in benefitting over 3,700 individuals currently residing in the camp. A total amount of (maximum) 786,834 JOD (more than USD 1 million) has been injected directly into the camp's economy,² all of which was likely spent on food and other necessities. The psychological impact of these opportunities was also notable; respondents reported that they reduced idleness and fulfilled an iterated need for doing productive work.

Focus-group participants agreed on the high value placed in their culture on work and the development of a set of practical skills. There was a general agreement that young males in Syria were expected to start actively participating in the economy starting at adolescence through informal apprenticeships. In fact, feedback from the focus groups reflects that the value placed on learning a craft often surpassed that placed on education for young men, where family and society often supported young men's decision to start working.

IBV is therefore largely viewed as an aid scheme that provides opportunities for doing mostly unskilled to semi-skilled physical work. Those in skilled positions are usually retained and their skillset invested in. These jobs are seldom available, however.

A key observation that emerged was refugees' strong adherence to social norms, which seem to have been an important factor in the development of a system of informal apprenticeships. For skills to be acquired by youth in the magnitude and manner required, a high level of coordination and guidance is needed. This was facilitated by the existence of a strong social structure centered around the extended family.

Most youth participants come from families with entrepreneurial involvement in the economy in Syria through a vocational workshop or a retail business. Most male youth possess at least one technical skill in a vocation such as metalworking, carpentry, painting, tailoring and decoration, and small-scale family farming. Males below the age of 18, on the other hand, have low retention of skills.

Skills among youth were acquired through non-formal apprenticeships (on-the-job training) facilitated by the network of family and acquaintances. For males, these took place in the workplace and among females, within the household. Female youth have a skill set that contributed to their households' self-reliance, particularly pickling and other food preservations, and to a lesser degree sewing and beautification. Whenever female-led entrepreneurial activity was reported, beautification and tailoring were the two that most frequently emerged. Literacy levels were found to be modest among the male youth in the camp and were notably higher among the youngest youth. Among females, literacy was noted to be significantly higher than males and higher school retention was noticed among the younger females. There is a growing awareness about the importance of literacy in improving work prospects among young adults in the camp.

Syrian young men possess high levels of skill needed to do the various unskilled and semi-skilled construction and maintenance jobs required around the camp. The study found, however, that there is a need to develop a better skills scale for construction occupations in order to take into account skill levels. Highly-skilled individuals (craftsmen) would then be expected to contribute meaningfully to technical aspects of the work, thus increasing their satisfaction with the work, creating a track for advancement including apprenticeship opportunities for the youngest and unskilled workers. At the same time, it is advised that NGOs keep exploring additional ways in which the skills held by the refugee population can be utilized in providing services needed for their work.

2 Those who left the camp were excluded. Their total earnings were 219,960 JOD.

Among women, the study found that IBV challenged negative perceptions about women's work and increased participants' motivation to become economically involved. Women face many obstacles, however, when thinking of participating in the economy; the most substantial were their competing household duties. Taking into account the importance of a job's proximity to the residence would remove some of the barriers for women. Solutions include providing daycare, keeping places of production in close proximity to homes, and being open to work conducted in the caravan.

Skilled IBV opportunities have the potential to develop into livelihoods. Such skilled positions are expected to increase in number with growth and could become more important in the future as the population builds a better skill set, understands the work, and is able to take on more duties. A skill development scheme can benefit NGOs as well as skilled job seekers, developing transferrable skills and improving job prospects in the future.

The uncertainty that prevails concerning prospects for camp dwellers to benefit from emerging opportunities is a negative factor. A market is expected to open in Azraq Refugee Camp, and the camp will soon be provided with electricity, both of which will open more opportunities for economic development and lead to growth in the camp. The market is expected to provide many of the commodities and services absent in the camp. It is also expected to improve the quality and variety of currently available commodities as businesses compete. Many camp residents look forward to starting a business providing commodities (produce and fresh poultry, prepared foods and sweets, clothes, shoes, housewares, cleaning products, beauty products and accessories, phone cards, etc.) and services (hairdressing, tailoring, mobile phone repair, etc.). Many NGOs in the camp have started thinking of sustainable investment schemes that provide needed services and commodities and incorporate a skill development/IBV element such as maintenance, agriculture, tailoring and retail.

The study identified areas that could be successful in providing paid or incentivized apprenticeships. Those that appeared to have great potential for high demand included:

- Second-hand clothing sales
- Shoe production
- Hair cutting and hairdressing
- Mobile phone repair
- The raising of saplings and seeds
- Cart-building
- Bicycle repair (potential demand)
- Water filters installation (potential demand)
- Extensive labor during the electrification campaign

Literacy classes and a campaign that highlights practical and personal benefits targeted at adolescents and young men could also potentially attract young men waiting to work.

Finally, NGOs can work together with the GoJ in identifying mutually beneficial ways to acknowledge the special status of refugees in the camps and facilitate livelihood activities.

Skill Supply

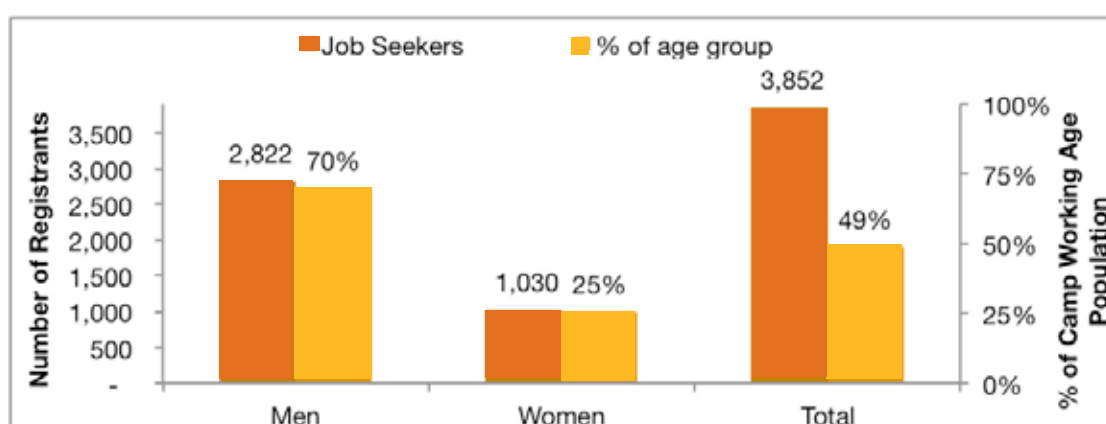
CARE's IBV database contains information on 4,734 individuals who chose to register as job-seekers, and key information on their involvement in IBV. As IBV opportunities are the only means of making money in the camp, the program currently presents 100% of the demand. CARE's database thus is considered reflective of actual supply and demand under the assumption that organizations working in the camp are cooperating in enforcing the IBV system, with the support of the camp management, the Syria Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD), and UNHCR.



After excluding those who were no longer living in Azraq Camp, the population of “active job-seekers” boils down to 3,613 individuals, a quarter of which were female.

- Half of the camp’s working-age population was registered in the database. Respondents said their interest was driven by the need for income, boredom, and interest in working to maintain self-respect and community norms.
- Male job-seekers comprised a much higher proportion (75%) than did women (25%).
- The mean age of registrants was 31.8 years; one quarter of them were 24 years of age and below with a maximum of two years of work experience and one half of them 30 years of age and below with up to six years of work experience.

Figure 1.1: IBV Registrants – Number and as a Ratio of Camp Residents in Working Age (18-59)³



Source: CARE IBVS 2015; UNHCR 2015.

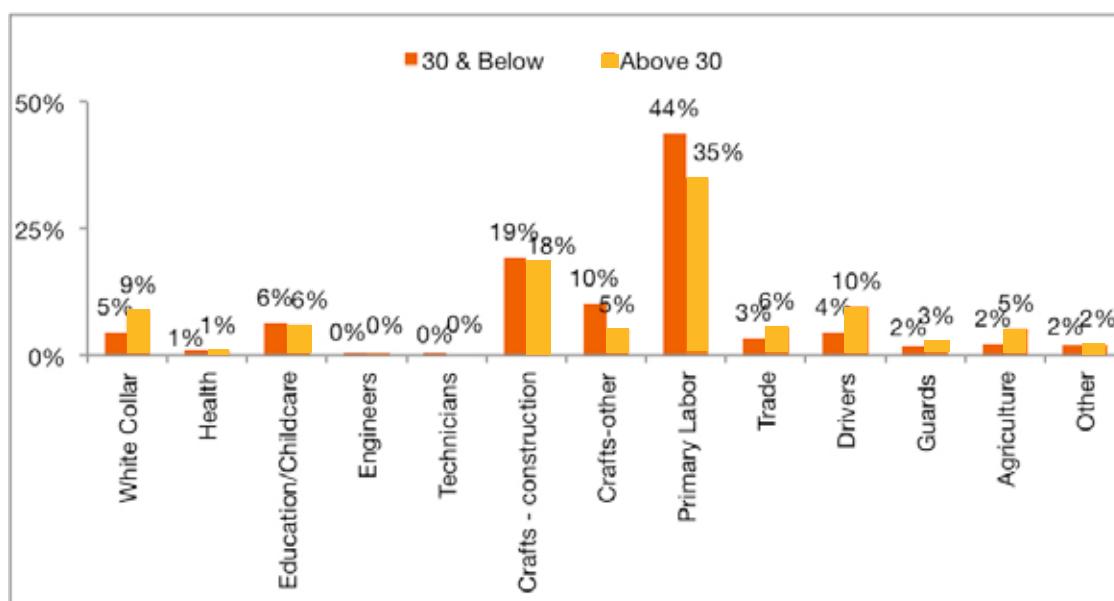
³ Ratio calculated by dividing number of registrants by population size for the age group 18-59 documented by UNHCR.

“I started off training as a welder because my cousins were welders. But with the crisis everything changed. Shops no longer had steady work. I worked as a welder for a few months and then I worked in decor, and then tiling. Us Syrians are like this. I would do any job I can find to help provide for my family.” Village VI male, age 21

SKILL SUPPLY AMONG CAMP MALES

In the IBV database, the largest segment of male job-seekers (39%) listed “primary jobs” as their main area of expertise. Primary jobs constitute manual work that can be learned and performed quickly without the need for any specific skill, such as low-skill jobs in construction, loading/unloading, and cleaning.

Figure 1.2: Distribution of Male Registrants by Area of Previous Experience (Youth vs. Adults)



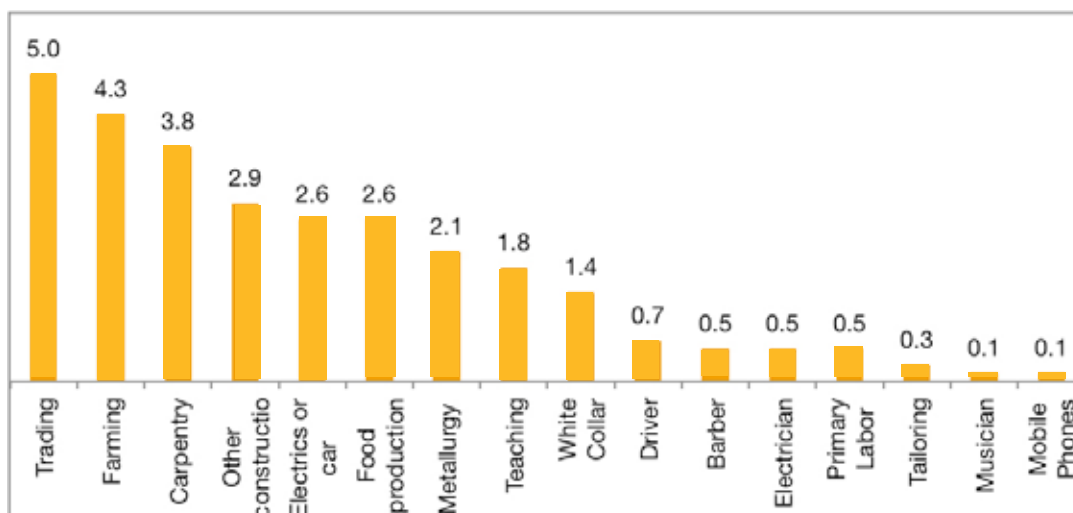
Source: CARE IBVS 2015. Note: Totals for 30+ age group only reach 98% due to rounding of actual numbers.

Focus group participants stated that the onset of the Syria crisis has resulted in a change in the historic patterns of skills acquisition and work. To cope with disruption in the economy caused by the crisis, young men found themselves diversifying their skill sets to be able to take advantages of emerging livelihood opportunities.

These included construction, maintenance and fast food and sales occupations they found to be in high demand both in Jordan and in Syria.

- 19-22 year-olds reported having at least 1-2 years of work experience in Syria and up to two years working in Jordan. None of them identified themselves as a craftsman—a master of their trade—but rather described themselves as “skilled” and “semi-skilled” in various occupations in various sectors, reflecting the fact that apprenticeships had an acknowledged position within the skills hierarchy.
- Those above 22 years of age reported being highly-skilled in at least one occupation. Some had built up work experience of up to 10 years and identified as craftsmen in their original area of expertise and as skilled and semi-skilled in the new areas that they entered with the onset of the crisis.

Figure 1.3: Skills of Male Family Members of FGD Participants⁴



Source: Focus Group Discussions.

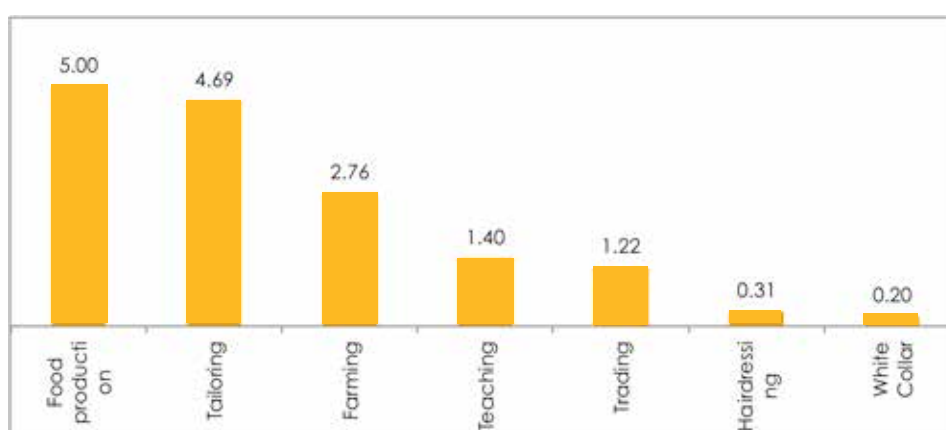
SKILL SUPPLY AMONG CAMP FEMALES

Demand for work by women in the camp was moderate when compared to that among men. From a gender perspective, however, these patterns can be said to be changing as economic pressures drive women to become more economically involved

A sizeable segment of women have relatively higher education levels and they are able to supply skills needed for many of the steadier better-paid IBV opportunities in the camp.

Women in focus groups described the involvement of females in the economy to be mostly within the household and the ways in which they contribute to the economy to be shaped by their gender roles.

Figure 1.4: Skills of Female Family Members of FGD Participants⁵



Source: Focus Group Discussions.

⁴ Numbers presented on the chart are weights that range from 0 to 5 corresponding to prevalence of the skill within households as reported by FGD participants

⁵ Numbers presented on the chart are weights that range from 0 to 5 corresponding to prevalence of the skill within households as reported by FGD participants.

“In Syria we don’t work for money; yes, we preserve food, and sew clothes and repair them, but for the house. Some do it for work, but not us.” (Village III, Female, age 30)

Women in the camp are responsible for fulfilling critical duties at home. They are responsible for the children, for hygiene, and for ensuring they have obtained what the household needs for the day. The absence of electricity has significantly increased the amount of time they spend running errands (washing by hand and buying groceries on a daily basis due to the lack of refrigeration). To subsequently spend hours away from the house for IBV places great strains on women, particularly those with no other adult earners. Some men voiced to the research team their objection to women’s work on the pretense that their role inside the home is more valuable, and that the priority for work should be given to men.

Skill Demand

The supply of willing and skilled workers in the camp is high in relation to demand, even with the IBV rotation system in place.

- In total, 1,172 volunteers had received IBV opportunities (as of May 14 2015), which is one in three of the 3,613 job-seekers during the first year.
- Most youth and adults that the research team spoke to complained about lack of livelihood opportunities and long waits for IBV placements, and in every focus group at least a number of participants believed some degree of favoritism was interfering with fair allocations and enforcing proper rotations.
- Data from the IBV database shows a substantial backlog in the allocation of IBV opportunities. More than half of job seekers have been waiting for over three months without hearing about a placement.

Demand is higher for unskilled volunteers in positions such as: laborers in infrastructural works, loading/unloading, ushers, cleaners, security guards, and outreach volunteers. There are 1.6 unskilled positions for every one skilled position.

- Unskilled volunteers waited around 76.56 days between registration and placement, worked on average 67 days and earned an average sum of 402 JOD. Half of them were under the age of 31.
- Females typically waited less for unskilled placements (49 days) than males (82 days) and also worked fewer days (53 vs. 67 days), making less in earned income (318 vs. 402 JOD median total sum).

Skilled volunteer positions included those for teachers, trainers, skilled craftsmen, and community workers (e.g. awareness-raising). Skilled positions all require very good or full literacy and good numeracy; some require a professional qualification (tertiary education degree). All skilled volunteers benefit from technical capacity building, and because of this investment in building their skill set, a number of skilled volunteers are placed permanently (e.g. teachers and crafts trainers). All in all, they are paid better wages than unskilled workers, stay on the job longer, and receive more opportunities for professional development.

- Of the 3,613 applicants, 412 of the current camp residents had received a skilled IBV opportunity; 120 of them were “currently in their positions”.
- The median wait for skilled volunteers was 76.57 days; half of them worked less than 55 days and earned 4868 JOD in total. Females had higher turnover rates: they typically waited less for skilled placements (47 days)

6 All values reported in this passage correspond to Median values.

7 All values reported in this passage correspond to Median values.

8 Maximum amount: based on the assumption that all volunteer worked the maximum allowed 6 hours per day which is not a likely scenario.

than males (82 days) and also worked fewer days (54 vs. 61 days), making less in earned income (486 vs. 571.5 JOD total sum).

SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH IBV: THE CAMP YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

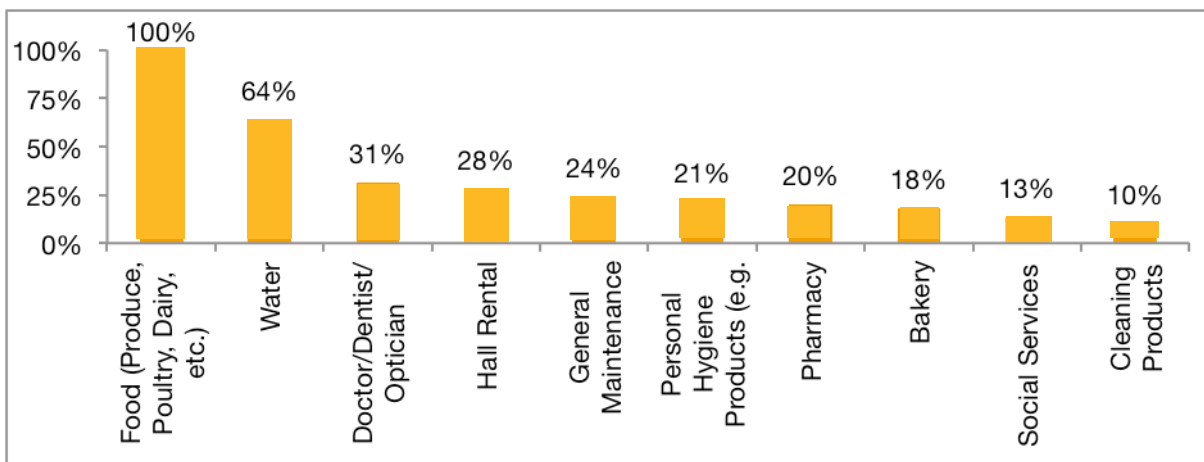
Youth interviewed in focus groups were asked about their experience of IBV (those who were not involved were asked about what they had heard from their family members or acquaintances who had received an opportunity).

- Male focus group participants above age 18 insisted that the current jobs in infrastructural works do not provide skill-building; they found the work basic, and requiring no specialized knowledge, advanced skills or creativity.
- Female participants agreed with the males that unskilled IBVs are simple and do little to develop practical skills; nonetheless, they viewed in higher regard the opportunities IBV provide for entering the labor market and becoming more active in camp life, as well as building work culture among camp women.

THE CONSUMER SURVEY

Respondents expressed the need for more and better quality food, water and medical services as the three commodities in greatest need.

Figure 2.1: Market Demand for Commodities and Services Currently Provided in the Camp



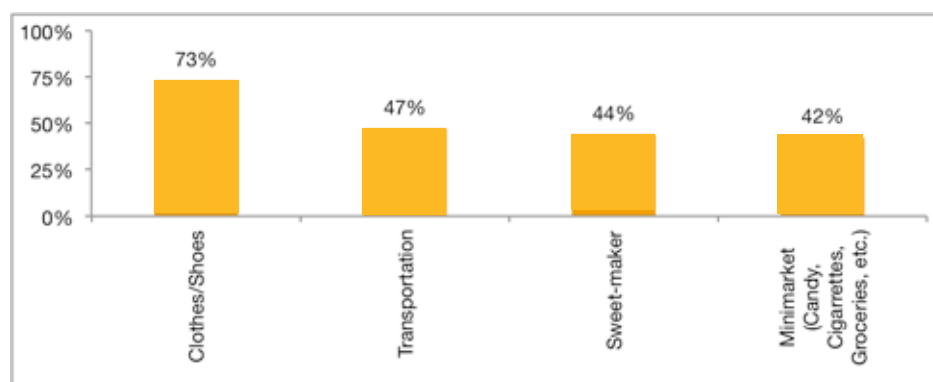
Source: Consumer Survey.

Unprepared food was the number one sought after commodity in the camp. Necessary food items are provided through the ACTED/WFP Distribution center (Sameh Mall), but respondents found their availability lacking—prices were said to be too high, quality poor and supply unreliable. The main food items mentioned across the board were (in order of importance): **fresh vegetables, dairy products, fresh poultry, grains** and other dry food.

The prospect of shopping elsewhere with the opening of the new market was viewed as a welcome change from the current situation where lines are often long and prices high by comparison with markets outside the camp.

Free camp services (medical and dental, caravan repairs, and the distribution of staples) were viewed as insufficient and requiring a long wait time. Drinking water, clothes and shoes, transportation, sweets and minimarket products available in the camp were considered inadequate and of poor quality.

Figure 2.2: Market Demand for Commodities and Services Currently Partially Provided in the Camp



Source: Consumer Survey.

Youth focus groups sought electricity in the camp, alongside herbal medicines to replace, better-tasting water, and other commodities that might make life in the camp more “normal.”

THE NGO PERSPECTIVE

Four of the five interviewed NGOs produced concepts for investing in the camps for the survey. These schemes included plans for IBVs providing technical services (electrical, welding or carpentry, etc.); the sale of products produced in existing centers for women and girls; the establishment of vegetable plots whose produce would be used to make goods and sold; a micro-fund for small loans; and a second-hand clothing and shoes store using volunteer workers.

NGOs were in consensus that the most likely planning scenario for Azraq Refugee Camp was one of growth, where refugees continued to enter the camp. Fewer residents are expected to leave after electricity is provided and a marketplace is established. An increase in demand for crafts workshops and camp activities was expected, alongside a 35% increase in the number of skilled volunteers running these programs. Smaller increases were expected for unskilled workers, ranging between 5% and 20%.

Skill Development in the Camp

Five agencies provide skills development programs in Azraq Camp. Males 15-18 were more enthusiastic about camp skill development courses. They were interested in pursuing activities that were “fun and useful.” This group has finished available schooling in the camp; and after running errands for the household (transporting water, receiving bread and other distribution, and getting groceries) they are left free for fun activities, including sports.

- Young men in the older age groups (19-22 and 23-26) received the subject with less enthusiasm. They expressed they were only interested in skill development that would help them make money and felt camp programs taught only basic skills and crafts that were not really useful in increasing their income or their chances at getting employment.
- Similarly, the youngest female youth were the most enthusiastic about current and potential skill development courses for the same reasons. Having left Syria at a younger age, developing their skill sets for the future was highly welcomed.
- Women in the older segments held a similar attitude to that of their male counterparts. By the time females in the camp reach age 18, many of them are married and in charge of a household. Making ends meet was their priority.
- Factors influencing women’s interest in pursuing training included proximity to their residences, possibilities for income generation and future work, and the activities’ perceived benefit for their living conditions. Still, females were more interested than their male counterparts in obtaining skills not related to work, for example, memorizing the Quran. Sex segregation was considered important for women and girls to feel comfortable in these activities.



TO THE GOVERNMENT OF JORDAN

Open the market in Azraq Camp, with the introduction of flexible policies allowing refugees to earn a legal living. In specific:

- Waive or significantly reduce fees for work permits for Syrian refugees;
- Simplify and ease the application process for work permits and approve all permit requests for refugees in non-protected sectors;
- Share a clear criteria permitting refugees to take part in the market activities; and
- Coordinate with the private sector and local communities to ensure that refugees and host communities benefit from the opening of the market place in Azraq Camp, thus contributing to the improvement of community relations.

TO HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

- Create and fund a skill development scheme to benefit job seekers, as well as agencies in Azraq Camp, building professional skills among job seekers and helping NGOs meet the future increase in demand for skilled Syrian volunteers.
- Introduce programs facilitating women's engagement in economic activities in Azraq Camp, taking into consideration barriers to women including attitudes, housework duties, the need for proximity to the residence, etc.
- Commence investment schemes that could provide a sustainable model in providing needed services and commodities that incorporate a skill development/IBV element in them in areas such as maintenance, agriculture, tailoring and retail.
- Continue and develop the IBV scheme in Azraq Camp. A more developed system can readily produce simplified "labor market information" for IBV positions and a clear waiting list can be accessed by case managers, so approximate starting dates can be anticipated by applicants.
- Another area identified for growth was the creation of occupational profiles for the different IBV positions that clearly state responsibilities, required qualifications, advancement prospects, and the initial hourly pay or salary associated with the position. Such information would inform job-seekers of opportunities they could access, align their expectations, and assist the UN & NGOs in better selection of suitable volunteers.
- To continue exploring innovative skill and livelihood development schemes that build on assets and opportunities, and continue targeting youth with literacy classes and campaigns.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Support the Government of Jordan in responding to refugees' needs, and opening up the market in Azraq Camp.
- Provide financial assistance for the electrification of Azraq Camp as a pre-requisite to opening the marketplace.



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