Labour Market Assessment

Poultry and Agricultural inputs trade sectors in the North West region of Syria

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Department for International Development
Executive Summary

As one of the most complex and tragic crises in history, the Syrian conflict has negatively impacted the agricultural labour market of the country in various manners that resulted in instability of the economic activities and jobs. The consequences of the emerging situations were reflected in higher vulnerability levels among the Syrian population in general while the women and people with disabilities (PWDs) are among the most adversely impacted population groups. CARE International responded by conducting this labour assessment survey to identify the job opportunities and the associated skills and skill gaps within the agricultural labour market in the northwest (NW) region of Syria. CARE International, supported by its partner iMMAP, initiated a rapid labour market survey in April 2019 across 9 sub-districts of Aleppo and Idlib governorates to get better an initial insight of the labour sectors across NW Syria region. The rapid labour market survey findings indicated that the poultry farming, and the agricultural inputs trade were the most potential sectors to expand across northwest Syria. These two sectors were also considered for their foreseen suitability to women and people with disabilities in terms of job opportunities compared to the other explored sectors across the studied geographical locations. Informed by a rapid labour market survey, Care International and iMMAP planned for an in-depth Labour Market Assessment (LMA) focusing on the Poultry and Agricultural Input trade sectors. The study assessed how these two sectors influence the agricultural labour market opportunities like jobs and household income for women and disabled people across northwest Syria. Study data was collected through direct interviews which were conducted in November 2019 with 79 employers and 99 workers across northwest Syria. Descriptive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative variables was adopted to answer the study questions.

Study findings of the in-depth LMA reported that, the inadequacy of vocational and business skills training was identified as a main skill gaining barrier for women and PWDs. Moreover, other challenges such as the local community norms that imposes negative attitudes towards recruitment of female workers and the challenges faced by PWDs regarding the special needs that must be met and facilities that are required at workplaces were identified. Those restricting factors reduces both groups’ opportunities within the studied agricultural labour market across NW Syria. The in-depth LMA participants indicated some job opportunities that possibly suites women and PWDs including establishment of privately-owned small enterprises for poultry production beside the recruitment of the educated women and disabled persons in accounting, administrative and sales jobs. A significant portion of the interviewed employers across both the poultry farming, and agricultural inputs trade sectors confirmed they were experiencing high demand for their products and services. They attributed that to the withdrawal of the government support to the agricultural sector and the growing demand for poultry products in the NW region of Syria. However, the employers confirmed that their agribusinesses were facing several economic constraints that were reflected in weak wages extended to workers, especially to the female workers.

The LMA highlighted the prominent skill gaps of the poultry farming which were associated to poultry rations preparation skills and other small livestock husbandry facets. Similarly, the skills gaps pertinent to trade in agricultural inputs sector were namely; lack of knowledge about crop seeds varieties, seed treatment skills and the optimum seed storage conditions beside lack of skilled labour in agricultural machinery maintenance and operation. The skill gaps in marketing and managerial sides of both business sectors revolved around lack of skills in accounting and bookkeeping beside the knowledge about local market needs and opportunities. The study provided some recommendations to raise skill capacities of the job seekers within the targeted groups and support the currently operating agribusinesses technically and financially to be more capable of recruiting more female workers and PWDs. The lessons learned from the implementation of CARE SRP is that, value chain informed food security and livelihood programming need to be continuously considered when designing new similar projects with the involvement of community members to increase the employment opportunities to improve household income generations for women and disabled people across NW region of Syria.
ACRONYM

**PWDs** People With Disabilities  
**NWS** North West Syria  
**LMA** Labour Market Assessment  
**SRP** Syria Resilience Program  
**SYP** Syrian Pound
1. Introduction

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has resulted in one of the most complex and tragic in history. Besides many other implications, the ongoing violent conflict has resulted in a change of gender relations in Syria over the last years. Due to the consequences of the prevailing conflict in Syria, many men are absent from their families, as either killed, in prison, have migrated or are involved in fighting. Others have lost their income-generating possibilities or/and became disabled due to war injuries. The supply chains have collapsed in many areas and costs for agricultural inputs are soaring due to the siege and widespread violence. Agricultural activities, production, small and medium-size enterprises have seriously suffered. Hence, these circumstances often force women and people living with disabilities to take over new roles and responsibilities, including generating income for their families and job opportunities in a labour market within the agricultural sector is not an exception. The devastating impact of the crisis is extended to the agricultural labour market in various manners. Ranging from the inability to continue agribusiness on daily basis, to the indirect effects in terms of constraints that confront the economic activities and adversely impact the jobs stability and revenues as well as the deterioration of workers’ wages and income. Women and disabled people face not only entirely new opportunities but also various challenges. Several factors hamper their access to the existing work and investment opportunities in sectors such as poultry and agricultural input trade to generate income, including a lack of literacy, insufficient education, lack of previous work experience, location (physical distance from the work station opportunity) and in some cases cultural sensitivities and appropriateness of possible employment opportunities. Consequently, the need to assess market dynamics and opportunities is crucial to enhance women and disabled people’s capacities to access the agricultural labour market.

1.1 Study Objectives

The north west region of Syria continued to be one of the main areas devastated by the crisis in a way that leave the citizens of Aleppo and Edlib governorates in a highly vulnerable situations and in need for support to their livelihood to gain access to some income generating activities. The women and people living with disabilities are among the most severely impacted groups across NW Syria. CARE International and in line with its agricultural value chain interventions initiated this study to assess the agricultural labour market in the north west (NW) Syria to assess how those groups can benefit and be integrated in the agricultural value chain intervention programmes.

The study tended to answer the following questions:

I. What are the livelihood opportunities that the targeted agricultural value chains provide?

II. What are the skills needed for these opportunities?

III. What are the skill gaps that prevent women and disabled people as current job seekers from matching these opportunities?

IV. What are the barriers for the supply side of the agricultural labour market to accommodate women and job seekers living with disability?

V. What are the potential interventions on both sides of the agricultural labour market to enable higher livelihood opportunities for women and job seekers living with a disability?
1.2 Methodology

Rapid Market Assessment

Due to the lack of data on the labour sectors in NW Syria, the study team conducted a rapid market assessment to inform the selection of the relevant sectors for the in-depth labour market assessment (LMA). That rapid assessment was conducted in April 2019 across 9 sub-districts of Aleppo and Idlib governorates. 37 workers/employees and business owners/employers were surveyed to explore the prevalent economic activities and to highlight on the expansion opportunities of the businesses operating across the surveyed sites; as well as presenting the challenges facing those businesses and restricting the hiring of employees. The rapid assessment findings indicated that the agriculture inputs trade, food and pastries, poultry production and sewing in addition to blacksmith workshops and trade in construction materials were sectors with potentials to expand across NW Syria. The blacksmith workshops and trade in construction materials were excluded for an in-depth LMA due to their perceived unsuitability neither to workers with disabilities nor to women. Then, further analysis of the rapid market assessment findings indicated that the sewing and food processing sectors were featured by lack of job opportunities as well as offering non encouraging salaries. So the agriculture inputs trade and the poultry production sectors were the only sectors that deemed to suit women and workers with disabilities while offering relatively better wages and having the potentials to expand in the future and create new vacancies as well as their positive impact on food security in the targeted region. Thus, the present in-depth LMA study endeavored to explore and triangulate that conclusion from the rapid market assessment.

The in-depth LMA focusing on poultry and agricultural inputs trade sectors in the NW Syria was implemented during November 2019. Two data collection tools were developed for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected through direct interviews with 79 employers and 99 workers selected through purposive stratified random sampling techniques from 12 sub-districts (5 in Aleppo and 7 in Idleb governorates). A special focus was given to women and on people living with disabilities to fulfil the major objectives of the study.

Data Analysis: The study adopted descriptive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative variables to identify the potential opportunities, required skills, skill gaps and aspects hindering women and people living with disabilities in getting adequate job opportunities.

1.3 Study Limitations

- The study faced some limitations in terms of the security situation which confined the data collection to certain districts.
- The women representation was limited, although the community norms could have been behind this situation but not having enough females in the data collection team might have also contributed to this situation.
Results

2. Labour Market Demand Side

Employers in Poultry and Agricultural Inputs Trading Sector

2.1 Employers Sample

Demographics

2.1.1 Distribution of employers by business types

Out of the 79 employers interviewed, 44% were from the poultry production sector and 42% were from the agricultural inputs trade sector. 14% of the employers were from other sectors including farmers, food processing and sewing.

2.1.2 Employers demographic characteristics

Gender: For the 79 employers as study respondents, these were dominated by males with about 18% of respondents being females and the majority (82%) being males. However, the female presence was more apparent within the poultry sector as the females constituted 29% of the poultry employers compared to 71% males; however, a contrary trend appeared within the agricultural inputs trade sector where the females constituted only 3% while the male employers in this sector constituted 97%.

Age: The survey revealed that the employers were relatively young as 72% of them were within the age group of 20-39 years old.

Education: Majority of the surveyed employers in northwest Syria are educated; 50% of respondents in both the poultry and agricultural input sectors reported to have attained up to secondary education.
2.1.3 Business establishment

Reasonable market growth and free market entry was reported by the employers of both sectors, the employer’s responses indicated that over 28% and 12% of the poultry and agricultural inputs trade businesses respectively, have been established during the last 6 years. A trend that confirmed the rapid market survey findings that the poultry and the agricultural inputs trade were expanding despite the conflict environment in northwest Syria. 63% and 70% of the currently active poultry and agricultural inputs trade were established 14 years ago, respectively. 18% and 9% of the agricultural inputs trade and poultry businesses were established between 22 and 41 years ago, respectively.

![Figure 3: Years since establishment by business sector](image)

2.1.4 Reasons for choosing reported businesses

A considerable intergenerational family business model was observed in both surveyed sectors; analyzing the mentioned reasons for choosing the current agribusiness types revealed that 25% and 30% of the employers inherited their poultry farming and trade of agricultural inputs business from the family lineage, respectively. Having a relevant educational background was the second reported reason of working in the business as reported by 10% of the poultry farming employers and 8% of the agricultural inputs business. More details in the following graph.

![Figure 4: Reasons for choosing the businesses](image)

2.1.5 The impact of the Syrian crisis on labour market

The devastating impact of the Syrian crisis extended to the agricultural labour market in various manners. The direct impact was interrupting the business continuity, in addition to the indirect effects in terms of the various difficulties and constraints that confront the economic activities and adversely impact the labour jobs stability as well as the deterioration of wages and income. The security situation was the major reason for business discontinuity as reported by 91% and 90% of the poultry and trade in agricultural inputs, respectively.
Aside from being forced to temporarily close the business activities; the rise of trade constraints and production costs and the devaluation of the Syrian pound eroded agribusiness profitability across NW Syria. This was reported by the poultry and trade in agricultural inputs employers as the main negative impact on agribusiness with 66% and 68 %, respectively. Interestingly, 6 % of the poultry employers, mainly from Al Bab and Jarabulus reported that demand on their products had increased during the conflict time as the number of consumers (population) increased in some urban centers due to high rate of displacement from the other sites such as rural Damascus, Homs and Deir ez Zor governorates.

2.2 Workers background from employer’s perspective

2.2.1 Workforce distribution by gender, age and education

The 79 interviewed employers reported a total of 560 employees distributed as 24, 12 and 19 female workers (55 in total) for the poultry, agricultural trade and other sectors, respectively. Whereas, the male workers (505 in total) were distributed as 186, 288 and 31 for the three sectors, respectively.

Most of the interviewed employers own small businesses of small enterprise size, thereby employing an average of 7 employees inclusive of at least 1 female per enterprise across both the poultry and agricultural input trade sector. Out of the surveyed employers, the majority (65%) reported they do not consider women for employment, attributing that to the physical nature of work, the prevailing customs and traditions that constrains females recruitment as well as the reported opinion that women are less productive than men. Only 35% confirmed that they employ women and reported an average of 3 female employees per employer.

As depicted by the graph on workforce by gender, women are more employed by micro-enterprise as compared to small enterprise to medium business enterprises.

Similar to the employers, the employee base was equally reported to be dominated by a youthful workforce with 86% of workers being within the 16 to 40 years age group; indicating a clear tendency for employment opportunities for the productive young age group. The respondent employers indicated that most of their workforce had attained elementary and secondary education with 56% and 29 %, respectively.
Only 6% of the workers were reported to have attained post-secondary education while the illiteracy rate among the workforce of the sampled employers was as low as 9%.

2.2.2 Disability among workforce

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) about 30,000 people get injured due to the ongoing conflict in Syria each month. Almost one third of these injuries result in permanent disabilities. The high rate of disability induces critical issues to the workforce in the Syrian labour market as special arrangements and trainings are needed to the inclusion of this category and providing them appropriate work opportunities. In this regard, 75% of the poultry farming and inputs trade employers indicated that they do not offer on-job training; and that all of the interviewed disabled workers mentioned that they did not receive any on-job training. Out of the 79 employers interviewed, only 12% of the interviewed employers confirmed that their workforce included workers with disabilities whereas, most employers of about 88% reported no inclusion of disabled people within their workforce.

2.2.3 Labour wages

The effort exerted by a worker was considered the primary basis for deciding the labour daily wage followed by a fixed rate within the prevailing wages in the local area regardless of age or experience. The least basis for deciding the workers’ wage was said to be the level of demand on employers’ products and the associated operations or sales. The decision on wages level based on the exerted effort may be highly linked to the wide variation between the wages paid to the elderly, women or workers with disabilities. These special groups by virtue of being naturally of less physical power would be paid less as compared to the male youths of productive age group with great zeal of energy and effort towards physical tough tasks execution. This may explain the motivation for the energetic youths to search for employment given the opportunity of higher wages linked to their ability exert the expected physical effort towards deliverables at work.
2.2.4 Workplace discrimination against women and people with disabilities

The wages distribution based on interviewed poultry farming employers’ responses stated that wages paid to women were far less on average as compared to wages paid to the male counterparts. Nevertheless, no difference observed for the agricultural inputs trade. Differently, the surveyed employers from both sectors reported paying their disabled workers equally or even a bit higher compared to the able-bodied men.

Despite these discrepancies of unfair wages between female and male workers, the majority employers (66%) confirmed that women work for the same numbers of hours as other highly paid workers.

![Figure 8: Average daily wages (in SYP)](image)

2.3 Required Skills and Available livelihood opportunities

2.3.1 Required technical skills

The required fulltime vacancies were mainly for skilled workers and the unskilled casual workers had available vacancies for part-time or seasonal work. The demand on casual labour was high in agricultural inputs trading sector. The traders of agricultural inputs indicated the need for administration personnel and accountants, reflecting the agribusiness nature in its interactions with a relatively high number of suppliers, customers and a wide range of inputs, entailing good cash flow, warehousing and inventory management.

![Figure 9: Needed jobs by business sector](image)

2.3.1.1 Required technical skills for the poultry production sector

Regarding the responses of the interviewed employers about the skills required for having successful poultry production business; the following skills related to poultry husbandry were reported as listed with order of decreasing importance from a) to d), that is, a) as poultry husbandry skills being the most important and d) being the least important. Employers reported that despite the importance of these mentioned labour skills listed below, they were facing serious challenges in securing workers with these necessary skills. Employers reported labour skills gap for these listed necessary skills required for successful poultry production business.
The declining economic conditions in Syria were behind most of the identified challenges as reflected by the high wages demanded by workers beside the security problems laying at the scene background. However, some specific challenges were associated with the poultry and agricultural inputs trading sectors as presented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Necessary Skills</th>
<th>Skill Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Poultry husbandry skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to manufacture poultry feeds from the locally available ingredients/raw materials with minimum possible cost.</td>
<td>Lack of skills in preparing poultry rations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills regarding keeping the appropriate ventilation and temperature in the fowl run</td>
<td>There was a need for skilled workers in maintaining poultry feeding machineries and keeping the appropriate ventilation and temperature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg hatching skills and chick production</td>
<td>Lack of experience in monitoring eggs hatcheries and chicks raising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Poultry diseases control and treatment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about the common poultry pest, diseases and vaccines and methods of application.</td>
<td>There was a high need for workers skilled in detecting poultry diseases, control pests, convey the symptoms and apply the appropriate management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c. Marketing and managerial skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about the produce demand across the different seasons of the year.</td>
<td>Lack of accounting and bookkeeping knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poultry slaughterhouses require skills in poultry meat preparation and cuttings</td>
<td>Skill gaps regarding knowledge about local market needs and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring of feed and products prices</td>
<td>Lack of negotiation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaps meat processing and meat cuttings skilled labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d. Interpersonal skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to act well and show promptness and being active in performing their tasks</td>
<td>Lack of communication and sales skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork and the ability to take appropriate decisions</td>
<td>Gaps in workers self-confidence and ability to act well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work commitment and time management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.1.2 Required technical skills for the agricultural inputs trade sector

The interviewed employers were asked to provide their opinion about the skills needed for the agricultural inputs sector. The responses were also categorized in order of importance from a) to C) as follows below a)
being the most important skill and c) being the least important. These listed required skills were also mentioned as labour skills gaps faced as a challenge by employers within the agricultural input trade sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Necessary Skills</th>
<th>Skill Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>e. The technical skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A wide range of technical knowledge about the agricultural seasons, durations and the weather conditions.</td>
<td>• Lack of knowledge about crop seeds varieties, seed treatment skills and the optimum seed storage conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge about seed types, quality, treatment and storage.</td>
<td>• Lack of skilled labour in agricultural machinery maintenance and operation including tractors drivers trained on land preparation and ploughing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skills in green house establishment, requirements and operations</td>
<td>• Lack of greenhouse management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fertilizers types, recommended doses and application methods and timing.</td>
<td>• Lack of experience in crop protection, and knowledge about the crop pests and diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appropriate knowledge about the common crop pests and diseases and the different types of weeds and the suitable pesticides and herbicides</td>
<td>• Lack of experience in pest and weed control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appropriate seed rate application, their appropriate quantities, application methods, and safety measures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Marketing and managerial skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to convince the farmers to adopt the optimum agricultural practices and to purchase the adequate inputs.</td>
<td>• Weak capacities in accounting and bookkeeping and poor decision-making capabilities in the stressful situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In-depth knowledge about the local market conditions.</td>
<td>• Poor marketing skills and awareness about local market demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning the various trademarks and their products.</td>
<td>• Poor time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have good business management and accounting skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Interpersonal skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commitment to work</td>
<td>• The new workers need training on the appropriate means for handling customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appreciation of teamwork</td>
<td>• In appropriate attitudes towards teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appropriate actions under stressful situations</td>
<td>• Workers were reluctant to work for consecutive several hours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.2 Required demographic characteristics

About 95% of the interviewed employers indicated their preference to employ youthful new recruits aged between 16 and 40 years old. The good physical capacity and acceptance to work for long hours were the dominate reasons for employers’ preference for youthful workers.

Regarding the preferred level of education, the analysis indicated that there was a tendency among the agricultural inputs traders and poultry producers to prefer highly educated workers with high school or university education as more than 50% of the employers reported. Well educated workers were reportedly preferred due to their ability to comprehend the technical skills required to deliver work outputs.

2.3.3 Current vacant opportunities

Regarding the currently vacant jobs, out of the 79 surveyed employers, 22 employers (28%) confirmed they had vacant job opportunities, out of these 22 employers, 19 of them (3 poultry production and 13 agricultural inputs trade) reported having vacant part-time jobs by the time of the study. On the other hand, only 3 employers (2 poultry production and 1 agricultural inputs trade) reported availability of full-time job vacancies
2.3.4 Potential job opportunities for women and people with disabilities

The employer’s responses indicated the following main potential job profiles that suit women are poultry, egg production and disease control for the uneducated women; Accounting, administration and sales jobs for the educated women. Regarding the potential job profiles that suit people with disabilities, almost all the employers did not prefer employing workers with disabilities. 43% of the employers favoured supporting the people with disabilities to establish their own small enterprises as home-based poultry production, soap manufacturing, and antiques manufacturing and trade. The rest of the employers reported several potential profiles for women and disabled people including; working as administrative office personnel, accountants and supervisors. 47% of the employers expressed that the people with disabilities are more vulnerable and marginalized within their local communities due to their limited employment opportunities. The employers noted that the high unemployment rate of disabled people has a negative psychological impact on their life as they become frustrated with failure to achieve their self-esteem. On a relevant note, some interviewed employers indicated that the need for special equipment or facilities was the reason of limiting the inclusion of people with disabilities and thus reducing their chances for skills acquisition.

2.4.1 Availability of inputs and demand on products

Regarding the supply of inputs, over 85% of both the agricultural input traders and poultry producers reported that inputs were readily available in the market. However, despite the reported availability of inputs, there were reports of employers failing to afford inputs due to high input prices. Disruption of the transport system was reportedly being the driving factor behind scarcity of inputs as well as the increase input prices. Regarding the demand on the products and services, over 80% of both the agricultural input traders and poultry producers reported a good demand on their products and services. The agricultural inputs traders reported a high demand, which is attributed to the growing need for the private sector to fill the gap left by the Syrian government’s cessation of agricultural inputs provision and subsidies.
3. Labour Market Supply Side

Employees in Poultry and Agricultural Inputs Trading Sector

3.1 Sample Demographics

3.1.1 Geographical coverage and job types

Out of the 99 workers interviewed, 60% of the workers sample was drawn from the three districts of Aleppo governorate (A’zaz, Al Bab and Jarablus) and 40% drawn from Idlib governorate (Harim and Idlib center districts). A considerable portion of the interviewed workers were poultry production labourers (38 workers) followed by agricultural inputs trade workers (31 workers), while 30 workers were from crop farming, sewing and food processing sectors.

3.1.2 Workers demographic characteristics

Gender: Out of the 99 workers, interviewed the female workers resembled only 12% and most of them were poultry production workers.

Age: Almost 51% of the workers were less than 30 years of age. Followed by 45% of the workers category within the 30 to 49 years age group. The workers age distribution showed a relatively youthful working group across NW Syria.

Workers education: The primary school was the dominating educational level attained mostly by males as confirmed by 51% of workers. However, females were less educated given that only 11% of female workers reported to have attained at least high school education. There was less evidence of vocational and business skill training opportunities as reflected by a small number of only 3% male workers who reported to have attained this skill.

Workers living with disabilities

On the supply side, out of the 99 workers interviewed, 14% of these workers are disabled people and 4% reported that they were suffering from chronic diseases.

Type of disabilities: various disabilities types were reported; however, the limbs amputation was the most dominant type of disability as recorded from 8 out of the 14 disabled workers interviewed.
3.2 Professional status of workers

3.2.1 Time since job commencement

The workers responses on the duration spent on jobs clearly indicated high tendency to join poultry and agricultural trade input businesses during the recent time period. About 81% of the poultry and inputs workers mentioned that they had a year or less since they had started their jobs in these sectors. A trend implying continuous recruitment within these two sectors despite the prevailing conflict in Syria.

3.2.2 Reasons to engage in job

The reasons for workers to get involved in their current jobs varied between those who indicated that their job matched their experience mainly in poultry production and trade in the agricultural inputs. However, others reported that they just got involved in their current jobs because they were the main jobs available in the labour market across the study area.

3.2.3 Impact of the Syrian crisis on workers

The Syrian crisis impact was even worse on the workers as 81% of the interviewed workers confirmed that they had to stop working for some time as a result of the conflict and remained without income source during those times. Other negative impacts of the crisis on workers was the wages reduction as 79% of the workers interviewed confirmed that salaries were reduced with the onset of the crisis. The Syrian crisis also affected skills development as 11% of workers indicated their loss of learning opportunities as they had to be college/school drop-outs due to the conflict.

3.2.4 Training and skills possessed

Workers Training

Only 10% of the interviewed workers confirmed that they had received training for skill development. However, the reported training fields were with no direct relevancy to the current field of work for the study respondents. It was mentioned that some of the workers in these agricultural sectors had received training in fields such as solar energy, wool industry or men’s shaving. The irrelevance and mismatch of training received, and current job opportunities was an issue that was confirmed by 40% of workers interviewed. Other major
challenges included inadequate security situation and transportation means which was reported by 20% of workers as study respondents.

**Workers experience**

The distribution of workers’ experiences according to years spent on jobs indicated that agriculture input trade and poultry production were the main sectors with long years of experience where 21 and 24% of the of workers of these two sectors mentioned they had work experience of 7 to 25 years. The shortest experience of one year or less included the largest proportion of workers in the various sorts of jobs as reported by the interviewed workers including trucks and cars mechanics and salesmen.

**Workers skills**

The skills related to the agricultural crops, livestock and marketing sectors were among the common competencies reported by the interviewed workers. However, the poultry production skills were the most dominant including egg hatching and broilers raising.

**3.3 Current livelihood opportunities for workers.**

**3.3.1 Available job opportunities**

Some of the interviewed workers confirmed the positive impact of the agricultural value chains interventions of the CARE SRP on the agricultural labour market. (26%) of the workers indicated that the CARE SRP interventions availed job opportunities for the casual workers. The casual work vacancies were linked to a wide range of activities in the agricultural sector where the interventions in the wheat and olive value chains created temporary jobs opportunities. This was reportedly evidenced throughout the agricultural production process starting from land clearance and preparation as well as recruitment for harvesting (wheat, olive fruit) work activities, olive processing and beyond. The job opportunities for the casual workers were extended to the agricultural inputs trade sector which has a higher possibility to expand as also confirmed by the initial
rapid labour market survey. This rapid market survey also indicated the agricultural input trade as one of the sectors most suitable and with high employment opportunities for disabled people and women. 11% of the workers as study respondents confirmed that women were employed or supported in various sectors in activities linked to the olive, wheat and dairy value chains. The dairy value chain approach of FSL programming within the CARE SRP has women who are supported with the provision of livestock feed and veterinary services. Female casual labourers were also involved in the wheat and olive value chains development as they participated in olive picking and mechanical control of some wheat pests. Women were also reported to have provided most of the casual labour in manual wheat crop harvesting. Limited supply fuel and failure to afford hiring expensive mechanical equipment for wheat harvesting would normal result in farmers resorting to manual harvesting of wheat.

3.4 The current job status

3.4.1 Information about available job opportunities

The workers’ response regarding the information about new vacancies indicated inefficiency in disseminating such basic information. 58% of the respondent workers tended to get this information through relatives and friends while 35% relied on approaching employers for such information.

3.4.2 Level of competition in agricultural labour market and demand on workers skills

77% of the respondent workers confirmed a high level of competition within the agricultural labour market in the NW Syria. A situation that may be attributed to the prevailing high rate of unemployment. Contrary to the prevailing high competition for jobs, 45% of the workers mentioned that the demand for skilled labour was low.

3.5 Recruitment challenges from supply side perspective

3.5.1 The challenges that face workers applying for new vacancies

The limited vacancies and their poor coverage on announcements regarding advertising were among the highly reported challenges that face workers searching jobs in NW Syria as reported by 30% of the interviewed workers. This was followed by the challenges regarding workers failing to match job requirements such as the desired education level and professional skills and previous work experience as reported by 27% of the workers interviewed. Workers also mentioned challenges regarding low salaries/wages as well as insecurity as other factors which negatively influence their efforts in securing employment.

3.5.2 Reasons for looking for a new job

The search for a permanent and a better income was reported by at least 20% of the respondent workers as the main reason to search for new jobs. This reason was widely shared by workers like salespersons in agribusiness who usually work in temporary jobs. 40% of the workers sample indicated that the work environment was stressful while the income was low, this was commonly shared between the agricultural input trade and poultry workers.
### 3.5.3 Wages received by workers

Across the poultry and agricultural inputs trade sectors, the workers reported that women tend to get wages lower by an average of 17% and 40%, respectively as compared to men and people with disabilities. Interestingly, the responses indicated that people with disabilities tend to get relatively higher wages as compared to able bodied men, a situation that may be attributed to a tendency of employers to assist that category.

![Figure 17: Workers motives to change their current jobs](image)

![Figure 18: Workers average daily wages (in SYP)](image)

### 3.6 Potential job opportunities for women and workers with disabilities

#### 3.6.1 Possible actions to improve job opportunities for women and the disabled people

The interviewed worker suggested that the awareness programs implemented by the humanitarian actors for inclusion of people with disabilities and women in workplaces are to be executed in mosques and population centers for the attainment of better inclusion of those employment marginalized population segments. The respondent workers mentioned that supporting the currently established businesses with working capital conditioned with creating new vacancies for recruitment of women and people with disabilities would widen the labour market opportunities for those groups. The workers added that establishing new poultry production cooperatives equipped with the necessary facilities and supported with vocational training in poultry husbandry, meat processing, marketing skills and business management would improve women inclusion in the labour market. They also indicated that the provision of vocational and business skill training for the people with disabilities in areas related to agricultural inputs trade and office work like accounting, receptionist, bookkeeping and beside training in the supervision of agricultural labourers would raise their recruitment opportunities.
3.7 Barriers facing women and the workers with disabilities

3.7.1 The labour skill gaps limiting the employment of women and people with disabilities

The skills gaining barriers for women revolved around the inadequacy of vocational and business skill training centres and the remoteness of such centres from residential areas. The mentioned constraints were aggravated with the local communities’ negative attitudes towards women being perceived as incompetent, a situation that imposes multiplier negative effects on women. Similar constraints regarding the inadequacy of vocational training facilities were facing the people living with disabilities as complicated by unavailability of adequate facilities in the training centres to accommodate the special needs of this group. However, the people with disabilities face other challenges including unwillingness by some employers to employ this population group, regardless of the type and level of disability they suffer. Other obstacles facing disabled people included negative attitudes from some of their co-workers who refrain from letting the new workers with disabilities to collectively participate in tasks execution. Bullying on disabled people as they are being perceived weaker and considered as easy target for bullying were reported.

The interviewed workers were also requested to inform based on their observations on the barriers that people with disabilities face when having multiple or different types of disabilities. The workers responses indicted that, generally, the need for certain special requirements for people with multiple disabilities to perform their tasks increase. The consequences of this was that business owners tend to reduce/avoid the employment of persons with multiple disabilities without considering how the multiple disabilities may impact on the work deliverables. The disability and loss of work opportunities drives high poverty rates among people with disabilities and this situation aggravates as the disability level become severe or multiple.

3.8 Discussion and Recommendations

3.8.1 Discussion

The focus of this study was mainly on assessing the agricultural labour market opportunities and challenges facing women and people living with disabilities as being the most vulnerable population segments adversely affected by the war toll. Hence, the study went on to further narrow down the assessment by investigating the potential growing sectors suggested by the earlier pilot rapid market survey results, namely, the trade in agricultural inputs and the poultry production sectors. The study explored the opportunities offered by those sectors and how would they suite the agricultural labour supply and demand for women and people living with disabilities. The study also highlighted the potential job opportunities and labour skill gaps and other challenges that are facing both the targeted groups and the business owners operating within the two investigated sectors of poultry and agricultural inputs trade. The provision of job opportunities for the female workers was considered a significant positive impact of the CARE SRP supported agricultural value chains informed FSL programming which target, 85,304 people (distributed as 51 and 49 % males and females, respectively(Care SRP, 2019)). These beneficiaries were supported with a mix of interrelated livelihood activities in the wheat, olive and livestock value chains between July and September 2019. CARE SRP influenced a range of positive impacts on the livelihoods of the targeted people and their communities and these impacts were also confirmed by the interviewed employers and workers in this study. For instance, the reported high active participation of youths in the agricultural labour market is considered a good opportunity for entrance into the FSL restoration activities through targeting the active age group inclusive of vulnerable
female youths and disabled people. Furthermore, vocational and agribusiness skill development targeting women and disabled people is highlighted as one of the appropriate opportunities to address barriers facing these population groups in accessing employment or to venture in agribusiness through self-employment.

Job opportunities for women and people with disabilities were presented by the interviewed employers and workers, however, those targeted groups are facing some specific challenges raised due to some community norms that prevent women from being fully involved in the agricultural labour market. While the challenges facing the people with disabilities were due to some negative attitudes induced by some of the employers and co-workers, over and above the challenges arising from the disabilities and injuries that this population group suffers. The study also presented the essential required skills for the poultry and the agricultural inputs trade sectors which include technical, marketing and workers personal traits. Those skills ranged from the ones that can be widely available as most of the job seekers in those sectors are residents in the rural areas and expected to be exposed to the agricultural field and its associated experience including poultry production. However, some of the mentioned skills seemed to be of technical nature such as the ones associated with pesticides use and handling, soil fertility, machinery operations and veterinary skills which entailed the need for previous work experience and/or training in the field. Despite that some workers including women and people with disabilities reported possessing some of the necessary skills for the two explored sectors, certain labour skills gaps were indicated by the interviewed employers and workers including basic poultry production skills such as improved animal husbandry practices and aspects related to integrated pest and disease management. The labour skill gaps were also pointed in areas related to the agricultural inputs trade in practices related to seed multiplication/production, plant protection and machinery maintenance. There were gaps in the management and marketing skills such as the need for accountants and skills in dealing with customer care as well as the gaps in personal traits which were almost common between the poultry and inputs trade sectors.

The vocational and business skills training centres for mitigating the labour skills gaps were reported to be inadequate and usually cannot be easily accessed due to the prevailing security conditions. Despite that, a significant portion of the interviewed employers in both the agricultural inputs trade and the poultry production sectors confirmed the growing demand on their products and abundancy of the necessary inputs, thus a positive situation. However, those businesses were facing challenges due to the pressing economic conditions that were reflected on the workers poor wages. The interviewed employers linked the inclusion of the targeted groups of women and disabled people with the additional need for support regarding some required materials, certain special equipment’s or financial support to make their workplace more appropriate to receive any additional workforce including women and disabled people.

3.8.2 Recommendations.

Recommendations to increase women and disabled people’s access to the agricultural labour market in northwest Syria

Based on the findings of the agricultural labour market study, the following suggested recommendations aimed at improving the inclusion of women and people with disabilities in the existing businesses including those in the poultry and the agricultural inputs trading sectors. Certain recommendations on the required support to the private businesses are also stated. As a result of this assessment, a range of forward-looking recommendations for the audience of this assessment to engage in women and disabled people employment promotion is suggested:

Recommendation regarding possible vocational and agribusiness skill training curricula:

- Implementing beginner and advanced training courses for women and disabled people complemented with material support towards on-the-job training and start-up agribusiness grants (in-kind or cash) and support to market home-generated agro-products through agricultural fairs. Finance is a major constraint that would be facing the newly established businesses; thus, humanitarian partners should complement the efforts of the entrepreneurs and communicate with them on how they can access finance.
• Supporting women and disabled people centered organizations, women and disabled people empowerment initiatives, taking into consideration offering additional training and employment opportunities for women, disabled people and designing solutions to address major risks and issues affecting Syrian women and disabled people. The trainings could cover the technical aspects as well as the managerial, accounting and marketing aspects as highlighted regarding labour skills gap by the present study. Such training programmes need to be provided by either the existing specialized institutions as well as establishing additional vocational and business skills training centres which need to be highly supported to make them well capable for providing such crucial services.

• In general:

• The humanitarian actors and the local councils are recommended to implement the less labor-intensive project activities within the selected agribusinesses value chains, thereby enhancing gender-sensitive and inclusive employment opportunities and supporting inclusive livelihoods projects, which lead to tangible short-term employment opportunities for women and disabled people. Less labour intensive activities within FSL programming will allow participation of women and disabled people.

• Provide financial and technical support to the currently operating businesses to raise their inclusion capacities to recruit more female workers and disabled people.

• Supporting childcare, transportation and security projects designed specifically to support women and people with disabilities in selected areas or inside existing local organizations to facilitate solutions to major challenges faced by women and disabled people aiming to secure employment.

• Fostering social dialogue led by local councils in selected governorates focusing on women and disabled people access to agricultural labour markets and creating solutions that enhance women and disabled people’s access to the agricultural labor market. Special attention should be given to the negative opinions against women and people living with disabilities as well to the negative community norms as the mitigation of such attitudes would relieve much of the constraints facing the targeted groups. The community-based organizations need to be proactive in providing care services and capacity building services to support people with disabilities and women to become economically self-sufficient and integrated into their societies.

• Just like the CARE SRP, continue to engage through the agricultural value chain approach in FSL programming to increase employment opportunities for women and disabled people, carefully designed in consultation with community members.

• Building sustainable partnerships with local women and pro-disabled people organizations to combine their comparative advantages and maximize impact. Such partnerships will enable effective and efficient collaboration on mutual capacity building, data collection, joint assessments, programme implementation, advocacy and other activities.

• Provide the information about new job opportunities offered by the humanitarian interventions in a manner that reach as much as possible of the targeted communities. Establishing an organized platform that links employment seekers with employers as has been recommended by CARE in its labour market assessment study conducted in 2017 across Dara’a and Quainter governorates. CARE indicated that such platform could be so useful and leads to reduce the unemployment rate(Care, 2017).

Implications for FSL programming

The information gathered for this agricultural labour market assessment can inform gender sensitive FSL programming in northwest Syria. Based on the study findings the following are key points to consider when formulating and designing FSL programmes:

• Communication skills, educational level and vocational technical skills are three of the most important
factors that employers consider when looking for new employees including women and disabled people.

- Technical skills vary greatly across the agricultural sector and business to business. However, we noticed that information technology skills have great demand for agricultural marketing involving women and disabled people with limited freedom of movement in Syria. Online agribusinesses marketing offers great promise as they can be operated securely from home, they provide a foreign cash infusion, and they are accessible to wide swaths of the agricultural labour market (including women, and people with disabilities). The raising of marketing opportunities and skills would increase and sustain the expansion of the existing agribusiness, this expansion could be achieved through the agricultural value chain approach as evidenced by the CARE SRP where the individual agribusinesses experience back ward and forward integration to reduce their production cost and maximize their returns. Thus, linkages need to be strengthened with the existing and future agricultural value chains interventions.

- Professionalism, honesty, and job experience are characteristics employers’ value in potential employees.

- Most businesses use personal connections and networking when they want to hire new employees across Syria. Given employers heavily rely on personal connections to find employees, women and disabled people could benefit from vocational agribusiness skills training with job placements, as they would allow them to develop specific job skills and give them an opportunity to gain experience.

- The home-based poultry business tends to be managed by women, so supporting them would also dovetail nicely with trying to encourage female labour participation. Additionally, home businesses is general tend to be taxed less, meaning that a microgrant will have a greater impact. Beyond poultry production, the other common home-based agribusiness is dairy production as supported by CARE SRP. The same approach can be applied to people with disabilities as their limited mobility impose constraints and challenges on accessing the work sites; thus, home-based work, or private businesses either in poultry production or agricultural inputs trade or any other suitable activity can be considered(Ferati, 2017).

From these key points, vocational and business skills training programmes targeting women and disabled people will have the most success if they focus on a combination of trainings and apprenticeships on both basic professional technical skills and professional ethics. Programmes that develop apprenticeships would be beneficial and would allow women and disabled people to gain the specific job skills needed to find employment in specialized businesses. Additionally, vocational technical skills training that focus on professional behavior, networking and interview skills, and basic job-hunting and resume-writing skills would help women and disabled people develop the more general skills they need to find opportunities and engage potential employers. Entrepreneurship training in FSL programming is another skill that could be helpful, particularly to women and disabled people, as many expressed the desire to start their own small agribusinesses. Understanding the many skills needed to operate and run agribusinesses, from identifying a niche and finding working capital to manage minor accounting, are crucial to finding success as a small-business owner. Adequate technical and financial support need to be provided to the existing businesses to make them more capable to expand and increase their workers intake abilities. The support should take into consideration the special needs of women and people with disabilities.

Recommendations to further studies

The concept of conflict-tolerant agribusinesses is a facet identified for further investigation of those businesses that were active at pre-conflict time and then continues to expand and remain viable even during the prevailing conflict/crisis era in Syria. Research to identify such less risk and crisis adaptive enterprises would inform the humanitarian community to consider long-term investment support on such business
sectors components for food security and livelihood restoration outcomes, while benefiting women and disabled people. Such conflict tolerant enterprises could thrive and may continue to be profitable in a future within a less conflict context, as there is always a perception that the conflict will eventually come to an end in Syria.

References

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