**ANNUAL PROGRAMME NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT**

**UN Joint Programme to Build and Strengthen Urban and Rural Resilience and the Conditions for Recovery in Syria Phase II**

**Reporting period**

**1 January – 31 December 2023**

**UN Joint Programme to Build and Strengthen Urban and Rural Resilience and the Conditions for Recovery in Syria Phase II**

**ANNUAL programme[[1]](#footnote-1) NARRATIVE progress report**

**REPORTING PERIOD: 1 january – 31 December 2023**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Programme Title & Project Number |  | Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results[[2]](#footnote-2) |
| Programme Title: UN Joint Programme to Build and Strengthen Urban and Rural Resilience and the Conditions for Recovery in Syria Phase II* MPTF Office Project Reference Number:[[3]](#footnote-3)00140233
 | Syrian Arab Republic |
| **Outcome 1**: Urban Area-based Recovery and Neighbourhood Plans that are responsive to community’s needs, particularly the most vulnerable groups, are developed, delivered and monitored in an inclusive, participatory and conflict-sensitive manner at local level. **Outcome 2:** Basic and social services are restored, improved and sustained to enhance community resilience and social cohesion. **Outcome 3:** Households and communities benefit from sustainable livelihood opportunities, including economic recovery and enhancing social cohesion and community security. |
| Participating Organization(s) |  | Implementing Partners |
| FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNICEF and WFP | * Please refer to the activity matrix.
 |
| Programme/Project Cost (US$) |  | Programme Duration |
| Total approved budget as per project document: MPTF /JP Contribution[[4]](#footnote-4): * *by Agency (if applicable)*
 | $ 2,000,000 |  | Overall Duration *(months)* | 24 |
| Contributions (donors)* Italy
 | $ 2,150,100 |  | Start Date[[5]](#footnote-5) *(dd.mm.yyyy)* | 1 January 2023 |
| TOTAL: | $ 2,150,000 |  | Original End Date*[[6]](#footnote-6)* *(dd.mm.yyyy)* | 31 December 2024 |
|  |  |  | Current End date[[7]](#footnote-7)*(dd.mm.yyyy)* | 31 December 2024 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
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# Abbreviations

**CWG** Communicatiosn Working Group

**DEZ** Deir-ez-Zor

**FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**GBV** Gender Based Violence

**HoAs** Heads of Agencies

**IP** Implementing partner

**JP** The Joint Programme to Build and Strengthen Urban and Rural Resilience and the Conditions for Recovery in Syria

**JSC** Joint Steering Committee

**M&E** Monitoring and Evaluation

**MOFAE** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expartriates

**MOU** Memorandum Of Understanding

**MPTFO**  Multi Partner Trust Fund Office

**NGO** Non-governmental organization

**OCHA** Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**PMU** Programme Management Unit

**PUNO** Participating United Nations Organization

**RC/HC** Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator

**ToC** Theory Of Change

**TWG** Technical Working Group

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**UNDSS** United Nations Department of Safety and Security

**UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund

**UN-Habitat** United Nations Human Settlements Programme

**UNICEF** United Nations Children Fund

**WFP**  World Food Programme of the United Nations

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Syrian context has largely invoked and still calling for the provision of humanitarian assistance with less emphasis on resilience efforts. The UN Joint Programme to Build and Strengthen Urban and Rural Resilience (JP) in Syria brings together six UN implementing agencies, namely FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, and WFP, to deliver coordinated resilience and recovery-oriented interventions, through a unique multi-donor, multi-year, multi-agency pooled funding mechanism to communities who are still witnessing massive damage to every aspect of life and livelihoods.

The JP on Urban and Rural Resilience is underpinned by a commitment to collective programming towards resilience solutions, applying a nuanced, area-based, and conflict-sensitive approach, which facilitates an optimisation of community participation, thereby creating an appropriate space for participatory and bottom-up-led processes with a focus on the rural-urban linkages, while ensuring gender-responsive/gender-transformative and inclusive planning.

The JP in Syria, during its first phase of implementation that ended by 31 December 2023, supported the resilience of Syrian people in Dara’a and Deir ez-Zor through jointly designed, and planned interventions ensuring complementarity in action, maximizing impact in urban and rural areas, and avoiding duplication and overlap in the two targeted locations. Additionally, the JP maintained current and future donor involvement through high-level meetings and joint field visits, while following up, monitoring and reporting on activities and making efforts in communication and advocacy

It was agreed in the JP’s Joint Steering Committee (JSC) meeting held back on 27th October 2022, that the JP in its second phase will ensure that the gains made during its first phase of implementation are sustained and built upon by the local community. This will be done by maintaining and expanding on a group of approved interventions that will further enhance the resilience of people and ensure smoother exit of the JP from its current locations in Dara’a and Deir ez-Zor. Consequenlty, during the first half of 2023, the JP programme management unit (PMU) worked with the JP technical focal points at the six UN agencies to develop a draft sustainability workplan for the JP second phase with a focus on sustaining and enahcning achievements made toward supporting people’s resilience.

During the Heads of Agencies (HoAs) meeting on 20th July 2023, and due to limited funding it was agreed that the participating UN organizationswill set the set criteria on most needed interventions/activities that will have the largest impact on sustaining outcomes of the first phase of the JP, to be included in the sustainability workplan, by using a result chain and problem tree approach.

To this end, the JP sustainability workplan was developed, revised and optimized during the second half of 2023 and was finally endorsed by early December 2023.

# PURPOSE

The JP has been developed to enable participating UN organizations to address critical resilience needs within targeted communities while also strengthening the resilience of displaced populations and hosting communities, promoting social and economic recovery, strengthening rural-urban linkages, supporting local planning and community participation, and contributing to overall social cohesion within communities. The JP adopts a flexible multi-year, multi-partner, and multi-sector programming approach, at district, subdistrict, city and/or village, and neighbourhood levels with strong emphasis on community consultations and decision-making to prioritize needs and activities and select areas of intervention. The second phase of the JP adopts the same programming approach while utilizing a theory of change following to a profound problem/results trees analysis to support urban-rural livelihoods and linkages.

# RESULTS

During the implementation of the first phase of the JP, the interventions proceeded to realizing the following three outcomes:

**1. Outcome 1:** Urban Area-based Recovery and Neighbourhood Plans that are responsive to community’s needs, particularly the most vulnerable groups, are developed, delivered, and monitored in an inclusive, participatory, and conflict-sensitive manner at local level.

**2. Outcome 2:** Basic and social services are restored, improved, and sustained to enhance community resilience and social cohesion.

**3. Outcome 3:** Households and communities benefit from sustainable livelihood opportunities, including economic recovery and enhancing social cohesion and community security.

**Sustainability workplan areas**

The JP sustainability workplan identified three key basis areas to support urban-rural livelihoods and linkages that are aligned with the original three outcomes of the JP, to build upon to enhance the resielince of people, while streamlining gender equality across the three sustainability basis areas. These areas are:

**Community engagement and empowerment (Aligned with Outcome 1)**: The sustainability interventions within this area embark on ensuring meaningful engagement with all relevant community stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalized groups (youth, women and girls, and people with disabilities) of diverse age and backgrounds. This important approach will support community members in expressing their views and participation in decision-making about how to sustain the gains made in phase I. Communities’ capacities will be enhanced to sustain access to critical livelihood systems as well as basic services in a manner that enables them to: 1) help the most vulnerable families generate sustainable income, 2) enhance communities’ financial capacity to improve access to basic services including reproductive health (RH) services, learning and skills-building opportunities. The JP participating UN organizations (PUNOs) will support the role of neighbourhoods and village committees in managing the community’s resources to anticipate and mitigate risks. PUNOs will advocate with different stakeholders to ensure that young people, women and other vulnerable and marginalized groups participate meaningfully in the committees.

**Support to service-provision facilities (Aligned with Outcome 2)**: The local service-provision institutions / facilities need to be supported to recover their capacity to deliver the services currently being provided through the JP in efficient, sustainable, and inclusive manner. Against this backdrop, the JP PUNOs will continue on doing light rehabilitation to existing local facilities, when needed, (e.g., health centres, community centres, etc.) and support others with extra functions (e.g., Curriculum B classes for Out-of-School Children [OoSC] in the already rehabilitated schools, etc.) to sustain the services provided to the local community. Priority shall be given to basic health, protection, learning, and skills-building services that addres rights of the most vulnerable including children, youth, and women who continue to be severely disadvantaged from access to such services.

**Improved urban-rural market dynamics, sustained livelihoods (Aligned with Outcome 3):** The JP PUNOs will work on sustaining the results supporting rural and urban interlinkages under the JP. This will be through: 1) improving access to market information, 2) provision of tools and knowledge to farmers to resume production and absorb shocks, 3) enabling connections to wholesale traders, and 4) providing information on market support services (e.g., logistical services.) to improve their understanding of market trends and conditions. Specific emphasis will be on women’s economic empowerment and inclusion to address gender barriers and challenge discriminatory structures that prevent women’s participation in market activities, including the overlap of care, domestic and community responsibilities.

**Sustainability workplan cross-cutting aspects**

## The JP sustainability workplan incorporated four cross-cutting aspects, and devised approaches that the JP PUNOs will adhere to during implementation. These are: 1) accountability to crisis-affected populations: by ensuring their voices are heard and programmatic decisions are informed by their priorities; 2) Gender and conflict sensitivity: by warranting that PUNOs are impartial and warrant that all individuals have equitable and unhindered access to services; 3) Climate change: climate change is a challenge that is hampering efforts to revive rural livelihoods, and impacts negatively on women girls through increased cases of GBV in rural areas. PUNOs will support the livelihoods of affected communities through increasing their awareness on the causes of climate change and the good practices of climate action at local level in a way that sustain their livelihoods while maintaining the natural resources; 4) Advocacy: through embedding it as a principle in each of the sustainability areas to ensure that they are committed and well-resourced to ensure sustainability of the JP intervention.

## Planning, and coordination highlights

During the reporting period, the PMU coordinated efforts with the participating UN organizations to develop the JP sustainability workplan through the Technical Working Group (TWG) bi-weekly meetings, in addition to a series of hands-on technical meetings between the JP programme management unit and the technical focal points at the six UN agencies to design and analyse key problem trees and develop a theory of change around the sustainability workplan.

## Narrative reporting on results

**First draft of JP sustainability workplan**

The first draft of the workplan for second phase of the JP, named as the JP sustainability workplan was developed during the first half of the year 2023. The workplan focused on four key thematic areas to craft around the sustainability interventions: 1) livelihoods and urban rural linkages, 2) infrastcuture, 3) vocational training, and 4) education.

The first draft design of the sustainability workplan reflected some shortcomings relevant to integration and complementarity between interventions, coupled with the funding deficit as the size of available funding for the second phase of the JP was not sufficient to ensure full coverage for all of the interventions that constituted the first version of the sustainability workplan.

The first draft was shared with JP donors for informal review and commenting. The key recommendation received was to focus on one or two of the above mentioned thematic areas, which may entail the most sustainable positive impact on the lives of the targeted population.

**Enhanced sustainability workplan**

As a result of the Heads of Agencies meeting on 20th July 2023, and due to limited funding it was agreed that the participating UN organizations will set the criteria on most needed interventions/activities that will have the largest impact on sustaining outcomes of the first phase of the JP, to be included in the sustainability workplan, by using a results chain and problem tree approach. The theme to support livelihoods and urban rural linkages was identified as the intervention that will have the maximum impact on population resielince in the two targeted locations.

The JP Programme Management Unit and the technical focal points at the six UN agencies held a series of hands-on technical meeting to design and analyse key problem trees and develop a theory of change around the livelihoods and urban rural linkages, which was prescribed in the narrative of the sustainability work plan (Annex A). In parallel, and through their technical staff in the field the UN agencies focal points conducted consultancies with local community stakeholders including men, women, youth and people with disabilities to consolidate their needs, views and ideas on interventions that will sustain their livelihoods, have a sustainable positive impact, and contribute to enhancing their urban-rural connectivity. Consequently, the UN agencies focal points supported by PMU revised and fine-tuned the sustainability workplan (Annex A) to describe interventions mainly associated with enhancing urban and rural livelihoods and linkages.

In parallel, the sustainability activity matrix (Annex B) that defines the activities to be undertaken jointly between JP UN agencies, was prepared alongside the workplan’s narrative document, and costs were refined to be within the limits of the available funding.

**Finalization and endorsement**

The final draft of the sustainability workplan, and the costed activity matrix were completed by mid November 2023 and shared with JP donors for their final informal review, upon which no comments were received and the final draft was endorsed.

In early December the JP sustainability workplan was finalized and sent for the JP’s Joint Steering Committee’s virtual endorsement, and was fully endorsed by mid December 2023. Fund requests were prepared per each participating UN organizatino, and funds were released to them by the MPTFO on 18th December 2023.

To this end, the JP PMU ensured that JP six participating UN organizations had funds ready to start their internal procedures, paving the way to start implementation of the sustainability workplan’s interventions as of early year 2024.

The reporting on the JP sustainability workplan’s outcomes and outputs will take place in the 2024 report that will be submitted in the first quarter of 2025.

#  LESSONS LEARNT

* The adoption of a theory of change (ToC) approach and problem tree/result chain analysis enhanced the design of joint sustainability interventions between the participating UN organizations.
* Maintaining engagement with the local community enabled better apprehension and prioritization of the sustainability needs for the already implemented interventions through the first phase of the JP.
* Continuous monitoring of local markets status with regards to availability of workforce, work tools, supplies, and materials, in parallel with monitoring inflation and the exchange rate fluctuations and its trends, will help to better estimate costs and lead to more efficient budgeting.
* There is a keen need to continually monitor and address the climate change effects on people’s resilience in the targeted locations, especially since rural livelihoods depend mainly on the availability of water resources, which are hampered by several drought-like conditions. This helped addressing some of the sustainability interventions.
* Continual engagement with donors and extended discussions regarding the development of the JP sustainability workplan helped in bridging any gaps of understanding and enhanced the development of the workplan.
* Continual coordination between the JP PUNOs’ technical field staff in Dara’a and Deir-ez-Zor and the JP PUNO focal points in central offices leads to achieving more solid complementarities and triggers innovative ideas to further enhance planning efforts at PUNO central offices. Furthermore, it fosters closer monitoring and sharing of findings to troubleshoot and resolve any emerging technical issues or obstacles in implementation in a timely manner. Additionally, field staff have better comprehension of access and security aspects and are able to provide timely information to central offices to manoeuvre implementation and field missions

#  GENERAL CHALLENGES

**Security and accessibility**

The security situation in Syria in general and particularly in Dara’a rural areas and some of Deir-ez-Zor rural areas continues to present a challenge and may temporarily hinder access to implementation. The sporadic tensions and conflicts in Dara’a governorate, especially in the eastern and western rural areas of Dara’a city, have caused some temporary delays in the activities of the participating UN organizations under the first phase of the JP implementation.

UN field missions to implementation sites require approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFAE), where the purpose, location, and participants, whether national or international staff, should be defined. Similarly, private contractors apply for their own permits and coordinate with relevant governmental authorities to transport goods, supplies and equipment and to deploy workers and implement contracts.

Although security incidents are usually unpredictable, the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) maintains coordination with relevant security parties in the country and stays abreast of developments. Any significant information regarding road-related and/or location-related risks are immediately shared with UN agencies, enabling the UN agencies to take necessary measures.

**Humanitarian situation**

The scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs suffered further worsening in 2023 due to the economic downturn resulting in some of the most challenging humanitarian conditions experienced in the past twelve years of the crisis: the rising cost of commodities and sharp devaluation of the local currency during 2023; scarcity of fuel and electricity, which were also topped up by various protracted socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19; the collapse of the Lebanese economy; sanctions; and climate change-induced events such as droughts.

As a result, risks of GBV; the likelihood of de-prioritization of women’s health, antenatal and postnatal care; de-prioritizing children’s education in return for sending them to child labour; hostility; and criminal actions all had severely increased, along with disrupted and deteriorated access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services, as well as essential GBV services. Additionally, the severe increase in financial burdens on families to maintain their access to basic needs on top of the increased costs of agricultural inputs and other livelihood sources may disrupt the gains made to sustaining livelihoods that were achieved through the JP interventions.

**Integration and coordination**

Each of the participating UN organizations has its own mandate, expertise, and specific programmes, and some of the agencies’ programmes share similar aspects and technical characteristics. This fact presented a key challenge to finding synergies, where interventions are streamlined to tackle the most opportunities for complementarities to maximize effectiveness and impact, as the JP is intended by nature to be conducted jointly. The PMU utilized the bi-weekly TWG meetings approach to share updates on the progress of UN agencies’ implementation of the JP activities, discuss challenges and present common solutions for better coordination and more harmonized activities on the ground. This helped to a large extent in overcoming coordination challenges. Additionally, the PMU created a communication working group (CWG) and also held area based TWG meetings with technical field staff during field missions, hence extending and enhancing the coordination efforts at the technical field level.

**Financial**

***Exchange rate related:*** The gap between the official exchange rate of the US dollar to the Syrian pound and the unofficial market rate remained a key financial challenge in 2023 and is still negatively impacting the UN operations in general, since the UN agencies have to apply the official rate in transactions with local IPs, while when they procure services, supplies and/or materials for projects, they are challenged with prices inflated according to the unofficial rate.[[8]](#footnote-8) The UN agencies, especially WFP, are closely monitoring the changes in market prices of many commodities and supplies and circulate frequent updates. The UN agencies are required to use the official rate in transactions with IPs and contractors, which inevitably imposes some burden on execution of required works and services. The flexibility of the JP to absorb further interested donor funds might provide a solution to cover the gap should additional donor funding become available.

**Operational**

Operational challenges are usually relevant to UN agencies’ internal procedures with regards to procurement and financial transfers to implementing partners. In some cases, when the procurement value exceeds a certain threshold, the case needs to be referred to the regional office of a given agency for review and clearance. Recognizing that procurement planning plays a critical role in expediting implementation, the JP PMU with the TWG members explored various opportunities to enhance joint procurement, where two or more agencies would collaborate to implement a joint intervention or to complement by means of sharing the technical studies and/or assign the procurement task to one of the agencies, hence saving time and cost dedicated for administrative processes.

**Implementing partners related**

Generally, agencies face the issue of a limited number of qualified IPs who can implement activities with expected quality and reach, and, in some cases, agencies have to directly deliver their interventions, which inevitably adds additional burden and time. In cases where the IPs’ performance and capacities are not up to the standards of UN agencies as evaluated through the framework of a Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers, agencies may suspend or put on hold contracts with IPs and share such information with other UN agencies.

**Other challenges**

The absence of a UN Hub in Dara’a governorate, along with intermittent access challenges in some parts of western and eastern rural Dara’a, pose a challenge to regular follow-up, coherent planning, and joined-up coordination with external partners.

# ANNEXES

ANNEX A

The JP Urban Rural Livelihoods Sustainability workplan. *(Separately attached in a PDF document)*

ANNEX B

The JP Urban Rural Livelihoods Sustainability Activity Matrix. *(Separately attached in a PDF document)*

1. The term “programme” is used for programmes, joint programmes and projects. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strategic Results, as formulated in the Strategic UN Planning Framework (e.g. UNDAF) or project document; [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The MPTF Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as “Project ID” on the project’s factsheet page the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](http://mdtf.undp.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The MPTF or JP Contribution, refers to the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](http://mdtf.undp.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The start date is the date of the first transfer of the funds from the MPTF Office as Administrative Agent. Transfer date is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](http://mdtf.undp.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As per approval of the original project document by the relevant decision-making body/Steering Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. If there has been an extension, then the revised, approved end date should be reflected here. If there has been no extension approved, then the current end date is the same as the original end date. The end date is the same as the operational closure date which is when all activities for which a Participating Organization is responsible under an approved MPTF / JP have been completed. As per the MOU, agencies are to notify the MPTF Office when a programme completes its operational activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Towards the end of 2023, the official exchange rate accounted for nearly 70 percent of the unofficial rate. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)