####  Arsal Coordination Meeting

***Minutes of meeting***

Date: 20.06.2018

Place: Arsal Municipality

Participants: Deputy Mayor of Arsal, Mayor of Arsal, MSA, MoSA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UN-OCHA, TDH-Italy, MSF, NRC, DAF, ACF, RI, Amel, Syrian NGOs (I am Human, Jana Watan, Women circle of Arsal, MCA-URDA, CEA and EDA).

***Updates***

* Discussions were ongoing with the government with regards to the issue of return. Meetings were held among the high commissioner and the team including few messages to the minister of foreign affairs. UNHCR mentioned that there is no change in its position on returns; UNHCR is not promoting nor facilitating returns to Syria, however, UNHCR will not discourage Syrians from going back to their country and respects their voluntary decision as long as they are not making this decision under coercion, i.e. as long as they are making an informed choice. In some cases, it appeared that UNHCR was perceived to be part of return deals and therefore it was important to clarify UNHCR’s position. UNHCR has a particular interest in looking at the issue from the perspective of solely ensuring, through dialogue, that the housing, land and property rights as well as documentation and other needs of Syrian refugees are factored in the implementation of this movement and working viably to attain them. UNHCR is transparent and clear in the assessments being conducted that aim or intend solely to ensure that the return is implemented in the best way possible. UNHCR stresses the importance of resolving this humanitarian issue for both refugees and the community as well as calls for all parties to respect the decision of the refugees who wish to voluntarily return and the refugees who wish to stay as well as be transparent in communicating on social media not to have a counter effect. UNHCR is present to answer any further inquiries on this matter.
* Mayor welcomed everyone and showed appreciation and gratitude for all the agencies that worked in Arsal throughout the Syrian crisis and he stresses that hosting refugees was not a forced nor pressured decision it was a choice of which collectively the Syrian refugees as well as local community need to find solutions. The municipality states that it does not play a part in facilitating the return movements, but rather plays a role in connecting the refugees with the relevant party so their demands are heard stressing that both point of views were displayed. No harm was meant with regards to communicating with the media to appeal to the government. The issue was meant to be kept on a humanitarian level; however, was intensified into becoming a political stance. Nevertheless, the mayor believes that this assisted in having a more clearer vision and ways forward for all of which everyone is on the same page that this is a voluntary decision and our role is to solely indicate and clarify where they are heading. The mayor stressed that UNHCR is welcomed to continue their work in Arsal with the belief that slight modification on the questions might be required.
* At the moment there are about 800 families willing to return. All of which, according to the mayor, are approved by the Syrian government but it was preferred that the movement happens in batches starting with 445 individuals that are planning to return as part of the first batch. The time of the departure is still undecided. Number of household who want to return 800 family.
* The Syrian NGOs voiced their opinion as to stating there are 4.6 % of the Syrian population in Arsal willing to return but the other 95.4% will do so only when the return movement is facilitated by UNHCR with protection guarantees.
* An important point was brought up to the municipality so it ensures that prior to the return movement all debts are paid to the locals as this is resulting in tensions among the Syrian refugees and Lebanese community.
* Before return make sure all debts are paid and no issues left with local community.

Shelter:

* There is no dedicated shelter partner in Arsal in 2016/2017 DAF was undergoing shelter activities, in 2017/2018 NRC, ECHO and UNHCR underwent shelter activities. In 2018, PCPM which is a polish organization and funded by the Polish government is to undergo shelter activities in Arsal. NRC remains the respondent to emergencies. The UNHCR is conducting a rapid needs assessment on the current condition of shelter in this day and this is to be followed by assessment in July and the distribution is to commence in September to the some 5,000 plus tents present in Arsal. The household level assessments will determine eligibility for different type of kits to be distributed along with weatherproofing prior to the onset of winter.
* The shelter team states that there are draft SOPs as to the usage of shelter kits upon return.
* The mayor suggests and recommends if the tents can be provided to the families planning to return as they might be of good use to them upon arrival, claiming however that there are a lot of already existing empty tents in informal settlements.
* Municipality is to assign one focal point to communicate with PCPM and shelter team UNHCR on the shelter component upon return and/or empty tents present.
* Refugees urge for distribution of fire extinguishers.

WASH:

* ACF assisted in in 17 informal settlements and conducted around 69 transfers for dislodging. They also conducted an assessment and accordingly distributed 199 cleaning kits.
* The QRC project of treatment plant as to provide drinking water (3L per day) for Syrian refugees is undergoing pending registration of trucks through municipality and ministry of interior. QRC is also working on the water network channel along with UNDP. As for the recycling plan they assigned a focal point for graveling so it can be initiated. They also have available an emergency response team and resources available to assist in WASH activities during emergencies.
* WASH programs will end as of June; however, will be renewed pending availability of funds.
* As to the waste water treatment plant and network the studies and approvals with relevant ministries are finalize and presented to interested donors and embassies for funding.
* Complains on flooding septic tanks in certain informal settlements.

Protection:

* UNHCR is thankful for the municipality for allowing UNHCR to utilize the premises for a 5 month period for the sake of conducting renewal exercise and providing relevant documents for refugees in Arsal. In recent round of interviews conducted with families planning to return, 20 families were identified in need of identification. UNHCR is assisting in trying to find a resolution as to their civil status documentation. A meeting was held with a focal point in Nofous so they can assist UNHCR in retrieving needed documentation. It is important to note that it takes 48 hours for it to move from Laboue Nofous and follow up from UNHCR is directly initiated after.
* Refugees stress the need for retrieving birth certificates and registering it in the Syrian embassy so it can be facilitated through return movement. UNHCR is working viably to assist in documentation needed upon return.
* As for upon return, there is no immediate access provided however there are ongoing humanitarian operation in Syria and they will benefit from existing organizations. This is still being under discussion.

Child protection:

* Awareness campaign ongoing for positive parenting on social media through UNICEF in coordination with MoSA and MEHE.
* Training or capacity building for other agencies in coordination with education sector is to be conducted on child protection as to enhance referral mechanism, identification and effective dissemination of information.
* IRC and ICRC have a new project on Friday that targets children undergoing worst form of child labor. IRC will take over Himaya agency.

Education:

* End of school year and awaiting the official results for the official exams specifically for Arsal at it is known to achieve very high standards. As mentioned earlier a fourth school was opened in Arsal and education sector still advocates with MEHE to identify more schools in Arsal. Some resolutions were identified for children not attending school such as the basic literacy and numeracy program that are suitable for children ten, fourteen years and above especially if they are not ready to enroll in formal education as of yet and the early education program which targets children of three or four years old. These certified programs will assist in reducing the load of formal education. In addition UNICEF and other agencies are collaborating on youth programs to advice or rather guide the youth that graduate from grade nine and above if they choose to attend a technical school. Preparation for the new school year is ongoing in the summer pending appointment of new minister.

Livelihood and Social Stability:

* Two studies were implemented the Labor Market Assessment (ALMA) through UNDP and UNHCR and the DRC assessment on livelihood and labor market in Arsal.
* UNDP allocated livelihood partner: ACF, TDH-Italy, Sb overseas and DRC. ACF and DRC in specific are working on labor intensive projects and providing training on small livelihood businesses.
* UNDP is also working on a project to provide support to the affected persons working in agriculture specifically cherries and apricots.
* A new study was also implemented on social stability that covers several topics such as tension among two communities, electricity, waste management, security... As means to provide conflict analysis. Under this study UNDP is looking into the possibility of assisting MoSA centers in Arsal with medical equipment.
* UNDP requests assistance from MSA to provide list of agencies working in the field so better coordination is in place and to avoid any future duplication.
* UNDP is also working on a storm water collection project (direct open channel).
* DRC’s have an open application for those interested in cash for work program and encourage all those interested to approach the municipality and list their names and contact information. This project is for both Lebanese community and Syrian refugees. DRC is also implementing three projects: preparation of three classes for students, retaining wall and closing of public hall and garden for uses lie exhibitions...

Health:

* Stated by refugees that the coverage criteria has been harder especially for open heart surgery that is not being covered and IF covered they are sent to Beirut. Nevertheless, the medical centers available in Arsal are poor in medical equipment and medication.
* QRC states that they are covering medical surgeries all over Lebanon for those aged 7-17 years.
* Deputy mayor speculated as to why Beyond is not operating anymore in Arsal: *(In reference to our health colleagues response on the matter)*
	+ They are not receiving any more funds that is why their operation stopped; but Amel, a local health NGO was doing the accelerated immunization activity in Arsal with the support of the MoPH and reached house to house and covered the ISs. Moreover, vaccination is available free of charge in majority of the health centres in Arsal.
	+ On an additional note, MSF-ch are actually supporting Arsal in reference to the surveillance for measles following the recent outbreak that affected Lebanon (majority affected is the Lebanese community)

Basic assistance:

* 5,054 households are receiving multipurpose cash assistance through ICRC, ACF and UNHCR, this assistance can be redeemed in ATMs in nearby towns. ACF’s assistance is extended till September.
* DAF responded to the flooding in Arsal. They distributed to four informal settlements. In total, 448 tents received 448 food parcels, hot meals and 2,688 blankets (6 blankets per family). During month of Ramadan, 3,000 families received food parcels, 500 clothes and 1,100 families received baskets of vegetables.

***Action points***

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| Action | Who |
| Inquire with regards to Beyond.  | Health UNHCR (mentioned above) |
| WASH referrals on flooded septic tanks in certain informal settlements. | MoSA/ UNICEF  |
| Dissemination of information as to those (Lebanese and Syrian Refugees) interested in cash for work program with DRC to approach municipality to register their names.  | Municipality, field workers, all agencies. |
| Attend to the need for fire extinguisher distribution.  | Shelter  |
| Share SOPs on usage of tents after return  | Shelter  |
| Focal point to be provided to coordinate on empty tents/tents left. Confirm the MSA.  | Municipality/Shelter |
| Meeting with refugees on WFP related issues  | WFP |
| List of NGOs working on livelihood social stability projects  | MSA/UNDP |
| Receive list of households in need of stoves and assess needs accordingly.  | DAF/BA |