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Success Story

6th Annual EvalMENA: Focusing on Humanitarian Response for Refugees

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The Middle East and North Africa Evaluation Network (EvalMENA) held its 6th General Assembly and Annual Evaluation Conference in Amman, Jordan on October 9 to 11, 2017. The event was sponsored by Chemonics, as well as other national, international, and UN organizations and was hosted by the Jordan Development Evaluation Association (EvalJordan), which includes two local Chemonics employees as board members. More than 150 participants included evaluation, research, and development professionals from the public, private, and government sectors throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The conference theme, “Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance and Refugee Response in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” reflected on regional challenges facing the region, especially the influx of Syrian refugees to the Kingdom of Jordan. Monitoring and evaluation is critical for Jordan and neighboring countries amidst regional crises and the increasing flow of refugees due to the protracted civil war in Syria. More than 50 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan[i] are unregistered, and official UNHCR reports document 659,246 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan. However, a recent Jordanian census showed that 1.4 million Syrian refugees are residing in the country[ii]. The conference focused on practical applications of evaluation tools in humanitarian settings and group problem-solving and innovations.

Mohammad Khair, a Syrian volunteer, tied these learnings from the conference to his daily work collecting data at the Za’atari refugee camp. He said:

“In 2013, I was forced to leave Daraa [Syria] when I was just about to graduate from my last year of university. War pushed us to seek refuge in Za’atari Camp of Jordan. Luckily, despite the challenges and difficult circumstances surrounding me, I managed to volunteer in the camp to coordinate the entertainment activities there. A major part of my work is data collection and documentation of children who benefited from the camp’s various activities like entertainment centers and soccer fields. However, I learned that this entails a lot more than just head-counting and document-archiving when I participated in the 6th EvalMENA General Assembly and Evaluation Conference. It was an eye-opening experience! I learned that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is about finding solutions and new ideas!”

Chemonics’ contribution to this year’s conference, through the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Practice, made it possible for Syrians living in refugee camps to participate for the first time. Yousef Al Hammadi, a Syrian volunteer data collector at the Za’atari refugee camp, shared his reflections on the conference, stating:



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"This is the first time that I participated in such a huge conference. I realized for the first time, that distributing humanitarian assistance is done based on a needs assessment and not randomly. I used to think that evaluators who visit the camp are just HR staff who collect complaints from beneficiaries; I didn't know then that they visit the camp to help sustain the humanitarian support we receive. The M&E topics addressed in the conference were basically what we practically do at the camp, yet put in a theoretical context."

A sub-theme of the conference focused on developing strategies for monitoring and evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals through an equity focused and gender responsive (EFGR) lens. In addition to refugees, the conference coordinators intentionally ensured that marginalized populations participated and actively contributed to the conference. Persons with disabilities led panels and facilitated sessions. Professional development workshops were held for emerging evaluators, including a workshop for the newly-formed EvalYouth chapter.

The conference contributed to the professionalization of monitoring and evaluation in Jordan and the MENA region. The sponsorship from the GESI Practice contributed to building in-country capacity and networks while not only considering but also incorporating the voice of marginalized groups.

Sources:

[i] "UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response/ Jordan". UNHCR. 18 March 2015. Retrieved 21 March 2015.

[ii] "Population stands at around 9.5 million, including 2.9 million guests". The Jordan News. TheJordan Times. 30 January 2016. Retrieved 8 April 2016.