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**Beqaa Communities Clear Irrigation Canals to Improve Local Livelihoods**

**USAID Provides Economic Relief for Vulnerable Lebanese Residents through Temporary Employment Amidst Ongoing Socio-Economic Crisis**



Hussein Ghanam, from El Fekehe, clearing the irrigation canals in the village.

*“I’m not only working for the money, but also to support the farmers from our community who have equally been suffering through this economic crisis.*

*Clearing the irrigation canal will help increase their yields and the quality of their crops.”*

**Hussein Ghanam, 23-year-old CFW beneficiary from El Fekehe**

“Since the significant influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, there have been fewer job opportunities for us,” shared Ibrahim Issa Oqla, a 33-year-old Lebanese daily worker from Qabb Elias, “I find no more than a day of work each week, and it isn’t enough to provide for my family.” Ibrahim has six children, four of whom are in an orphanage in Beirut because he can no longer afford to provide for their education and other essential needs. His is one of many families in Lebanon’s Beqaa Valley who are struggling to secure an income amidst Lebanon’s protracted socio-economic crisis, while heightened competition over limited job opportunities is fueling inter-communal tensions.

To help local residents cope with this situation, USAID’s Community Support Program (CSP) implemented a series of cash-for-work (CFW) projects in June and July 2022 in four of the most vulnerable villages in the Beqaa, including Qabb Elias, Barr Elias, Bwarej and El Fekehe. Through these activities, CSP provided \$220 to 250 Lebanese residents over a 22-day period to clean irrigation canals and thereby improve agricultural production for local farmers. CSP used vulnerability criteria to select the workers for these CFW projects, including financial situation, family size, dependents who are disabled or elderly, and whether they are from female-headed households – which include women who are widows or divorced or whose husbands are disabled and cannot earn a livelihood. “This project is the only support my family is receiving during the crisis,” said Marwa Bast, a 57-year-old female beneficiary from Bwarej.

The workers cleaned, weeded, desilted, and removed bushes and debris from 53,000 meters of irrigation canals which serve the plots of 1100 farmers. “These canals used to be completely blocked,” stated Hussein Ghanam, a 23-year-old beneficiary from El Fekehe, “but thanks to USAID’s CSP, clean water is flowing again for the first time in over 20 years.” Hussein had to drop out from his first year of university studies in international business because he could no longer afford the fees. His father is unemployed, and he therefore searches for daily work whenever possible to make ends meet, but these opportunities are now scarce and provide only \$2 per day. “The income I am gaining from this project will help me provide basic necessities for my family, including fuel to heat our home this winter.”

This is one of five CFW activities implemented by CSP, which together, have directly benefitted over 1,300 households across the Beqaa Valley, Akkar, south Lebanon, and Beirut. These projects have provided much-needed economic relief to some of the country’s most vulnerable families amidst the socioeconomic crisis afflicting Lebanon. Another two similar activities are still being implemented in northern Lebanon, which are estimated to reach an additional 750 beneficiaries.