



# NGOs IN JORDAN AND THE RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

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**The Kingdom of Jordan currently hosts 642,868 Syrian refugees<sup>1</sup> including the first and one of the largest camps housing civilians who fled the Syrian Civil War.** In March 2016, a team of graduate students from Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government and Public Service set out to examine the role and performance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in responding to this increasingly complex humanitarian crisis.

## RESEARCH FOCUS

In collaboration with the Center on Conflict and Development at Texas A&M University, graduate researchers from the Bush School of Government and Public Service conducted a semester-long research project to examine the role of NGOs in addressing the needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan. During the course of their research, the students investigated the extent to which NGOs in Jordan are instrumental in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis. In doing so, they examined a number of research questions, including:

- How have NGOs been responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan?
- How do NGOs prepare their staff (e.g. through formal and informal training, skill development, and the use of previous experiences in the provision of aid to refugees and/or the delivery of similar programs) to respond to refugee needs?

Based on the findings gathered through semi-structured field interviews conducted with NGO employees, volunteers, and beneficiaries, the research team developed a set of recommendations that NGOs can implement to better address the needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

## BACKGROUND

In March of 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations spread rapidly throughout Syria. These protests were viewed as an existential threat to the authoritarian government led by President Bashar al-Assad. In response to these protests, President Assad ordered a heightened presence of police, military and paramilitary personnel, who used brute force to quell demonstrations. As the protests continued and violence spiraled out of control, civil war ensued.

As a result of this war, over 320,000 Syrians have lost their lives<sup>2</sup>, 6.6 million people have been displaced within Syria, and a 4.4 million Syrians have fled the country.<sup>3</sup> According to the

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Jordan, "daily arrivals rarely fall below 1,500 people...and can reach up to 2,500 refugees, depending on the situation on the ground [in Syria]".<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the UNDP acknowledged that the influx of Syrian refugees was placing a considerable burden on local host communities in Jordan, depleting natural resources, exacerbating pre-existing issues within the country, and straining local governments. Furthermore, the UNDP observed that, "as Syrian refugees are granted access to public services, the pressure on water and public electricity supply, education, health, sanitation, and solid waste management has drastically increased where refugees have settled".<sup>5</sup> As a result, many donors have provided support through NGOs to assist in the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### Improve Sensitivity Training to Aid Workers

The team recommends that sensitivity training be implemented by every NGO, so that refugees feel respected by all aid workers, especially as the crisis moves from emergency to long-term development.

### Focus on Capacity Building for Long-term Development

Emergency and short-term aid are necessary especially in the case of housing and rent, where provision of unconditional cash assistance has been invaluable in assisting refugees meet housing needs. However, capacity building should begin to comprise a larger percentage of the programs being implemented.

## METHODS AND RESULTS

Researchers conducted 32 interviews with 72 respondents, comprised of both Syrian refugees and members of local and international NGOs. The NGO interview sample included a variety of personnel including country directors, program managers, field officers, and volunteers. As a result of these interviews, researchers identified the following successes and challenges facing NGOs operating in Jordan.

### SUCCESSSES

Based on interview results, students concluded that NGOs generally excelled in establishing program quality control systems, individual and targeted needs assessments, and internal reporting mechanisms.

- **Program Quality Control Systems**

Almost all NGO staff interviewed who worked directly with refugees and implementing partners had quality control systems in place for their programs. These systems allowed for detailed monitoring and reporting of projects that informed donor funding decisions. NGOs also used a variety of quality control systems which included satisfaction surveys, meetings, daily and weekly updates, and performance reviews.

- **Individual and Targeted Needs Assessments**

Most of the NGO staff interviewed either conducted individual and targeted needs assessments or acknowledged the need for assessments. The most commonly used needs assessment was the Jordan Response Plan (JRP). NGOs that utilized the JRP used it as a starting point to determine general area needs. Those who did not use the JRP conducted more targeted needs assessments through community outreach and a needs ability framework.

- **Internal Reporting Mechanisms**

Many NGOs had internal reporting mechanisms for employees that allowed field officers and volunteers to communicate information from the ground to the office and offer suggestions for program improvement, or identify necessary changes to programs.

### CHALLENGES

Despite these successes, the team's findings indicate that NGOs also face three major challenges: coordination, psychological preparation and training, and transitioning to long-term development programs.

- **Coordination**

Coordination both between NGOs and with the Jordanian government was frequently cited as a challenge during interviews. One project coordinator in the health sector reported, "...at the moment, more and more agencies are stepping into 'Cash For Health', but how do you avoid duplication? You have one beneficiary who needs 'Cash For Health', and because [our agency goes] through UNHCR, they go through another agency and they just get three times the money, if you don't coordinate." One program manager stated that, as a member of a larger NGO, they are able to speak with government officials and better navigate bureaucracy, but that smaller NGOs do not usually have that accessibility. It is difficult for some NGOs to gain access to information from the

government. Ultimately, our findings suggest that coordination has continued to be a fundamental weakness for NGOs that offer humanitarian relief assistance in Jordan.

- **Psychological Preparation and Training**

Psychological preparation and training are divided into risk of burnout and sensitivity while interacting with refugees.

#### Risk of Burnout

Interviewees believed that burnout is a concern, though workers in Jordan face a lower risk compared to workers in higher stress work regions. All NGOs had methods to manage burnout including interventions before burnout and encouraging open lines of communication between field officers and managers. Human resources officers are aware of and seek methods to mitigate burnout risk. However, only a few larger NGOs employed a staff counselor or psychologist. Six out of eight NGO leaders interviewed conveyed concerns about burnout due to the Syrian refugee crisis approaching five years; however, they had not documented high rates of burnout. Many NGO staff interviewed said programs were in place to address the psychological stresses of the job with protections such as field site rotations and available staff counselors.

#### Sensitivity while Interacting with Refugees

A number of refugee interviewees stated that some NGOs treated them in a condescending manner and were not sensitive in their approach for providing aid. Others shared that certain religious organizations made them feel like people, and that the employees cared about refugees. The disparity in these experiences highlights the need for increased sensitivity training in order to ensure that beneficiaries are respected.

#### **Transitioning to Long-Term Development Programs**

As the Syrian crisis continues, NGOs have had difficulty deciding on whether to treat the crisis as an emergency response or as a long-term development program. One third of the NGO employees interviewed mentioned the need for a longer view of the crisis. A few NGO employees believed that Jordanian NGOs have faced similar dilemmas when dealing with Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in the past, but the organizations have not learned from those experiences, stating, "Neither local authorities nor NGOs seemed to have learned [from Iraqi refugees], they all thought it would be short...they should have expected it to be long in the first place". In order to effectively manage this protracted humanitarian crisis, NGOs must address the challenge of transitioning from emergency aid to more sustainable mid- and long-term development programs. The Jordanian government has made progress in this direction by offering a three-month grace period for Jordanian employers to obtain work permits for Syrian refugee employees in specific sectors. This is a step in the right direction; however, NGOs will have to play a major role in developing programs and projects that can assist in building refugees' capacity to live independently in Jordan.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> UNHCR figure as of April 19, 2016. See Union, E. (Producer). (2014). Syrian Refugees A Snapshot of the Crisis- In the Middle East and Europe Retrieved from [http://syrianrefugees.eu/?page\\_id=87](http://syrianrefugees.eu/?page_id=87)
- <sup>2</sup> What you need to know: Crisis in Syria, refugees, and the impact on children. (2016, April 11). Retrieved May 08, 2016, from <https://www.worldvision.org/wv/news/Syria-war-refugee-crisis-FAQ>.
- <sup>3</sup> Syrian Arab Republic. (2016, May). Retrieved May 08, 2016, from <http://www.unocha.org/syria>.
- <sup>4</sup> UNDP. (2013). Mitigating the Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Jordanian Vulnerable Host Communities. Retrieved May 08, 2016, from <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/jordan/docs/Poverty/PD Signed with Japan.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

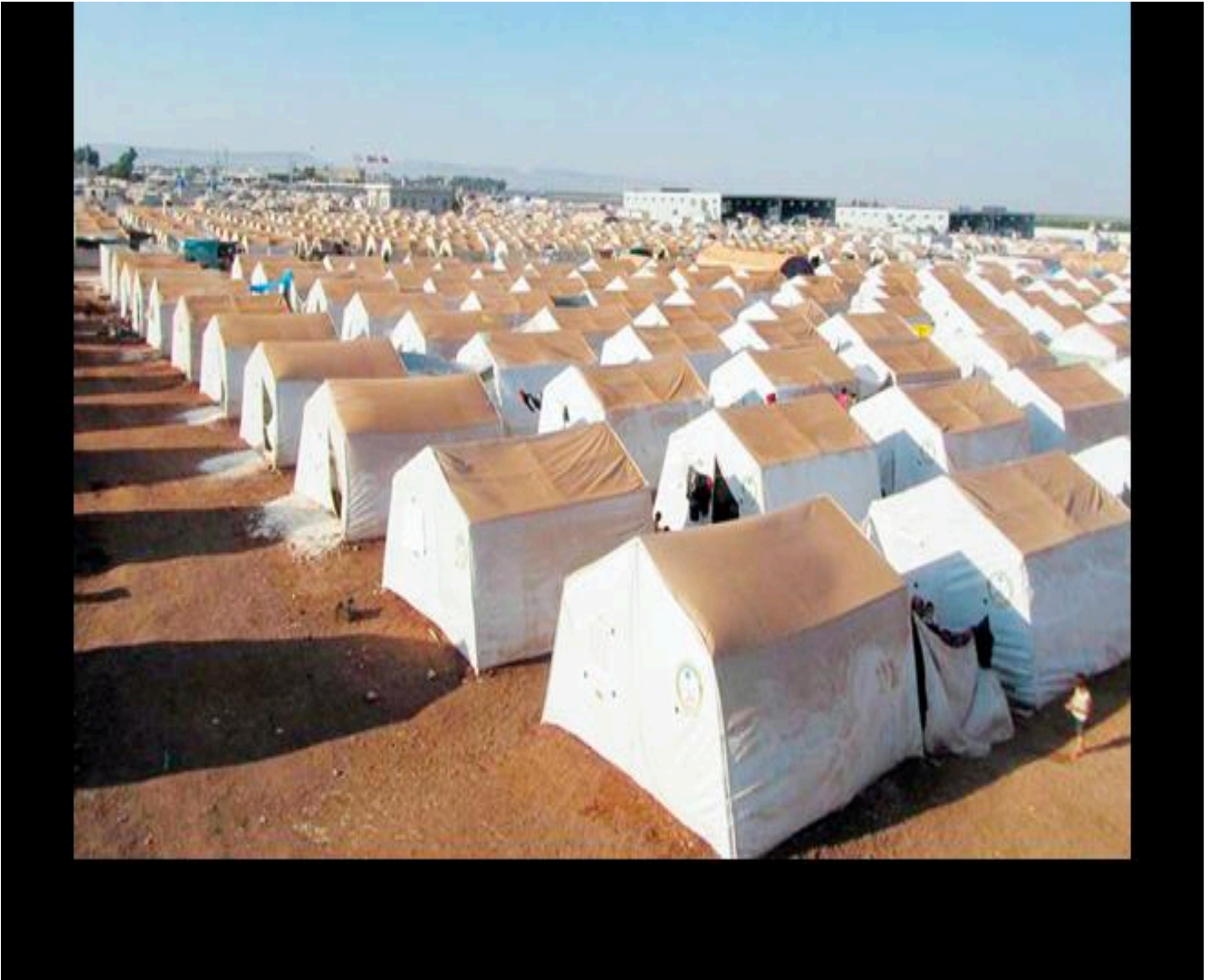


Photo from: <http://www.arabnews.com/news/460413>

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**The Bush School of Government and Public Service** Spring 2016 capstone course—comprised of students Carlos Fierros, Kristian Jaloway, Alissa Jones, Mary Mason Christine Shtepani, Mariah Shuler, Rainey Spiva, Jerica Ward, and Carolina Weir conducted this research under the supervision of Dr. Silva Hamie and guidance of Dr. Leslie Ruyle. For specific inquiries, please contact Bush School's Silva Hamie ([silva.hamie@tamu.edu](mailto:silva.hamie@tamu.edu)) or ConDev's Leslie Ruyle ([ruyle@tamu.edu](mailto:ruyle@tamu.edu)).

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