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Waste disposal with positive effects

Jordanian communities are growing rapidly due to Syrian refugees, and so are the amounts of waste. A project is creatively solving the rubbish chaos.

The challenge

The Syrian refugee crisis poses a great challenge to Jordan. More than 660,000 of the approximately ten million inhabitants are registered Syrian refugees, but unofficial estimates are far higher. Around 80% of them live in cities and municipalities; most of them have resided in the country since 2015. As a result, the amount of waste has also grown significantly, and littering has increased further. Jordan's waste management was inadequate even before the crisis, and the situation has gotten worse with the population growth. Moreover, these grievances also lead to conflicts between the local population and the Syrian refugees who have moved there.

The approach

In 13 Jordanian communities and the two refugee camps Za'atari and Azraq, the living conditions of the residents are being improved. This is happening through more efficient waste management and employment opportunities in the waste sector for people in particular need. Jordanian and Syrian workers collect rubbish, separate recyclable materials, and prepare them for sale. This relieves the strain on the communities and the refugee camps, makes hygiene better and stops the spread of diseases. In addition, by collecting recyclable materials, the waste that ends up in the already completely overloaded landfill is reduced.

Dialogue platforms and awareness-raising events serve as integral components of the project. Various groups in the communities are thus given the opportunity to exchange ideas on the subject of waste and the environment, which supports peaceful coexistence in the communities.

Project name	Waste to (positive) Energy
Client	German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); co-financed by the European Union and the EU Trust Fund (MADAD)
Project region	Project region communities and refugee camps (Za'atari, Azraq) in northern Jordan
Leading executive agency	Jordanian Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MoLA)
Overall term	September 2015 - December 2023

Through the construction of a biogas plant in the Za'atari Camp, an environmentally friendly and cost-efficient disposal of the sewage sludge is achieved, and part of the camp's energy requirement is covered.

Support is also provided to garbage collectors who are not formally employed and who suffer from poor working conditions. They learn how to protect themselves at work, for example, and receive the necessary equipment.



Left: Women at the waste sorting station in Mafrqa pressing cardboard

Right: A Cash-for-Work laborer processing the organic compost

With an information and awareness-raising campaign, the populace learns more about recycling and environmental protection. The aim is to bring about a change in behaviour and a greater environmental consciousness. Various measures are being implemented in selected municipalities in a pilot project. The most successful activities will then be expanded across Jordan. Cooperation between German and Jordanian universities strengthen academic competence in waste management issues.

Effects: Promoting environmental protection and integration

A total of 11 recycling systems have been built in the communities and two more in the refugee camps and equipped with the necessary devices and machines. Cardboard, paper, plastic, and metal are sorted, pressed, and shredded, and prepared for sale there. Composting plants have also been set up at the Karak and Irbid sites, where high-quality compost is produced from organic waste. These measures aim to achieve an annual recycling rate of 15% for paper/cardboard and plastic, and 5% for organic waste.

A participatory and conflict-sensitive Cash-for-Work system has been established in the partner communities and the two camps. From 2016 to the end of 2020, a total of more than 42,000 Jordanians and Syrians, 25% of them women, benefited from short-term jobs in waste management.

More than 4,000 people, almost 75% of whom are female, have participated in the dialogue forums so far.

Recycling creates added value

In Syria, Jasem Al-Wrewir was a successful entrepreneur in the waste management sector, employing more than 400 workers in four landfills. In 2013, he fled with his family to the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. He reports:



“At the beginning there was rubbish everywhere in the camp – including insects and pests, which go along with it. The garbage containers were so overfilled that you could only throw your garbage on the ground. In 2016,

GIZ and Oxfam set up a recycling centre that I now manage. We recycle over 20% of the waste and earn money by selling recyclable materials, which then flows back into the project. The project is close to my heart”.

Jasem Al-Wrewir, Syrian refugee in Za'atari, Jordan

The project is part of the BMZ special initiative “Fighting the causes of flight, stabilising host regions, reintegrating refugees”. In the short term, it supports refugees and host communities alike. In the long term, sustainable measures reduce structural causes of flight such as social inequality or food insecurity. This project contributes by providing employment to refugees and host communities, as well as promoting social cohesion, health, and sustainable development in the region.

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