

Protecting Water Dams – Generating Income

Water dams in Jordan require protection – vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees need work. This project tackles both of these needs.

The Challenge

Jordan is one of the most water-scarce countries on earth and has one of the world's highest share of refugees. Population and economic growth combined with the considerable influx of refugees (particularly from neighbouring Syria) are increasing the pressure on already scarce water resources. The country's infrastructure is overstretched and can no longer meet the needs of the growing population. The supply of drinking water cannot always be guaranteed. Furthermore, the unemployment rate is high in many of the communities hosting refugees, as the economic situation in Jordan has deteriorated steadily since the start of the Syrian crisis as well as since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jordanians and refugees therefore compete for scarce resources – a development that is increasingly challenging peaceful co-existence.

Jordanian water dams are at risk of siltation due to bank erosion. These dams play an important role in storing rainwater runoff and supplying water for the cultivation of farmland in the Jordan Valley. If the dams are no longer able to provide enough rainwater for irrigation, farmers will resort to using the country's scarce groundwater reserves.

Our Approach

The project "Protection of Water Dams in Jordan through Labour-intensive Activities (Cash for Work)" tackles two challenges at once: Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians can help protect dams and water resources and receive needed income in return for their efforts. In order to prevent soil erosion, they construct check dams out of gabion baskets, create terraces, construct dry-stone walls and plant seedlings. As a result, the storage capacity of the reservoirs is maintained, safeguarding irrigated agriculture and drinking water in the medium and long term.

The second component of the project aims to safeguard Jordanian archaeological sites and rehabilitate ancient water infrastructure. Additionally, the new third component of the project entails the establishment of a project support unit in the Ministry of Labour. This ensures a more efficient implementation of BMZ Cash for Work projects in Jordan. Furthermore, standards created for a more efficient implementation of Cash for Work activities are being applied by all relevant partners.

By providing short-term employment opportunities, the project is contributing to the improvement of the livelihoods of vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees. It also contributes to fostering peaceful co-existence and reducing conflict potential between the two groups. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project has also provided Cash Transfer Assistance (CTA) to vulnerable households.

Project name	Protection of Water Dams in Jordan through Labour-intensive Activities (Cash for Work)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Jordan; Eight dams (King Talal, Wadi Arab, Mujib, Waleh, Kufranja, Ziglab, Alwehedi, and Zarqa Ma'een), King Abdallah Canal, Za'atari Refugee Camp, as well as the archaeological sites of Petra, Rihab and Um Qais
Lead executing agency	Jordan Valley Authority (JVA)
Partners	Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
Duration	April 2017– June 2026



Left: King Talal Dam – one of the largest reservoirs in Jordan.

Right: Female Cash Worker restoring a mosaic at the archaeological site of Rihab.



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Left: Cash Workers working on measures to prevent further soil erosion in the catchment area of Wadi Arab Dam.

Right: Female Cash Worker planting seedlings in the catchment area of Kufranja Dam.

Impact in Figures

The project will provide short-term work for around 15,500 Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians. Half of the workers are Jordanian men and women; the other half are Syrian refugees. 20% are women, who primarily work in tree nurseries or produce vests for the other workers to wear. Since the average household has five family members, the project will potentially benefit up to 77,500 people. So far, over 13,000 Cash Workers have completed their short-term employment with the project (around 21% of which women). To mitigate the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, 1,125 additional households were provided with Cash Transfer Assistance.

Erosion control measures like the construction of check dams are being implemented along a 100-kilometre stretch in the catchment areas of the dams. Furthermore, the workers are planting 500,000 seedlings and are cleaning/ constructing water drainage systems, culverts, and canals along 250 km length of water catchment areas. So far, the following has been achieved:

- Around 10.7 km of running meter length of infrastructure and almost 3,500 m² of riprap area have been constructed in the dam catchment areas.
- More than 1.2 million seedlings have been produced in tree nurseries and 286,259 seedlings planted.
- 196.5 km length has been cleaned and cleared of obstacles on both sides of King Abdullah Canal.
- More than 25 km of a stormwater drainage system constructed in Za'atari Camp to protect against flooding.
- Over 8,000 training opportunities and 772 self-employment/business grants have been provided, as well as other services like livelihood counselling and MHPSS.
- Rehabilitation and (re)construction activities were completed in the archaeological sites of Petra, Rihab, Umm Qais, and Umm Al Jimal.

- The JVA archiving centre has been created at Walah Dam. More than 30,000 documents are being sorted and archived there by Cash Workers.

Impact in Faces

In 2012, Amal Um Odai fled from Dara'a, Syria with her elderly husband and their three children. They initially lived together in the Za'atari refugee camp before moving to Jerash in north-western Jordan to escape the challenging conditions and overcrowding in Za'atari. In Jerash, Um Odai started working at a tree nursery, where a group of 20 women were producing and raising seedlings. Through her work, Um Odai contributed to the fight against soil erosion and was able to support her family.

'Watering the plants and watching them grow...It feels as though you're watching your own children grow before your very eyes.'

– Amal Um Odai (55), refugee from Dara'a in Syria

The project is part of the **BMZ Special Initiative** 'Tackling the root causes of migration, stabilising host regions, supporting refugees'. The supported measures benefit refugees and host communities alike. By taking a sustainable approach, the measures mitigate structural causes of displacement in the long term, such as social inequality or a lack of prospects. This project contributes to establishing a secure water supply and to the short-term employment of refugees and people in need from the host communities. It also promotes peaceful co-existence and sustainable development in the region.

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