Empowering Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies

Findings from the CARE Learning Tour to Jordan
July 6-9, 2017

In July 2017, a delegation of policymakers, technical experts and the media traveled with CARE to see the positive reach and scope of U.S. investments and partnerships in Jordan, particularly focused on the impact of humanitarian assistance programs and the long-term efforts to protect and empower displaced women and girls. Today, Jordan is home to an estimated 1.4 million refugees, one of the largest populations of displaced people in the world, where most refugees are women and girls and more than half are under the age of 18. This massive influx of refugees since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 has placed a significant strain on local economies and job markets. The health and education infrastructure often fails to meet the needs of both Jordanians and refugees living in the country. As the conflict in the region continues to become more protracted, U.S. efforts must go beyond humanitarian relief and emphasize programs that promote women’s empowerment and stronger livelihoods to support future peace and security in the region.

Participants:

Rep. Ami Bera  
U.S. Congress (D-CA-7)

Rep. Cheri Bustos  
U.S. Congress (D-IL-17)

Rep. Dwight Evans  
U.S. Congress (D-PA-02)

Rep. Brenda Lawrence  
U.S. Congress (D-MI-14)

Ruby Mellen  
Fellow  
Foreign Policy Magazine

Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman  
U.S. Congress (D-NJ-12)

Carol Winograd, MD  
Professor Emerita of Medicine and Human Biology  
Stanford University

Terry Winograd  
Professor Emeritus of Computer Science  
Stanford University
Day 1: Why Jordan?  
A Look at the Short-term Response  
Scene-Setter Briefing with Local Technical Experts

The Learning Tour began in the capital city of Amman with a briefing from local technical experts, including Barbara Jackson, acting country director for CARE Jordan; Blake Selzer, senior regional advocacy coordinator for CARE International; Laila Baker, representative for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Jordan; Heather Kalmbach, regional advocacy coordinator at the U.S. State Department and Nancy Eslick, acting mission director for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). During this briefing, the panelists provided an important overview of the current development and humanitarian challenges in Jordan, particularly related to the Syrian refugee crisis. While it is critical to respond to the immediate needs of refugees, the delegation learned about the importance of investing in their long-term resiliency, particularly for women and girls who are disproportionately impacted by the conflict. As the delegation heard, it has become increasingly important to have programs that promote and emphasize women’s economic empowerment, stronger livelihoods for families and quality education for youth. While Jordan has been a beacon of regional stability for decades, the country is grappling with many development challenges, including limited access to health, education, potable water and widespread gender disparities. Today, 10 to 15 percent of the population of Jordan are refugees. As Blake Selzer noted, “If the U.S. took in this many people, it would be approximately 30 million people.” The U.S. is currently the largest funder of U.S. humanitarian assistance in the world, where these investments support regional and economic stability, particularly in places like Jordan.

UNFPA Maternity Clinic – Zaatari Refugee Camp

After the briefing, the delegation traveled 1.5 hours north of Amman to the Zaatari Refugee Camp, the largest camp in Jordan, to visit UNFPA’s maternity clinic. Presently, there are more than 80,000 Syrian refugees living in the camp – many of them women and girls – where the need for reproductive health services is critical. Here, the delegation toured UNFPA’s maternity clinic, which operates in partnership with Jordan Health Aid Society International (JHASI). The goal of this clinic is to provide refugee mothers and families with critical health services and education, including safe delivery, counseling, sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence support, specifically to reduce child marriage, which is more common in humanitarian settings. The delegation heard from Abeer Shraiteh, emergency field officer for UNFPA and Dr. Rima Diab, lead physician at the hospital.

Since UNFPA began working in the camp nearly three years ago, the clinic has safely delivered 7,600 babies; despite the heightened risk of maternal mortality among refugees, the hospital has not seen a single maternal death since it began operations.

The clinic – the only place in the camp that provides safe deliveries for mothers – is a testimony to the exceptional outcomes that can take place with the right combination of financial and technical support from UNFPA and its partners in Zaatari. The delegation spoke with three mothers who have received prenatal and postnatal care and delivery services at the clinic. The group heard from Dua’a, a 28-year-old mother who fled Syria after the war started in 2011. Dua’a shared that she was married off at the age of 14 and had no access to reproductive education or services. She experienced 10 miscarriages before she was given the care she needed to successfully carry a baby to term. During the visit, Dr. Diab shared that the average refugee woman will visit the clinic 17-18 times throughout their pregnancy at the UNFPA clinic to ensure a safe pregnancy and safe delivery. This visit was an important opportunity for the delegation to see the critical impact of U.S. foreign assistance programs on the health and well-being of women and their families in refugee camps.
Next, the delegation visited Mercy Corp’s home documentation program for refugees, located in Mafraq, an urban area in northern Jordan. They wanted to gain a better understanding of the documentation process for refugees and the challenges many families face when they lack proper documentation or registration with UNHCR. Presently, 85 percent of all refugees live outside of the camps in urban settings. This makes them especially vulnerable, where they struggle to obtain proper documentation needed to access critical health services and emergency food or cash assistance. Many of these families have arrived across the desert with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

They often have no money and sometimes not even the paperwork they need to register as a refugee. The delegation heard from Mohie Wahsh, area project manager for Mercy Corps and Kari Diener, director of programs for Mercy Corps. Currently, the Government of Jordan requires specific documentation from the Ministry of Interior for refugees to remain legally in the country. They also require several other documents, including a birth certificate and marriage certificate, which allow families to access services such as health care and education. Without these, for example, children are unable to go to school. The delegation met two families who are presently unregistered. Mercy Corps is trying to address their immediate needs, while working with other local agencies and UNHCR to find a path toward legal registration. One family from Aleppo has 16 children and none of them are in school. When the father of these children, Khaled, was asked about his hope for his children, he said, “there is no future for my children.”

That evening, the delegation attended a reception with the U.S. Mission, local NGO partners and officials from the Jordanian government. During the reception, Teddy Bryan, acting deputy chief of mission gave remarks and thanked the CARE Learning Tours’ delegation for taking the time to visit Jordan and learn about the U.S. response to the humanitarian crisis and the need to continue investing in Jordan’s stability and development. Next, Imad Fakhoury, the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, gave remarks, where he thanked the U.S. government for its partnership with the Jordanian government and the work we must continue together as a global community. Lastly, Representative Bera spoke on behalf of the delegation, where he thanked the U.S. Mission for their work, in collaboration with the Jordanian government and local partners, to respond to the urgent needs of refugees and build a safer, more prosperous world for us all. He said, “the future is not yet written. I want to see a 21st century where we see ourselves as citizens of the world and we come closer together.”
Day 2: Empowering Communities in Urban Jordan

CARE Urban Refugee Community Center

Next, the delegation headed to CARE’s urban refugee community center, located in East Amman in the Hashmi neighborhood. While the media has covered the refugee camp situation extensively, it was important, again, for the delegation to learn that only 15 percent of refugees in Jordan live in the camps. The untold story has been the struggles of refugees living in Amman and other urban areas. The delegation heard from Maher Qubbaj, urban protection response director for CARE Jordan; Eman Ismail, deputy country director of programs for CARE Jordan and Mohammad Al Awamreh, relief program manager for CARE Jordan.

CARE began this program in 2001 in response to the Iraq war. And today, they have served more than 500,000 refugees from Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Palestine, as well as asylum seekers in Jordan. The program aims to enhance the resiliency of all populations impacted by the conflict in Syria and Iraq. A critical component of this program is the community centers, which are located in areas with the greatest concentrations of urban refugees in Jordan. They offer a variety of targeted services, including psychosocial support, emergency cash assistance, education support, livelihood programs and more. CARE provides emergency cash assistance for refugees so they can pay for basic living costs. Most of the refugees use the cash to pay for medication, education, food and rent.

The delegation also had the chance to watch a skit performed by a female youth group who come together weekly to address concerns and topics in their daily lives. The delegation also had the chance to meet with a group of refugees – both men and women – who take part in CARE’s psychosocial support groups. Many of these refugees have faced devastating challenges and this group brings about a sense of hope, community and friendship, where group members can share their experiences leaving home and living as a refugee in Jordan. Tagreed Jabhar Daftar, a 50-year-old refugee from Iraq said, “I really like this group. It brings together both Syrian and Iraqi refugees, as well as others. I have built friendships because of this group and it helps me feel less lonely.”
CARE Community-Based Livelihood Program

Next, the delegation headed to a small, community-based organization called Sanabel Al-Khair in East Amman. Sanabel Al-Khair started working with CARE Jordan in 2011 to provide vocational training to men and women, including training on computer literacy, sewing, cooking and cosmetology. The goal of the program is to provide long-term development assistance and human capacity-building for women refugees and Jordanian host communities. The trainings provided by Sanabel Al-Khair help women in the community develop important skills so they are empowered to conduct income-generating activities.

The delegation heard from Mohammad Al Awamreh of CARE Jordan and Moyassar Saaydeh, president of Sanabel Al-Khair. After touring the center to see the different training activities, the delegation had a chance to sit down with three women participants. Rania shared that her husband – a barber for Jordanian TV stars – is the reason she joined the program. Over the duration of her training, she built her skills as a successful beautician and now works from her home providing these services to women in her community. This has helped generate income for her family, which has in turn improved their ability to pay rent, afford food and access health care services. Runa, one of Rania’s daughters, said that it has been so inspiring to watch her mother learn a new skill and be more confident because of this training program. Her family has felt the ripple effect and their dignity and outlook on life is much improved.

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Jordan River Foundation Program

On the last stop of the trip, the delegation visited the Jordan River Foundation (JRF) program located on popular Rainbow Street in Amman. JRF is a Jordanian non-profit, chaired by Queen Rania Al Abdullah, that was established in 1995 to provide numerous socio-economic projects for vulnerable women, aiming to enhance their income and livelihoods. To date, JRF has reached over a million beneficiaries through its programs. The delegation heard from Fairuz Taqi Eddin, director of fundraising and business development at JRF, about their handicraft training program, which looks to enhance women’s entrepreneurial skills and ability to produce traditional handicrafts. Such initiatives have succeeded in benefitting countless individuals, directly and indirectly. The initiatives continue to generate income for vulnerable communities and families across Jordan. The delegation had a chance to tour their showroom, an old primary school built in 1936 that was renovated by JRF, to see the handicrafts that are produced by the program participants. These handicrafts are a testament to the Jordanian culture and the many women – whether Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi or Palestinian – whose lives have been transformed by the financial stability this program has provided.

Conclusion

This Learning Tour provided the delegation an opportunity to see firsthand how U.S. investments in Jordan are helping the country address the many humanitarian challenges facing the region today. Support from the U.S. and other bilateral partners has been critical in helping Jordan reach the most vulnerable and remain a beacon of regional stability. However, as the conflict in the region continues and becomes more protracted, it is critical that we go beyond just lifesaving humanitarian assistance and emphasize long-term, strategic development interventions to promote future peace and security in the region.

Jordan is currently host to 1.4 million refugees, where 85 percent live in urban areas.
Working together with all stakeholders, we can build a smart, strategic approach to policies that emphasize the integration of sustainable solutions in Jordan and that can support the livelihoods of a refugee population that can hopefully one-day return home and help rebuild their own communities. **CARE knows that leveraging the influence and special capabilities of the United States will motivate others to do more and create lasting collaborations that could transform the lives of millions and bring stability to this region and around the world.**

**Policy Recommendations**

CARE advocates for the U.S. government to integrate gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment throughout its foreign assistance programs. By placing an emphasis on empowering women and girls to exercise agency and influence through educational tools and economic opportunity, we can provide communities with the tools needed to sustainably lift themselves out of poverty. This, in turn, creates more stability and self-sufficiency at a national level and can help promote America's prosperity and security around the world. This can be done by creating strong policies and robust resources to promote women and girls’ education and leadership, prevent child marriage, combat gender-based violence and foster food and nutrition security.

Achieving these goals starts with commitments from national governments in developing countries and support and smart investments from the international community, including the United States. The **International Affairs budget** is the U.S. government’s primary funding source for international programs for emergency response and long-term development. Although the international affairs budget is roughly less than one percent of the overall U.S. budget, it is routinely targeted in budget cuts. Proposals to dramatically cut the international affairs budget raise serious concerns about the future of American leadership and how we will achieve the benefits of addressing poverty. Another continued and increasing concern is the continued erosion of base funding levels within the international affairs budget, which has dropped to 2009 levels. CARE believes that there should be no disproportionate cuts to the International Affairs budget. U.S. foreign assistance programs save millions of lives every year, address the root causes of poverty, decrease dependency and build stronger, more resilient societies. CARE also advocates for greater accountability and transparency of these funds in addition to protection of humanitarian and poverty-focused accounts.

CARE strongly urges Congress and the Administration to **reconsider the misguided decision to halt funds to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).** In 2016, UNFPA received $69 million in funding from the U.S. Government; this funding supported a wide variety of programming from providing safe delivery services and family planning counseling to new mothers, to combatting child marriage and gender-based violence. UNFPA provides high-quality, lifesaving maternal and reproductive health care in countless crisis settings, including the Zaatari camp in Jordan, where, thanks to U.S. funding, the UNFPA has helped to deliver more than 7,000 babies without a single maternal death. The loss of this funding is a matter of life or death for families in this camp, with services for nearly 50,000 people at risk due to this funding decision. Cutting off funding to UNFPA represents a major setback in efforts to ensure the United States meets the needs of the world’s most vulnerable populations.

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We are deeply grateful to the many people who generously gave of their time to make this visit to Jordan a success. CARE specifically thanks the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its generous financial support of the Learning Tours.

If you are interested in learning more about CARE’s Learning Tours program, please contact:

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