



# MICROLINKS WEBINAR: FOSTERING LIVELIHOODS IN TIMES OF CRISIS: LESSONS FROM SYRIA

---

CHAT TRANSCRIPT

NOVEMBER 28, 2017

## **PRESENTERS**

Vaidehi Krishnan, Mercy Corps

Kelly Van Husen, Global Communities

## **MODERATOR**

Laura Meissner, USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

April Thompson, USAID Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Program

Benjamin Franklyn Umar: Hi Morning My name is Benjamin. Am having difficulties linking up

USAID Microlinks: Good morning, Benjamin! We won't be starting until 9am EST, about 40 minutes from now. So please stay tuned!

Vai Krishnan: hi april, hello everyone

Vai Krishnan: just got online a bit earlier than planned and think i am all set

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome! I sent you a private chat - do you see that?

Imran Bashir - Livelihoods PM Syria/Iraq: Can hear you clear and loud Adam

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hi Imran! Thanks for joining bright and early - look forward to hearing your experiences today working in the region.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome too to Celine, Hamza and Karim - we will get started 30 minutes from now but feel free to introduce yourself here in the meantime.

Imran Bashir - Livelihoods PM Syria/Iraq: Thanks April , looking forward to informative session ahead.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Sound good, Laura!

Dick Tinsley: Dick Tinsley signing in from Virginia

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Hi Mr. Tinsley. Glad you could join us!

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello, Dick! Great to see you!

hamza hamwie: Greeting all, Sphere and LEGS Focal point Very interested to be with you today

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome, Hamza - where are you joining from?

Karim Shrayedeh 2: Hello everyone, this is Karim Shrayedeh from The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (Royal Ngo) as a proposal writer for more than 51 organizations throughout Jordan. I'm very proud that I was working with Mrs. Vai Krishnan

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Welcome Karim!

April Thompson - Microlinks: That's great, Karim, thanks for joining.

hamza hamwie: thank you April, Hello from Turkey

April Thompson - Microlinks: Great, Hamza!

indra klein: Hi, indra klein, independent development consultant, dc

indra klein: great olume

AV Tech (Washington DC): Great to see everyone online this morning!

AV Tech (Washington DC): Check out the polls!

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome to everyone who is just now joining; we will be getting started in just a few minutes. Do introduce yourself here and let us know where you're joining from.

Rene Celaya: Hello, I am René Celaya, c

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello Rene!

Rene Celaya: Hello, I am René Celaya, Country Director with CARE International in OPT.

AV Tech (Washington DC): Let me know if you can hear me speaking?

Tom Shaw 2: Yes - loud and clear.

Celine Najem: No, I dont hear you

AV Tech (Washington DC): If you have technical issues, hover your mouse over my name. I will also private chat you, look for a yellow box at the bottom of this window

Mathilda Atogiyire: Mathilda Atogiyire from Ghana -Yes I can hear you

April Thompson - Microlinks: Great to see so many of you joining from the Middle East. If you are currently doing any livelihoods development work, we look forward to hearing your experiences today as well. This chat box will be used for your questions as well so feel free to type in any questions for the presenters as we move through the content today.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks, Mathilda!

AV Tech (Washington DC): And this is being recorded and will be shared out so if you miss any content during the webinar itself, you can always check out the recording(s)

April Thompson - Microlinks: We will get started in just a few minutes, so last chance to answer the polls!

Vai Krishnan: Adam - just FYI I did see the missed call notifications on my phone

Vai Krishnan: apologies it was on silent - but if there are issues, that is likely still a good way to reach me

Kelly Van Husen: im here!

zubair Barkat: Hello!!

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello, Zubair, welcome!

Kelly Van Husen: i keep getting cut off the phone. can you send me the room number again please?

Ashis Kundu: Hello this is Ashis here based out of Iraq

April Thompson - Microlinks: We're just about to get started. If you're just joining us please let us know where you're joining from.

Ben Ersing : Hello, this is Ben from Palladium, working in Lebanon

Lene Hansen: Hi, Lene - based in South Africa, right now in Frankfurt, Germany

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello Ashis! Welcome!

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Welcome Ben and Lene!

Kristi Rice: Hello - joining from South Sudan. Is there audio right now that I should be hearing?

April Thompson - Microlinks: You should be hearing us now.

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Glad you could join us Kristi

Astrid Bessler: Hello, this is Astrid from Palladium, London

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hi Astrid!

Astrid Bessler: Hello April

Astrid Bessler: is anyone talking?

AV Tech (Washington DC): Laura Meissner is introducing the program ...

April Thompson - Microlinks: Yes, she is speaking a little faintly - try increasing your volume!

Astrid Bessler: audio doesn't seem to work

April Thompson - Microlinks: please hover over the AV tech in the list of attendees for help troubleshooting your audio.

April Thompson - Microlinks: In the list of hosts, Astrid

Dick Tinsley: Does the uSA contributions include the overhead costs incurred by USAID?

April Thompson - Microlinks: You will see an option for "start private chat"

Ziad Ayoubi: Ziad Ayoubi-Head of Livelihoods Unit in UNHCR Geneva

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome, Ziad! Thanks for joining.

Ben Ersing : Is Kelly speaking?

Elise Sidamon-Eristoff: I can't hear Kelly

April Thompson - Microlinks: One moment all!

Arno Bratz: Arno Bratz, MEL Manager for Syria Youth&Livelihoods Programmes @Mercy Corps. Excited about this session!

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks, Arno! Welcome.

Hailu Teka: Hailu Teka, cash Advisor at Mercy Corps in Nigeria.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome, Hailu - great to see so many of you tuning in from West Africa as well - probably some good cross-cutting lessons to be shared here!

Marydean Purves: Marydean Purves

Celine Najem: Celine Najem - South Syria Livelihoods Program Manager with World Vision

Gabriella D'Elia: Gabriella D'Elia - Cash/Livelihoods on a break now (just completed an assignment in Iraq, prior to that, Syria)

Daan Besamusca: Daan Besamusca - investor at the Soros Economic Development Fund

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello Marydean and Celine! World Vision does some interesting work in livelihoods, I know, so look forward to hearing your comments and questions.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hello Daan and Gabriella!

Trina Chase: Trina Chase, Monitoring Advisor with World Relief in Iraq

AV Tech (Washington DC): If you want to see the presentation full screen, hover your mouse over the 4 directional arrows at the top of the presentation window

Barbara Gallets: Barbara Gallets, Program Assistant with the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)

April Thompson - Microlinks: Please feel free to type in any questions for the presenters here.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Welcome Trina and Barbara!

Dick Tinsley: So the government was supervising the farmers not collaborating with the farmers!!

Laura Meissner: yes

Laura Meissner: we can hear you

Hailu Teka: I can hear you well.

AV Tech (Washington DC): If you are calling in, please make sure your phone is muted. Thank you.

Dick Tinsley: Was the fixed price of bread a floor price as in the USA or ceiling price designed to promote low urban prices at the expense of the farmers?

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks for your question, Dick, duly noted.

Gary Alex: Weren't wheat varieties preserved in international seed banks somewhere?

Dick Tinsley: They should be at CIMMYT or in Fort Collins, or Norway

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hi Gary - good to see you here!

Hailu Teka: No subsidy now but would people in the production area be able to buy? Can they afford to buy products given the current economic crisis?

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks for everyone's questions - please keep them coming and they will be addressed after both of our speakers.

Dick Tinsley: ICARDA was a victim of the war

Claire Durham: How do you ensure you pick the correct points along the value chain, and enough of them to ensure the programme is successful?

Ben Ersing: Is there an access to finance component in strengthening the private sector?

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Great questions Claire and Ben, we will address them during the Q and A portion of this presentation

Tom Shaw: Are you looking at a crop insurance component given the larger risk of the continuing conflict?

Ahmad Alkasir: Think the government will always be able to offer competitive prices that are hard to beat given that Syria exports durum (hard wheat), and replaces it with less expensive soft wheat

Dick Tinsley: You have mentioned the production inputs how about the operational needs such as mechanization cost

Ahmad Alkasir: thus, they make some money to compensate for the subsidies

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hi everyone, please do the polls you see here!

April Thompson - Microlinks: Pop quiz!

Gary Alex: If the government quits dictating what a farmer is to plant, is there any indication that farmers would switch from wheat to higher value more profitable products?

Indra Klein: Re: govt control -- to what degree has economic inequality been considered? (Consider efforts in Central America in '90's)

Ahmad Alkasir: Gary, think water availability is the major factor to consider. Given that wheat can be grown rain-fed, think wheat will always prevail

Dick Tinsley: For those interested in more in-depth look at smallholder agriculture please visit the website: [www.smallholderagriculture.com](http://www.smallholderagriculture.com)

AV Tech (Washington DC): I do!

Imran Bashir - Livelihoods PM Syria/Iraq: Isn't eligibility criteria developed as per context as a standard practice?

Angeline Ndabaningi: thank you for the opportunity to learn from Syria

Eugenie Catta: Just joined. Eugenie Catta for Logalto - Monitoring and Evaluation Software for Development projects.

Dick Tinsley: How much of the farmers' limited energy and labor should be allocated to animal vs. crop management? In Ethiopia it was about 50/50. <http://smallholderagriculture.agsci.colostate.edu/ethiopia-diet-analysis/>

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks for your question, Imran. Welcome Angeline! Glad you could join, Eugenie!

Ziad Ayoubi: for those interested in reading about inclusive value chain development go to <http://www.unhcr.org/594b7d7f7.pdf> to see how UNHCR and ILO adapted the initial methodology to include refugees

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks, Ziad!

Indra Klein: Given cultural mores, how are women-led households/businesses faring; & to what degree are their efforts hindered?

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: YES! Love James Bond!

Eugenie Catta: Thanks Ziad!

Indra Klein: With regard to displacement, what steps have been taken to (1) contain resentments/suspensions & create environments of trust & respect during processes?

Angeline Ndabaningi: connection is really bad from my side. is there a way of accessing the audio/visual even after this webinar

AV Tech (Washington DC): Yes, for anyone having connectivity issues, this webinar will be made available for playback on YouTube in about a week.

Indra Klein: Is crop insurance a part of the equation? If so, how is cost contained?

AV Tech (Washington DC): You will receive a follow up email with appropriate links (to video, audio, transcripts, and other resources). Thanks.

Mumino Kamara: Weekend farmers market can develop poultry and also create a port for trade

marydean purves: not lear on the 'partnership' btw vulnerable HH and (3) 'agent'...

Angeline Ndabaningi: thanks

marydean purves: rabbits are very fragile to initiate!

Ahmad Alkasir: Is there a market for rabbits? Would people eat rabbit meat in target areas?

Ziad Ayoubi: I assume no

Ahmad Alkasir: I thought so

Joe Chal: rabbits had a food security objective in this case

Joe Chal: it was used as an alternative fodder, already in practice in these besieged areas

Hamsha Pathmanathan : hi everyone! I'm doing something similar in post war Sri Lanka, but focused in the paddy sector. I'm looking at implementing agroforestry systems to increase soil fertility, improve harvests, and increase food security in the North. Would appreciate any input/suggestion to resources to this project sustainable

Ziad Ayoubi: so far looks more like a food security project that has a humanitarian nature rather than market system intervention.

Ahmad Alkasir: broiler chickens will do better than rabbits

SHERI ARNOTT: was a gender analysis done? If so, what were some key issues that came up

Dick Tinsley: what is the conversion ratio for rabbits? That should be the key to what you should promote although you have a major promotion problem for rabbits

indra klein: As the program further develops, are you incorporating financial lit components, as well as training that fosters collective bargaining for small producers?

April Thompson - Microlinks: We'll be wrapping up soon and going to Q&A so please do type any lingering questions here!

Ziad Ayoubi: can we get the value chain analysis?

Lene Hansen: Building on Ziad's comment: sustainability of this intervention?? And why is lending constrained - were MFIs linked in?

indra klein: How are you using mobile tech & social media to raise awareness, train/educate and motivate behaviours that effect desired change?

Lene Hansen: adding to indra's comment: and for price info

Trina Chase: Is it possible to get a copy of the powerpoint and audio to share with others on my team?

April Thompson - Microlinks: Trina, absolutely - that will get shared within a few weeks

AV Tech (Washington DC): Yes, you sound good Laura.

AV Tech (Washington DC): Moving on to QA so please get those questions in. Thanks to those who have contributed already.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Moving to Q&A now - feel free to keep the questions coming. We have a little less than 45 mins for this portion of the event.

Trina Chase: Perfect. thank you!

indra klein: Thoughts on intergenerational perspectives --practices and behaviors that may create better paths for sustainability?

Rabih Yazbeck: Can you please elaborate further on the lending constraints and if you are aware of some pilots or successful lending interventions in this context?

Mumino Kamara: I need some improved customer service relations tools and KSF key support facts

hamza hamwie: Hi Laura, could you please raise your voice

April Thompson - Microlinks: Hamza, she is a bit under the weather so turn up your computer volume if you can : )

SHERI ARNOTT: really appreciate the candor in your presentation, Viadehi

Laura Meissner: Yes, sorry Hamza, I have a bad cold. Normally I am louder!

hamza hamwie: Thank you, much appreciated your great effort and wish to be better

Ahmad Alkasir: privatisation of wheat value chain and introduction of cost-recovery in such a context might be associated with out-of-control bread prices, which might not be favourable for food security

indra klein: Are there any efforts in developing a campaign -- whether govt, biz assns or producer collectives to raise awareness globally & encourage consumers to buy products produced in areas of conflict, as away to foster global humanitarian support, esp with use of mobile tech and social media?

indra klein: From a funding perspective, thoughts on leveraging resources with use of social media & mobile tech, esp targeted at millenials?

Dick Tinsley: how much of the fertilizer for wheat was diverted to other more profitable crops?

Ahmad Alkasir: The wheat prices, pre-crisis, were higher than those of the global market. So farmers benefited

indra klein: Based on current data, what % of revenue (on avg) is put back into biz/production? Thoughts on % towards savings? meeting living needs? If not yet known, any plans to obtain data in future survey?

Ahmad Alkasir: the game was that durum wheat (80% of Syrian wheat is durum), has a higher value than soft wheat used for making bread

Dick Tinsley: durum wheat is usually preferred for pasta

April Thompson - Microlinks: Ahmad, thanks for clarifying that!

Ahmad Alkasir: exactly

marydean purves: Indra's question is really key... investment versus subsistence...

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks, Marydean - we will get to it.

indra klein: Is there a game plan with regard to time frame when govt will lessen its control?

Marisa Ferri 2: Greetings from USDOL! Here are two great companies in the MENA region offering online employment. Great opportunities for Syrians, especially tech savvy youth. They gave a presentation to USDOL's ILAB that was really inspiring. -Ms. Abeer Abu Ghaith from <http://menaalliances.com/Based> in the West Bank "MENA Alliances aims to provide high quality remote resourcing solutions faster, easier, of better value, trusted and fully localized while creating economic opportunity for talent in the MENA region." -Mr. Mehemed Bougsea from <http://www.think-it.io/lsde-tunis/> Based in Tunisia. His company's mission is, "Connecting companies with the brightest software engineers from North Africa."

Marisa Ferri 2: (This is Christine Carlson-Ajlani)

Lene Hansen: Postal banks were quite widespread pre-crisis? Jamaiyats relatively widespread in South. FMFB-S and UNRWA MFP still active in Syria. Have you actually been intouch with them?

April Thompson - Microlinks: Interesting, Marisa, thank you for sharing that lead.

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks for your question, Lene - we have a lot to cover here but we'll note it!

indra klein: alas...have no idea what is being said due to echo-effect and bouncing...looking forward to recording

April Thompson - Microlinks: Sorry to hear, Indra - I know that's often an issue for you but rest assured we will share this out soonest!

indra klein: thank you...today's session is a very much needed presentation

Ahmad Alkasir: Expectedly. Wheat is easy to grow

April Thompson - Microlinks: We'll be wrapping up questions soon, so do give us your feedback on this presentation via the polls on your screen.

Mumino Kamara: The Halal market can improve the market reach and als some Arabic language fluency can improve scenarios atleast 70%

Dick Tinsley: Ahman, thus the farmers are mostly interested in thier return to labor

Ahmad Alkasir: Does that imply that abolishing subsidies will end wheat farming?

Dick Tinsley: not if the wheat is openly marketed instead of controlled market

Ahmad Alkasir: openly, means exporting it. Right?

Dick Tinsley: no open within the country, just not controlled with a ceiling price

Ahmad Alkasir: But durum wheat is mostly exported.

Ahmad Alkasir: It will have a small market

Dick Tinsley: in that case they might shift to a bread wheat as open market will increase the price received

Ahmad Alkasir: unless we are planning on a multi-decade policy shift towards soft wheat instead of durum wheat

marydean purves: Vai, well said re the younger generation and how to attract them to stay/return to their community...even in non-crisis, conflict countries this is a huge challenge in ag/rural communities.

Dick Tinsley: In response to a positive market structure for hard red, the conversion would be a few years rather than decades

Lene Hansen: ACTually, we're seeing refugees return to Syria from neighbouring countries now...with potential skills/experience from other markets, including women with vocational skills.

indra klein: From a program perspective, thoughts on how you are rethinking donor participation, esp when considering tech and entrepreneurial components merging/improving farming/livestock production practices?

Ahmad Alkasir: I can't give a precise estimate, but I guess things like availability of seeds to the satisfy the increasing deman for soft wheat, in addition to adapting the whole wheat natural eco-system (varieties, micro-climates, pests etc), will take a very long time. Dick

indra klein: Thank you for a very thought-provoking presentation -- time well spent!

Dick Tinsley: If you allow for market seed a introduced variety can blanket an area in 3 seasons starting with only 1 kg of seed. The multiple factor for wheat is 1 to 50. wheat is self pollenated so little change in gentic quality with different generations

Hamsha Pathmanathan : thank you

April Thompson - Microlinks: Thanks everyone for such a lively chat here - great to hear from you all. Hope to see those of you who were new to our events in the future!

Adam Ahmed - USAID Microlinks: Thank you for joining us today everyone!

Laura Meissner 2: Thank you, everyone!

Ashis Kundu: Thanks Microlinks

Gabriella D'Elia: thsnk you!

Tom Shaw: Thanks very informative.

Alison Cavicchio: thank you

indra klein: Happy Holidays to all!

Claire Durham: thank you