BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH NEXUS PROGRAMMING

Impact Brief

Lessons and opportunities from Year 1 of Nexus Accelerator Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countries experiencing significant fragility face overlapping crises, conflict, climate shocks, economic instability, and social fragmentation, that cannot be solved through siloed interventions. Traditional humanitarian responses address immediate needs but often fail to tackle the root causes of vulnerability, while development programmes alone cannot operate effectively in volatile environments.

The Nexus approach bridges these gaps by integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) efforts into a holistic programming. It enables organisations to deliver life-saving assistance while simultaneously strengthening systems, fostering social cohesion, and building resilience against future shocks. In doing so, Nexus programming transforms short-term relief into long-term stability, ensuring that communities are not just surviving but moving towards sustainable recovery.

World Vision's Nexus Accelerator Fund (NAF) projects have enabled Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria offices to implement integrated, multi-sectoral interventions that bridge HDP objectives. Year 1 focused on building trust through addressing local needs, while laying the foundation for resilience and systems strengthening in fragile contexts. Through adaptive programming and strong local partnerships, the projects demonstrated

how Nexus approaches can accelerate impact and foster sustainability.

Across six pillars - Sustainable Solutions, Peacebuilding, Local Ownership and System Strengthening, Behaviour Change, Integrated and Sequenced Programming, and Adaptive and Risk-informed Programming - the projects delivered promising results. From climate-smart agriculture in Afghanistan to layered peacebuilding and livelihood recovery in Iraq, interventions were tailored to context-specific fragility levels. Community-led models such as savings groups and youth-led activities enhanced trust and accountability, while cross-cutting themes like GEDSI and MHPSS ensured inclusivity and behaviour change.

Lessons from Year 1 highlight the importance of tailoring interventions to fragility, institutionalising adaptive management, and embedding community leadership. Partnerships with local actors proved critical in volatile settings, enabling rapid adjustments during shocks such as conflict escalation, drought, and displacement. These insights inform forward-looking recommendations for Year 2 and 3, which prioritise deepening fragility-sensitive design, scaling community-driven approaches, and integrating risk-informed planning across all programme components.

INTRODUCTION

World Vision's understanding of the Nexus approach is rooted in the integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) efforts to deliver holistic, sustainable and child-centred impact in fragile contexts. It emphasises moving beyond siloed interventions to create pathways that reduce vulnerability, strengthen resilience, and promote stability through coordinated and adaptive programming. While we see Nexus as an *ecosystem* and *way of working*, not just a set of components or pillars, for operationalization purposes it is essential to name its core pieces, which are not a stand-alone sector or task, but a cross-cutting enabler. Thus, World Vision Middle East and Eastern Europe (WV MEER) understands Nexus approach as a combination of six enablers or pillars:

Sustainable Solutions - Focus on long-term resilience and reducing dependency on aid by addressing root causes of vulnerability. This includes integrated approaches such as livelihoods, climate-smart agriculture, and systems strengthening, while remaining alert to life saving interventions, where necessary.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity - Promote social cohesion, conflict prevention and resolution, and trust-building among communities and institutions to reduce tensions and foster stability, inclusion and collaboration. Peacebuilding addresses root causes, prevention, and reconciliation. Peace operates at the community, system, and policy levels.

Local Ownership and System Strengthening - Empower local actors and community-based structures to lead interventions, ensuring sustainability and accountability through participatory planning and decision-making. Collective outcomes achieved through coordination, accountability, partnership, and advocacy with government and civil society actors (incl. faith-based partners).

Behaviour Change - Encourage positive practices and norms (e.g., positive parenting, gender equality, hygiene, disaster preparedness) that improve well-being of children and adults and reduce harmful coping strategies both, short and long term, essential for sustainable and transformational change.

Integrated and Sequenced Programming - Design and delivery of multi-sectoral interventions, spanning humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding domains, in a coordinated and phased manner. Prioritizing cross-cutting themes such as Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), and Child Protection (CP), Anticipatory Action (AA) and layering them across all stages, as relevant.

Adaptive and Risk-informed Programming - Programmes that are flexible enough to adapt plans, budgets, and delivery mechanisms quickly, informed by context monitoring, while maintaining alignment with long-term resilience goals. This means integrating anticipatory action, iterative learning, and rapid decision-making into design and implementation so that interventions remain relevant, effective, and sustainable despite volatility.

The above listed enablers are traceable in World Vision's Nexus Accelerator Fund (NAF) programme,[1] the objective of which is to act as a catalytic mechanism that strengthens programming in fragile contexts by accelerating the integration of HDP approaches. This is achieved through:

(1) Enabling targeted, tailored, and sustainable interventions by analysing local needs and vulnerabilities and strengthening community resilience.

(2) Building capacity of community-based structures as first responders and promote local ownership for long-term impact.

(3) Engaging with governments and local partners to foster collaboration and systems strengthening in fragile contexts.

Four MEER offices – Syria Response, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon – have completed the 1st year of the three-year nexus projects implementation and have important lessons and examples to share on adaptive programming, community ownership and partnership strategies, informed by their context specifics, as well as varying levels of fragility.

The purpose of this learning document is to capture and synthesize key lessons from the first year of NAF implementation in the Middle East and Afghanistan, highlighting what worked, why it worked, and how it can be strengthened and scaled. It aims to inform adaptive decision-making, improve fragility-sensitive Nexus programming, and guide Year 2–3 priorities by translating evidence and experience into practical recommendations that enhance impact, sustainability, and child-centred outcomes across fragile contexts.

The impact brief is developed by analysing NAF Project Annual Reports and validating findings with field teams in each project locations. Impact stories and quotes from project participants were obtained and added from Communications teams' ongoing storytelling activities, intended to capture project's impact.

World Vision's Nexus Accelerator Fund (NAF) countries in MEER

[1] NAF programme is funded by the generous support of World Vision International private donors.

BACKGROUND

Fragile countries in MEER face overlapping crises, conflict, climate shocks, economic instability, and social fragmentation. While all four NAF countries are experiencing significant fragility, it is important to see through the different levels of fragility, since the root causes to vulnerabilities that children and adults experience vary and so will the solutions. In general, fragility levels reflect the capacity of state structures and local partners to manage crises and deliver services. In the most fragile contexts, there are no or newly established, even de facto functioning, state systems and very limited partners, requiring life-saving interventions and strong community-led mechanisms. Medium fragility contexts have a willing, but still very new government and some local partners, enabling transitional programming that combines humanitarian response with early recovery and resilience-building. Minimum or transitioning fragility contexts feature established but semi-capable governments and strong local partners, allowing for integrated development and delivery of interventions and peacebuilding approaches that strengthen systems and promote sustainable solutions. Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria were chosen for the NAF project due to their significant, complex and diverse fragility within the region.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex humanitarian crises, with 22 million people requiring assistance and widespread food insecurity affecting nearly half the population. In Herat province, recent earthquakes compounded chronic vulnerabilities caused by decades of conflict, economic collapse, and climate-induced shocks such as drought. Over 80% of households struggle to access food, and 98% of wells have dried up, leaving communities without safe water. Livelihoods have deteriorated sharply: agricultural income fell by 52%, livestock by 24%, and household expenditure dropped by 39%, forcing families to adopt negative coping strategies like selling productive assets and reducing health spending. Women's participation in income generation is minimal (5%), and restrictions on movement further limit their access to services. The influx of 1.5 million returnees from Iran, 31% settling in Herat, has intensified pressure on already fragile systems. Protection risks—including child labour, early marriage, and GBV—are rising, while malnutrition among children and lactating women remains critical.

Syria

North-east Syria faces protracted fragility marked by economic collapse, displacement, and recurrent drought, which have eroded household resilience and market systems. Years of conflict have left infrastructure damaged, and governance fragmented, while sanctions and inflation have driven food prices beyond the reach of vulnerable families. Agricultural losses due to drought and water scarcity have deepened food insecurity, forcing households to rely on humanitarian aid and adopt harmful coping mechanisms. Malnutrition among children is a growing concern, compounded by limited access to health and WASH services. Displacement remains high, with families living in informal settlements or overcrowded shelters, lacking basic services and protection. Social cohesion is fragile, and opportunities for livelihoods are scarce, leaving communities dependent on short-term assistance.

Lebanon

Lebanon's crisis is characterised by economic collapse, hyperinflation, and political instability, compounded by the recent escalation of regional conflict and internal and cross-border displacement. Tripoli, one of the country's most vulnerable urban centres, hosts large numbers of refugees and marginalised Lebanese families living in poverty. The cost of living has skyrocketed, eroding purchasing power and pushing households into extreme deprivation. Food insecurity and child malnutrition are rising, while access to education, healthcare, and protection services remains severely constrained. Vulnerability is layered: refugee children face statelessness and exploitation, while Lebanese families struggle with unemployment and deteriorating public services. Social tensions have deepened, with sectarian divides and competition over scarce resources.

Iraq

Iraq continues to grapple with overlapping crises of political fragility, environmental degradation, and socio-economic vulnerability, particularly in conflict-affected governorates like Ninewa and Thi Qar. Communities face high unemployment, weak governance, and deteriorating infrastructure, while climate change has intensified water scarcity and agricultural decline. Local markets are fragile, dominated by micro-enterprises with limited access to finance, and women's participation in economic activities remains minimal. Social cohesion is strained by ethno-religious divisions and unresolved grievances, increasing the risk of localised conflict. Vulnerable households struggle to meet basic needs, relying on informal labour and humanitarian assistance. Across both governorates, multidimensional poverty, child labour, early marriage, and the unequal burden of unpaid care work borne by women and girls further exacerbate fragility and constrain long-term resilience.

NAF Projects Summary

Country	Project Goal / Objective	Year 1 Budget (USD)	Location(s)	Project Participants Reach
Afghanistan	Transform the lives of vulnerable populations in fragile contexts by implementing sustainable strategies that integrate humanitarian, development, and peace-building efforts, ultimately showing measurable impact on approximately 2% of children residing in 11 fragile contexts by 2027.	500,000	Herat – Zendah Jan district (earthquake-affected)	Direct: 4,524; Indirect: 31,668 (Total: 36,192)
Syria	Deliver life-saving support while strengthening resilience and early recovery through integrated HDP Nexus interventions (food vouchers, nutrition, savings groups, parenting, WASH).	490,618	Raqqa – Al-Karama sub-district	Direct: 9,286; Indirect: 12,560 (Total: 21,846)
Lebanon	Strengthen community resilience and well-being via integrated Education, Child Protection, Livelihoods, and Civic Engagement; empower local councils and partners.	739,617	Tripoli (Tabbane, Jabal Mohsen, Haddadine, Qobbeh)	Direct: 18,880; Indirect: 1,199 (Total: 20,079)
Iraq	Integrate anticipatory action, climate resilience, ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA), and peacebuilding under RRPI to address root causes of fragility.	490,618	Ninewa (Sinjar, Baa'j) & Thi Qar (Nasiriyah, Chibayish)	Direct: 334,901; Indirect: 69,470 (Total: 404,371)

NEXUS PROGRAMMING BETTER PRACTICES

The following section highlights better practices on how different nexus pillars are operationalized in each of the four contexts, as their level of fragility varies from one context to another, requiring a tailored solution. Shared examples aim to demonstrate that nexus approach can be materialized even in the most fragile environments, if intentionality is applied to find a holistic and locally-led package of interventions, which looks beyond the short-term resolution of the vulnerability and needs among the targeted population.

Sustainable Solutions

Livelihoods and Resilience (Nexus Approach). Afghanistan's protracted crisis demands a shift from short-term assistance toward sustainable solutions that address root causes of vulnerability while preserving lifesaving support where required. With food insecurity persisting at crisis and emergency levels and humanitarian funding declining, strengthening livelihoods and resilience is essential to reducing aid dependency.

Afghanistan: Climate-smart agriculture

Afghanistan's protracted crisis demands a shift from short-term assistance toward sustainable solutions that address root causes of vulnerability while preserving lifesaving support where required. With food insecurity persisting at crisis and emergency levels and humanitarian funding declining, strengthening livelihoods and resilience is essential to reducing aid dependency.

Through the project, key actions have focused on integrated, nexus-oriented interventions that link humanitarian response with early recovery and development outcomes. **Cash-plus approaches, combining cash-for-work with skills, agricultural inputs, and community-led planning,** have helped restore productive assets and improve household shock-coping capacity. Climate-smart agriculture, crop diversification, and on-farm technical support have strengthened food security and income generation, while support to livestock keepers and Community Animal Health Workers has stabilized livestock-based livelihoods amid drought and pasture loss.

Dairy value chain support, including the establishment of milk collection centers, has improved market access, reduced post-harvest losses, and increased household incomes by linking small-scale producers to reliable buyers. In parallel, women-focused, home-based livelihood activities and clean energy solutions have enabled income generation within prevailing access constraints, while community-based disaster risk management and climate-resilient infrastructure have enhanced preparedness for future shocks.

Together, these actions demonstrate how livelihood recovery, market systems strengthening, and climate resilience—delivered through a humanitarian–development nexus lens—can generate durable outcomes and support a gradual transition from relief to self-reliance.

Years of drought and declining groundwater left farmers in Cheshma Ghori village struggling, as much of their Kariz irrigation water was lost before reaching their fields. Crop yields fell, incomes dropped, and some land remained uncultivated.

Through the Nexus Accelerator Fund (NAF) Project, World Vision Afghanistan built a durable water passage system to prevent seepage and channel water directly to farmland. Implemented through Cash for Work and coordinated with the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) committee, the project provided temporary income while strengthening community ownership.

Today, 25 hectares are irrigated reliably, improving harvests, incomes, and resilience to drought.

A local farmer said: "For many years, we watched our water disappear into the gravel before it reached our fields. During drought, every drop of water is valuable. Now, thanks to this project, our land receives water properly, and we can grow crops with confidence again."

Another community elder stated: "This water passage has changed our situation. We were struggling to irrigate even a small portion of our land. Today, 25 hectares are green again. This project has restored hope to our village".

Syria: Emergency food vouchers linked to savings groups

In Syria's fragile context, the project combined **food assistance with savings groups** to reduce aid dependency and stimulate self-reliance among returnees. The food voucher component provided immediate relief to returnees and vulnerable households, ensuring access to essential nutrition amidst rising food prices, disrupted markets, and the phasing out of large-scale institutional food assistance. Furthermore, savings groups, comprised mainly of women and returnees, were established to offer a safe space for members to pool resources, access small loans, and invest in income-generating activities. With further scale up plans in Year 2, this financial inclusion model helped households' smooth consumption, cope with shocks, and gradually rebuild their livelihoods. The groups also served as platforms for peer support, financial literacy training, and community dialogue.

"Pairing emergency food vouchers with savings groups is showing us what real recovery looks like. Families need more than short-term assistance—they need the chance to rebuild. When people can cover today's essentials and still put something aside for tomorrow, dignity grows, confidence returns, and the path toward long-term resilience becomes real." Dilsher Ibrahim, Area Manager

Lebanon: Cash-for-Work, vocational training, and market-based livelihoods

In Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, **Cash-for-work activities** provided short-term income opportunities for participants, enabling them to meet essential needs such as food, healthcare, and education. These schemes not only offered immediate financial relief but also enhanced participants' dignity and sense of contribution to their communities. Notably, caregivers of children involved in education activities and households from the same neighbourhoods were engaged, strengthening the link between household economic stability and improved learning outcomes. **Vocational training programmes** equipped participants with technical and entrepreneurial skills tailored to local market demands. Upon completion, participants received start-up kits and official certificates endorsed by the Ministry of Labour, boosting their employability and credibility in the job market. Finally, **Market-based approaches** included events like the Tripoli Market, which showcased local artisans, crafts, and small businesses, stimulating economic growth and encouraging community interaction. These initiatives provided accessible spaces for entrepreneurs to sell products, increase incomes, and build social capital. The project also supported the installation of solar streetlights and road safety equipment, improving safety and encouraging commercial activity in local stores.

> *"Beyond market-driven technical skills, vocational training equips participants with essential life skills, coaching, and access to professional networks. Together, these elements significantly improve employability and open pathways to the labour market."* Georges Abi Rizk, Resilience and Livelihoods Specialist at World Vision Lebanon

Iraq: Ecosystem-based adaptation for livelihoods

Implemented across the governorates of Ninewa and Thiqar, the project integrated **ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) with sustainable agriculture and peacebuilding** to address the interconnected challenges of environmental fragility, declining livelihoods, and social tension. By sequencing EbA with sustainable agriculture, the project helped communities adapt to climate shocks, restore degraded land, and diversify income sources. Locally informed, climate-adaptive strategies were developed through participatory design workshops, engaging government officials, city planners, engineers, farmers, and community leaders. Capacity-building and awareness-raising activities reached a wide range of stakeholders, including women and youth, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed for climate-resilient planning and management. Toward the end of Year 1, additional assessments including a citywide assessment, vulnerability and needs assessment (VNA), and conflict sensitive market analysis (CoSMAT)—were conducted to deepen understanding of vulnerabilities, markets, and conflict dynamics for Year 2 interventions.

From Training to Livelihood: Rasool's Journey Toward Stability in Iraq

Rasool, a 34-year-old agricultural engineer from Nasiriyah in Thiqar Governorate, faced years of unemployment and financial instability due to limited job opportunities, political fragility, and climate-related challenges affecting agriculture. Like many young graduates, he struggled to support his family's basic needs, from education and healthcare to nutritious food. His life began to change when he learned about a World Vision Iraq–led initiative, supported through Nexus Accelerator Fund (NAF) under the Resilience and Recovery Pathways for Iraq (RRPI), which helps young graduates move from skills development to sustainable income generation.

Through targeted training in climate-smart agriculture, green business, and enterprise management, Rasool gained both practical skills and confidence. With continued mentorship and a business grant from World Vision Iraq, he established his own agricultural enterprise, turning his knowledge into action. The project provided his family with a steady income, easing financial pressure on his parents and allowing his siblings to focus on their education while enabling him to better care for his young daughter.

Today, Rasool's project has strengthened his family's stability and renewed his sense of hope for the future. He now aims to expand his business, create opportunities for other young graduates, and contribute positively to his community. His journey shows how training, support, and persistence can help Iraq's youth build sustainable livelihoods and transform challenges into lasting change.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity

Promote social cohesion, conflict prevention and resolution, and trust-building among communities and institutions to reduce tensions and foster stability, inclusion and collaboration.

Syria: Strengthening social cohesion

In parts of North Syria, drought, economic fragility, prolonged displacement, and competition over limited resources have fuelled tensions within communities. Through the formation of parents' committees, Family MUAC groups, and community representatives, the project created safe spaces where caregivers and local leaders could meet, exchange concerns, and jointly address challenges affecting children and families. These encouraged **dialogue between different community groups**, reduced tensions linked to displacement and resource scarcity, and promoted shared responsibility for health, nutrition, and caregiving practices for children. The project's inclusive approach involving women, youth, and local influencers strengthened social ties and built confidence in collective problem-solving. As trust grew, communities became more open to collaboration with humanitarian actors and with each other, laying the groundwork for simple peacebuilding steps for Year 2, which will include Do No Harm, Psychological First Aid, and Peace Road life-skills sessions. Peace clubs and two community-led initiatives will further create spaces to reduce tensions and encourage positive interaction.

Lebanon: Peace Corners and community dialogue

The project established **Peace Corners**—safe spaces within schools and community centres designed to foster dialogue, psychosocial support, and peaceful interaction among children and youth. These corners provided structured environments for conflict resolution, emotional wellbeing activities, and peer-led discussions, helping young people develop the skills needed to navigate daily challenges and build positive relationships. **Community dialogue sessions** complemented peacebuilding efforts by bringing together diverse groups—parents, teachers, local leaders, and youth—to discuss shared concerns, resolve tensions, and co-create solutions to local problems. Facilitated by trained moderators, these sessions encouraged open communication, mutual understanding, and collaborative action, contributing to a more inclusive and peaceful community environment.

On July 15, 2025, young people aged 12-16, including Shatha, Maryam, and Issam, are taking the lead in their community through the Impact+ and Childhood Rescue project in Lebanon. In a recent activity, they helped design signs to remind people to keep public gardens clean. These gardens, restored by Cash-for-Work participants, now serve as safe spaces for children to play and learn.

Iraq: Conflict resolution and social cohesion workshops

Across Ninewa (Sinjar and Baaj), the project implemented a series of **conflict resolution and social cohesion workshops** as part of a multisectoral approach that combined peacebuilding with climate adaptation and livelihood recovery. These workshops were designed to address the root causes of fragility in communities affected by conflict, environmental stress, and economic hardship. The workshops brought together diverse groups—including farmers, youth, women, local leaders, and government representatives—to participate in facilitated dialogue, mediation exercises, and collaborative problem-solving sessions. Participants explored sources of tension such as competition over water resources, land use disputes, and the impacts of climate change on traditional livelihoods. Through interactive activities and scenario-based learning, community members developed practical skills in negotiation, active listening, and consensus-building. Participants co-developed action plans for sustainable water management, climate-resilient agriculture, and inclusive economic opportunities, linking conflict resolution directly to tangible improvements in community wellbeing. In addition to the workshops, complementary initiatives in targeted locations contributed further to community peace and cohesion. **The Illuminated City Initiative** improved public safety and strengthened community confidence, particularly for women, while fostering a more secure environment for dialogue and collective action through installation of streetlights. **The Colors of Peace Initiative**, through the creation of murals promoting peaceful coexistence and environmental awareness, enhanced public spaces and schools, reinforcing messages of tolerance, social cohesion, and shared responsibility.

Claiming her rights: Asia's path to advocacy in Sinjar

Asia, a 21-year-old photographer from Sinjar, Iraq, has transformed from a quiet storyteller behind the camera into a confident young advocate for her community. Displaced by conflict and later returning to a deeply scarred hometown, she joined World Vision Iraq's life skills and advocacy training programmes. "Before, I didn't know what advocacy meant," she says. "Now, I know how to speak up—for myself, for my friends, and for my community."

Through the training, Asia learned how to organise collectively and demand basic rights, such as access to clean water and electricity. The experience not only equipped her with advocacy skills but also reshaped her confidence and worldview. "It changed my personality—I became more confident," she explains, adding that the programme also helped her overcome social and religious divides. "I realised we must be united, regardless of our religion or background."

Today, Asia speaks clearly and confidently about her community's needs, earning greater respect and trust from those around her. "Even though I was respected before, now people listen to me more," she reflects. Her journey shows how empowering young women through advocacy and peacebuilding can help rebuild trust, strengthen unity, and give a new generation the courage to claim a better future for Sinjar.

Local Ownership and System Strengthening

Empower local actors and community-based structures to lead interventions, ensuring sustainability and accountability through participatory planning and decision-making.

Afghanistan: Community-led preparedness committees

Local ownership was embedded across interventions to ensure sustainability, accountability, and continuity of humanitarian, development, and peace outcomes. **Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) committees** enabled communities to lead risk analysis, preparedness planning, and response actions, while strengthening coordination with district and provincial authorities and reinforcing local governance structures.

Milk collection centers promoted locally led market systems by establishing producer groups responsible for day-to-day management, quality control, and market linkages. This participatory model strengthened trust, accountability, and income sustainability beyond project support. In parallel, the Community Animal Health Worker (CAHW) capacitation and support built durable local service delivery capacity by training and equipping community-based providers and linking them to government veterinary services.

Together, these interventions demonstrate how community-led structures and local service systems, supported through a nexus approach, can enhance ownership, reduce dependency on external assistance, and sustain impact over time.

Syria: Community-driven adaptation and localization

In North Syria, community ownership was clearly demonstrated through the **Family Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) initiative**, which equipped caregivers—primarily mothers and family members—with the skills and tools needed to independently conduct malnutrition screening and referrals for children under five. Caregivers received training on how to use (MUAC) tapes, interpret results, and recognise signs of malnutrition. The programme provided simple, colour-coded MUAC tapes and clear instructions, making the screening process accessible even for those with low literacy. By decentralising screening responsibilities, the initiative overcame barriers related to distance, cost, and stigma, ensuring that children at risk of malnutrition were identified early and referred to appropriate health services. Family MUAC not only increased the coverage and frequency of malnutrition screening but also fostered a sense of empowerment and responsibility among caregivers. Community health workers supported the process by offering refresher training, monitoring accuracy, and facilitating referrals to nutrition clinics and support services. Important to note that the project heavily relied on local actors. Community engagement played a central role in shaping the project's direction, including the community-driven decision to integrate WASH support in response to emerging drought-related hygiene challenges, demonstrating agility and locally-led decision-making.

In north Syria, Nadia*, 36, has endured years of displacement and hardship since the conflict reached her hometown in 2017. She now lives in a small house with 22 family members, including her husband's three wives and their children. After fleeing on foot and surviving months in makeshift tents, the family returned home only to face new challenges. With her husband injured and unable to work, rising food prices pushed the family deeper into food insecurity, and Nadia's one-year-old son became malnourished. "For the past three months, my child hasn't been getting enough nourishment from breastfeeding. I haven't been able to buy milk for the last 15 days," she shared.

Things began to change when Nadia joined World Vision Syria Response's nutrition project, supported by World Vision Canada. Through the programme, she learned how to identify child malnutrition using MUAC tapes. "I was amazed to learn this crucial information," Nadia said. After attending five sessions, she didn't keep the knowledge to herself—she taught her husband's other wives and women in her neighbourhood, helping monitor the health of around 50 children.

The project also provided food vouchers to 200 families, easing financial pressure and allowing households to prioritise other essential needs. "Instead of spending money on food, we could use the savings to buy medicine and clothes for our children," Nadia explained. Today, she is a trusted source of support in her community, using her knowledge to protect children's health and inspire other women. "I hope women can achieve everything they aspire to," she says.

Lebanon: Local councils co-designing and leading initiatives

In Lebanon, the project strengthened local systems by empowering a **diverse range of councils**—including Children's Councils, Youth Councils, Business Councils, and Organisation Councils—to co-design and lead integrated interventions across education, child protection, livelihoods, and civic engagement. These councils served as platforms for participatory decision-making, enabling community members of all ages and backgrounds to identify priorities, shape solutions, and take ownership of programme activities. Children's and Youth Councils played a pivotal role in advocating for safer learning environments, improved access to psychosocial support, and the inclusion of life skills in school curricula. Through regular meetings, workshops, and community events, young people developed leadership skills, built confidence, and contributed to the design and monitoring of education and protection initiatives. Finally, Business and Organisation Councils brought together local entrepreneurs,

civil society organisations, and community leaders to address economic challenges and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Iraq: Local CSOs co-leading project implementation

In Ninewa and Thiqar, the project adopted a collaborative approach by **engaging local civil society organisations (CSOs) as co-**

leaders in project implementation. Local CSOs played a central role in planning, delivering, and monitoring activities across sectors such as livelihoods, climate adaptation, and peacebuilding. Their deep understanding of local needs and dynamics enabled the project to tailor solutions to specific community challenges, while their established networks facilitated outreach to vulnerable groups and fostered inclusive participation. By co-leading implementation, CSOs helped to improve governance and service delivery at the grassroots level. They worked alongside local authorities to strengthen accountability mechanisms, enhance transparency in resource allocation, and ensure that community voices were reflected in decision-making processes. Regular joint meetings, participatory assessments, and collaborative action planning built trust between CSOs and government representatives, laying the groundwork for more effective and responsive local governance.

Behaviour Change

Encourage positive practices and norms that improve well-being of children and adults and reduce harmful coping strategies both, short and long term, for sustainable change.

Afghanistan: Hygiene promotion, positive parenting and MHPSS

Behaviour change interventions focused on encouraging positive, sustainable practices that improve the well-being of children and adults while reducing harmful short- and long-term coping strategies in vulnerable and disaster affected communities. Communities adopted climate-smart agricultural practices, including improved irrigation management, crop diversification, and better storage techniques, strengthening food security and reducing distress sales of assets. Climate awareness promoted environmental stewardship and awareness of climate risks.

Collective action was reinforced through milk collection centers, which encouraged collective marketing, quality control, and cooperation among producers, shifting practices away from informal and exploitative market arrangements. Disaster preparedness behaviours were strengthened through CBDRM-led planning, drills, and early warning dissemination, improving readiness and collective response to shocks.

At the household level, the use of solar energy systems reduced reliance on firewood, limiting environmental degradation, improving health outcomes, and easing the daily burden on women and children. These behaviour changes fostered collaboration, resilience, and safer coping strategies, contributing to sustainable outcomes. **Positive parenting and PSS** sessions were delivered through an **innovative Parenting in Crisis chatbot**, which provided caregivers with accessible, real-time guidance on nurturing care, discipline, emotional support, child protection and self-care practices. The chatbot offered tailored advice, reminders, and interactive content, enabling parents to strengthen their skills and confidence in supporting their children's wellbeing. This digital solution was particularly valuable in remote or hard-to-reach areas, where traditional services were limited.

Parenting in Crises Chatbot supports caregivers in distress

As part of NAF, an innovative Parenting in Crisis Chatbot, named as "Parents' Light", is implemented in Afghanistan. Co-developed by Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) with families living in humanitarian crisis situations, the Parenting in Crisis Chatbot demonstrates how Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Child Protection can be accessible in the hardest to reach places, at a minimal cost. It offers evidence-based support for parents using any messaging app, such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram.

The chatbot uses text, audio, and short videos to deliver 10 practical messages designed to support caregiver well-being and strengthen positive parenting during stressful times. Caregivers are supported in managing their own stress, strengthening relationships with children through age-appropriate and candid communication and quality time, and protecting children from various threats and stressors.

The chatbot was initially available to 600 families across 10 villages in Zindajan District, Herat — an area heavily affected by the 2023 earthquake. What makes "Parents' Light" unique is its personalised, culturally adapted, and accessible design, as it offers:

- Real-time parenting and emotional support
- Guidance for coping with stress and trauma
- Locally contextualised messages, illustrations, audio, and videos — designed for families with low literacy
- Confidential access to professional help when needed

> *"Before, when my children asked for something, I would get angry... now, using the tips from the program, my ability to control my anger has increased and I behave with more patience."* – male participant, 45 years old

> *"The simple and fluent language is designed according to our culture and region, making it easy to use."* – female participant, 32 years old

> *"Voice messages are very useful for people with low literacy."* – female participant, age unknown

> *"Audio messages were more useful for me and helped me find more peace."* – male participant, age unknown
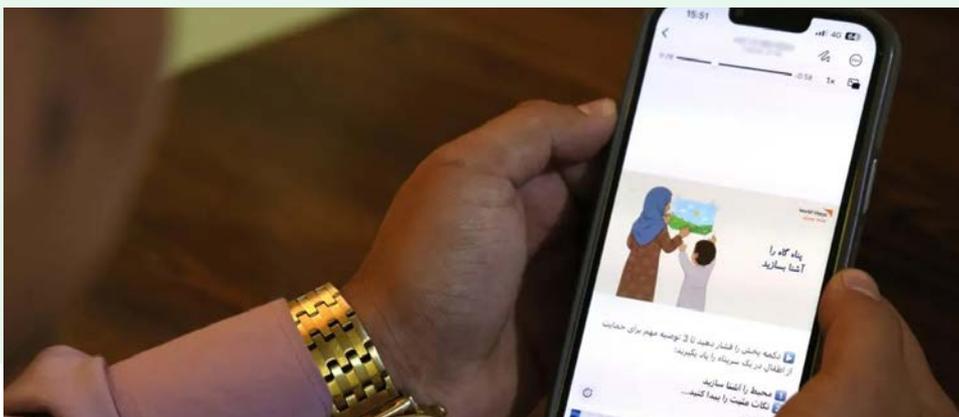
Syria: Parenting sessions reducing negative coping

The project implemented **structured parenting sessions** designed to equip caregivers with practical skills for stress management, positive engagement, and non-violent discipline. Facilitated by trained community workers, these sessions provided a safe and supportive environment for parents and caregivers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn evidence-based strategies for nurturing care. The curriculum included modules on understanding child development, managing stress and anger, effective communication, and building positive routines. Special attention was given to recognising and replacing negative coping behaviours with constructive alternatives, such as active listening, praise, and consistent boundaries. The sessions also integrated psychosocial support elements, helping caregivers process their own trauma and build resilience. Group discussions and peer support fostered a sense of community, reducing isolation and encouraging mutual encouragement among participants. By strengthening caregivers' confidence and skills, the intervention contributed to safer, more nurturing family environments, ultimately reducing the risk of violence, neglect, and poor mental health, malnutrition outcomes for children.

Lebanon: Adolescents life skills and civic engagement opportunities

The project prioritised behavioural change as a cornerstone for resilience-building in fragile urban contexts. Through the IMPACT+ curriculum, the project introduced **structured life skills training** designed to equip adolescents and youth with competencies essential for navigating uncertainty and promoting positive coping strategies. These sessions covered communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, and stress management, integrating psychosocial support elements to strengthen emotional well-being alongside practical skills. Later on, youth-led projects under IMPACT+ addressed issues such as school dropout and gender-based violence through awareness campaigns and peer support networks. Established local councils—comprising youth, caregivers, and community representatives—were established to co-design and lead initiatives that addressed pressing social challenges. Activities included community dialogue forums, participatory planning sessions, and advocacy campaigns promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

"In one of Lebanon's most fragile contexts, adolescents learned how to identify challenges and put solutions into practice, while strengthening their life skills, leadership, and confidence." Elio Haddad, Education Technical Coordinator at World Vision Lebanon.

Iraq: Life skills training for youth

In Ninewa and Thiqar, the project prioritised behavioural change through **structured life skills training for youth** aged 18–29. Delivered in collaboration with local Vocational Training Centres, the five-day programme implemented the well-developed curriculum, blending employability skills with socio-emotional competencies. The curriculum covered modules on empathy, emotional intelligence, active listening, interpersonal effectiveness, teamwork, and SMART goal-setting, alongside structured decision-making and problem-solving techniques. Beyond individual capacity-building, the programme linked participants to local vocational systems and labour market networks, reinforcing pathways to sustainable livelihoods. Participants reported improved confidence and readiness to engage in income-generating activities, while also demonstrating enhanced interpersonal skills critical for social cohesion. Beyond individual capacity-building, the activity emphasized social inclusion and community resilience by actively engaging youth, women, and people with disabilities. By combining life skills development with exposure to vocational and entrepreneurial options, the activity contributed not only to enhanced employability but also to stronger community ties and adaptive capacity in the face of ongoing socio-economic challenges.

Integrated and Sequenced Programming

Design and delivery of multi-sectoral interventions, spanning humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding domains, in a coordinated and phased manner.

Afghanistan: Integrating emergency WASH to livelihoods and resilience

Programming is designed and delivered through integrated, multi-sectoral and sequenced interventions that span humanitarian response, early recovery, development, and peace-building. Interventions are implemented in locations where health, nutrition, and WASH services are already present, alongside emergency assistance such as MPCA, cash, and food support delivered to meet immediate survival needs. This ensures that lifesaving assistance stabilizes households before transitioning to recovery and resilience-building.

Building on this foundation, livelihood and resilience interventions are layered to address the root causes of vulnerability, enabling communities to recover, adapt, and thrive. Cross-cutting priorities—Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), and Child Protection (CP)—are mainstreamed across all stages, from emergency response to longer-term systems strengthening, ensuring inclusive, protective, and conflict-sensitive programming.

Through this coordinated and phased approach, humanitarian assistance is deliberately linked with development and peace outcomes, reducing negative coping strategies, strengthening community resilience, and supporting sustainable pathways out of crisis.

Syria: Combining food security with savings and protection

In North Syria, the project adopted a **layered multi-sectoral approach**, that integrated immediate humanitarian assistance with early recovery and longer-term resilience pathways. Initially, food vouchers were distributed to address acute food insecurity among vulnerable households, ensuring immediate survival needs were met. This humanitarian entry point created the foundation for subsequent resilience-building activities, allowing families to stabilise before engaging in longer-term solutions. The project introduced complementary interventions such as Family MUAC, positive parenting sessions, and health and nutrition messaging, which strengthened caregiving practices and improved early detection of malnutrition. As community trust deepened, the project expanded into adaptive WASH support in response to drought-related hygiene challenges, demonstrating how community feedback directly shaped

programming. Building on this momentum, the project prepared households for future economic resilience by introducing Savings groups as the next layer, creating a pathway from basic needs support toward savings, small loans, and income-generating opportunities. Together, these sequenced interventions show how the Nexus approach can move families from survival to stability and ultimately self-reliance.

Lebanon: Multi-sectoral approach with GEDSI and MHPSS integration

The Lebanon project also adopted a multi-sectoral design that combined education, livelihoods, and child protection interventions, ensuring that humanitarian and development objectives were addressed in tandem, with **strong emphasis on GEDSI and MHPSS mainstreaming**. Livelihood initiatives, such as vocational training and cash-for-work schemes, were tailored to include women, youth, and persons with disabilities, while education interventions prioritised out-of-school children and adolescents facing compounded barriers. This inclusive lens not only addressed structural inequalities but also strengthened social cohesion by promoting representation and voice for marginalised groups. Parenting sessions, life skills training, and community dialogue platforms integrated psychosocial components to reduce stress, enhance coping strategies, and foster positive family dynamics. These interventions were delivered alongside economic and educational activities, ensuring that material recovery was reinforced by emotional resilience. By linking MHPSS with livelihoods and protection, the project mitigated risks of harmful coping behaviours and strengthened protective environments for children and caregivers.

In Tripoli, Lebanon, Rabiaa, mother of five, shows her new acquired skills in the sewing machine, determined to provide for her family after her husband was unable to work because of a disability.

World Vision implements vocational training in Lebanon for vulnerable youth and communities to improve livelihoods and promote economic empowerment, particularly through partnerships with organizations like the Safadi Foundation.

Iraq: Layered peacebuilding and livelihood interventions

In Ninewa and Thiqar, the project adopted a layered and sequenced approach, combining peacebuilding workshops with livelihood recovery activities to address both social and economic dimensions of fragility. The initial phase focused on restoring trust and reducing community tensions through dialogue sessions, youth-led discussions, and conflict resolution workshops. Building on this foundation, livelihood activities—including vocational training, cash-for-work schemes, and small business support—were introduced to reinforce peacebuilding gains with tangible economic opportunities. These interventions targeted vulnerable households, particularly women and youth, promoting inclusion and reducing gender disparities in access to resources while helping families rebuild income streams and reduce reliance on negative coping mechanisms. Finally, environmental fragility was addressed in parallel through ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) and anticipatory action measures integrated into livelihood programming, ensuring that economic, social, and environmental interventions were mutually reinforcing. This sequenced and integrated design allowed short-term recovery efforts to directly contribute to long-term resilience, inclusive participation, and sustainable development.

From Doubt to Advocacy: Shakir's Journey of Empowerment in Ba'aj

In the remote town of Ba'aj in Ninewa, 25-year-old Shakir grew up facing daily hardship. With unreliable access to water and electricity and unemployment reaching nearly 80%, most families struggle to meet basic needs. "Every 10 days, about 200 people rely on three to four water tankers that we have to buy," Shakir explained. "Sometimes we only have electricity for three or four hours a day—sometimes not at all." Like many young people, Shakir worked as a labourer, caught in a cycle of poverty worsened by climate change and weak infrastructure.

When World Vision Iraq introduced an advocacy training in Ba'aj, Shakir was hesitant. "I didn't believe it could bring change," he admitted. But after joining the two-day session, his perspective shifted. "It was like a real school," he said. For the first time, he learned what advocacy meant—how to raise concerns, organise collectively, and speak out about shared problems. Motivated, Shakir encouraged other youth to join, and together they began engaging local media and using social platforms to highlight water and electricity shortages. "For the first time, our voices were heard," he said proudly.

Their efforts led to real results. The cost of water tankers in Shakir's neighbourhood dropped from 5,000 to 4,000 Iraqi dinars—an important relief for struggling families. More importantly, the training gave Shakir confidence and a sense of purpose. "Standing up and explaining my community's challenges was powerful," he shared. Once skeptical, Shakir is now a committed advocate, proving that empowering one young person can spark collective action—and that even in the most remote communities, change can begin with awareness and courage.

Adaptive and Risk-informed Programming

Afghanistan: Rapid adaptation to earthquake and drought shocks

Programming is designed to remain flexible and risk-informed, enabling rapid adjustments to plans, budgets, and delivery modalities while maintaining a clear focus on long-term resilience outcomes. Continuous context monitoring, MEAL feedback, and community consultations inform iterative learning and timely decision-making, ensuring interventions remain relevant amid climatic, economic, and access-related volatility.

Learning from Year One directly shaped Year Two adaptations, allowing programming to better align with community priorities and emerging risks. Based on evidence and community feedback, adjustments included refining beneficiary targeting, expanding cash-for-work to reach more households, introducing kitchen gardening and women-run community kitchens, and adding home-based income activities to enhance inclusion and feasibility for women. Investments were

also strengthened in climate resilience, including tree nurseries, clean energy solutions, and community-led disaster preparedness, while seasonal sequencing of agriculture and livestock activities was improved to maximize impact.

These adaptive changes strengthened community leadership, inclusivity, and resilience, enabling programmes to move beyond short-term recovery toward sustainable, locally driven outcomes. By embedding anticipatory action and learning-based adaptation, programming remains responsive to risk while reinforcing durable humanitarian, development, and peace impacts.

Syria Response: Adapting food vouchers and WASH support to context shifts

The project demonstrated strong adaptability by **revising interventions in response to shifting risks and evolving community needs**. Originally designed with a food voucher value of USD 100, the project increased the amount to USD 110 to reflect rising food prices, larger household sizes, and market volatility, ensuring families could meet minimum nutritional standards. Likewise, routine context monitoring revealed drought-related hygiene challenges and declining river water levels, prompting the addition of WASH support through hygiene kit distributions, an activity not included in the original design but introduced to safeguard health and reduce disease risks. Furthermore, in response to the challenges faced by community members in accessing activities such as positive parenting sessions, IYCF sessions, malnutrition screening, and family MUAC, the project adapted its approach by deploying a mobile team. This allowed the sessions and trainings to be delivered directly in the villages instead of conducting them in a centralized location. These adjustments illustrate how risk-informed programming, informed by continuous monitoring and community feedback, kept assistance relevant, protected outcomes, and reinforced trust.

"In North Syria, where conditions can change overnight, staying rigid simply isn't an option. By adjusting voucher values and expanding WASH support in response to drought and unstable markets, we kept assistance meaningful and ensured families were protected when the pressures were at their worst." Dilsher Ibrahim, Area Manager

Lebanon: Revising plans during conflict escalation and displacement

The Tripoli Project has also demonstrated strong **adaptability when conflict escalation and population displacement** disrupted its original implementation plan. Activities were rescheduled and layered, focusing first on humanitarian components, such as cash assistance and hygiene promotion taking precedence before transitioning to education and livelihoods programming. Real-time context analysis and community consultations enabled the team to identify critical gaps and recalibrate delivery modalities accordingly. For example, vocational training sessions were postponed and replaced with short-term income opportunities through cash-for-work schemes, providing immediate relief to displaced households. This flexibility ensured that programme objectives remained relevant and achievable despite volatile conditions. The project also integrated psychosocial support and protection measures into its revised plan, recognising the heightened vulnerability of children and caregivers during displacement.

In Tripoli, Lebanon, Mayssa, a mother of three, described how she balances community clean-up efforts with running her recycling shop. She said through volunteering, she found strength, purpose and the power to keep going for her family, her business and a cleaner environment.

Iraq: Incorporating early warning systems and anticipatory action

In Ninewa and Thiqar, the project embedded **early warning systems and anticipatory action** into its resilience framework to proactively address climate and conflict-related risks.

Recognising the unpredictability of shocks in fragile contexts, the programme invested in community-based monitoring mechanisms that tracked indicators such as rainfall patterns, water availability, crop health, and local security alerts. These systems enabled timely dissemination of risk information, allowing households and local committees to prepare for potential disruptions before they escalated into crises. Furthermore, anticipatory action measures were integrated into livelihood and protection activities to safeguard gains and minimise exposure to shocks. Livelihood interventions were adapted to include climate-smart practices such as soil conservation and water harvesting, reducing vulnerability to environmental stressors. Through this integrated, risk-informed approach, the project shifted communities from reactive coping toward proactive preparedness, strengthening resilience and stability in highly vulnerable settings.

LESSONS LEARNED

World Vision's Nexus projects demonstrate the transformative potential of integrated, adaptive programming in fragile contexts, as they bridge humanitarian, development, and peace objectives to deliver holistic impact. Year 1 results carry important lessons, essential for sustaining and scaling project's impact in targeted communities.

Tailoring Nexus interventions to fragility level accelerates impact: Designing interventions that match the fragility context ensures faster and more meaningful results. When programmes are sequenced to address immediate humanitarian needs while laying the foundation for long-term resilience, communities experience quicker recovery and reduced vulnerability. This approach also helps optimise resources and align strategies with local realities, making interventions more effective and sustainable.

Partnerships and adaptive programming are critical in volatile settings: In highly dynamic environments, flexibility and collaboration are essential. Strong partnerships with local actors and adaptive planning allow programmes to respond quickly to shocks, such as conflict escalation or economic instability, without losing sight of long-term objectives. Adjusting delivery modalities, revising plans, and leveraging local capacities enable continuity and maintain impact even under unpredictable conditions.

Community-led approaches enhance sustainability and trust: Empowering communities to lead interventions builds ownership, accountability, and trust. When local groups and civil society organisations take an active role in implementation, programmes become more culturally relevant and resilient to external disruptions. Community-driven models also strengthen social cohesion and ensure that solutions are maintained beyond project timelines, creating lasting change.

Targeted inclusion strengthens equity and resilience: Deliberate engagement of women, youth, and persons with disabilities enhances both social and economic outcomes. Inclusive approaches not only empower marginalized groups but also improve overall community cohesion, decision-making, and adaptive capacity, reducing the risk of exclusion or conflict over resources.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the lessons learned from Year 1, these recommendations aim to strengthen programme effectiveness and Nexus focus in Year 2-3. By implementing these actions, World Vision Field Offices will be able to sustain impact and accelerate progress, even in the most volatile and fragile contexts.

1. Deepen Fragility-Sensitive Design

Expand the use of fragility assessments to refine intervention sequencing and ensure that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding components are proportionate to context-specific risks. This will accelerate impact and strengthen resilience in the most vulnerable settings.

2. Institutionalise Adaptive Management

Formalise adaptive programming practices by integrating scenario planning and contingency budgets into project cycles. Identify specific indicators and triggers that are regularly tracked and can be used for quick decision making for activating relevant intervention packages. This will enable teams to respond quickly to shocks such as conflict escalation, climate events, or economic volatility without compromising long-term objectives. Engage communities in both monitoring and activation process of various contingency protocols to enable locally led action.

3. Strengthen Local Partnerships and Capacity

Shift from "partner implementation" to co-leadership models with local CSOs, community committees, and councils, particularly in design, implementation, monitoring, and adaptation decision-making. Invest in capacity-building for local civil society organisations and community groups to lead implementation and monitoring, while increasing flexible funding allocation for CSOs. Formalise collaboration with local authorities, where feasible, clarifying roles in service delivery, risk monitoring, and sustainability planning.

4. Scale Community-Led Models

Expand successful community-driven initiatives such as savings groups, youth-led activities, and local governance committees. Integrate these models as core delivery platforms rather than stand-alone activities, linking them to livelihoods, protection, peacebuilding, and early warning and anticipatory systems. Support peer-to-peer learning across communities and countries to accelerate replication and adaptation of successful approaches. This should enable continuity beyond project timelines.

5. Integrate Risk-Informed Planning Across Sectors

Integrate early warning indicators (climate, conflict, market, displacement) into sectoral plans and MEL systems to inform anticipatory action. Embed AA into all programme components, linking them with climate adaptation and peacebuilding strategies, especially around conflict-sensitivity. This will reduce vulnerability to shocks and strengthen preparedness at both household and institutional levels.

6. Systematise Learning and Evidence Use Across Nexus Programming

Establish structured learning loops at country and regional levels, linking monitoring data, community feedback, and context analysis to regular reflection and decision-making moments. Define a small set of priority learning questions for NAF year 2-3 and track them consistently. Ensure learning outputs are actionable and used, by linking recommendations directly to programme adjustments, design guidance, and capacity-building priorities.

Acknowledgements:

To ensure the safe and ethical participation of children, caregivers, and other adults when they shared their experiences and perceptions, all surveys and discussion groups were conducted in line with World Vision's safeguarding protocols. All photos included in this report have provided informed consent.

Follow WV MEER on:

𝕏 @WVMEERO
f @WorldVisionMEER
◎ @wv_middleeasteurope
in @world-vision-middle-east-eastern-europe
🌐 https://www.wvi.org/middle-east-and-eastern-europe

World Vision