



# Enabling the rural poor to overcome poverty in **Jordan**

## **Rural poverty in Jordan**

Jordan is classified as a chronically water-scarce country. Less than 5 per cent of the land is arable. For farmers, little or no rainfall means severely reduced cultivation and production. Not only do poor farmers have fewer products to sell, they also have less to eat. Hunger and food insecurity are constant threats.

About 20 per cent of Jordanians live in rural areas where poverty is more prevalent than in urban areas. Approximately 19 per cent of the rural population is classified as poor. Because of the arid nature of the land, many rural poor people cannot grow enough crops to feed themselves and their families. People who find other ways to supplement their incomes generally earn very little. Regular drought exacerbates the situation. For example, during the drought of 1999/2000, wheat production dropped from 70,000 tonnes to 9,000 tonnes, an amount that fell disastrously short of the country's demand for about 650,000 tonnes of wheat annually.

Many of Jordan's rural poor people live in extremely difficult conditions:

- They have limited access to alternative sources of income
- They have limited opportunities to diversify their farming enterprises because of low rainfall, poor soil quality and the topography of the land that they cultivate



- They lack collateral and cannot obtain loans needed for investment in farm activities that could lead to higher incomes
- They do not own land and they are unwilling to make long-term investments on the land they cultivate as tenant farmers

The most vulnerable groups include large rural households (with eight family members or more) headed by illiterate or poorly educated people, households headed by women, households with sick or elderly people, and households that do not own land or have very little land.

Families headed by women tend to be among the poorest of the poor. They have fewer economic assets than households headed by men. For example, only 44 per cent of households headed by women own agricultural land and 30 per cent own livestock. Instead, 68 per cent of households headed by men own land and 36 per cent of them own livestock. Similarly, only 21 per cent of women who are heads of households receive loans for agricultural development and 9 per cent for income-generating activities, compared to 43 and 14 per cent of men who are heads of households.

Poverty is not concentrated in a particular region or regions in the country. It is found in urban centres, refugee camps and rural areas. The poorest of the poor tend to be in low rainfall zones where agriculture is severely limited and where the environment is significantly degraded, leading to widespread erosion and desertification.

Rural poverty in Jordan has its roots in the following basic conditions:

- **Landlessness:** The landless usually depend on wage labour and informal employment in rural areas as sharecroppers. They may have limited access to government services and may rely on their employer for additional assistance in the form of small loans to pay medical expenses if they are not beneficiaries of the social safety net
- **Small-scale farms:** Unless the family owns livestock or has access to additional off-farm income, small-scale farmers are forced to enter into less profitable farming arrangements, such as renting land and sharecropping. They may be indebted to middlemen who help them market their products
- **Large families:** The average Jordanian family has six children, and many families have nine or more members. The composition of the family varies and may include small children, elderly parents and unemployed young adults. Lack of resources to pay for health care and school fees can reduce the living standards of these families to a level of extreme poverty
- **Access to resources:** Various development programmes provide access to improved services for rural and agricultural development. Rural women and isolated and illiterate poor farmers have inadequate access to credit and other services

In addition, 90 per cent of the population lives on only 10 per cent of the country's surface area. As a result of the prolonged conflict in the Middle East, Jordan has hosted several waves of refugees, displaced persons and returnees. This has had a significant impact on the population growth rate. Since 1961, the population has increased fivefold, leading to increased pressure on natural resources, income disparities and growing poverty. Since 2000, the rapid growth rate has slowed.



# Eradicating rural poverty in Jordan

Jordan's National Agenda is focused on supporting steady growth in the country. Within the national policy framework, the Jordan Poverty Alleviation Strategy of 2002 sets out the country's development priorities, including improvements in education, health and employment opportunities. The strategy places special emphasis on:

- expanding the outreach of the National Assistance Fund for poor people
- supporting job creation in the private sector
- supporting business development in targeted communities
- improving infrastructure
- expanding nutritional and health services
- promoting gender equality

The National Strategy for Microfinance supports the poverty alleviation strategy by making microfinance more accessible and more affordable to the country's poor people.

The National Strategy for Agricultural Development focuses on promoting sustainable agricultural development and improving food security in the highlands, Jordanian Badia and the Ghor by:

- improving rural people's access to technology and resources
- ensuring optimum use of resources such as soil and water
- improving access to financial services and marketing support



# IFAD's strategy in Jordan

Projects: 7

Total cost: US\$189.3 million

Total loan amount: US\$71.4 million

Directly benefiting: 69,132 households

IFAD has committed US\$71.4 million in loans to Jordan since 1981 to support agricultural development and reduce rural poverty.

The funds have been used in six agricultural development programmes and projects with a total value of US\$189.3 million. The Government of Jordan and project participants have contributed US\$63.2 million. The programmes and projects are designed by IFAD in collaboration with rural people, the government and other partners. They address poverty through promotion of sustainable natural resource management, particularly water and soil conservation. A seventh project is being designed.

The first IFAD-supported operations in Jordan helped promote the Government's strategies for rainfed agricultural development and extension of credit to small-scale farmers and women. Later operations aimed to improve food and water security and the income levels of small farmers, rural women and landless people. Programmes and projects promote better use of soil and water resources and introduce better management practices, with particular focus on environmental conservation.

Activities focus on:

- providing technical and financial support to develop soil and water conservation measures, and improving agricultural production through people's participation
- promoting sustainable land management practices and providing support to environmental monitoring
- promoting rural microfinance for on-farm and off-farm activities
- strengthening capacity to deliver technical support services and extension in the project areas
- strengthening local communities' capacity to involve all community members in decision-making and project implementation
- strengthening women's capacity to be involved in community participatory planning processes
- addressing women's special needs and interests, including literacy, on-farm and off-farm income-generating activities and credit

Empowering rural poor people to improve their lives in ways that can be sustained beyond the duration of projects is at the heart of IFAD's work.

IFAD supports the Government of Jordan's efforts to improve the social and economic well-being of rural poor people and conserve the country's natural resource base. Through project assistance, policy dialogue and partnership, IFAD contributes to development in the rainfed highlands and rangelands.

In the medium term, IFAD's development assistance in Jordan has focused on:

- building institutions that provide support for rural poor people
- reducing poverty and empowering rural poor people, particularly women
- protecting the environment through conservation of natural resources such as soil, water and rangelands



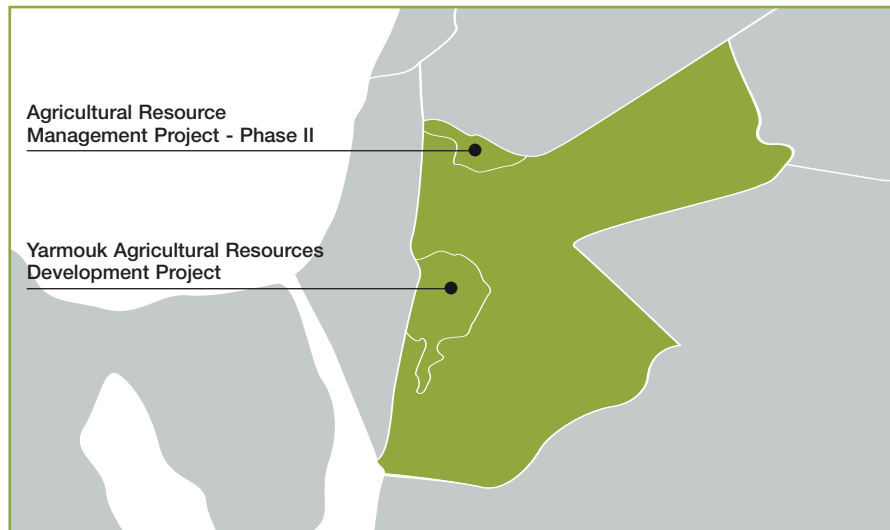


The most recent generation of IFAD projects in Jordan is designed to empower small farmers, herders and rural women and give them a voice in decisions that affect their future. Projects include specific measures to channel assistance to the poorest people in rural areas. There is a particular focus on supporting women and the tasks they traditionally perform, such as food processing, home gardening and handicrafts.

Protecting the environment is a high priority for IFAD. Poverty and environmental degradation go hand in hand, and in Jordan severe environmental problems arise because of the shortage of good quality water and soil. IFAD works to offer rural poor people solutions for environmental problems. Future IFAD projects will give even higher priority to improving the way water is used.

With both an environmental dimension and a human dimension, the main thrusts of IFAD's strategy are the conservation and management of natural resources and the promotion of people's empowerment and participation.

# Ongoing operations



## Agricultural Resource Management Project - Phase II

A community-based participatory approach is at the core of this project, which builds on a first phase, the Agricultural Resource Management Project in the Governorates of Karak and Tafila, which closed in 2003. The second phase of the project directly benefits 75 per cent of the total rural population of the southern highlands, one of Jordan's poorest regions, by improving food and water security and income levels. Poverty in the area affects mainly farmers and landless people, particularly women. Although only 10 per cent of farmers are women, because few women own agricultural land, the proportion of women is high among landless people and other disadvantaged groups involved in the project.

To promote community development and efficient use and improved management of soil and water resources, the project adopts a community-based participatory approach. In partnership with the project, communities themselves elaborate and implement their own village development programmes, and establish criteria for identifying poor and disadvantaged households. The project provides technical and financial support for soil and water conservation and improved agricultural production. It promotes sustainable land and water management practices and environmental monitoring by participants. The project supports rural microfinance for on and off-farm activities and works to strengthen the capacity of local institutions.

## Yarmouk Agricultural Resources Development Project

This IFAD-initiated project helps farmers combat land degradation and restore soil fertility, paving the way for sustainable use of land and water resources. The project supports almost 3,000 poor farming households by:

- providing technical and financial support to promote soil and water conservation measures and improve agricultural production
- providing and funding credit for on-farm and off-farm enterprises
- strengthening the capacity of agricultural institutions to provide the required technical support and extension services

In addition, income-generating programmes are being created to assist about 800 women develop small-scale business enterprises.

**Total cost: US\$42.0 million**

**IFAD financing:**  
loan: US\$11.4 million  
grant: US\$200,000

**Duration: 2005-2013**

**Geographical area: the governorates of Karak and Tafila in the southern highlands**

**Directly benefiting: 22,300 poor rural households, including farmers and landless people**

**Total cost: US\$28.1 million**

**IFAD loan: US\$10.1 million**

**Cofinancing:**  
- OPEC Fund (US\$5.0 million)  
- Abu Dhabi Fund for Agricultural and Economic Development (US\$5.0 million)

**Duration: 2000-2008**

**Directly benefiting: 11,590 households**

# Completed operations

## National Programme for Rangeland Rehabilitation and Development - Phase I

Total cost: US\$9.0 million

IFAD loan: US\$4.0 million

Duration: 1998-2003

Directly benefiting: 12,242 households

## Agricultural Resources Management Project in the Governorates of Karak and Tafila

Total cost: US\$18.5 million

IFAD loan: US\$12.8 million

Duration: 1996-2003

Directly benefiting: 4,500 households

## Income Diversification Project

Total cost: US\$19.7 million

IFAD loan: US\$10.0 million

Duration: 1994-2001

Cofinancing: US\$8.0 million (AFESD)

Directly benefiting: 9,600 households

## Small Farmers Credit Project

Total cost: US\$44.0 million

IFAD loan: US\$12.0 million

Cofinancing: US\$8.7 million (AFESD)

Duration: 1983-1992

Directly benefiting: 1,400 households

## Cooperative Development of Rainfed Agriculture Project

Total cost: US\$28.0 million

IFAD loan: US\$10.6 million

Directly benefiting: 7,500 households

Duration: 1981-1990





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For further information on rural poverty  
in Jordan, visit the Rural Poverty Portal:  
<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org>



## Building a poverty-free world

IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD develops and finances programmes and projects that fit within national systems and respond to the needs, priorities and constraints identified by poor rural people themselves.

Since starting operations in 1978, IFAD has invested US\$9.8 billion in 751 programmes and projects around the world. These initiatives have enabled more than 310 million small farmers, herders, fishers, landless workers, artisans and members of indigenous communities to take steps to achieve better lives for themselves and their families.

But this represents only part of the total investment in IFAD programmes and projects. In the past 29 years, a further US\$16.4 billion in cofinancing has been provided by governments, project participants, multilateral and bilateral donors and other partners.

Working with partners, including poor rural people, governments, NGOs, financial and development institutions and the private sector, IFAD tackles poverty not just as a lender, but also as an advocate for poor rural people. One of its priorities is to assist poor rural people in developing and strengthening their organizations so that they can advance their interests and remove the obstacles that prevent so many people, especially women, from creating better lives for themselves. In this way, poor rural people are able to participate more fully in determining and directing their own development.



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