CASH-FOR-WORK INITIATIVE AIMS TO DEVELOP IRAQ'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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Iraqs humanitarian crisis remains at alarming levels as years of conflict has left millions at risk of food insecurity.

As the violence continues to force people to abandon their farms and agriculture-based livelihoods, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has teamed up with Zain — a regional mobile telecommunications company — to reconstruct Iraqs agriculture sector.

The partnership aims to provide 12,000 displaced families in more than 30 villages with access to urgently needed money through a safe cash payment as a means of restarting or expanding their agriculture activities.

Fadel Al Zubi, FAO representative in Iraq, said the programme targets households with no other income source, including women who are often the sole breadwinners and people with special needs.

The use of mobile technology will streamline the safe delivery of cash transfers to participants, who are some of the most vulnerable people in the country, he said.

Payments are facilitated by Zain whereby participants names and identity numbers are pre-registered with the company and they receive a free sim card.

Once they complete a certain number of days of work, they will receive a text message with a security code enabling them to collect their wages from certified money mobile transfer agents.

Yazen Al Tamimi, managing director of Zain Cash, said that the partnership is part of Zains

corporate social responsibility programme that aims to make a positive difference in the lives of Iraqis through collaborations with civil society organisations.

Our co-operation today with FAO stems from our commitment to assist internally displaced persons in Iraq, as Zain Cash is keen on providing services to cater to the needs of society in all of its segments and improve their standards of living, Mr Al Tamimi said.

With more than 350,000 Iraqis from Nineveh still displaced, according to the International Migration Organisation (IMO), humanitarian needs remain significant after the liberation of Mosul and Tal Afar from ISILs brutal control.

A further 3.2 million people are at risk of food insecurity. Water shortages and the lack or high cost of agricultural inputs continue to negatively affect the performance of the agriculture sector, reported the IMO.

Mr Al Zubi stressed the need to provide income opportunities to families in rural areas that are affected by conflict and where competition for employment is high, jobs are scarce and people are struggling to survive.

Iraq has come so far, and point to point cash delivery is a great advancement, Matthew Cochran, chairman of the Defence Services Marketing Council, said.

The collaboration is secure and enables for new start-up businesses to pop up in Iraq, he said.

However, with smartphones and smart apps continuing to be a target for cybercrime, Mr Cochran warned that Zain Cash will need to educate their users on protecting their passwords and usernames.

Users will be need be as careful as possible with the Zain Cash application as they are with their own personal wallets, he said.

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