

WATER SCARCITY, HUMAN SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIZATION: ASPECTS AND IMPACTS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

An intersectional workshop and supporting activities

April 19, 2016



Co-convened by:

Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global
Institute at the University of Nebraska

UNL Norman and Bernice Harris Center for
Judaic Studies

International Arid Lands Consortium

In partnership with:

Forsythe Family Foundation in Human Rights &
Humanitarian Affairs

UNL Global Studies Program & Department of
Political Science



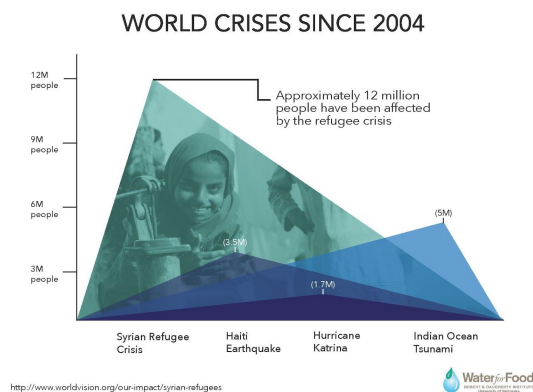
Context

Of the 17 million people in Syria, it's estimated that half the population is currently food insecure. Another 4.6 million refugees have fled Syria, flowing through the borders of neighboring Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and other nations. Host countries, strained to provide enough food and water to their own citizens before the refugee crisis, are challenged more than ever to keep up with growing demands.



On Tuesday, 19th April 2016, the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (WFI), the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), and the International Arid Lands Consortium hosted a workshop on the intersection between water scarcity, human security and democratization as they relate to the Syrian refugee crisis in the arid lands of the Middle East. The all-day workshop was held at the Nebraska Innovation Campus Conference Center and attracted over 90 people from UNL and the broader community.

Team



The workshop was organized with help from a team of interns recruited by WFI in January 2016. The interns, assisted by WFI program associates Paul Noel and Richael Young and Director of Policy Nick Brozovic, undertook background research and managed the workshop logistics and administration. James Garza, Maiya Shahwan and Maddie Thorn, three Global Studies students, worked on promoting the workshop in the UNL community and

through social media. They developed a series of infographics that were displayed on social media and at the workshop. Morgan Spiehs, a photojournalism student, worked with James, Maiya and Maddie. She also developed videos to promote the workshop. Rebecca Lang, a graphic design student, designed all the infographics that were developed by the other interns. Other WFI staff and interns helped on the day of the workshop.

Workshop activities

Introductory remarks

The workshop kicked off with remarks from Harvey Perlman, Chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Chancellor Perlman compared the vital linkages between food, energy, and water in the Middle East and in Nebraska. He spoke of UNL's long-term commitment in the Middle East and North Africa through collaborative activities such as the Global Yield Gap Atlas and National Drought Mitigation Center. Following these remarks, Roberto Lenton, Founding Executive Director of the Water for Food Institute, and Jean Cahan, Director of the Harris Center for Judaic Studies and Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, welcomed speakers and attendees.

Keynote addresses

The three keynote speakers addressed different aspects of water issues in the Middle East. Mr. Khaldon Khashman, Secretary General of the Arab Countries Water



Utilities Association, gave a presentation about the impacts of the Syrian crisis on Jordan's water and wastewater sectors. Mr. Khashman spoke passionately about the problems arising in Jordan, one of the most water insecure countries in the world. He spoke about the needs for unconventional new water sources and for new sewage systems

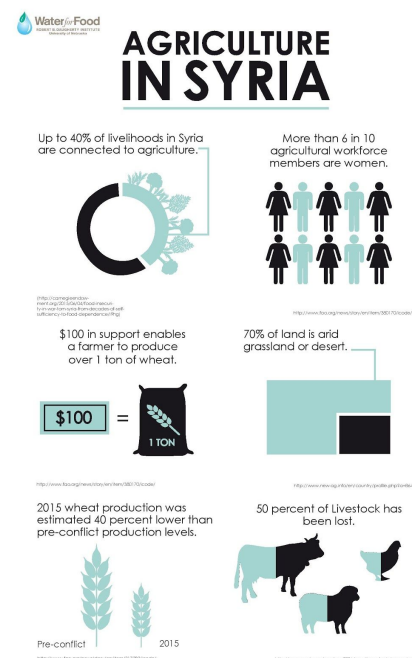
as a result of the refugee influx. He voiced the need to change focus from short-term humanitarian efforts to sustainable, medium-term projects as a solution.

Dr. Anders Jägerskog, Counsellor for Regional Development Cooperation in Water Resources at the Embassy of Sweden in Jordan, talked about the role of droughts and water governance in the Syrian crisis. He informed the audience that drought wasn't the sole cause of the Syrian crisis. Instead, Dr. Jägerskog described how Syria's "misguided" efforts for self-sufficiency in the food sector, as well as the lack of governance and water inefficiency exacerbated the negative impacts of the country's drought. Dr. Jägerskog emphasized that the water crisis in Syria can be attributed to repression and poor governance, not drought.

The third and last keynote speaker was Dr. Clive Lipchin, Director of the Center for Transboundary Water Management at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies. Clive talked about water scarcity issues in the Middle East and particularly in Israel and Jordan. He gave an overview of how Israel manages its water resources and what the most pressing issues are in the region. Dr. Lipchin stressed the need for robust collaboration between countries in the region to solve water sustainability issues, giving examples where collaboration has been effective in improving water management.

Panel discussion

The panel discussion involved several social scientists from UNL. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Jean Cahan; panelists were Dr. David Forsythe, Emeritus Professor of Political Science, Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, Assistant Professor of History, and Dr. Adam Thompson, Assistant Director of the Ethics Center. Panelists discussed historical events leading up to the Syrian crisis, issues of water scarcity and mismanagement of water resources in the region, and the humanitarian consequences of the crisis. Main points made by the panelists included the need to take a long-term view of Syria's history to understand the crisis, the need for developmental assistance in addition to emergency relief, and an



emphasis on how rebuilding Syria after the crisis will require the return of citizens with technical expertise that have fled. The discussion was followed by an engaged question and answer session with the audience.

Conversation with students

The second panel discussion was a conversation with four WFI interns who traveled to Jordan for a week during Spring Break 2016 to learn about the impacts of the refugee crisis on water security. The discussion was moderated by Molly Nance, Director of Communications at WFI. The four students were James Garza, Maiya Shahwan and Maddie Thorn from the Global Studies program and Morgan Spiels from the School of Journalism. Before the conversation, [a 10-minute video](#) produced by Morgan was shown to provide context to the discussion.



The students gave personal stories and perspectives on what they learned and what surprised them during the trip. Maiya, who visits family in Palestine every year, said



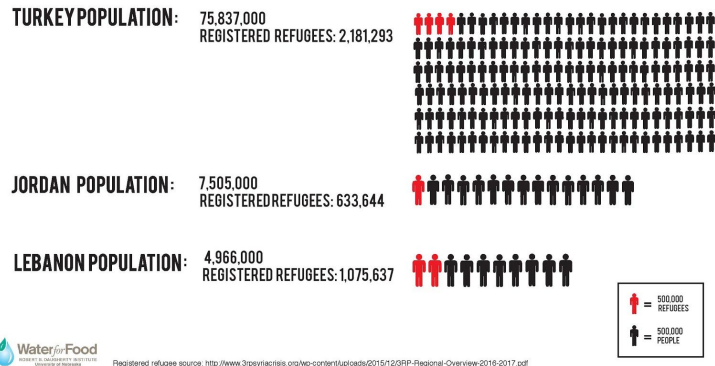
she thought she'd be prepared to enter the Za'atari Refugee Camp, with a population exceeding 80,000 people, until arriving. "I was just speechless," Maiya said. "It was just massive. I didn't think it was going to be that big." The panel members described learning about the impacts of conflict including drought and terrorist activity. "When you're talking about the Syrian crisis,

there's many other factors that have led to this event," James said. The interns also discussed meeting Jordanians directly affected by water rationing and learning about efforts to improve stressed sources of water in the country. The conversation was followed by a lively discussion with the audience.

Movie screening

The workshop concluded with the screening of the movie “Salam Neighbor”, a documentary about two young American men, and their experiences during a stay at the Za’atari refugee camp near the Syrian border in Jordan.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN OTHER COUNTRIES



Workshop multimedia

Prints of Morgan’s photos from the trip to Jordan were displayed at the workshop, together with a slideshow of additional photos and infographics developed by the interns. The infographics and some of Morgan’s photos are reproduced throughout this report.

Supporting activities

Trip to Jordan



From March 17th to March 27th 2016, a team of staff and interns from the Water for Food Institute traveled to Jordan to learn about water and agriculture in the region and humanitarian issues related to the Syrian crisis. The team had meetings with representatives from the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association; GIZ, a German organization supporting international cooperation for sustainable development; the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas; the University of Jordan’s Water and Environmental Research and Study Center, the Swedish Embassy; the United States Agency for International Development; and EcoPeace Middle East. The team was also invited to a field trip to learn about treated

wastewater use and groundwater-irrigated farming in the northern governorate of Jordan. Finally, the team visited the Za'atari refugee camp where they were given a tour of drinking water and wastewater facilities by UNICEF staff. The trip allowed the interns to meet with several workshop speakers, to learn about key issues on the ground, as well as providing background information and content for the workshop.



Photo exhibit

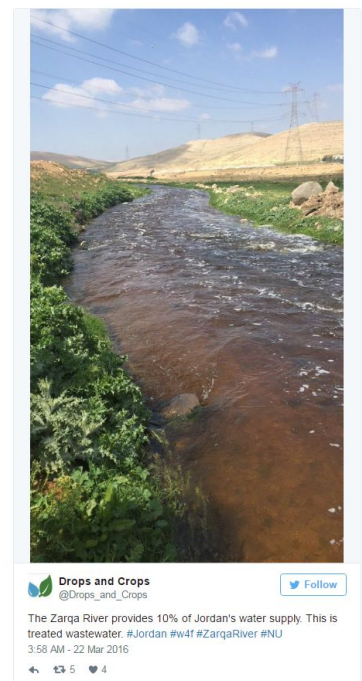
Photos from the interns' trip to Jordan were displayed at a local art gallery in downtown Lincoln to promote the workshop. The exhibit was attended by hundreds of people and drew many positive comments. Because of its success, the exhibit was displayed at the workshop and a second time at the gallery on the Friday following the workshop.

Visits and meetings

International guest speakers were taken on visits and meetings to learn about a variety of water issues in Nebraska. The activities included visits of the UNL research farm, a water exhibit at the Kaneko Museum in Omaha, a Valmont Industries center-pivot manufacturing facility, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, and one of Omaha Metropolitan Utilities District's water treatment plants.

Social media reach

Social media coverage for the workshop included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Engagement was



enhanced by interactions with organizations and influencers including the University's incoming chancellor, Swedish Embassy staff and several WFI employees. Between Twitter and Facebook, over 100 workshop-related posts including photos, videos, blogs and infographics were posted.

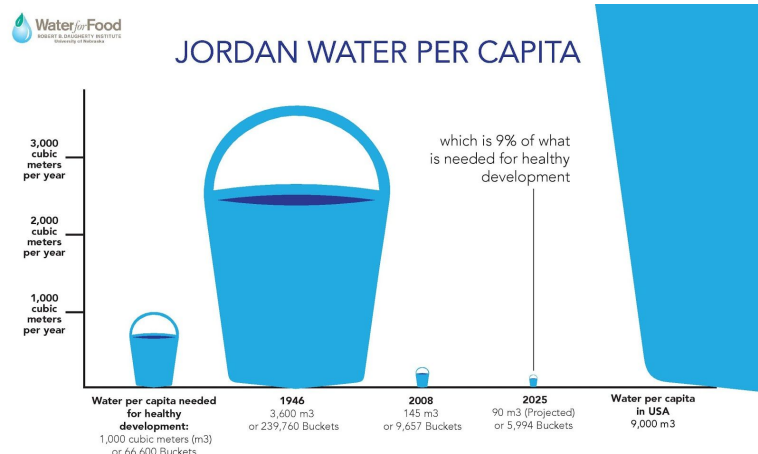
Media coverage

Multiple media outlets published content related to the workshop including the Omaha World Herald, the state's largest newspaper. Articles from UNL's news service and the campus newspaper reached across student, staff and professional audiences.

Outcomes

Increased awareness

The workshop helped raise awareness about humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis and the resulting refugee crisis, as well as about water scarcity in the Middle East, to a broad audience from the UNL and Lincoln communities. About 90 people attended the workshop, including from UNL, Union College, Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, and other organizations. Lincoln has a significant refugee population and a number of representatives from city and state agencies attended the event.



New materials

New materials were developed for the workshop and will be reused by WFI in other contexts. This includes digital copies of Morgan's photos as well as 16 large prints mounted on foam boards that can be displayed at future events. Morgan also produced a video that has been uploaded on the Institute's YouTube channel. A series of infographics was developed that can be reused in the future on social media or printed and displayed during events.

Professional development and future collaborations

The workshop provided valuable professional development to the five interns that helped prepare and organize the event, as well as for Program Associates Richael Young and Paul Noel. International guest speakers enjoyed their visit to Nebraska, and there have been several discussions about potential future collaborations around educational and research programs in the Middle East.



Workshop schedule of events

9:30 – 9:50am	Welcome and opening remarks Harvey Perlman, Chancellor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Roberto Lenton, Founding Executive Director, Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute Jean Cahan, Director, Harris Center for Judaic Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
9:50 – 10:30am	Keynote address Khalidon Khashman, Secretary General, Arab Countries Water Utilities Association
10:30 – 11:00am	Coffee break
11:00 – 11:30am	Keynote address Anders Jägerskog, Counsellor, Regional Development Cooperation, Water Resources, Embassy of Sweden in Jordan
11:30am – 12:00pm	Keynote address Clive Lipchin, Director, Center for Transboundary Water Management, Arava Institute for Environmental Studies
12:00 – 1:00pm	Lunch break
1:00 – 2:00pm	Panel discussion David Forsythe, Emeritus Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bedross Der Matossian, Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Adam Thompson, Assistant Director, Ethics Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Jean Cahan, Harris Center for Judaic Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
2:00 – 3:00pm	Conversation with students on their trip to Jordan James Garza, Global Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Maiya Shahwan, Global Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Morgan Spiehs, School of Journalism, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Maddie Thorn, Global Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
3:00 – 3:30pm	Break
3:30 – 5:00pm	Screening of the movie Salam Neighbor

Keynote speaker biographies



Eng. Khaldon Khashman is a senior water utilities management expert, who has served the water sector in Jordan for more than 25 years. He started his career at the Jordan Drinking Water Corporation, then filled multiple positions at the Water Authority of Jordan in different service areas in Jordan. Eng. Khashman is a member of the board of directors of the Water Authority of Jordan, municipal councils, the Jordan Engineers Association and other professional organizations, and a former board member of the Jordan Water Company (Miyahuna), Northern Governorates Water Administration and Aqaba Water Company. He has attended more than 40 local and international professional training programs covering technical, financial, legal and administrative issues in water utilities. Since 2009 Eng. Khashman has been working as the Secretary General for the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA). He strongly believes in the importance of knowledge and experience transfer between Arab water utilities and promoting ACWUA as a regional center of excellence that will partner with water supply and wastewater utilities in Arab countries to provide best practice service delivery to customers.



Dr. Anders Jägerskog is currently Counselor at the Swedish Embassy in Amman, Jordan, with responsibility for Swedish support to regional water resources in the MENA region. He is on leave of absence from his position as Director at the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI). At SIWI he headed the Transboundary Unit and the Applied Research work of SIWI and was the project manager for the UNDP programme, Shared Waters Partnership (SWP). From August 2009 to August 2011 he was on leave of absence to work as Senior Programme Manager of Water Resources at the Embassy of Sweden in Nairobi. He is Associate Professor in Peace and Development Research at the University of Gothenburg. He has worked at the Expert Group on Development Issues (EGDI) at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, at the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), and at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on Middle Eastern

security issues. In 2003 he finished his PhD on the water negotiations in the Jordan River Basin at the Department of Water and Environmental Studies at the Linköping University, Sweden.



Dr. Clive Lipchin serves as Director of the Arava Institute's Center for Transboundary Water Management. He oversees research projects, workshops and conferences that focus on transboundary water and environmental problems facing Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. His specialty is in water resources management and policy. Clive consults for a number of national and international water agencies such as the World Bank, EU, UNDP and USAID and has been involved most recently with the European Union's Water Initiative project for the Mediterranean region and the USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) program. Clive's research focuses on cross-border stream restoration and wastewater management issues between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and on integrated food, energy and water systems for off-grid communities in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. This work is being supported in part by the EU, USAID, the British Council, the Israeli Ministry for Regional Cooperation and the US National Science Foundation. Clive, a native from South Africa, has been living in Israel for over 20 years. He received a BSc in zoology at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, a BSc Honors in wildlife management from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, a MSc in desert ecology from the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel and a Ph.D. in resource ecology management from the School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Michigan.

Clive has published and presented widely on the topic of transboundary water management in the Middle East and has served as senior editor on two books: "Integrated Water Resources Management in the Middle East" and "The Jordan River and Dead Sea Basin: Cooperation amid Conflict". Since the online publication of "The Jordan River and Dead Sea Basin: Cooperation amid Conflict" there has been a total of 2,440 chapter downloads of the book making it one of the top 50% most downloaded eBooks in the Springer eBook Collection.

Intern blog posts

International cooperation in Jordan: balancing cultural and practical issues

April 22, 2016

Tags: [Middle East/North Africa](#)



A view of Amman, Jordan from the top of al-Qa'ala or the Roman Citadel

By James Garza, Water for Food Institute student intern and global studies major at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

A team of Water for Food Institute staff and four student interns traveled to Amman, Jordan March 18-26 to learn first-hand about the impacts of the Syrian crisis on neighboring countries and the difficulties local governments face in providing water and food to thousands of refugees. The students also explored Jordanian culture and history, including visits to world-famous archeological sites. The team showcased what they learned during the conference, "Water Scarcity, Human Security and Democratization: Aspects and Impacts of the Syrian Crisis," April 19 at Nebraska Innovation Campus. WFI intern James Garza shares his experience.

Jordan's relative stability and motivated government make it a central place for international cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa. Various organizations have been in place for decades in Jordan, but only recently has the country received attention due to its response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

My recent visit to Jordan highlighted international cooperation that is being used to respond the crisis, as well as the history of cooperation between the Jordanian government and various organizations before Syrian refugees were in the minds of every Jordanian.

After interviewing officials from organizations such as USAID, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association and the University of Jordan, a common theme emerged of two sides of a solution to the water scarcity issues facing Jordan.

The element of cultural and community inclusion in solving water distribution issues was advocated by regional organizations such as Eco-Peace and GIZ Jordan at the Ministry of Water and Irrigation.

Water user associations were created in order to give small communities of farmers and other water consumers a voice in the decision-making process regarding water distribution. Often times, disputes over water and where it should go originate from tribal claims that date back hundreds of years. Navigating centuries old norms regarding water usage with projects utilizing modern technology is proving difficult for the Jordanian government and the Jordan valley.

Although Jordanian and Arab water professionals advocate for such associations as a smart solution, western professionals in Jordan seem to not agree. When speaking to organizations from western countries such as the United States, these water user associations were described as a waste of money. Some feel that the money and time spent on these associations can be better used to fund the many projects the kingdom needs to use their water more efficiently.

The farmers that make up these water-sharing associations are also criticized for the crops that they insist on growing as well. Crops such as bananas and tomatoes require amounts of water that are not sustainable in Jordan, and yet are still being grown. Although there are efforts by researchers and the government to replace the crops grown with ones that require less water, some of these plants have a cultural significance that is a challenge.

One crop in particular that is widely grown in Jordan, yet requires irrigation is the olive tree. It is believed among Muslims that the Prophet Muhammad said, "anoint yourself with olive oil because it comes from a blessed tree." The olive tree is referenced in the holy texts of Islam and remains today a significant part of agriculture in Jordan and the Levantine area.

One American official working on projects to help Jordan use its water more efficiently in agriculture expressed his dismay for the growth of olive trees in Jordan. Olive trees are meant to be rain-fed, yet are irrigated due to the arid climate they are grown in.

Although many of the organizations working on water scarcity and drought prevention in Jordan would love to see the farmers give up plants such as the olive tree, there is a cultural barrier set in place with deeper roots than some people may believe.

The solution to this problem needs to address the financial requirements for the projects while balancing the cultural norms associated with farming that date back hundreds and even thousands of years. This is where international cooperation is crucial between western and eastern oriented organizations. From what I saw in Jordan, I believe all organizations are aware of these issues and are not wasting time to work together to solve a water problem that is turning into a crisis.

James, originally from Laredo, Texas, is a junior undergraduate student working on a bachelor's degree in global studies with minors in Arabic, history, and national security studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. James' regional specialization is the Middle East and North Africa, with an emphasis on security issues in the region. James is president of the Great Plains National Security Education Consortium, a student organization affiliated with UNL's national security program. In addition to management and leadership of the 60+ member organization, he is also working on research regarding deterrence of cyber-attacks on U.S. space assets in addition to developing an intelligence simulation to compete for a contract with the Defense Intelligence Agency. James has spent time studying Arabic in Amman, Jordan in addition to traveling with a University of Nebraska delegation in Oman.

He hopes to help guide policy on the Middle East for U.S. decision-makers and work in diplomacy to build relationships with other countries in the Middle East. He hopes that his experience at WFI will give him insight on critical environmental issues that are drivers in issues in the Middle East and North Africa today.

Photographing Jordan: joyous firsts and lessons from a broken lens

April 15, 2016



Carved out of a sandstone rock face, tourists crowd around The Treasury in Petra.

By Morgan Spiels, student intern, Water for Food Institute; senior news-editorial and women's and gender studies major; University of Nebraska–Lincoln

A team of Water for Food Institute staff and four student interns traveled to Amman, Jordan March 18-26 to learn first-hand about the impacts of the Syrian crisis on neighboring countries and the difficulties local governments face in providing water and food to thousands of refugees. The students also explored Jordanian culture and history, including visits to world-famous archeological sites. They will showcase what they learned during the conference, "Water Scarcity, Human Security and Democratization: Aspects and Impacts of the Syrian Crisis," April 19 at Nebraska Innovation Campus. WFI intern Morgan Spiels shares her experience.

I heard a distinctive sound that my camera didn't land well.

I stood up quickly after slipping and falling down a few stairs of the second century Roman amphitheater. My lens took the hit. I had yet to determine how extensive the damage was, but I crossed my fingers in hope

that an expert's removal of the bent filter would do the trick. My Keds were no match for the theater's stairs, which were much steeper than any multi-million dollar arena I had been to in the United States. I was strangely comforted by the idea many Romans may have also fallen down those same steps.

We'd been in Amman, Jordan for less than 12 hours and I was down one lens. I only had two.

This was my fourth international trip as a photographer and videographer. I've been working as a photojournalist for over four years and never broke a camera or lens. This trip was full of joyous firsts: My first adventure in the Middle East, my first camel ride outside of the state fair and my first time dancing dabke. But my first lens break was not such a joyous first.

I felt defeated, embarrassed and afraid I let my team down. I was the only intern responsible for capturing the sights and sounds of our study tour – and wondered how my work would suffer having only one lens at my disposal. But the trip carried on.

On previous travels, I chose my story. I Googled topics I was interested in within each country I was traveling to, made contacts and documented the story after arriving in the country. Our trip to Jordan was the first time I'd traveled without a set story. Instead, I wondered how to document broad issues related to water, agriculture and humanitarian matters. Not only were these broad concepts I wasn't sure how to document, it was also a heavy topic. Our conference is focusing on the impact of the Syrian Crisis, a crisis I believe could be the most significant human plight of my lifetime. I felt and continue to feel momentous pressure to give the weight of this issue justice within the work I do during my internship.

Another difference between this trip and my previous travels as a photojournalist was that we were able to be tourists outside of the work we did in Jordan. On other trips, I'd almost exclusively focused on my stories and other than a trip to the Taj Mahal, I don't recall feeling like a tourist in India, Brazil or Ethiopia. In Jordan, outside of our interviews and work related-trips we floated in the Dead Sea, we hiked to the Monastery at Petra, and rode in the back of a pickup driven by a bedouin in a desert used as a film set to emulate Mars. My appreciation for these experiences hasn't even sunk in yet.

Though, oddly enough, being a tourist raised issues for me. I'm a photojournalist through-and-through. I rarely remember to take photographs when I'm in a tourist capacity and don't find joy in it personally. I felt out of my element attempting to find the moments between interacting with others or within a certain environment while in Petra or Wadi Rum like I do when I'm at a Nebraska football game or a women's rights rally. And there was the disadvantage of my broken lens weighing on top of this uncertainty. Luckily, Richael, one of our Water for Food trip sponsors who joined us late in the trip, was able to bring another lens for me to use for the remainder of the trip.

Within 48 hours of returning to the United States, my photos were slated for printing. The reaction from the First Friday show we hosted featuring photos I took on the trip was astounding and reassuring of my worries related to my work and the gravity of the topic we covered. My friends, family and strangers asked questions related to water scarcity, irrigation and humanitarian issues. Hundreds of people filtered through the gallery and read the detailed captions accompanying each photo with information pertaining to the area's complicated crisis. A friend and fellow photographer said he couldn't believe I photographed how I did with one lens for most of the trip. I enjoyed the evening, feeling my worries were laid to rest. But there's still work left to do.

See you April 19.

Students and experts on water issues in the Middle East will present a one-day conference April 19 to discuss the important water security and humanitarian implications of the Syrian refugee crisis, focusing on the impacts in Jordan. "Water Scarcity, Human Security and Democratization: Aspects and Impacts of the Syrian Crisis" will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Nebraska Innovation Campus conference center, 2021 Transformation Dr., Lincoln, Neb. USA. It is free and open to the public with online registration requested. For more details on the event, including the full agenda and registration page, visit: <http://wfiglobal.org/10mlft>.

Morgan Spiehs is a senior news-editorial and women's and gender studies major from Wood River, Neb. She's interned for the Northeast Nebraska News Company, the Lincoln Journal Star and News 21, a national investigative journalism project. Her work in the United States and abroad has been nationally and internationally recognized. As a Water for Food Institute video intern for spring 2016, she hopes to create visuals that inspire positive change and further the WFI's mission. After graduation, Spiehs hopes to combine what she learns from the WFI and her photo/video skills and continue working for humanitarian and environmental causes.

Jordan's Za'atari camp reveals the power of hope, resilience

April 21, 2016

Tags: [Middle East/North Africa](#)



Syrians walk and ride their bikes down the Champs-Élysées market street in the Za'atari refugee camp. Photo by Molly Nance.

By Madison Thorn, Water for Food Institute student intern and global studies major at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

A team of Water for Food Institute staff and four student interns traveled to Amman, Jordan March 18-26 to learn first-hand about the impacts of the Syrian crisis on neighboring countries and the difficulties local governments face in providing water and food to thousands of refugees. The students also explored Jordanian culture and history, including visits to world-famous archeological sites. The team showcased what they learned during the conference, [“Water Scarcity, Human Security and Democratization: Aspects and Impacts of the Syrian Crisis,”](#) April 19 at Nebraska Innovation Campus. WFI intern Madison Thorn shares her experience.

Over the last four months, I have been doing intensive research on the Syrian Crisis. Before my trip to Jordan last month, I could have told you that there are 4,837,208 million registered refugees and 638,633 thousand living in Jordan. However, knowledge and experience are two different things.

All the research in the world could not have prepared me for the experience of seeing the Za'atari refugee camp with my own eyes. When I entered camp, I stepped into the lives of the refugees. Za'atari is the Middle East's largest camp for civil war refugees with a population of nearly 80,000 people. It is a place where one would expect to find so much darkness, yet the Syrians are illuminated by hope and continue to strive for a better life. The circumstances are not ideal in the camp. The houses are small, but the system is strong. UNICEF and other organizations keep the camp sanitized and the water supply constant.

I expected to see tent after tent but found that there were rectangular unit homes painted with various colored murals. The murals represented important valued aspects for a healthy life, such as water, hygiene, education, etc. The Syrian people are strong willed and hard working. Those living in Za'atari built a city from the dirt and rocks, an unthinkable place. The main and busiest street in the camp is the market street, otherwise known as the Champs-Élysées. Syrians are clever too. In Jordan, work by refugees is not permitted by the government and is hard to find. Instead of finding work outside the camp, they make work for themselves. The Syrians took this camp full of tents and units and made it a place where they can profit; a place with an economy where they have something to do each day while they wait for the fighting to stop and they can return home.

During our visit in Za'atari, I had a conversation with Aiya, a UNICEF volunteer. I was specifically touched by her words and description of the camp. In her time working there, she has found the spirit of the place irresistible, making her always want more and always want to return. She wanted to buy a tent to live in the camp to be closer to the people instead of making the two-hour drive day in and day out from Amman. She is extremely dedicated and committed to the work she does and compels others, like myself, to do the same.

Another experience in Za'atari was with Omar Abdul, a Syrian man who has been living in the camp for two years with his family. He told us the conditions were good, and that he and his family drink the water available and that it is safe. He was a kind man in high spirits. Omar kept inviting us for tea and coffee, insisting we go and share more time with him. A man with so little, who has suffered through many hardships, still finds a place in his heart for generosity and benevolence.

Did you know that only 20 percent of the refugees in Jordan live in designated refugee camps and are being supported by groups like UNICEF and other NGOs? Most of the refugees, more than half a million, find their homes outside the camps in communities. This has a large impact on the Jordanian infrastructure and water resources. Jordan, the third most water-poor country in the world, already deals with a high level of stress on its resources. Yet its people continue to be generous and open their borders for Syrians to find a safe home away from violence.

6,566 miles away from home, I found myself learning more than I could have from hours spent behind the screen of my computer. There is so much to learn through cross-cultural interactions. I learned so much from both the Jordanian and Syrian people. Jordanians continue to let refugees in, hosting more than 3 million refugees from all over the region, even when times are tough. The Syrian people continue to act compassionately and show kindness to others even in the most difficult of times. They open their hearts to others and show resilience against the war back at home, not letting it destroy who they are. They are strong and courageous to leave their lives behind and enter a city, town, community, or camp that is foreign to them. There is so much to learn from Syrians; I hope the world can learn from their hospitable ways and show them the same level of respect. They haven't lost hope – and we shouldn't either.

Madison Thorn is an undergraduate student pursuing a global studies major and communication studies and Spanish minors at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She is originally from Phoenix, Arizona and has a passion for cultural immersion. She has spent time studying abroad in both Ecuador and Spain. This spring she has been researching the Syrian refugee crisis, specifically in regard to water scarcity and its humanitarian implications. Thorn will graduate in May 2016 and hopes to continue her thirst for cultural immersion by teaching English on a Fulbright Scholarship in Mexico.

Budget breakdown

Workshop

Airfare	\$5,544.10
Other transportation	\$342
Lodging	\$1,277.33
Food	\$1,638.90
Conference center rental	\$1,000
Intern salaries	\$4,780
Other expenses	\$402

Total: \$14,984.33

Supporting activities

Airfare	\$11,576.08
Other transportation	\$899.99
Lodging	\$386.46
Food	\$5,290.78
Printing and publishing	\$720.81
Other expenses	\$1,372.53

Total: \$20,246.65

Grand total: \$35,230.98