Syria country programme evaluation 2025

Time: June-November 2025

Carried out by: Jouri Research and Consulting

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation reviewed the **Finn Church Aid (FCA) Syria Country Programme** covering the period **2022–2024**, assessing its **relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability**, and **cross-cutting commitments**. The purpose of the evaluation was to inform the Implementation of FCA's Global Programme 2026-2029 along with the design of SYRCO's next country strategy. The evaluation equally worked to identify actionable recommendations to strengthen programme **quality, localisation**, and **long-term impact**. As part of the evaluation, FCA aimed to establish an understanding of the strategically relevant opportunities that FCA is yet to seize. **Jouri for Research and Consulting** was contracted by FCA to carry out this evaluation. The evaluation was conducted between July and October 2025.

The evaluation combined a review of programme documentation with extensive field consultations, including **12 focus group discussions (FGDs)**, **30 key informant interviews (KIIs)**, **180 beneficiary surveys** and **3 case studies** across FCA's main operational hubs in **Aleppo** and **Hama**. It examined interventions across **education, livelihoods, humanitarian response, and protection**, as well as FCA's partnerships with local civil society and faith-based actors.

The evaluation finds that FCA's Syria Country Programme overall aligns with FCA's global priorities in education and livelihoods and has made **significant contributions** to restoring **learning opportunities, rebuilding livelihoods**, and **responding rapidly to humanitarian needs** in a highly complex and volatile operating context. The programme has demonstrated strong **adaptability**, effective **partnership management**, and commendable **responsiveness** to evolving crises, including the 2023 earthquake. FCA's Rights-Based Approach (RBA) was well applied at project level, but evidence of influence at systemic or policy levels remained limited.

Evaluation Findings

Relevance: FCA's strategies and interventions were highly relevant and closely aligned with the evolving needs and priorities of affected populations and national frameworks. Beneficiaries valued the focus on education, livelihoods, and emergency response, with 93% confirming alignment with their needs. FCA's rapid adaptation to the 2023 earthquake response illustrated its strong capacity and commitment to being a "first responder in emergency situations," a core tenet of its Humanitarian Strategy.

Coherence: The Syria Country Programme demonstrated strong overall coherence, aligning effectively with UN coordination mechanisms and peer interventions. FCA's work complemented Ministry of Education and local recovery plans, ensuring synergy with HRP sectoral strategies. Integrated area-based programming fostered links between education, livelihoods, and humanitarian assistance. However, internal coherence varied across governorates, and donor-driven fragmentation and short project cycles at times limited coordination and continuity.

Effectiveness: FCA's programme was largely effective, meeting most targets across education, livelihoods, and humanitarian aid, with 85–97% beneficiary satisfaction. Education yielded the strongest outcomes, while livelihoods and cash support stabilised vulnerable households. Community-driven and inclusive approaches, guided by gender-disaggregated data, promoted equitable access for women and other vulnerable groups. However, monitoring data was mainly used for compliance and reporting, with limited evidence of systematic use for learning or adaptive management. While FCA's MEAL systems, policies, and tools are in place, their practical application at the country level remains limited. Use of PME and SAC global support was also constrained by insufficient MEAL capacity within the Syria Country Office.

Efficiency: The programme maintained strong financial discipline and value-for-money, delivering most outputs on time and within budget despite inflation, liquidity shortages, and donor fragmentation. Although quantitative cost-efficiency data was unavailable, qualitative evidence confirmed robust financial control and operational agility, particularly during the 2023 earthquake response. Efficiency gains from direct implementation, however, came with trade-offs, including reduced partner engagement, heavier staff workloads, and risks to long-term sustainability.

Impact: FCA's interventions contributed meaningfully to improved education, livelihoods, and community resilience. Education support restored learning continuity and psychosocial wellbeing, while vocational training enhanced employability and women's economic participation. Community structures such as PTAs and savings groups continued to function, fostering agency and improving social cohesion. Institutional influence was demonstrated through the partial uptake of FCA methodologies by education authorities. Yet, beyond project-level evidence, available data does not provide a full picture of macro-level or institutional impact.

Sustainability: FCA achieved moderate to strong sustainability in community and technical outcomes. Most trained teachers, graduates, and committees continued to apply skills six to twelve months post-project. Institutional ownership was strengthened through collaboration with education authorities and active community structures. Nevertheless, financial and systemic sustainability remained constrained by Syria's fragile economy and short funding cycles. Localisation efforts involved trade-offs: while direct implementation enhanced efficiency, it limited shared governance and financial autonomy for local actors. FCA's participatory, localised approach fostered adaptable systems and latent capacity for sustained recovery despite external risks.

Cross-Cutting Issues: FCA effectively mainstreamed gender equality, disability inclusion, and conflict sensitivity across its programme, with measurable progress in women's leadership, community trust, and safeguarding. Environmental integration was modest—mainly solar energy in schools—constrained by humanitarian priorities and limiting progress toward FCA's environmental objectives.

Evaluation Recommendations – Strategic Level (FCA Country Office, Service & Accountability Center)

1. **Strengthen localisation and empower national partners** – Transition national NGOs from sub-grantees to co-leaders, invest in leadership and educational management capacities, and ensure senior FCA presence on the ground for strategic engagement and policy dialogue.
2. **Strengthen the humanitarian–development nexus** – Integrate nexus thinking into all programme designs, prioritise areas where FCA has comparative advantage, consolidate EiE as a flagship response, and link humanitarian interventions to long-term recovery and system-level strengthening.
3. **Institutionalise cross-sector coordination and referrals** – Establish formal coordination mechanisms, enhance cross-governorate collaboration through joint planning and learning, and advocate for multi-year, flexible funding to ensure coherent, integrated programming.
4. **Institutionalise evidence-driven planning and adaptive management** – Embed adaptive learning processes, strengthen knowledge management systems, and ensure data, insights, and community feedback systematically inform programme design and strategic decision-making.
5. **Strengthen outcome-level monitoring and adaptive learning** – Shift MEAL systems toward outcome-focused measurement, build partner capacity for data analysis, and allocate resources for Third-Party Monitoring and independent evaluations to enhance quality and accountability.

6. **Integrate exit and transition planning into design** – Embed sustainability milestones, handover strategies, and institutional partnerships into project inception, and prioritise multi-year planning to ensure continuity and national ownership of results.
7. **Mainstream environmental sustainability and climate resilience** – Integrate environmental and climate considerations into all programming to reduce risk, align with national recovery priorities, future-proof operations, and strengthen community resilience.

<u>**Evaluation Recommendations – Programme Level (FCA Country Office)**</u>

8. **Strengthen pathways from training to employment** – Align vocational training with market demand, enhance post-training support, and focus on areas where FCA has proven comparative advantage to maximise sustainable employment outcomes.
9. **Conduct regular market assessments for livelihoods** – Implement systematic and ongoing market analysis to ensure livelihood interventions remain relevant, adaptive, and aligned with evolving economic conditions.
10. **Provide mentoring and post-grant follow-up for livelihood participants** – Institutionalise structured mentoring and aftercare to enhance business survival, strengthen self-reliance, and increase the durability of livelihood outcomes.
11. **Integrate structured MHPSS across sectors** – Mainstream psychosocial support in education and livelihoods programmes, particularly in earthquake-affected areas, to strengthen well-being, holistic recovery, and community resilience.
12. **Strengthen and institutionalise inclusion and accessibility** – Embed inclusion and accessibility standards into PME tools, partner agreements, and programme design, reinforce staff and partner capacity, and apply systematic monitoring using disaggregated data and inclusion indicators.
13. **Expand outreach to underserved and remote communities** – Extend programme coverage to marginalised and hard-to-reach areas through mobile and flexible delivery models, community-based partnerships, digital and low-tech engagement tools, and inclusive design ensuring equitable access.