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Independent Final Evaluation of the BOUZOUR Project Building Inclusive Markets and Decent Work for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities

QUICK FACTS

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

BOUZOUR was funded by Sida and implemented by ILO in Lebanon from July 2023 to March 2026. It aimed to make agricultural and agri-food markets work better for Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees, while also promoting decent work. In simple terms, the project tried to improve the system around farmers and workers, not only to provide one-off support to individual people.

The project used ILO's Approach to Inclusive Market Systems (AIMS). This means that BOUZOUR tried to work through the actors who already shape the market: farmers, cooperatives, exporters, service providers, local manufacturers, training institutions, ministries, employers' and workers' organisations, and implementing partners. The logic was that change is more likely to continue when these actors have a reason to continue it after project funding ends.

The project focused on four main outcome areas. First, it supported greenhouse upgrading, climate-smart agriculture and selected contract-farming or structured-sourcing models. Second, it supported the cherry value chain through export readiness, certification, post-harvest improvements, farmer-exporter coordination and decent work entry points. Third, it supported access to solar energy for agriculture through technical assessments and shared or rental productive infrastructure. Fourth, it supported Improve Your Agribusiness (IYAB) and SIYB institutional anchoring so that agribusiness skills could continue through local trainers and institutions.

The project's Theory of Change evolved during implementation. It was designed around a market-systems logic, but Lebanon's crisis context forced practical adaptation. Economic collapse, banking and liquidity constraints, energy shortages, conflict escalation, movement restrictions and agricultural market disruption made it difficult for many actors to invest or take risk. BOUZOUR therefore kept its AIMS orientation, but combined facilitation with targeted and time-bound de-risking where market actors could not realistically carry investment risk alone.

Geographically, the evaluation covered the main areas where BOUZOUR operated, including Akkar, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon and Beirut-based institutional and market actors. South Lebanon and some conflict-affected locations could not be covered through direct

	fieldwork because of security conditions. The project was managed by ILO, with Sida funding, AIMS technical backstopping and implementation through several partners and market actors.
Present situation of the project	The project was implemented in a highly volatile context marked by economic crisis, liquidity constraints, inflation, institutional fragility, conflict escalation and geographic access restrictions. Several interventions had to adapt to changing security, market and partner conditions, and South Lebanon could not be covered through direct fieldwork during the evaluation period. By project closure, BOUZOUR had exceeded several formal output and outcome targets and had generated credible early behaviour-change and systemic-change signals, particularly in greenhouse upgrades, SmartLand climate-smart services and IYAB/SIYB institutional anchoring. The cherry pathway also showed important potential, but requires more seasons and more stable market conditions to confirm its systemic potential. Solar energy access was relevant, but remained constrained by affordability and liquidity. The overall situation of the project can therefore be explained simply: BOUZOUR delivered strongly under crisis conditions, but some results remain early. The project opened doors, tested models and created practical examples. Several promising pathways now require follow-up, finance, repeated market testing or stronger institutional ownership before they can be considered fully sustainable or systemic.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The independent final evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact orientation and sustainability of BOUZOUR, including cross-cutting issues related to gender equality, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability, decent work, tripartism and social dialogue. The evaluation covered the full implementation period from July 2023 to March 2026, all four outcome areas, and the main geographic areas where BOUZOUR operated, including Akkar, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon and Beirut-based institutional and market actors. Due to security conditions, South Lebanon and some conflict-affected locations could not be covered through direct fieldwork and were assessed through remote interviews, project documentation, partner data and triangulation with other stakeholder perspectives. The evaluation focused on both accountability and learning. Its primary clients are ILO, Sida, project

	stakeholders, implementing partners, constituents and future programme designers working on inclusive market systems and decent work in fragile and crisis-affected agricultural contexts.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation used a mixed-methods, theory-based contribution analysis approach, combining document review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and analysis of project monitoring data and result chains. Evidence was assessed against the Evaluation Question Matrix agreed in the inception phase and interpreted through OECD-DAC criteria and the AIMS/AAER lens. The evaluation distinguished between project-reported results, triangulated evidence and evaluator judgement. The evaluation did not try to prove strict attribution. This was a performance evaluation, not an impact evaluation with a counterfactual. It therefore assessed plausible project contribution by comparing evidence from documents, interviews, focus groups, monitoring data and stakeholder validation. Gender equality, disability inclusion and other ILO cross-cutting issues were integrated through sampling, data-collection tools and analysis across the criteria. The evaluation included women workers, farmers, IYAB participants and relevant institutional actors where feasible. It also reviewed whether decent work, worker voice, child labour, OSH, disability inclusion and just transition were built into the intervention logic and evidence. The main limitations were the short evaluation timeframe, exclusion of South Lebanon from direct fieldwork due to conflict, reliance on available project and partner data, and limited in-season validation of some cherry labour findings because one cherry worker focus group was conducted outside the harvest season. These limitations do not invalidate the findings, but they require careful wording, especially where evidence concerns systemic change, seasonal labour or longer-term sustainability.
MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	Overall assessment BOUZOUR was a highly relevant and strongly delivered project implemented under exceptionally difficult conditions. The project team and partners delivered important results despite economic crisis, financial-sector dysfunction, energy shortages, conflict escalation, access restrictions and market volatility. This is a major

positive finding. At the same time, the evaluation keeps a clear line between delivery, behaviour change and mature systemic transformation. BOUZOUR delivered strongly and generated credible early systems-change signals, but full systemic transformation across the whole portfolio was not yet mature at project closure.

This distinction is not a criticism of the project. It is a realistic reading of what can be expected from a short AIMS project in a crisis context. Several models were tested, adopted and partly adapted by market actors. Some are close to a stronger sustainability pathway. Others still need finance, repeated seasons, institutional follow-through or stronger market response. The evaluation therefore assesses BOUZOUR positively while remaining careful about claims that require more time to prove.

Relevance - High

BOUZOUR was highly relevant to Lebanon's crisis-affected agricultural market system and to the economic realities of Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees. Agriculture was an appropriate sector because Lebanese farmers, agri-food SMEs, cooperatives, service providers, Syrian seasonal and permanent agricultural workers, and women workers are all present in this market. This made agriculture a practical entry point for inclusive livelihoods, decent work and enterprise resilience.

The project was most relevant where it addressed concrete constraints that actors already felt: productivity, water and energy efficiency, greenhouse working conditions, market access, certification, business skills and post-harvest quality. These were not abstract development topics. They were problems that farmers, workers, service providers and enterprises had to deal with in daily economic life.

Relevance to Syrian workers and women was also clear, but more difficult to translate into strong worker-side pathways. Agriculture in Lebanon is highly informal. Worker representation is weak. Syrian workers are vulnerable and often have limited bargaining power. This meant that decent work could be addressed where it was connected to productivity, OSH, quality or buyer requirements, but it was harder to build a strong independent worker-voice pathway.

Coherence - Medium-high overall; high strategic coherence

BOUZOUR was strategically coherent. It aligned well with ILO's Decent Work mandate, AIMS, sustainable enterprises, productive

employment, social justice and just transition priorities. It also aligned with Sida's focus on resilience, livelihoods, inclusion, market systems and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Lebanon. The project addressed the right types of market-system functions: access to technology, climate-smart services, certification, market access, business skills, energy, recruitment, OSH and decent work.

Internal ILO coherence was strong. The project coordinated with relevant ILO project teams and technical structures, including DWT, ROAS and AIMS backstopping. This supported a practical OneILO approach by linking market systems, sustainable enterprise development, OSH, gender, decent work and just transition perspectives. It also kept relevant ILO structures informed on progress and results.

The main coherence weakness was not strategic. It was operational portfolio integration. Several pathways were relevant and worked on complementary functions, but they often operated in parallel rather than as one deliberately connected portfolio. Solar addressed energy, greenhouse upgrades addressed technology and OSH, cherry addressed certification and export access, IYAB addressed business skills, PlantLab addressed recruitment, and QOOT addressed structured sourcing. These are coherent functions, but they were not always strongly linked around shared bottlenecks such as finance, market access, certification, labour services or buyer requirements. Access to finance was the clearest unresolved cross-portfolio connector. The project did test affordability, rental, shared-use and de-risking approaches. Still, Lebanon's financial crisis, frozen liquidity and weak feasibility of conventional finance made this a structural constraint. This affected solar adoption, cold chain, greenhouse upgrades, SmartLand uptake, cherry post-harvest investment and scale-up of promising models.

Effectiveness - Medium-high

BOUZOUR was effective in delivering outputs and exceeding formal targets. The project reported 274 farms with improved productivity or working conditions against a target of 60; 146 farmers connected to new market opportunities against a target of 50; 490 farmers enabled to benefit from solar-powered productive infrastructure or services against a target of 100; and 303 farmers and small agri-businesses capacitated to better manage their operations against a

target of 200. These are strong delivery results in a highly constrained context.

The effectiveness rating is medium-high rather than simply high because target achievement does not automatically mean mature systemic change. The project did what it said it would do, and in many cases exceeded planned targets. However, immediate outcome-level behaviour change varied across pathways. Some pathways generated strong behaviour-change evidence. Others delivered outputs but still need more evidence of continued adoption, adaptation or scale.

The strongest evidence of behaviour change and early systemic signals was found in greenhouse upgrades, SmartLand climate-smart services and IYAB/SIYB institutional anchoring. These pathways had clearer actor incentives, more visible benefits and stronger continuation logic. They show why BOUZOUR was more than a standard delivery project.

Greenhouse upgrades were one of the strongest pathways. The intervention linked affordable local manufacturing with farmer productivity and improved working conditions. Farmers had a practical reason to adopt the upgrades because they improved ventilation, usable planting space, movement and heat-related working conditions. Local manufacturers also had a reason to continue because the model opened a possible commercial service line in agriculture. This created a credible market relationship, not only a one-off transfer of equipment.

SmartLand climate-smart agriculture also showed strong evidence. The project helped reduce farmer uncertainty around sensor-based irrigation and fertigation. The business case was linked to water, fertiliser, energy and productivity benefits. BOUZOUR did not create SmartLand's commercial growth from zero because SmartLand was already an existing provider. Its contribution is better understood as strengthening the evidence base, farmer confidence and market uptake around an existing actor.

IYAB/SIYB showed a strong institutional signal. The project trained and anchored an agribusiness-adapted training offer through trainers, institutions and MoET-related processes. This is important because institutional anchoring can continue beyond direct project delivery. However, participant-level business outcomes still need

longer-term follow-up to show how far training translated into durable business performance.

The cherry pathway was promising, but it was the most complex intervention area. It should not be understood as a weaker version of the greenhouse pathway. Cherry export upgrading required coordinated change across farmer-exporter relationships, cooperative functions, production quality, post-harvest handling, certification, phytosanitary compliance, buyer engagement, market positioning and decent work practices. BOUZOUR made important progress in repositioning selected cherry actors toward higher-value markets. However, systemic transformation in cherry cannot yet be confirmed because it requires repeated seasons, consistent quality, certification use, buyer continuity, farmer benefits and embedded decent work mechanisms.

Solar energy access was highly relevant but showed weaker evidence of direct farmer-level adoption. The technical assessment pathway reduced information gaps and helped farmers understand investment options, but affordability, liquidity and capital access remained binding barriers. Most of the reported outreach under the solar outcome came from shared or rental productive solar infrastructure. This is a promising response to the finance constraint, but it is different from 490 individual farmers buying or installing solar systems. Scale remains dependent on finance and capital access.

Efficiency - High at portfolio and management level

BOUZOUR was efficient at portfolio and management level. It delivered strongly through a lean team, adaptive management and strong ILO technical backstopping. The project exceeded logframe targets despite extreme operating conditions and repeated crisis-related disruption. The hybrid AIMS model - facilitation combined with targeted de-risking - was appropriate for Lebanon's compound crisis context.

In line with the agreed evaluation questions, efficiency was assessed primarily at portfolio, outcome and management-structure level. The evaluation does not rank each intervention by cost per beneficiary or cost per systemic result, because the pathways differed in maturity, risk, leverage potential and time needed for change to materialise. This is a fairer way to assess a diverse AIMS portfolio.

The main efficiency caveat concerns MRM and real-time steering. Result chains and documentation helped reconstruct contribution, but they could have been used earlier and more systematically as a management tool. In a crisis context, MRM should help teams decide what to scale, adapt, pause or stop. It should not only support reporting after the fact.

Impact orientation and sustainability - Medium / conditional

BOUZOUR had strong impact orientation and generated credible AAER progression in several pathways. The strongest pathways were greenhouse upgrades, SmartLand climate-smart services and IYAB/SIYB institutional anchoring. These showed strong adoption and early adaptation signals, and they had clearer commercial or institutional incentives for continuation.

BOUZOUR was impact-oriented to the extent that could reasonably be expected at the time of design and implementation. As implementation progressed, however, the more complex transformational pathways revealed additional constraints around finance, certification, buyer relationships, labour practices and market continuity. This does not weaken the project's performance; it explains why several promising pathways now require further consolidation and repeated market testing before their full systemic potential can be confirmed.

Sustainability is strongest where actors can see a practical reason to continue. Farmers need visible returns. Service providers need a business case. Institutions need ownership and capacity. Buyers and exporters need quality, reliability and commercial value. This is why greenhouse upgrades and SmartLand look relatively stronger: the economic logic is visible. It is also why IYAB/SIYB has a credible institutional pathway.

Other pathways are promising but more conditional. Cherry export upgrading has strong systemic potential, but needs repeated seasons and more stable market conditions. Solar rental and shared-use models respond to the affordability problem, but need capital and finance to scale. Recruitment and worker-service innovations remain early-stage. QOOT and structured sourcing were relevant, but need stronger evidence of continuation and wider uptake.

The absence of full systemic transformation at project closure should not be read as weak performance. The project was short and operated through rolling crises. AIMS programming needs time for

actors to test, adapt, invest, repeat and respond. BOUZOUR has created useful foundations, but several foundations now need consolidation.

Cross-cutting issues and just transition - meaningful but uneven

BOUZOUR's cross-cutting results were meaningful but uneven. Gender and decent work were strongest where they were embedded in real economic roles and actor incentives. Greenhouse upgrades improved working conditions because better ventilation, movement and lower heat stress were connected to a productivity-oriented upgrade model. IYAB/SIYB had strong women's participation and created a practical entry point for women's agribusiness skills. Cherry created relevant decent work and child labour entry points, but these require in-season verification and stronger responsibilities across cooperatives, exporters, buyers and public actors.

The project should be understood through a just transition lens rather than as a project pursuing standalone environmental objectives. Climate-smart agriculture, solar energy and green jobs were most relevant where they contributed to productivity, enterprise resilience, safer or better work, resource efficiency and longer-term economic viability. This framing is consistent with ILO's mandate.

Disability inclusion and worker voice were weaker. This reflects both project design and structural constraints in Lebanese agriculture. Future programming should make these areas more explicit through accessible training, outreach, monitoring, worker consultations, seasonal worker feedback mechanisms, OSH focal points and stronger links between buyer requirements, cooperative practices and decent work safeguards.

Overall conclusion

BOUZOUR should be assessed positively. It was highly relevant, strategically coherent, effective in delivery, efficient at portfolio level and impact-oriented. Its team and partners achieved strong results in an unusually difficult context. The project also generated credible early systemic signals in several pathways.

At the same time, the most accurate judgement is not that BOUZOUR completed full systemic transformation across the entire portfolio. The better judgement is that BOUZOUR opened and tested several relevant market-system pathways, proved that some are viable, and showed which conditions are still needed for scale and sustainability.

A focused follow-up or consolidation phase would be justified, especially for the strongest and most promising pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

Recommendation 1. Launch a focused BOUZOUR follow-up / consolidation phase around fewer, better-connected intervention pathways.

A next phase should build on the strongest and most promising pathways, but should avoid spreading effort across too many parallel activities. It should focus on pathways where actor incentives, technical assistance, market access, quality assurance, finance, institutional ownership and decent work requirements reinforce each other. Potential examples include upgraded and climate-smart horticulture, productive energy and cold-chain solutions linked to concrete investment cases, agribusiness skills and women's enterprise development, and cherry export and certification consolidation.

Recommendation 2. Test and address access to finance where it prevents adoption and scale.

Future programming should not treat access to finance as a generic add-on. It should identify where finance is the actual binding constraint and link support to concrete investment decisions and realistic business returns. Possible models may include asset leasing, buyer-backed or exporter-backed finance, seasonal repayment, cooperative-based repayment or other locally feasible arrangements. More complex instruments should only be considered after feasibility testing in Lebanon's constrained financial context.

Recommendation 3. Match intervention ambition to project duration and management expectations.

Complex value-chain transformation pathways, such as cherry export and certification, should not be expected to deliver completed systemic transformation within a short crisis-phase project. This does not mean that such pathways are inappropriate. It means that expectations must be calibrated. They should be framed as proof-of-concept or early consolidation work unless the project has enough time, resources and stable seasons to test repeated performance and scale.

	Recommendation 4. Use project documentation as an adaptive management system, not only as donor reporting. Future AIMS programming should establish intervention-level documentation systems from the start. These should include result chains, assumptions, adoption and behaviour-change indicators, AAER signals, evidence-confidence ratings, cost and leverage tracking, and periodic portfolio reviews. Monitoring should help teams decide what to scale, adapt, pause or stop. Recommendation 5. Embed decent work, gender, worker voice and just transition objectives in economic and institutional incentives. Future programming should continue one of BOUZOUR's strongest features: linking gender, decent work and just transition to real economic and institutional incentives. Gender should remain connected to women's actual roles as workers, farmers, agri-entrepreneurs and household economic decision-makers. Decent work should be embedded in productivity, OSH, worker reliability, product quality, certification, buyer requirements and service quality. Worker voice, child labour monitoring and disability inclusion should be made more explicit.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Lesson 1. Access to finance and visible business returns are critical for sustainability. Market systems interventions gain stronger traction where actors can see a clear link between investment and expected return. In BOUZOUR, this was clearest in greenhouse upgrades and selected climate-smart agriculture services. By contrast, models requiring higher upfront investment or longer payback periods - such as solar installation, cold-chain infrastructure, YY ReGen rental scale-up or cherry post-harvest investment - remained more conditional. Where finance remains unresolved, technical relevance may not translate into adoption or scale. Lesson 2. Complex value-chain transformation requires sufficient time and repeated market cycles. The cherry pathway shows that value-chain upgrading cannot be fully assessed through one-off pilots or a single season. Each season tests sourcing, quality, logistics, buyer relationships, labour needs and climate risks in different ways. Short projects can test relationships and generate proof of concept, but resilience develops when farmers, cooperatives, exporters, buyers and institutions have enough time to adapt across multiple seasons.

Lesson 3. Decent work is more likely to be sustained when embedded in economic and institutional incentives.

Decent work outcomes are more likely to continue when they are linked to productivity, OSH, quality, buyer requirements, certification, worker reliability or service quality. Greenhouse upgrades showed this most clearly. Cherry and other seasonal labour pathways also created relevant entry points, but these require stronger monitoring, repeated enforcement and clearer roles for cooperatives, exporters, buyers and public actors.

Emerging good practice 1. Locally sourced affordable greenhouse upgrades as a practical access-to-technology solution.

The affordable greenhouse upgrade model is an emerging good practice because it addressed an access-to-technology constraint through local market actors rather than imported solutions or project-delivered equipment. Farmers needed lower-cost improvements that could increase productivity and improve production conditions. Local manufacturers had an opportunity to develop a new commercial service line. Workers, including Syrian women workers, benefited from improved ventilation, reduced heat stress, easier movement and a safer working environment.

The model is important because it linked access to technology, commercial continuation potential and decent work benefits within one intervention logic. It also created a more interactive relationship between farmers and local manufacturers, where farmers could give feedback on design, quality and practical improvements. The practice remains emerging rather than fully proven because scale is still limited and continuation depends on farmer demand, manufacturer quality, affordability and finance.

Emerging good practice 2. Using cherry export upgrading to combine market access, certification and decent work entry points.

The cherry pathway is an emerging good practice because it used export upgrading as an entry point to connect several functions that are often treated separately: market access, product quality, certification, traceability, post-harvest handling and decent work. This was especially relevant because higher-value markets require not only better products, but also more reliable production, clearer sourcing arrangements and stronger compliance with buyer expectations.

The practice is promising because it shows how decent work and child labour concerns can be linked to commercial incentives, rather than handled only through awareness raising. Certification, buyer requirements and export readiness can create practical reasons for farmers, cooperatives and exporters to improve production and labour practices. However, this remains an emerging practice because it requires repeated seasonal validation, stronger in-season monitoring and continued buyer and exporter engagement before its full systemic potential can be confirmed.

Emerging good practice 3. Using sector and value-chain selection as an inclusion strategy.

BOUZOUR showed that inclusion can be strengthened when a project deliberately selects sectors and parts of value chains where target groups are already economically present and where market incentives can support their participation. This is important because inclusion is not only about adding vulnerable groups to activities. It is also about choosing intervention spaces where women, refugees, small farmers, workers and agri-entrepreneurs have realistic roles and can benefit through market change.

This practice is relevant for future AIMS and MSD programming because it links inclusion to intervention design from the start. In BOUZOUR, agriculture, greenhouse work, cherry production, agribusiness skills and selected service pathways created different entry points for Lebanese host communities, Syrian refugees, women workers and small producers. The practice remains context-specific, but the transferable lesson is clear: projects should select sectors and value-chain functions not only for growth potential, but also for where decent work, gender equality and inclusion can realistically be advanced.