AVS Podcast Launch Event – 4 May 2021

Mirela Barbu [00:00:01] Hello, everyone! I would like to welcome you to the launch of our podcast series, Agriculture Voices of Syria, and thank you for participating in our event. We hope you will enjoy learning about our project and that you will be willing to promote our podcast to your listeners. Now, I will share my screen with you. I have prepared some slides.

This is our podcast, Agricultural Voices Syria, and this is our podcast logo that you will see on many slides today. We have prepared three short presentations.

I am Mirela Barbu and I am the project principal investigator. In my presentation, I will introduce the project explaining its rationale and also the ways in which we are implementing it. Shaher Abdullateef is our project coordinator for all activities in Turkey and Syria, and he will talk about the role of Syrian agricultural experts in addressing the needs of Syrian farmers. Martin Spinelli is the project co-investigator who will explain the role of podcasting in knowledge exchange for development. To conclude, Katherine Jones, our project communication officer, will briefly present our website. And after our presentations, we very much welcome comments and questions from you.

So I will start with my presentation, and I will talk about our project, first of all, our project goals. The main goal of our project is to promote sustainable agriculture in Syria through podcasting. And we are planning to do so through knowledge exchange, mobilizing researchers, practitioners and decision makers in Syria and abroad. We are also working towards the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and those concerning our project activities are mentioned on the slide, as you can see. The project is funded by IDCF-SSRP. ICDF is the International Development Challenge Fund; SSRP is Sussex Sustainability Research Programme. ICDF is part of the UK Global Challenges Research Fund, which covers different areas of intervention. Our specific area is equitable access to sustainable development and, in particular, to build secure and resilient food systems supported by sustainable resources in agriculture.

These are our product partners, and I would like now to spend a few words on the role of Cara, which has enabled our partnership. I started to collaborate with Cara last year, and this allowed me to meet Syrian colleagues who are experts in agronomy. The idea of this project stems from those conversations when I became aware of the urgent need of supporting services for Syrian farmers. From these, I envisaged a way to deliver these services from abroad, during a pandemic and using Syrian expertise. And I also add here during a relatively short project - over 30 weeks - and with a relatively small budget of twenty-five thousand pounds. So Cara introduced us to ACDP-SAE networks, which became our partner and with whom we have built the project. I would like to add here the importance that Cara played in establishing these networks, because many of our colleagues today are or were members of Cara Syria Programme.

When it became clear to me that podcasting would be the best means to pursue our goal, I searched for a partner in our university and I discovered my colleague Martin, who is an internationally renowned expert in podcasting. And at this stage, that means in November last year, we wrote this project that was awarded the grant.

Here you can read our project stakeholders. First of all, Syrian agricultural experts and Syrian farmers, but also NGOs who operate in northwest Syria, project collaborators and research community and humanitarian aid organisations interested in food security and livelihoods. I would like to underline that our project collaborators are very important to us,

the project activities have been designed to allow them to use and enhance their expertise. And, in fact, we have two groups of people: Syrian colleagues, those who participated in the podcast production, the experts, and also those who participate in promotion that will start this month in Syria, and also in running the survey.

I will talk now briefly about the project implementation. The project has four stages. It began by organising the activities, selecting the team and purchasing the equipment for podcasting. And all this activity is being implemented in January. In the second stage, which ran over February- March, we organised a training course, after which our Syrian colleague, the experts in agriculture, started to prepare 15 podcast episodes. At the same time, a smartphone app was designed and also the website, the ACDP website. But we also started to promote the project on social media. And also we started to work on five case studies on agri-food value chains. I will explain this a little bit later. Now, we are in the third stage of our project; we are starting it this week. This week is the 18th week on our Gantt diagram. So this stage will run over May and June, and we will promote the podcast and the app amongst Syrian farmers. And following their distribution, the farmers will participate in the survey, which was designed to collect their feedback for the first five episodes and, more broadly, their use of social media. And finally, the last stage in July: we will analyse the data survey and the research results will be disseminated with stakeholders and also with wider audiences.

So as you can see, the project is relatively short, as I said, developed over 30 weeks. And also we have a very tight schedule of activities. We have stuck to it until now and I have to thank Kate and Shaher for the very efficient coordination of all activities organised in Turkey and in Syria, that have run very smoothly until now. And it was a great, great teamwork for all of us. As I mentioned before, and you can see on this slide, during stage two, we also started to prepare some case studies on agri-food value chains. I would like to spend a few words on them now. Three of them are already available on our website and two will be released soon and we also record them in English and will translate the transcripts in Arabic.

I am working on this material together with my colleague, Izabela Delabre, from Birkbeck University of London. Izabela and I are geographers, and we thought that we could use knowledge from our beautiful discipline to inform our Syrian colleagues about the ways in which a range of agricultural and institutional actors in other countries are developing agri-food sectors. And the whole idea was to disseminate this research, anticipating that a range of Syrian agricultural operator, and maybe policy makers, will be interested in understanding opportunities that could be further developed at this stage in Syria, but also challenges faced by other countries. As a result, drawing on academic literature from different disciplines - from environmental studies, global value chains, from political ecology and international studies - we have prepared five case studies on successful practices in agri-food value chains. As this research field is very rich and the cases do not aim to provide an extensive literature review, we selected specific examples from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries because their climatic conditions make the farming of crops and trees present in Syria possible. And the content of these case studies is linked to analytical dimensions of the global value chain framework - mainly agricultural inputs and outputs, producers and power relations, institutional framework and trade regulations - maintaining a focus on sustainability. The topics are listed on the slides, as you can see. So these are ready: the case studies on agricultural resource use, producer organisations and food standards; and are almost ready those on byproducts and waste and international institutions and trade regulations. The last two will be released this month.

So I would like to finish my presentation here and give the stage to my colleague Shaher who will talk about the podcasts and our promotional activities in Syria. So I will continue with the presentation on this set of slides, but Shaher will take over here. Thank you very much.

Shaher Abdullateef [00:11:02] Yes, thank you, Mirela, but I still need to share.

Mirela Barbu [00:11:08] OK, I'll continue from here. Yes.

Shaher Abdullateef [00:11:10] To see the presentation, please.

Mirela Barbu [00:11:14] Do you see it?

Shaher Abdullateef [00:11:19] No.

Mirela Barbu [00:11:23] OK, no problem, we can resolve that. Here we are, just putting it on … your cover … so, here we are!

Shaher Abdullateef [00:11:48] Well, I will talk in Arabic, so the translation will be in English.

Thank you, Mirela, for that excellent presentation about an excellent initiative. On behalf of our team of Syrian academics, I'm happy to say that we're proud to be working on this project, which is only one of a number of activities that we're taking part in. You all know that the conflict in Syria has lasted for more than ten years at this point and it's not simply a human tragedy. It's actually a set of tragedies. More than six million people have become food insecure and a further four million are at risk of becoming food insecure. That means that more than ten million people are now facing food insecurity. A wide range of sectors have been decimated by the conflict, including the education sector or system, which has been affected at all stages, from primary education through to higher education, including technical education and applied sciences. As a result of the conflict, thousands of Syrian academics and technical experts have been forced to leave the country. As you know, this has had a profound impact on the level of technical knowledge and expertise in Syria. For that reason, one of our key concerns is to gather this knowledge and expertise and to connect it to the knowledge base currently available in Syria. In Syria just as in any other developing country, the agricultural sector is of paramount concern, not only because it is central to food production and to ensuring food security, but also because it's an important source of income for a majority of the population. Statistics show that the majority of Syria's population live in the countryside, which is unlike countries with developed economies in which the majority of the population lives in cities. Therefore, I think that working to develop the agricultural sector is perhaps the most important step to focus on—not only for the production of food as I've said—but also to help the population of a country that has been suffering the effects of war for more than a decade at this point.

The war has had a significant impact on the ability or willingness of the government to provide agricultural services; they used to provide farmers with information, skills, and training. We are currently focusing our efforts on information exchange through the group Syrian Academic Expertise for Agriculture and Food Security and the Council for At Risk Academics Syria Programme. We have produced a study of the current state of food security in Syria and, in collaboration with a colleague at the University of Kent, we are also studying the efficacy of distance learning in a program to teach engineers and agricultural sciences students in Syria remotely. We also participated with researchers from the University of Edinburgh in a study on the future of food security in Syria and also

in another study with researchers from the same university about the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the agricultural labor performed by internally displaced people within Syria and Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. In sum, we're participating in all these different research projects in order to share information. The issue in a country that is facing a series of crises isn't simply the production of new information, but also how to communicate this information, as well as skills, expertise, and new techniques, to ensure food security.

The current situation forces researchers and experts to ask ourselves a critical question: How can we help people? How can we feed people in the middle of a war? These are questions that simply weren't asked before. This initiative and other initiatives like it are an opportunity for us to share ideas and propose a new model that will allow us to help the Syrian people.

This slide shows the plan for our project. I think it's similar to plans in many other countries where there are linkages between universities and research centres and farmers, and by farmers here I mean those who grow fruits and vegetables and who raise animals. Our research is focused on what these farmers need, and those needs are what determine our research agenda. This is where agricultural training comes in. In a country like Syria, we use agricultural training to disseminate the information produced in universities and research centres to farmers and to collect information about their needs and communicate this to researchers. This knowledge is disseminated through agricultural training, the goal of which is to increase production and ensure food security. This is what led to the creation of the Agricultural Voices project.

Why is the Agricultural Voices project important? What is the role of our online platform?

As my colleague Mirela has explained, the project has a number of goals. The first is to share the latest in agricultural developments and practices that are well suited to the state of affairs in Syria. For example, we can't expect farmers in Syria to be using advanced technology or agricultural practices that are fuel or energy intensive because they don't have access to a stable energy supply. So we need to come up with regionally appropriate and creative solutions that will allow these farmers to increase their production in light of the significant constraints they're facing. The project also seeks to bring together Syrian academics and agricultural engineers. I can tell you that there are big gaps in our community because we're spread over many countries. We all hope that this situation will end soon, of course. There is also a big gap between the academic community and farmers in Syria. We used to hold on-site visits and workshops, and even conferences, in Syria but none of that is possible right now because of the war. These events allowed us to share information and they were also an efficient way of disseminating information to farmers in a simple and quick way when we couldn't work directly with a large number of them. If we were to ask our colleagues working in agricultural research organizations what is the largest number of farmers they could bring together and how many would actually attend a session, the answer would be something like twenty or thirty farmers, or maybe fifty but certainly no more than that. Now even those modest numbers are impossible to reach. Our online platform is an efficient and practical way for us to reach thousands of farmers. This development is itself an important tool that allows us to communicate quickly with farmers. To give you an example, which my farmer colleagues will all recognize, we might need to address an urgent issue such as last week's infestation of desert locusts. I can easily communicate relevant information to farmers through a blog post on this topic or on a number of other topics. The same applies to longer term interventions in food security

and agricultural sustainability that depend on knowledge sharing. This will have long term benefits for farmers and researchers alike.

In order to make the online platform efficient and responsive to farmers' needs in the pilot phase, we conducted a small study with some farmers and agricultural engineers about the topics that we plan to cover. I'll mention the key topics now, but I want to reiterate that this is just for the pilot phase and that we will continue to develop our platform in the future with the introduction of a weekly agricultural topics, which will be about the most pressing topic or news in Syrian agriculture in a given week. In the current phase, we'll be providing information about irrigation, fertilizers, producing vegetables and fruit trees, and preparing the soil and maintaining its productivity. The latter topic is a new area of concern, and it is critical because the soil has been polluted for years by fertilizers and pesticides. We will also be discussing how to prevent diseases, with a focus on those that affect wheat, potatoes, and olives because these are the most important, strategic crops in Syria today. Alternative crops could also be an important substitute because they are low-cost and highly productive and they are in-demand around the world. They could do very well in a sunny climate like Syria's and they are also full of fragrant oils and other substances of medical value. This brings us to another important issue: preserving seeds and producing local crop varieties, organic fertilizers, and composting. For example, how can we produce more olives of better quality? We have to re-think our agricultural practices and come up with ways to increase our productivity and assess which new methods will be most beneficial. We'll also be discussing new agricultural practices like hydroponics and growing fungi. And of course we plan to cover other topics like growing and preserving vegetables in the home, etc. As I've said, we'll eventually produce content on all these topics but the order we work in will be determined by the priorities of farmers.

The next steps to develop this project

I'll be brief as my colleague Mirela has already discussed this in detail. I just want to say that we've participated in a training session about how we can use and develop the online platform and whether a blog is the most efficient means of communicating. We've also contracted with fifteen experts to produce content on these topics because we want to hear a range of views from colleagues who are working directly with farmers, and they are the ones who will be producing the podcast episodes. We've also hired fifteen agricultural trainers, who are already working directly with farmers, and they will be training farmers to use the mobile app so they can get access to the podcasts. We will follow this up with a marketing campaign and a survey in which we hope to solicit the views of approximately 600 farmers in order to hear what they need. I'm sure my colleague Martin will have more to say about the other activities, including the database of survey results that will help us identify what subjects we should tackle in future episodes.

As for how the information will be disseminated or how people can access it, it's an online-only platform for now and it will be accessible to farmers within Syria and elsewhere. Let me take this opportunity to tell you that people outside Syria have already been in touch to ask me about our blog. As for the survey, in the bottom right-hand corner of the slide, you can see a map of the area that we're targeting, North-West Syria. Of course, the website will be available to farmers across Syria and the topics that we're covering will be relevant for them as well.

You can access our platform online and it will also be available as a mobile app on the Google Play Store soon. You can also get to it through Facebook and Twitter or through

Anchor and Spotify, which are very well-known apps. We've tried to make the content as easy to access as possible and to make it available across a range of platforms.

That's all from me, but before I hand over to my colleague Martin, I just want to thank the Cara Syria Programme and my colleague Mirela from the University of Sussex who has been a source of constant support. I also want to thank the funders who have made this possible and, of course, the audience. This unique initiative depends on your support, so thank you very much.

Stay tuned for my colleague Martin, who has played a big part in getting us to this stage. He will be discussing the podcast series and how knowledge exchange can promote development.

Martin Spinelli [00:31:24] Thank you very much, Shaher and a big thank you to Mirela. From the very beginning, she was the driving force behind Agricultural Voices Syria and has made it happen in spite of a lot of very challenging circumstances, both with covid and with getting various institutions to communicate to each other and sifting through their bureaucracies. It's a very difficult job, and I appreciate you doing that.

So let me talk a little bit about why podcasting is good for development projects. First, it's economical. It's cheap. As we mentioned, we spent about £750 on very high-quality professional podcast production equipment for the project. That buys everything you need, the microphones, the accessories, the mixing desk. If you don't have one already, for another £750, you can get a brand-new laptop that functions perfectly fine for uploading the podcasts and managing the podcast feed. It's a relatively easy-to-learn technology to do in situ. We did the training that you had mentioned in about three days on Zoom, three rather intense days with some extra support sessions as needed. The producers learnt the basic shapes and elements of podcasts and the form and tone of podcasts that were most similar to the kinds of things that we imagined being produced with Agricultural Voices Syria. The training also included the technological side of things, how to use the console, how to use the connections, how to make phones communicate with consoles, and how to do the basic uploading feed management that's done through Anchor FM, which is a free platform for distributing podcasts on all of the major podcast aggregators. It is a part of Spotify, but it gets podcasts on Google podcasts, Apple podcasts, Audio Boom podcast and all of the others. You can, if you want to spend a little bit more money, get an increased level of subscription that allows you more access to more features and to more analytics. However, 95% of the podcasts—professional podcast—that are produced are produced with the free version.

The history of using podcasting to give voice to people marginalized by official, authorized, licensed media channels is also a very significant factor as to why podcasting is very, very good for development projects. Podcasting, at least at the moment, and especially in the developing world, is an opportunity to rebalance the scales somewhat between the large state and commercial broadcasters, which tend to dominate the scene, and more independent humanitarian/development NGO voices that would have a hard time reaching the same kind of audience. I'll talk a little bit about that later. This is, interestingly, not something that is unique to the developing world. Podcasting is used to give voices to marginalized groups of people in all countries. I worked over the past few years with an outfit called Podium.Me, which was born in the wake of the London riots in 2011 to give young minority urban people an opportunity to express themselves and to frame the issues that concern them in their own terms, in their own ways.

The freedom that podcasting offers cannot be understated. You don't need a fixed point of transmission like old media, it's much harder to shut down and to silence. Broadly speaking, there are no podcast police, you can do whatever you want and whatever your audience will bear.

One of the key characteristics of it that meshes very, very nicely with development projects is its intimacy. Most people listen to podcasts on earbuds, which are literally inside your body, visualizing what's being described, and that way people build stronger attachments to them—through listening to you, through having to do that imaginative mental work. This intimacy also means it's easier to build longer lasting connections with an audience than it is on lots of other media.

The idea of it being a niche form of communication is also quite important. It's really, really great for developing connected communities that might have been fractured through conflict or through migration or other ways, and Agricultural Voices Syria is a great example of that, where we are putting together agricultural experts living in exile with Syrian farmers on the ground in Syria.

A few more positives for framing podcasting in terms of development projects. Because of that intimacy and because of these strong relationships, calls to action are extremely effective on podcasting. In the US, two-thirds of podcast listeners have followed through on calls to action in podcasts that they listen to, whether that is buying things that are promoted in an ad or getting involved in particular economic or social movements or making a contribution to something else in some other way.

Podcasts are integrated into social media. What I mean by this is that they are native to social media. They have always been a part of social media. Social media really came onto the scene about 15 years ago, exactly the moment when podcasts were starting as a medium and podcasting was originally conceived as a form of audio social media. So what that native integration means for us is that it's very, very easy to promote podcasts on social media and also to listen to them on social media. So most podcast projects, all of them that I can think of, are promoted into the world through social media. And those social media posts contain embedded links that you could simply click on and listen to the podcast. So the social media platform becomes a kind of audio channel for the podcasts.

Smartphone ubiquity and versatility is also extremely important. Another key factor that a lot of people have written an awful lot about and is worth noting here. In 2020, 45% of adults in the world own a smartphone. In 2019, the estimates were that between 20 and 25% of people in the developing world, adults in the developing world, owned smartphones. And that number was rising sharply. I personally couldn't find any data specific to Syria, but in neighbouring Turkey, in 2019, 54% of adults owned a smartphone. And smartphones are the way that we reach people now. These same devices that we're using for financial transactions and e-commerce and simply staying connected to friends and family are the same devices that we are using to listen to, and in lots of cases create, podcasts. You can create a podcast with just a smartphone and nothing else. And plenty of people do that.

There are some pitfalls that I feel we just need to kind of pull back into the frame for at least a minute or two. Podcasting is a tremendous opportunity, but there are some things that we need to always consider, if not let dominate our minds and imaginations, but to keep in mind. For example, podcasting is integrated into the world of neoliberal corporate telecommunications. Social media platforms, podcast platforms do not exist to keep people connected or to increase public discussion around topics, they exist primarily to

keep people on those platforms and to put ads and paid promoted content in front of the maximum number of eyeballs and eardrums that they can. That's it. That is the reason why they exist. There are for us very clearly opportunities, particularly in the developing world, to use these platforms for our own progressive and humanitarian ends. But we always need to remember who owns the playing field and what their agendas are. The more these private platforms take over, the more an authentic public sphere tends to get pushed to the margin.

And as you scale up—this is quite an interesting one—a lot of people go into podcasting thinking, oh, well, you know, we'll be able to monetise it relatively quickly. That is actually quite a hard thing to do. As you scale up and produce more content and have more listeners, you are helping build the space that others monetise. That Apple monetises. That Spotify monetises. You're creating content for those platforms. And while you might over the long term see a little bit of money, it's generally not enough unless you're really, really well-known, to cover the even very minor costs of producing podcasts. And the last thing worth noting is the way that podcasting participates in the social media economy of followers. Undertakings like these, which involve social media in general, involve the pursuit of likes and listens and follows. And those things do take a psychological toll, particularly on young people and the vulnerable and now there's plenty of evidence to demonstrate this.

Podcasting and NGOs. So podcasting and NGOs go hand in hand around the world. NGOs in particular, find them incredibly useful and effective in getting the word out. And here are some of the reasons why that's the case. So you can use podcasts to reach your key stakeholders very, very directly and immediately without any filtering from authorities. I mentioned this freedom a moment ago. You have a tremendous autonomy in podcasting. It's also quite a young medium, especially in the developing world. And this gives you the opportunity to claim space in the public sphere as a leader or as an authority in your field. And that means that you get to set the agenda. That's a very, very appealing for NGOs that are trying to foreground concerns that are often not on everyone's radar.

They're very useful in building communities, generating discussions, identifying issues of concern and facilitating solutions amongst stakeholders because they are—certainly the best podcasts are—they are essentially conversations. So the fact that they are conversational, both in the actual sound of each episode where in good podcasts you are hearing, you are eavesdropping on a conversation. But more broadly speaking, there is a back-and-forth between listeners and producers that make them a more conversational medium.

They're also very effective in integrating messages into your global-facing public relations and funding campaigns, where hearing the actual voices of people who are directly benefiting from your work increases the impact of your initiatives. Just two very quick examples from my recent students here at the University of Sussex on our degree in Media for Development and Social Change, two of my podcasting students last year are now producing podcasts for NGOs, one in South Africa and one in Nigeria. And I have another very promising Nigerian student this year who is going to do the same thing in the Niger Delta in about six months' time.

So the goals of AVS, I'm not going to go into too much detail here because Shaher did such an excellent job of covering this: we want to improve food security first off. We want to fill those holes left by the collapse of government support services that provided previously necessary information to farmers. We want to use AVS to undertake a systematic pilot in conflict zone podcasting for development. And what we want to do is we

want to generate a model for these kinds of projects that can be done in other parts of the world. That is that is the reason why I'm involved with this project and the thing that I see as the most wide-ranging potential social benefit from it. Part of that involves doing some research, which I'll talk about briefly on the next slide, which Mirela has mentioned.

The last goal and the goal that is very, very important and very, very tangible and real is we wanted to resource the AVS producers with skills and technology to do their own completely autonomous podcast projects in the future and do them to a very high standard, to help them develop an audience that they might draw on for programme ideas, but also support going forward. This is a photo from our training sessions, which we did on Zoom. That is one of our podcast hosts learning how to use our Rodecaster pro board and microphone to record a sample of the podcast.

So, in terms of Mirela and I being at the University of Sussex and what is expected from us by our universities, the research aspect of this project is quite important. It's more conventional, but academically very useful. Because of that conflict in Syria that you all know about so well, the amount of media, sociological and consumer data that is available about Syria or at least that I have been able to find is extremely limited. So this project holds the door open for us to collect lots of useful information through the small army of podcast promoters and survey takers that Shaher has organised. So we're going to ask our listeners and collect information about their crops and their modes of agricultural production, their relationship to the land they farm, the way they use podcasts, social media and technology more broadly, what future content might be appealing to them, what expectations for the tone of podcast delivery is, how they feel about their own communities and relationships, and how they might be able to contribute to similar projects in the future, and to what extent they might be willing to offer perhaps a modest bit of financial support. So, I am now going to pass it over to Katherine Jones, who is our Communications Manager, who has reached out to all of you and invited you to this event and put together the Sussex-based website, which is the more academic facing website. The ACDP website, where the podcasts themselves live and where the audio can be played through a web browser is accessible through our site. But I'm going to leave Katherine to take us through and stop the share. And Katherine, you can share the screen and take us to the website and talk us through it.

Katherine Jones [00:49:13] Thank you very much, Martin. So I'm just sharing my screen right now. I hope you can all see that. So this is the Agricultural Voices Syria website. This is the English phasing site. On it, you can find much of the information that we've had already in the presentations about the project, the stages of the projects, some of the goals. This is also where you can find the project's outputs. So we have a lot of information about the podcast themselves. You can't listen to the podcast on the site at the moment, but this is something will probably happen in the future. But we do have the English transcripts on the Agriculture Voices site so you can read what the podcasts are about. And there's also a lot of information about what's included in each episode.

This is also where you're able to find the case studies. Currently we have three case studies up with the other, as Mirela said, will be following soon. So this is just the place that you can find all the information about Agricultural Voices. I think pretty much everything is covered on here at this point and it will continue to be updated as we go on. So once we have the results from the surveys, they will also be put up with some of the graphics information about them. So keep coming back here if you want more information and if you follow us on Twitter, in particular, you will know what it's being updated. Anything else you want me to say?

Martin Spinelli [00:50:59] I think if you stop the show, I'll just put up the last slide and then we could take some questions. OK, so that is all of the formal content of this launch event for Agricultural Voices Syria, we are really, really happy to entertain some questions and to start some discussion. Now, what you can do is you can put those in the chat, if you like, or just raise your hand and Mirela, Shaher or myself will look out for those and try to answer. So what questions about our very ambitious and fast project? So I think Mirela kind of glossed over it, but it's really remarkable how much we have been able to accomplish in such a short period of time, for such a small amount of money relatively speaking. That is a real bonus to podcasting. It is light and lean and nimble, and it gets out quick. What questions?

RECORDING WAS PAUSED DURING THE DEBATE

Mirela Barbu [00:52:25] So because I think we are heading towards the end now, I would like to thank you for attending our event and also to invite you to follow us on social media, to follow our project website, and ACDP - SAE websites where you'll find the episodes and also further information. Our Twitter is *agricultura vox* and ACDP uses it too. So this is how we share it. It is our AVS Twitter and just remain in touch with us.

Just to address some of the last comments that we received today. The content of further episodes will depend a lot on this collaboration and, of course, farmers can be part of them; other experts also, that can trigger future research to work on topics that today become very important and urgent. So this tool that we imagined with this project can become a tool for development and for addressing agricultural problems, and for promoting sustainable development in northwest Syria.

Thank you very much for being today with us and that's a pleasure to meet you all. And I hope to see you also at the end of July, when you will have a workshop to conclude the project and when we hope to present our results from the survey. So more news for you, possibly interesting, and just remain in touch. And of course, from our side, will we follow your advice, your guidance, and Shaher - I'm sure - as a director of SAE, will continue to monitor closely farmers' needs and agricultural-related issues in Syria. If we don't have other questions and other comments, I will just finish here. Martin, do you want to add something?

Martin Spinelli [00:54:42] Thank you all for being here. It was a very great way to launch Agricultural Voices Syria, please do listen, please do follow us on social media and let us know what you think as the episodes come out.

Shaher Abdullateef [00:54:58] Thank you very much everyone. In fact words cannot express my happiness for the start of this podcast. I can say now we have more than five episodes, with the sixth episode broadcast yesterday. We will be continuing with you and, as I say in the opening of the podcast: "Agricultural Voices are with you at all times and in all places". Many thanks to you all, starting with the University of Sussex, Dr. Mirela and Dr. Martin. Thanks to Kate Robertson and the Cara Syria Programme, which facilitated this wonderful communication, which I hope will continue, God willing. Thanks are also due to all colleagues who worked and are working with us, to the presenters who are doing a wonderful job, and to the agricultural extension workers, the technical and administrative teams who also work with us. Thank you to our farmers, who provided us with suggestions. Thank you all for attending, for your time and your wonderful interventions. Forgive me for taking this long, but this is an opportunity for all of us, thank you again.

Mirela Barbu [00:56:50] Thank you, I will end now. Thank you again!