Brief Context

Syria has faced one of the worst humanitarian crises since the 21st century with over 11.5 million people displaced and over 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. The Syrian diaspora is playing an important role in supporting the refugees and the reconstruction of Syria. The WBG has a strong commitment to finding ways of supporting Syrian refugees and would like to support these efforts. Over the years, the diaspora has been recognized as first movers for economic recovery and reconstruction during or after a conflict or crisis. Evidence has been seen in countries such as Nepal, Palestine, Haiti and Rwanda. Through means such as remittances, skills transfer, diaspora connected FDI, diaspora entrepreneurship, heritage tourism & nostalgia trade, philanthropy, volunteerism and advocacy.

The goal of this diaspora project is to create sustainable investment, skills transfer and business partnership opportunities while creating opportunities for Syrian refugees and host countries. Thus facilitating engagements from the Syrian diaspora as well as other private and development partners who i) are willing to invest directly or enable foreign investments ii) are highly skilled and can transfer skills iii) have connections for new markets and business opportunities iv) have established themselves competitively in international markets but would like to establish an operating base, in a number of well-established Special Economic Zones in Jordan and other host destination. There are huge prospects for new business development given the tradition of Syrian’s as adept business people with a history of merchants. Already there has been cases of successful business partnerships.

Efforts are ongoing to provide key incentives such as improved business climate and preferential market access. An example of this is already underway in Jordan where there has been investment and business climate reforms as well as preferential market access to the EU and US. Other investment and business incentive include: i) creating alliances with institutions and partners that would support the project as this increases chances of success ii) support to strengthen network and build data base iii) identification of investment and business partnership opportunities iv) provision of access to information especially through one-stop shop for investment information and market intelligence vi) providing access to networks and organize business events for diaspora members vii) providing access to business training on key topics viii) matching Syrian refugee entrepreneurs with diaspora business owners and as well as other investment opportunities ix) exploring opportunities for corporate social integration, linking Syrian refugee and diaspora owned businesses to corporations to explore areas of shared value.

We recognize that this development goal should be a joint effort from both the Syrian diaspora and other development partners. Joint coordination has already been initiated from the World Bank Group and some other crucial development partners which include CMI (Center for Mediterranean Integration), GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), IOM (International Organization for Migration), and ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) as well as some private partners. However, there is need for more partnerships as the success of this initiative is strengthened by the participation of ample partners as you each play unique roles.

The project development objectives include:

- Developing a knowledge and data base as well as a one-stop shop where potential diaspora investors or contributors can access relevant information especially investment opportunities.
- Strengthening the ecosystem for diaspora engagement which includes strengthening the diaspora network and partnership from private and development partners, host governments, business associations and other key stakeholders.
- Creating a diaspora matchmaking platform that would help connect both the supply and demand side; thus connecting Syrian refugees to investments, market, business partnership, mentorship and skills transfer opportunities to potentially increase job opportunities and improve livelihoods for both Syrian refugees/diaspora and host countries.
Project Approach

Study and Initial engagement: Qualitative and quantitative study which would include in-depth one on one interviews, focus groups and survey questionnaires of Syrian diaspora members and other key stakeholders. This will help shape the design of the action plan and implementation phase.

Diaspora/Investors Conference: The diaspora/investors conference will proceed the study and the initial engagement activities around 1st quarter of 2017 and this would be a two days conference. On day one, we would seek to share key knowledge insights and study findings on where things are now and where things need to go. Day two will be focused on answering two key questions - what do we do? and how do we do it? Thus jointly articulating the scope and action plan which will be built from the findings from the workshops and survey and well as from joint participation during the conference.

The core objective of the diaspora/investors conference is to:

- Develop a database of Syrian diaspora investors and businesses as well as other key players
- Initiate dialogue and strengthen network and engagements with key stakeholders
- Facilitate knowledge sharing around sustainable opportunities for investments, new markets, skills transfer, sustainable partnerships and lessons from other diaspora engagements
- Develop tangible action plan for implementation

Post Conference: Communication, collaboration and implementation of the action plan which will be facilitated and monitored with anticipated support from the Syrian diaspora and other key partners.