



Soriyat For Development

2013 Annual Report



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Soriyat for Development

Samar Yazbek, a Syrian writer and journalist, founded Soriyat For Development (SFD) in June 2012 and it has been registered as an organization in France since that time.

The idea of SFD was born in northern Syria during a time of chaos and war, well before it was founded in France. Samar Yazbek created SFD after meeting and working with various women's groups inside Syria. Through her discussions with these groups, Yazbek saw the dire need to support their missions, which focus on empowering Syrian women.

SFD is one of the first Syrian organizations working to support women and children in northern Syria. Samar Yazbek visited this region of Syria many times and was able to document, as a writer and journalist, the daily lives of women and children. Yazbek's dedication to this project is more than just a professional commitment. She was there, above all else, to support the local populations, especially the women.

The general mission of SFD is to support and empower women in Syrian society. SFD will encourage the women as they become active actors in the process of rebuilding a democratic and free society in Syria where human rights and justice will be respected. In this new society women will be treated as equal citizens who enjoy the same rights as men and will play an important role in the social, cultural, and political sectors.

Since its creation SFD has been faced with the challenge of how to best contribute to the empowerment of Syrian women in a time of war and destruction in order to reestablish peace and rebuild Syria. SFD's work is based on the principles of freedom, dignity, democracy, as well as the protection and education of Syrian children.

Since SFD's creation in 2012, the organization has worked primarily to:

1. Empower Syrian women;
2. Support civil society;
3. Educate and protect Syrian children. SFD has found that these three target areas are all interconnected and one cannot be achieved without the others.

Context of the Intervention

Since the beginning of the protests and the violent repression that followed in 2011, the conflict in Syria has worsened into a bloody war affecting the entire population and the Syrian infrastructure. The number of displaced people inside Syria has risen from 150,000 in mid-2012 to 6.5 million today.¹ The number of refugees is estimated to be 3 million², with 1.14 million in Lebanon, 815,000 in Turkey, and 610,000 in Jordan. Among these 3 million, more than half are women and children (4 out of 5 people are women and/or children)³. The Syrian economy is in ruins, consumption has plummeted, the exchange rate is decreasing, inflation is rising, infrastructure has collapsed, cities have been destroyed, and the lives of Syrians have been forever changed. In addition, a large number of men have either been killed, have disappeared, or been severely injured. As a result, many women are now widows and have found themselves left with the responsibility of providing for their families.

Syrians have been adapting and making the best of the situation while facing conditions that have made their lives difficult and often unstable. The Syrians are running out of everyday supplies, especially those who live in areas under siege, access to

¹ Centre d'actualité de l'ONU, article du 29.08.14 : http://www.un.org/apps/newsFr/storyF.asp?NewsID=33199#.VEe1cb_GxFM

² Ibid

³ International Rescue Committee. *Are we listening? Acting on our commitments to women and girls affected by the Syrian Conflict*. Septenbre 2014.

healthcare is problematic and in some cases impossible, children are not guaranteed the right to attend school, electricity is cut-off in many zones, and the prices of goods have risen enormously. Syrians also live with shortages of gas for cooking and fuel for heaters and fighting and shelling have become part of everyday life.

The Circumstances facing Syrian Women

Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, women have been highly involved in the uprisings. Women have also, sadly, paid a high price for their involvement. Detention, torture, sexual assaults, and murder are all punishments used against women. The Revolution has, however, given women an unprecedented sense of empowerment through their newfound roles as social and political actors. At the same time, escalations of radicalism and militarism have reinforced restrictions on freedoms granted to women regarding their education, the social rights, and their involvement in politics.

In the larger cities many women have a high level of education (50% of the number of students in higher education are women)⁴, however, due to the patriarchal society in place these women do not have access to higher-level jobs. In fact, only 12.4% of the members of parliament were women.⁵ It is important to note there is very little information available about the situation of women living in rural areas.

The Syrian conflict has uncovered some information about women living in rural Syria. According to statistics from the Syrian government, illiteracy in women between the ages of 15 and 24 living in rural areas is more than 90%.⁶ The information we have

⁴ Idem

⁵ Idem

⁶<http://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMTendanceStatPays?langue=fr&codePays=SYR&codeStat=SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS&codeStat2=x>

collected from our work in different areas indicate that in certain rural areas almost 30% of women do not know how to read or write and more than 50% of women only have a primary school education. These women are extremely vulnerable and do not possess knowledge of their rights, the tools to express themselves, or independence. Their lack of education makes them more vulnerable to the increased abuse caused by the war. Most of these women have never had an active role in society, other than being a mother. In 2010, only 20%⁷ of Syrian women were part of the workforce, among that percentage 60% of them were single. Too often, in Syria women stop working once they get married or have children.

The terrible fighting throughout Syria has left many women widowed or unaware of their husband's whereabouts. These women are now faced with the task of providing for their families. Many Syrian women have never worked before and lack the knowledge and experience necessary to provide for their families.

⁷ http://www.unicef.org/UNICEF_Syria_Two_Year_Report_March_2013_FR.pdf

Projects organized in 2012-2013

Soriyat for Development experienced much growth in 2013. Throughout the year SFD put into place a number of projects that allowed women to further develop their skills and to become an active member in Syrian civil society. Various other projects were organized to educate and protect children while others focused on reinforcing civil society.

A. Projects Supporting Women

1. Economic Empowerment

SFD organized different projects to support widowed women who must now provide for their families.

a. Small Businesses in Saraqeb

This project progressed over the course of 2013, with the help of young volunteer civil activists, in the city of Saraqeb in northern Syria close to the city of Idlib. Before the revolution the population of Saraqeb was 40,000 people. Today almost 50,000 people live in Saraqeb, of which 15,000 are internally displaced persons.

The goal of this project is to allow widowed women to continue to earn a living, despite the disappearance of their husbands. This project was actually divided into smaller micro-projects, which will be explained in further detail later.

SFD choose to develop this project after meeting with families in Saraqeb, where they were able to assess their living conditions and identify their needs. After many trips to Saraqeb, SFD identified 50 families who needed assistance, however, at the time SFD was not financially capable of supporting all 50 families. A set of criteria was developed to assess the needs of each family and to allow SFD to identify which families were more in need of assistance.

The families were chosen following these criteria:

- The number of children (keeping in mind that children have specific needs)
- The condition of the home (location, cleanliness)
- The family's other sources of income.

The micro-projects had three main goals. First, to allow the women to provide for their needs, second, to promote their autonomy, and third, to encourage the women to begin working as soon as possible instead of waiting and being forced to rely on humanitarian aid.

For each of our micro-projects an economic study was conducted before beginning the project to ensure the projects would progress correctly. It was also necessary to verify that a similar project did not already exist in the surrounding area, to avoid any competition and to guarantee the success of the project.

SFD opened the following businesses:

- Two cleaning supply shops;
- Two hair salons;
- Three shops selling clothing and shoes for women and children;
- Three grocery stores;
- A bakery;
- A workshop for fermenting yogurt;
- A toy store.

All of the completed projects were successful. Each small store was profitable for the people running the store but also for the local community who now have easy access to many goods that they need.



Figure 1: bread being cooked



Figure 2: small grocery store

b. Raising Cows in Jabal al Zawyah

This project began, in collaboration with Zoom In, in May 2013 in the mountain village of Jabal al Zawyah, home to 18,500 that is located near the the city of Idlib. As with many cities in the region of Idleb, Jabal al Zawyah had been victim of numerous shelling attacks and attacks from airplanes. These strikes caused much harm, both to the inhabitants and their belongings.

Similarly to the project in Saraqeb, the goal was to support mothers, who have lost their husbands to the war, to meet the needs of their children and to allow these families to be financially independent. Eight cows were given to eight families that totaled eighty-five people.

This project had four different goals:

- To guarantee lasting revenues to the families who received a cow;
- To develop the local production of milk;
- To provide milk to children;
- To revive the economy through selling products and purchasing food for the cows.

This project successfully created a motivation and an interest in the families who received a cow. Unfortunately, due to the conditions of the war, the project was not sustainable. The price of raising a cow was too expensive and could change from day to day depending on the conditions, and as a result many families decided to sell their cows. Many families were also forced to flee from the area because of the shelling and chose to either sell or eat their cows.



Figure 3: raising cows' project

c. Raising Hens in Jabal Alturkuman

In the region of Jabal Alturkuman, not far from the Latakia Governorate, SFD put into place a project of raising hens and building a hen house that would be taken care of by a group of female agricultural engineers. The project began in May 2013, unfortunately due to shelling, the hen house was destroyed and the project was unable to continue.



Figure 4: construction of the hen house

d. Bakery in Al Ghouta (area under siege)

The Ghouta is an agricultural belt surrounding southern and eastern Damascus. The areas of west and east Ghouta are home to about one million people. The Ghouta was originally controlled by the Syrian regime but in summer 2012 it was taken over by different armed groups and opposition brigades. After the regime forces were defeated, the area was partially and then completely under siege. Shortages of flour and bread forced people to wait in lines for hours for a minimal amount of bread. Some of these long lines were even targeted by the Syrian Air Force several times. Single mothers were unable to spend hours waiting in line because they risk having to leave their children in the streets while they wait.

The project's goal was to open a bakery that would be completely run by a team of women and that would cater only to a female clientele. SFD managed this project in collaboration with the Local Development and Small Project Support office (LDSPS),

which was run by Razan Zeitouna. Sadly, Razan Zeitouna was kidnapped on December 9, 2013 with three other members of her team and the project fell because of losing the contact person. It's important to mention that the team on the ground had lots of difficulties finding flour that was necessary to begin the project before Zeitouna's kidnapping.

2. Social and Cultural Support: the Cultural House "Dara Thaqafia"

Projects in the Ghouta were not limited to only basic needs. These zones are fundamental for beginning the construction of a Syrian state built on human rights. The Cultural House project was born out of this dream for Syria and was established specifically for women. Female activists quickly realized that Syrian women face a complicated situation in semi-rural conservative areas because the war has reinforced the inequalities experienced by Syrian women. The Cultural House is a refuge from the war where women can come together and support each other.

The Cultural House was equipped with two computers, a small library, a meeting room, and was decorated with famous pieces of art, such as the Mona Lisa, to introduce the women to international culture.

In only three months the Cultural House welcomed about one hundred women who engaged in social and political discussions as part of an initiative called "What do you think about it?" The goal of these debates was to allow women to develop a position on the current political situation, to suggest projects, and to become active participants in society. The women were divided into groups based on their age and social standing. There was one group of married women and another of younger women who had all received a high school diploma who were more active and enjoyed meeting with each other.

The Cultural House also organized activities for children that were supervised by a specialist. This project for children was done in collaboration with Razan Zeitouna and a young female activist.

Women and children from many different cities in the Ghouta used the library at the Cultural House. Young women also had access to the internet at the Cultural house and were able to learn about navigating the internet and use social media.



Figure 5: cultural house

B. Projects Supporting Children

Due to the worsening situation in Syria many schools were damaged, destroyed, or are now homes to displaced people. A countless number of children have been severely traumatized after witnessing members of their families being killed, after being separated from their parents, or from the constant shelling attacks. According to a UNICEF report

published in March 2013⁸ more than two million Syrian children have already been affected by the conflict.

A number of local initiatives began to allow children to attend alternative educational programs and to protect the maximum number of children from the consequences of violence.

SFD had the honor of supporting three different initiatives in different parts of Syria: Saqba in the Ghouta, Aleppo, the village of Kifranbel and neighboring villages in the region of Idlib.

1. Al Karama Bus

In March 2013 a moving school was created to serve displaced Syrian children in a northern Syria region. These children, who have taken refuge with their families in northern Syria, actually live in buildings that were used as schools before the war. There is no other opportunity for these children to attend school.

A Syrian activist visiting the region of Idlib, in northern Syria, realized that children in that region were not receiving an education because the schools had lost their original function and had been transformed into centers to house displaced families. After seeing this, the activist came up with the idea of a moving school to make-up for the lack of education. Then on foot and after with their bus, a team of volunteers began organizing visits to four different former school buildings in Idlib, where they organized different activities for the children. The Al Karama bus team goes to a different former school daily to conduct activities with students of different age groups. The activities the children participate in will depend on the age and can differ from group to group. The children will also participate in different sports and take classes in drawing, reading, writing, math,

⁸ http://www.unicef.org/UNICEF_Syria_Two_Year_Report_March_2013_FR.pdf

and science, for the older students. Children also have the opportunity to watch movies and participate in theatre classes. The goal of this project is to give the children a quality education as well as time to play and enjoy themselves.

This project, which will continue throughout 2014, has been beneficial to and appreciated by the children. SFD made multiple visits to verify the progress the project is making. Each time SFD accompanied the Al Karama team to a different school the children were always impatiently waiting for them to arrive. For more information on this project visit: <https://www.facebook.com/alkarama.bus?ref=ts&fref=ts>.



Figure 6: children playing

2. Nabad al Hayat Center for Children and Development

SFD supported the renovation and transformation of a 300m² basement into a center for children and youth in the city of Saqba. The center, which is run by a team of 24 young graduates as well as a number of volunteers, was equipped with 12 computers, tables, and benches. The center was officially opened on July 15, 2013 but was operational prior to that time.

From August to December 2013 the center welcomed 180 children for reading, math, and science classes. The children were also given access to psycho-socio support.

The center's team also organized fun activities for the children and approximately 200 children took part in these activities.

Forty young women between the age of 15 and 30 also benefited from the center's services. These women attended classes in English, French, and computer skills.

Even before beginning this project SDF worked with Nabad to support a writing and entertainment workshop for children in primary school (66 boys and 88 girls), as well as a local school in the village of Saqba in late May 2013. This workshop, "Children draw freedom", is run by specialists and has allowed young children to gather in a safe and calm environment where they can use their imaginations and express themselves. Through the children's artwork it is clear that they have witnessed unspeakable horrors.⁹ Nevertheless the center allowed the children to express themselves, to find joy in drawing together, and to spend time in a safe place.



Figure 7: workshop with children

⁹<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.520220951371028.1073741845.177009252358868&type=3>



Figure 8: computer class for young women

3. Bassel Shahede (Kawla Alazour) School in Aleppo

In June 2013 SFD assisted in opening the Bassel Shahede School in the Jalloum neighborhood of Aleppo. The school is located inside the building of an old traditional school and is made up of twelve classrooms, a library, and a large courtyard. The Jalloum area of Aleppo was largely abandoned from 2012-2013 and was the victim of many shelling attacks. The opening of this school was an important step in helping the neighborhood to return to normal.

The standard Syrian curriculum is taught in the school; however, all ideological subjects normally imposed by the regime were removed from the curriculum.

From June to September 2013, 150 primary school children attended classes to prepare them to return to normal schooling after a period of absence. During the summer these children also benefited from different activities, such as celebrating the festival of Eid, theater workshops, and film screenings. When the 2013-2014 school year began in October the school welcomed 340 students.



figure 9 : children in class



figure 10 : children watching a movie

4. Huzeifa Al Altrash School

The Huzeifa Al Altrash school aims to support young woman who want to obtain their middle school exit exam (the *brevet* in the French school system) or a high school diploma.

Two rooms in an apartment were rented and equipped with the necessary supplies. The school is located in the Bustan Alkasar neighborhood of Aleppo, an area that has been heavily attacked during the war. One hundred students were studying to pass

the exam for their high school diploma and 20 were prepared to pass their middle school exit exam.



figure 11 : women in class

Our partner, Nabad (Arabic for heartbeat), organized these last three projects. Nabad is a network of young Syrians who are work towards establishing democracy in Syria. Nabad has completed numerous projects supporting awareness about democracy, human rights, as well as education. Sadly, Nabad was forced to abandon their projects after its members were all arrested by the Syrian regime and extremist groups. SFD would like to acknowledge their courage and perseverance. For more information on Nabad and the projects we completed together visit: <https://www.facebook.com/nabd.shabab.syria/>.

C. Projects Supporting Civil Society

Throughout 2013 SFD organized different projects to support civil society, especially in northern Syria where these projects were necessary to make up for the absence of the state.

1. Creation of a Food Co-op

This project began in July 2013 in the city of Maarat al-Naman, not far from the city of Idlib, in northern Syria.

Due to the current situation in Syria everyday food staples are not as abundant as they have been previously and the prices have risen drastically. The Syrian population is confronted with a serious problem of being unable to purchase the necessities they need because they cannot afford them.

The project's goal was to open a food co-op where the prices of goods would be more affordable for the Syrian population. SFD organized this project in collaboration with the organization Basmet Amal.

The main goal of this project was to supply basic food supplies at a lower price. In the long term the project also aims to encourage people who have fled from Maarat al Naman to return. The co-op will also employ three people.

The co-op benefits around 12,000 people in the city of Maarat al Naman and is running smoothly. Many people come to the co-op daily to buy the food they need. Today the co-op is still open and continues to provide lower cost food to the Syrian population.



figure 12 : food co-op

2. Support for Civil Defense: Repair of a Fire-Truck

In the northern parts of Syria the communities are led by local councils, which are elected from the community. The councils try to make the most of the resources available to them to organize daily life and to ensure support for different sectors, such as education, health services, and protection of civilians. In July 2013, the local council of Saraqeb, with SFD's support, was able to repair a fire-track so that it could effectively be used to put out fires, especially after a shelling. Today the fire-truck is still in use and can effectively fight fires.



figure 13 : firetruck

3. Support for a Hospital

In May 2013 SFD financially contributed to CODSSY, a federation of French NGOs who support Syrian civil society. This financial contribution allowed a hospital in northern Syria to purchase medical supplies, bags of blood, and to open a maternity ward. For more information on this project visit: <http://codssy.org/?p=1804>.

D. Humanitarian Projects: the Women in the Caves

This project was carried out from June to August 2013. The project's aim was to provide emergency aid for refugee families who had taken shelter in caves while waiting for a long-term solution. In the countryside surrounding Idlib, in northern Syria, about thirty families, made up of mostly just women and children, live in caves. SFD visited these families in order to find a solution so they could live in better conditions.

The project's main goal was to support the families living in the caves that were dying from starvation, exposure, and disease - especially as winter was approaching.

Different solutions were put into place to respond to this problem:

- Guarantee essential goods
- Dispense money
- Distribute blankets and fuel for heaters.

This project ran for three months and benefited 174 people.

SFD also intervened and brought food and shelter to internally displaced persons in the Latakia region. The internally displaced persons living in this region were all forced to flee their homes due to the conflict.

Overview of 2013

Soriyat for Development had an effective year. SFD supported a number of different projects in various regions across Syria, principally in the Ghouta, Idleb, and Aleppo.

Seventeen micro-projects were put into place to support single mothers who are now solely responsible for providing for their families. The single mothers are now able to provide for their families because of the skills and personal development they gained through these projects. By teaching women skills they can use in their everyday lives, these micro-projects went further than just delivering humanitarian aid, which all other NGOs present in Syria already do.

SFD's other projects were dedicated to supporting and protecting children. Through these projects children were given access to education and psychosocial support to protect them from the consequences of war. More than 830 children benefited from four educational projects. 160 young women were able to obtain a high school diploma, computer skills, or began studying a foreign language.

Civil Society and humanitarian projects were also carried out with SFD's support. These projects met important human needs and saved lives.

The unpredictable working conditions combined with sieges and shelling attacks made it impossible to complete some projects. SFD lost partners and volunteers who were killed by attacks, kidnapped, or arrested. Some were forced to flee from the country.

SFD attempted to respond to the harrowing situation in Syria with optimism and very few resources. SFD's strategy has since been revised. SFD will no longer support one-time economic projects but instead will focus on long-term development projects.

After reviewing all of the projects in 2013 SFD has decided to target certain important issues with their projects. As a result of this decision SFD will concentrate on

projects that target women empowerment and the protection and education of children in 2014.

Our Local Partners

We would like to thank all of our partners. Without their support our projects would not have been possible.

- Nabd: <https://www.facebook.com/nabd.shabab.syria?fref=ts>
- Bus Al Karama: <https://www.facebook.com/alkarama.bus?fref=ts>
- Basmat Amal: <https://www.facebook.com/basmetamal2011?ref=ts&fref=ts>
- Local Development and Small-Projects Support Office
- Zoom In
- Saraqueb Local Council



Our Donors

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