

Soriyat For Development

2014 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.

SFD was born in northern Syria during a time of chaos and war, well before it was founded in France. It was the fruit of meeting and working with various women's groups inside Syria.

SFD is one of the first Syrian organizations working to support women and children in northern Syria. The founder visited this region of Syria many times and was able to document, as a writer and journalist, the daily lives of women and children. Her 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 act as an incentive for women as they become involved with 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 at a time of war and destruction in order to re-establish 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.

To date, SFD's work has primarily focused on:

- 1. Empowering Syrian Women;
- 2. Supporting civil society;
- 3. Educating and protecting Syrian children.

The experience of working on those three targets areas affirmed to SFD that all three are closely 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 country's 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 local currency's exchange rate against foreign currency continues to decrease, inflation continues to rise, 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 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 heating. Fighting and shelling have become part of everyday life.

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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 Commitee. *Are we listening? Acting on our commitments to women and girls affected by the Syrian Conflict.* Septembre 2014.

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, their 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 a predominant patriarchal society these women do not have access to higher-level jobs. In fact, only 12.4% of the member of parliamentarians are 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, literacy in women between the ages of 15 and 24 living in rural areas is more than 90%.⁶ The information SFD has 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, nor have 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% 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 husbands' whereabouts. This has shifted to them the task of providing for their families, a task traditionally associated with men. Given that many of them have never worked before, they now face the challenge of having to provide for their families without having the knowledge or experience necessary to meet this challenge.

⁴ Idem

⁵ Idem

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

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

Overview of 2014

2014 was an eventful year for Soriyat For Development, with the establishment, support and development of several projects.

Despite the difficult and complex situation inside Syria, SFD's teams continued to ensure the centers would run so they could provide activities and support the beneficiaries. The dedication of our teams in Syria and its neighboring countries allowed us to support the women, to reinforce their knowledge and skills and to further their personal development. SFD succeeded in gaining support for its projects from the local population by acting progressively so not to shock them.

SFD name's was changed at the end of the year, and is now Women Now For Development, SFD.

Over the course of 2014 our team also grew. In addition to the executive director based in Paris, a former manager of the center inside Syria is now the coordinator for all the projects inside Syrian centers. She is based in Gazientep, Turkey. At the end of 2014, the Soriyat team included 93 active women.

As we saw in this report, numerous activities were organized throughout the year. In total, the five training centers, six schools, as well as one-off support projects for partners, the actions led by Soriyat For Development benefited more than 11,000 people.

We believe we need to continue our actions at any cost regardless of the deteriorating situation. Our centers offer a real safe place for women where they can escape their daily problems and the misery of war in order to work on their personal development. Syrian women have engaged with the centers and have shown a remarkable willingness to learn. They have the opportunity and the willingness to participate in the social and political life of their country in the local, national or international levels. They have a very important potential that needs strong support. Mothers are the key for peace in Syria.

We have, however, encountered some difficulties that we needed to address. Many women struggle with illiteracy and it is a source of embarrassment for them. As a result not many women attend our literacy classes. This issue requires further development of a plan of action. SFD has also struggled to provide adequate psychosocial support because of the lack of professionals in this field.

Projects organized in 2014

The year 2014 was an important one for Soriyat For Development, projects were focused on two main areas: women empowerment and child protection. In addition to these two target areas, SFD also provided support to Syrian civil society.

With the support of several donors, SFD was able to implement the following projects in 2014:

A. Women empowerment

SFD's work on helping empower women continued to grow. Women who were trained in the first few training cycles became agents who helped develop activities within Syria allowing SFD to meet with and have access to more women, therefor enabling SFD to launch a new project in 2014 called "Women Now Center". All the activities offered in the center allow women to empower themselves, both inside Syria and its neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

These centers aim to support Syrian women and give them the necessary tools for their economic, social, psychological and political empowerment through workshops and activities.

Wherever possible, each center is equipped / includes the following departments:

- Professional empowerment: this department offers professional and vocational training, such as hairdressing, manual work, crochet, knitting, micro-project management, as well as a variety of other income-generating activities.
- Education strengthening: literacy teaching, foreign language classes, computer literacy, and remedial courses for young people.
- Psychosocial support: sessions of psychosocial support at the center and outside, in places like refugee camps, usually help twice weekly.
- Social and civic strengthening: training workshops, political participation, and discussions are frequently organized.
- Cultural strengthening: centers are equipped with libraries and multimedia equipment to enable regular screenings of carefully selected documentaries or

children's films. These activities have become cherished moments that are both informative and friendly moments, especially that electricity and television have become rare in Syria and refugee camps.

- Centers are also equipped with daycare for children between the ages of 2 and 12 whose mothers come to the centers. The daycare offers psychosocial support activities and educational programs. The center also do roving activities for children inside the camps.
- Activities for young adults: some of the centers offer specific activities and workshops for young adults (professional, educational and psychosocial workshops and activities).

The centers have proven to be a huge success with women and the wider local communities. **More than 5,000 women have benefited from the many activities offered**. This success has reflected very positively on SFD as it has become a good model for other organizations working in the field of Syrian women empowerment. As a result SFD received numerous requests for new partnerships and center openings.

1. The centers in besieged areas

Two centers opened in besieged areas, with the cooperation of Razan Zeitouna who worked as the representative of the Local Development and Small Projects Support office (LDSPS) with Samira Khalil⁸. Some of these besieged areas were victims of chemical attacks, and are still bombed by the Syrian regime. Since 2013 the inhabitants of these areas have been living in complete poverty and have little or no access to electricity, running water, means of communication, healthcare education or other basic needs. They are completely cut off from the rest of the world. There is a drastic food shortage in the Ghouta for example because humanitarian aid allowed inside this area is incredibly limited. It is estimated that more than 70% of the infrastructure of Ghouta has been destroyed.

In the first town, SFD's women empowerment center is the only civil entity present.

⁸ Samira Khalil was kidnapped with Razan Zeitouna, a famous human right defender, on 09/12/2013.

Since opening in January 2014, more than 650 women have benefited from the center, and more and more women would like to come. The center has organized around sixteen different workshops, focusing on educational, political and economic issues.

In addition to the workshops and other activities, conferences addressing different topics, such as the economic life in a besieged area, child protection, and early marriage, are organized.

A second center was also built and got partially destroyed following bombardment on October 20, 2014. Since then, the team moved into another building and the center reopened on December 12, 2014. The center welcomed around 830 women the first year it was open and is expecting more women in the future.

Limited financial resources meant that it was not possible to open more centers in the Ghouta. SFD is therefore supporting a literacy project, in a third village, which benefited women of the Ghouta for four months.



Figure 1 Project management training

2. Idlib center

This center opened in March 2014 in Idlib in northern Syria in collaboration with a local organization.

With its relative close proximity to the Turkish borders, the issue of shortage of supplies is not as serious as in the other cities where SFD's centers are located in besieged areas. This enabled SFD to better equip this center. It has for example six computers that are being used in workshops and classes.

This center is renowned for its activities throughout the region. Many more women would like to come to the center to benefit from the activities but are, unfortunately, unable to because of the lack of transportation.

In August 2014, there were numerous confrontations and the city was heavily bombed. These unfortunate events did not prevent women from coming to the center and participating in the graduation ceremony. It shows the great bravery, motivation and engagement of those women who aim to strengthen their knowledge or continue their education.

The center welcomed 670 beneficiaries in 2014.



Figure 2 First aid course

3. Mazaya center

This center opened in the summer of 2013 in Kifranbel as a local initiative in the region of Idlib in northern Syria. The center was opened after women in the village launched a local initiative. Mazaya center organized different activities, such as English, first aid, sewing, knitting and hairdressing courses as well as discussions about the situation of women in Syria. They also held a satirical cartoon contest. SFD supported the launch center and it's management during six months. Today, SFD still collaborates with the center on different scales.

4. Lebanon center

The center opened in January 2014, in northeastern Lebanon. It works with Syrian refugee women in the region. These women represent more than half of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, which is estimated to be 1.14 million. The majority of the refugees come from the suburbs of Damascus or Homs.

In Lebanon most women and children refugees live in poverty, face discrimination, and do not have access to health care, education, or job opportunities⁹. Around 60% of them feel insecure. Most refugees live in refugee camps or in inappropriate accommodation.

The center has been successful since it first opened its doors. Every week the center organizes a film screening or talks, lectures, workshops about several topics, such as democracy or women's involvement in society.

In order to provide easy access to the center for the women a bus is sent to pick them up from the camp, or where they are living, and drop them back off at the end of the day.

The center has become a model in Lebanon for other organizations to follow on the issue of strengthening the position of refugee women. SFD's success in Lebanon drives the team to further develop actions.

Many mothers and families who have young sons fear that because their sons have no access to education or jobs they will be vulnerable and easily recruited to join extremist groups or other armed groups. In response to these fears the Lebanon center has created a workshop, gets repeated, for young men that meets two hours once a week, after all the courses for the women have finished. This opportunity for the young men has reassured many mothers and has created better family cohesion.

⁹ International Rescue Commitee. *Are we listening? Acting on our commitments to women and girls affected by the Syrian Conflict.* Septembre 2014.



Figure 3 Film about the role of women in politic

5. Turkish center

This center opened in august 2014 in Killis in southern Turkey near the Syrian border. The center has benefited the Syrian women who took refuge in the city. Many women came to the center to take advantage of its many workshops and classes and the center has been very successful. In addition to economic and political workshops, women have the opportunity to learn Turkish, a request made by the women themselves, to make their transition to life in Turkey easier.

Unfortunately, by the end of 2014 SFD was forced to end its activities in Turkey.



Figure 4 Killis Center inauguration



Figure 5 Children activities

While the center was open it was successful and popular among the local population. In total, the center, welcomed more than 7,500 women and 3,000 children.

Um Mahmoud: I took a literacy course at the WNC. Before the course I didn't even know how to hold a pen and I was ashamed of my illiteracy when I saw my husband and children reading. I love to read the holy Quran alone, and follow the news ticker on the TV. Now I know what letters look like. I learned how to hold a pen, draw the letters, recognize the forms, and master the movements of the pen. Now I can spell words, and write complete sentences. May Allah reward everyone who works to improve the situation of women.

Um Mohammed: "I am taking a sewing course and I am now able to sew clothes for all of my children. My husband was detained and I am raising our five children alone. Only god knows how I will be able to feed them while we live under siege and there is mass hunger. Today I work from home and earn enough money to feed my children. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the opening of this center and all the employees. I hope the centre will organize embroidery and fashion design courses as well, they would be very useful for my work".

"Noor is a young girl of only 16 and sadly she has a hearing problem that makes it difficult for her to learn. Noor does not speak fluently and is difficult to understand. She stopped going to school when the war broke out.

A few months ago she began attending a literacy course, first the introductory level and then the second level. With specialized help from her professors, today Noor is able to write short messages and communicate better. She has gained more self-confidence and has begun taking a hair styling course".

Summary, January to December 2014, for all SFD's center :

Activities	Courses	Beneficiaries	Diploma
Hair dressing	11	315	240
Sewing	17	271	260
Hook	20	420	400
Workshop	4	73	73
Knitting	3	50	50
ICDL	15	180	140
English	30	858	555
French	17	190	175
Literacy	13	190	147
First aid	10	358	221
Drawing	3	63	63
Photography	1	25	
	1	25	
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	Hair dressing Sewing Hook Workshop Knitting ICDL English French Literacy First aid Drawing	Hair dressing 17 Sewing 17 Hook 20 Workshop 4 Knitting 3 ICDL 15 English 30 French 17 Literacy 13 First aid 10 Drawing 3 Photography 1 Legal advices 1 Civil defence 1 Conferences (conflict, women rights) Psycho social support Education, psycho social support	Hair dressing

6. The establishment of economic micro-projects

Three micro-projects were set up in the city of Saraqeb in January 2014.

The first project was organized to manufacture cotton underwear. The project benefits a woman and her six children. The woman was employed in a workshop in town until it closed a year and a half ago. With the grant from SFD she bought a sewing machine, cotton fabric and a generator to make up for the absence of electricity in her area. The woman makes cotton underwear and sells them in a little store.

The Second project was designed to manufacture yogurt. The project benefits a woman and her four children. The woman used to work in a dairy product factory. She purchased the utensils she needed, a generator, and gas with the money from SFD. She makes yogurts that she sells to the residents of the neighborhood. This project has been successful because people prefer to buy homemade yogurt instead of industrial ones, which are also rarer because many factories have closed due to bombings.

The third project is a clothing store. It benefits a woman and her 6 children. Contrary to the first two projects, this woman does not have any experience in the workplace. She is in charge of the management of this little store that is the only one of its kind in the area since most of the stores in Saraqeb move to the suburbs.

B. Education and child protection

The situation for Syrian children has deteriorated in 2014. Nearly 2 million children live in Syrian areas that are cut off from humanitarian aid and more than 2.6 million do not have access to education.

SFD has continued to support alternative educational initiatives launched in 2013.

1. Al Karama Bus

A travelling school project was launched in March 2013, with the goal of providing educational and fun activities to displaced Syrian children who sought refuge in former schools all over the area.

The team uses its bus to visit four schools in the Idleb area to work with the displaced children. The Al Karama team goes to a different school each day to lead activities with children, who have been divided into different age groups. The type of activities offered to each group vary with the age of the participating children. Activities include gymnastics, sports, drawing, reading, writing, maths, and science for the older children, as well as movie screenings and theatrical activities. These activities allow children to continue their schooling and to have fun at the same time¹⁰.

Six former schools, where internally displaced persons now live, were visited by the al Karama Bus, benefiting more than 1 570 children, during 6 months.

SFD supported this educational project until March 2014. Since March 2014, the media office of the city of Kifranbel took over the sponsorship of this project.

¹⁰ For more information on this project read our annual report from 2013,page 15 "1.Bus al Karama"



Figure 7 Class for children

2. Support for "Nabd" schools

In 2014 SFD continued to support three school initiatives of our partner Nabd (Bassel Shahede School, Huzeifa Al Atrash school and Nabad Alhayat center) in the towns of Aleppo and Saqba, until the end of the school year 2013-2014.

Unfortunately, because of the escalation of the conflict and the arrest of numerous Nabd members, two initiatives ended in March and the other was forced to end in May. SFD does not have any more information about the projects at this time. The number of children who benefited from the initiatives is estimated to be 640.

These projects were very helpful for children and young adults who were able to spend time together to exchange ideas and to do activities in order to escape the conflict, even if it was only for a short amount of time.



Figure 8 One of the last picture we took in Aleppo, March 2015: the happiness train.

3. Partnership with the child protection network

In January 2014, SFD become a partner of "Hurass" ¹¹, the children protection network in Syria. This network began as a local project that was organized by young Syrian women in the suburbs of Damascus. Under the direction of the Non-Violent Syrian Movement the network became a national project in January 2013. With the help of SFD, Hurass was about to further develop their projects and SFD also benefited from the network's expertise who work with children to enhance our child protection projects

a. Psychosocial and education center

In collaboration with Hurass, three child education and protection centers were opened from January to December 2014 in the Idleb countryside and the suburbs of Damascus.

These centers work according to the Educational Principles in an Emergency. Thanks to the training centers, this project aims to offer an accelerated learning program to fill gaps to internally displaced children. Then, the goal is to try to rehabilitate them in functional schools. The project also includes a large number of psychosocial support activities that can be individualized according to the children's needs.

¹¹ http://www.childprotectsyria.org/

Beneficiaries			
Total	1346		
Girls	49.5%		
Boys	50.5 %		
Children under 18 years old	93.6 %		
Adults	6.4 %		
Intern displaced person inside Syria	100 %		



Figure 9 Children activities

b. Child protection workshops

These workshops set up by the Hurass network aimed at training and relaying necessary knowledge to people who work with children about tools that can be used to protect them in an emergency situation, such as a time of war. The workshops also focus on teaching people how to identify the most vulnerable children and how to most effectively help them.

Teachers, social workers and volunteers that have experience with children organized these workshops. The goal at the end of each session is that each trainee can in turn train others about child protection.

The workshops, which are organized over a few days, cover the following topics:

- Child communication during war;
- Child protection;
- How to protect and help our children
- How to offer psychosocial support to children
- To understand how children are affected by the crisis

The workshops on child protection were held simultaneously in seven Syrian cities: Idleb, Douma, Daraa, Aleppo, Qunaitra, Qamishli, Aamouda. Our entire team participated in the workshop.

- 1. QAMISHLI: 3 groups, 44 beneficiaries.
- 2. IDLEB: 5 groups, 61 beneficiaries.
- 3. DOUMA: 3 groups, 39 beneficiaries.
- 4. DARAA: 2 groups, 25 beneficiaries.
- 5. ALEPpo: 3 groups, 38 beneficiaries.
- 6. QUNAITRA: 3 groups, 36 beneficiaries.
- 7. AAMOUDA: 1 group, 15 beneficiaries.

All of the 243 beneficiaries of the child protection workshop were satisfied with what they learned and have given the sessions positive feedback. They felt they had learned a lot and that they were able to use what they learned in their work.

Some NGOs and associations working on the ground for children have requested a similar session be organized for them.

One of the participants explained that before the course he agreed with the general consensus that "children must be involved in some aspects of the war, it will help the child to better understand what is going on and to cope with conflict and risk. After completing the course I understand this is wrong and that war affects children negatively in the long term, even for an entire generation! I understand that our role is to protect children and to not involve them in the war. I also learned how to protect children and how to communicate with them

C. Civil society support

1. Agricultural project in the east Ghouta

This project was implemented in March 2014. It was born out of a partnership with a local council in the Ghouta.

This agricultural project, in a besieged city, aims is to cultivate enough land, so the inhabitants can harvest enough food to feed the 25,000 residents of the city.

The teams in charge of this project worked for a long time on the preparation, clearing and maintenance of the land to make them cultivable. Once this first stage was accomplished wheat, barley, and legumes were planted, cared for, and harvested.

In total the residents of the Ghouta have harvested around 28 tons of beans and peas.

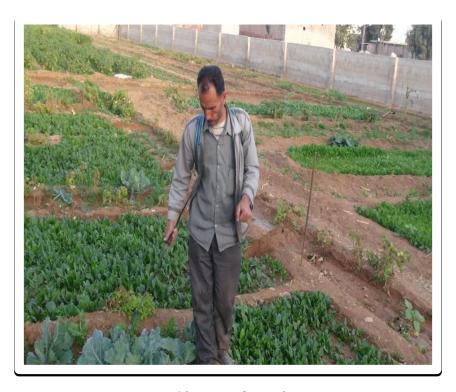


Figure 10 Pesticide application

2. Kitchen solidarity project: "one same hand"

The worsening situation in Syria has made it difficult to support income generating activities inside the Ghouta and for this reason Soriyat For Development has chosen to support a female solidarity initiative founded by a female activist. The project is called "one same hand" and it works to provide meals to the impoverished families of the Ghouta. The project works in solidarity with Syrians outside of the Ghouta. The founder of the project cooks to feed 100 to 300 families each day. When the project first began, she had few kitchen tools at her disposal, making it difficult to prepare enough meals to feed all the hungry families. Soriyat For Development chose to support this project for two reasons. First, to allow the founder to make enough food for the as many people as possible, and with the assistance of SFD the founder was able to buy the kitchen utensils and firewood she needed. Secondly, SFD works to support female activists and encourages women to become active participants in their communities, for this reason it was important to support this project so other women could have a successful female role model to follow.



Figure 11 Kitchen utensils

D. Invitation to international conferences

SFD has become a key and vital actor in the field of Syrian women empowerment. SFD was invited to an experts meeting organized by Henrich Boll¹², a fund based in Berlin, called: "Women at the Peace Negotiation Tables: Negotiating the end of sexual and gender-based violence in (post) conflict environments".

SFD was also invited by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to share our work and experiences with Women refugees in Lebanon¹³.

SFD participated in the "Ending sexual violence in conflict" 14 meeting, organized in London, in June 2014.



Figure 12 Samar Yazbek and Majd Shourbagy from SFD participate in Syrian women, Ending sexual violence in conflict meeting¹⁵

¹² http://www.boell.de/en

¹³ Annex 1 : invitation to a meeting with the Dutch MFA

¹⁴ http://www.wilpfinternational.org/the-women-of-syria-advocating-for-peace-in-syria/

¹⁵ http://www.wilpfinternational.org/the-women-of-syria-advocating-for-peace-in-syria/

Women Now Price

In January 2015, Women Now launched the first edition of Women Now prize Samira Al Khalil.

SFD aim to launch an annual prize as part of establishing a live and rolling archive to protect and preserve the memory of Syrians, both long-absent and systematically dismantled during years of repression and dictatorship.

Every year the prize will be named after a Syrian activist. This year the activist is Samira al-Khalil (portrayed here by a Syrian designer).

Candidates can submit their work until September, then a jury will select the best entry.



SFD's national partners

SFD would like to thank all of it's partners. Without their support, SFD's projects would not have been possible.

- Bus Al Karama: https://www.facebook.com/alkarama.bus?fref=ts
- Basmat Amal: https://www.facebook.com/basmetamal2011?ref=ts&fref=ts
- Child protection network (Hurass) http://www.childprotectsyria.org/
- Local Development and Small-Projects Support Office.
- Nabd: https://www.facebook.com/nabd.shabab.syria?fref=ts



SFD's donors

SFD's projects would not have been possible without the generous support of:

- Asfari Foundation.
- Fond des Femmes pour la Méditerranée.
- GIZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.
- Kvinna till Kvinna.
- Kayani.
- Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Français (centre de crise).

SFD would like to thank all of our donors.







Annex

Annex: 2014 financial report.