



Integrated Development in Syria

The Aga Khan Development Network has made a long term commitment to working with the peoples and Government of Syria to support and contribute to the improvement of prospects for economic, social, and cultural development. Current priority areas include rural economic development, employment and enterprise development, enhancing the quality of social services, strengthening civil society organisations, and protecting cultural heritage including the development of sustainable tourism.

Drawing on its considerable experience in the region as well as selected countries of South and Central Asia and Africa, AKDN is piloting an integrated approach to addressing issues of social, economic and cultural development specific to the Syrian context. The aim is to develop a programme with the necessary critical mass to serve as a model for wider sector reform. AKDN will test models of public-private partnership that enhance quality in the provision of social services and augment the capacity of the public sector

to work with private institutions to meet the needs of a growing population.

These efforts are undertaken within a Framework for Development Cooperation Agreement, between AKDN and the Government of Syria, which was ratified by the Syrian Parliament in 2002.

Economic Development

Syria's primary economic challenge is unemployment, which has been increasing at a rate faster than GDP growth. Economic policies based on the state's responsibility to ensure full employment contrast with the increasing demands of a free market economy and attempts to deregulate. As a result, changes on the ground remain difficult despite the government's commitment to expand foreign investment and increase the pace of economic liberalization.

One of the most difficult changes required to transform a state-run, command economy into a vibrant economic structure characterised by private enterprise, is to

catalyse entrepreneurship by drawing on the creative potential of an educated labour force bolstered by enabling structures such as access to finance and business development services. To assist in building this human resource base, AKDN has initiated a credit and business advisory services programme in six Syrian provinces (Hama, Latakia, Aleppo, Tartous, Damascus, and Sweida), serving both rural and urban populations.

Under the programme, loans are disbursed for the creation of new enterprises, the expansion of existing businesses, and servicing agricultural activities. In the area of microfinance, AKDN works closely with existing Village Development Committees (VDCs) as part of the healthy villages programme in Haffeh within the province of Latakia and in areas surrounding Aleppo. Within the first three years of the programme, more than US\$12 were disbursed in loans resulting in the creation of more than 11,000 new jobs. Nearly a quarter of loan recipients are female. The proportion of women benefiting from the

The Health Programme is implementing capacity-building initiatives as well as providing technical assistance, clinical and management training to staff and volunteers to ensure sustainable improvements in healthcare delivery.



programme is much higher after taking account of the fact that lending supports businesses which employ many women. This two-pronged strategy of building human resource capacity and providing access to microfinance, especially for rural populations, also addresses the income and wealth differential between Syria's urban and rural populations.

Building Institutions

A national Microfinance Institution, the first of its kind in Syria and the region, intended to scale up AKDN's current microcredit programmes, is under discussion with the Syrian government. Given broad agreement about the critical role of credit and business advisory services in creating wealth and stimulating economic development, the AKDN is working closely with the Government to develop the necessary institutional and legal framework enabling the establishment of a microfinance institution within the country.

One of the sectors with significant potential for employment generation, and which is expected to benefit from credit and business advisory services, is cultural tourism. Syria has yet to capitalise on its rich and diverse history and vast cultural resource for tourism development. Building on its international experience in the leisure industry, especially as a key strategy for economic development, AKDN is exploring several opportunities to develop cultural assets in collaboration with the Syrian Ministries of Culture and Tourism and the Governorates of Damascus and Aleppo.

The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture are proposing investments

that will combine tourism development with conservation and re-use of landmark monuments, rehabilitation of historic areas, urban planning, and wide-ranging socio-economic development to boost living conditions in historic areas and create new opportunities for residents.

Social Development

Rural Development

Water scarcity poses a major challenge for Syria's agricultural sector. Of Syria's seven aquifers, only two, near the Euphrates and coastal areas, carry surplus water. Dry climates aggravate the shortage further. With limited infrastructure for water redistribution and increasing demand nationally, AKDN has been working to improve water management in rural areas, which includes building long-term awareness of water availability and drought-resistant crops. The Foundation's initiatives include programmes to increase agricultural productivity, diversify income sources, and improve rural livelihoods complementing efforts by other international agencies such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Dutch Government.

Health

National health policy and practice continues to emphasise curative care rather than preventative care. Public resources are unable to cope with rapidly increasing demand. The negative effects of privatisation of health services, the low wages for healthcare staff, and weak allied health services e.g., nursing, clinical pharmacy, epidemiology are all reasons that affect quality of care, particularly in rural areas. A focus on community health, environmental health and disease

AKDN is working closely with both the government and community-based organisations on improving standards and quality of care, as well as on developing mechanisms for community-based health care financing. Discussions with the Ministry of Health include priority setting in areas such as increasing hospital autonomy and furthering collaboration in policy making and joint training programmes with the Aga Khan University's School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences and Department of Community Health. Community-based organisations and Village Development Councils are vital AKDN partners in an effort to improve quality of care and increase community trust in local health centres by providing training for a spectrum of health staff.

prevention is critical to the improvement of long-term wellness, given current demographic trends. Integrated health and early childhood education services, with particular focus on mothers and young children, are important to enhance health and educational status and thus strengthen Syria's long-term economic outlook.

AKDN has responded to these challenges by adopting an integrated approach towards improving the quality of healthcare in Syria, which links community health programmes, nursing education and improvement of the standards of healthcare in Syrian hospitals and health clinics.

Education

The Syrian government has recognised the need for reform and investment in education, from pre-primary to tertiary levels, to move Syria gradually towards global competitiveness. The government is supported by the European Union and EU member states, which emphasise human resource development among their development priorities for Syria. In the face of growing demand for quality education, job-ready skills, and qualifications that are internationally recognised, the Ministry of Education has shown willingness for education reform. The Ministry has developed a new law on private education, thus opening the door for private schools in Syria. AKDN is particularly interested in promoting not-for-profit private schools, and has been asked to help establish Professional Development Centres to improve teacher education and performance. Discussions with the Ministry of Education have also begun on the establishment of an Aga Khan Academy in Damascus. The Academy will be part of a system of some 20 private, not-for-profit schools that will

provide world class education through the International Baccalaureate curriculum from pre-primary to higher secondary levels in selected countries of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

The Ministry has also shown a keen interest in improving English language instruction in Syria. English teachers will spearhead a programme to re-conceptualise the role of the teacher as a catalyst for modernising teaching practices and improving education broadly. AKDN and the Syrian government have since worked together on ways to strengthen teaching capacity through training delivered by the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED), to improve the quality of English language instruction through curriculum development, new pedagogical approaches, and computer-based learning. AKU-IED is developing a programme with the Ministry of Education for providing technical assistance in teacher education and development.

Civil Society

The Government has recognised that the state cannot meet the total social and economic needs of every citizen and can benefit from community-based initiatives as an engine for socio-economic development. Non-profit, community-based organisations have an important role to play in providing social services, fostering professional networks, and generating employment opportunities. The recent creation of FIRDOS (Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria), SYEA (Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association), Bidaya and Mawred (incubators to assist start-ups), and the registration of several new NGOs working in areas like environmental management, suggest that the government is willing to

The Syrian Ministry of Education increasingly recognises the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD), which focuses on mothers and young children to improve cognitive development and learning preparedness. In Syria, early childhood education services – generally provided by the state – are poorly developed and reach less than 10 percent of children. AKDN has played a lead role in working with the Ministry of Education, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and UNICEF in developing a framework strategy for ECD in Syria, including curriculum development and teacher training.



The ECD Programme has selected the village of Taltout to initiate a pilot community centre in collaboration with the Women Federation and the local community. The community centre will provide child care and educational activities for children and education workshops for parents.

The Rural Support Programme has encouraged farmers to switch from gravity irrigation to the more efficient drip irrigation technique, which uses half the amount of water. In Freytan, RSP worked with AKAM to arrange a group loan for farmers to purchase equipment.



Programme Development Partners

Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo
 General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums
 Governorate of Aleppo
 Governorate of Damascus
 Governorate of Hama
 Governorate of Sweida
 Governorate of Tartous
 Healthy Villages Programme
 Ministry of Health
 Ministry of Higher Education
 Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
 Syrian Commission for Family Affairs
 UNICEF
 Women General Federation
 World Monuments Fund

experiment with trustworthy groups able to fill gaps where state resources are increasingly scarce.

AKDN will work closely with the government to strengthen rural and urban citizens' organisations through training and capacity building.

Cultural Development

Syria is endowed with a wealth of cultural resources. From ancient Roman cities to Crusader castles to mosques and citadels, the country is a museum of living history and an example of cultural and religious pluralism that has existed for centuries.

Due to scarce resources, the Ministry of Culture, and the Department of Antiquities in particular, is struggling to protect and manage Syria's cultural heritage.

Since 2000, AKDN has been working closely with the Ministry of Culture on citadel restoration projects in Aleppo, Masyaf and Haffeh (in Lattakia). Projects have sought to improve the physical structures of the buildings, enhance urban environments, upgrade tourist facilities, and train staff from the Department of Antiquities in documentation and rehabilitation. Communities living in close proximity to the projects have benefited from

access to income-generating loans and improvements to the urban environment.

Through the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's Historic Cities Support Programme, in particular, AKDN seeks to scale up conservation and restoration activities in urban areas in ways that catalyse social and economic development in neighbouring communities. Such activities may focus on the Old Cities of Damascus and Aleppo where AKDN's experience in urban environmental upgrading, cultural tourism, and community economic development could be integrated along the lines of the approach taken in Cairo's Darb al-Ahmar district, which has benefited from cooperation with the German development agency, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), amongst others.

For further information

Aga Khan Development Network-Syria
 Abou Rumaneh, Rawda Square,
 Abdul Kader Al Jazairi St., Building No. 15
 Damascus, Syria
 Tel: +963 11 334 3610/11
 Fax: +963 11 334 3613
 E-mail: syriainfo@akdn.org
 Website: www.akdn.org

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in Africa and Asia. Its agencies work in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. Its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

© AKDN, December 2005. Information contained in this brief can be reproduced with acknowledgement to AKDN.

Photo credits: AKDN / Naoura Al-Azmeh

