



ARMADILLA SCS ONLUS NOTEBOOKS

Syria: Territorial partnerships and cooperation for peace

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Introduction

Armadilla is a non-profit organization of social utility committed to international development cooperation. (www.armadilla.coop)

It also carries out training and information activities on the 2030 agenda of the United Nations, for the defence of human rights and for the achievement of the 17 objectives for sustainable human development: <https://www.unric.org/it/agenda-2030>

In this context these Notebooks want to contribute to disseminate among the students and the public opinion to which Armadilla addresses, information, critical analysis, possible answers to the priority problems that are faced.

The collection of all the Notebooks from 2015 to today can be found at: <http://armadilla.coop/quaderni/>

In this Notebook we want to update information and analysis on the situation in Syria in particular the cooperation activities for the promotion of territorial partnerships.

In Syria, Armadilla has been operating since 2004 in activities with the Zaharet Al Madan - ZAM association as a local partner. He also collaborates with OCHA, the United Nations Coordination Office for Humanitarian Affairs and with UNICEF, the Otto per Mille Office of the Italian Waldensian Church, the Italian Development Cooperation Agency and the Autonomous Province of Trento, for the realization of a humanitarian assistance program. in the Damascus area, which provides for food aid and child protection measures for around 1,200 families affected dramatically by the consequences of the conflict.

In the Damascus area millions of people have fled who, forced to leave their homes, try to escape the violence of the conflict. Together with ZAM, Armadilla manages a social center, which in recent years has become a fundamental reference point for families who find support and protection there.

Thanks to this program carried out in collaboration with the United Nations Agency, the most vulnerable families have received for years, monthly food kits that have helped to improve the conditions of access to food that due to the protracted conflict are always dramatic and urgent. The project also makes it possible to carry out important psycho-pedagogical support activities for children, who experience the consequences of conflict in a more traumatic manner, experiencing the sense of disorientation and lack of security.

The Waldensian Church collaborates with the funds of Otto for Thousand with the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Italian Development Cooperation Agency for the humanitarian aid activities that Armadilla is carrying out in Syria in the Damascus area, to give an immediate response to the most urgent needs of the population.

Thanks to this collaboration, Armadilla supports the local partner ZAM, in its effort to rebuild peace relations through emergency humanitarian aid and, above all, psychological support to victims of traumas caused by war, family grief and uprooting from their communities of origin.

The project to support local communities has allowed to continue the actions of psychosocial support to families and in particular to the children who have suffered in a traumatic way the drama of abandoning their homes and the sad situation of widespread war.

The existence of a reference community aggregative reference, in a situation of total abandonment by public institutions, is already an important result guaranteed by these projects.

Armadilla is also involved with various partners of the Emilia Romagna Region in the support and exchange of good practices in the field of Disability and Occupational Therapy.

In this framework, after a year of joint work with Syrian partners and Italian territories, on Sunday 16 September 2018 the agreement between the Al Manara University of Latakia and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia for the establishment of the first degree course in Occupational Therapy in the Syrian territory.

The three-year course will see the professors of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (Unimore) at work and is open to Syrian students and professors. In addition to representing an innovative training opportunity for young graduates, the course will contribute to the creation of a lasting and concrete relationship between the Syrian and Italian academic world.

In the difficult context of this region, various difficult problems are posed on how to contribute to overcoming armed conflicts, how to guarantee the indispensable humanitarian aid in situations of extreme emergency and how to foresee the transition from emergency to cooperation for sustainable human development.

How to strengthen the presence and role of the Italian entities involved to contribute to achieving what the 125/2014 law calls for: the creation of an "Italian system" that is an effective protagonist in international cooperation.

To this end, Armadilla is convinced that cooperation between territories and the promotion of continuous territorial partnerships must represent a renewed way of conceiving international solidarity and fair and sustainable development among peoples, based on participation, on the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, on strengthening the capacities and powers of the decentralized actors and in particular the most disadvantaged social groups, contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals established in 2030 Agenda, approved by the UN General Assembly in September 2015 Knowing how to properly combine the local with the global, without believing that they are opposed.

1. Armadilla and international cooperation in Syria

Armadilla has been operating in Syria for almost 15 years, with an integrated program to promote the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the resident population in the southern suburbs of Damascus, an area that has always been characterized by poverty, poor literacy and insufficient access to basic services. Armadilla carries out its action in close collaboration with the local association Zahret al Madaen (ZAM), which since 2000 has been running a multiservice center offering social and health services for the most vulnerable categories of the population, especially women and children with disabilities, courses professional services for women and basic support for families in economic and social difficulty.

Through the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Union and private foundations, Armadilla has favored the strengthening of the local partner's intervention skills, making the ZAM Center an important territorial reference in the field of physical and cognitive rehabilitation therapy for minors with disabilities and in the field of vocational training for women, aimed at promoting income support activities, and psychosocial interventions aimed at increasing the emotional well-being of women and girls. These development interventions have been implemented within the framework of agreements signed with the competent Authorities, in particular with the Ministry of Health and with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Beginning in 2012, the worsening of the crisis began to make its effects felt in the Damascus area, especially in the area of Hajar Al Aswad, from which most of the families come, who referred and referred to the ZAM Center. The exponential increase in needs, which required an immediate response, led Armadilla and ZAM to increase their efforts to meet emerging needs.

While continuing to support the development processes initiated, an integrated humanitarian assistance program has been launched, still active, thanks to UNOCHA funds, funds from the Otto per Mille of the Waldensian Church and the Italian-AICS Cooperation, Autonomous Province of Trento (humanitarian emergency initiatives).

This program focused on integrating pre-existing assistance to minors with disabilities and vulnerable women, with a wide range of basic necessities: food, hygiene kits, blankets, etc.

In this framework, moreover, protection and psychosocial support for women and minors have been extended and a dense training program has begun for the ZAM Center for the assistance and rehabilitative therapy of minors with disabilities and cognitive impairments. and / or motor.

Until November 2012, the activity took place at the Hajar Al Aswad Center.

When the armed conflict reached the southern outskirts of Damascus in November 2012, almost all the families (those long settled there and those that came during the crisis) were forced to flee in search of a safer arrangement, found in the neighbouring area but safe, by Midan Kawakibi, in such a way as to be able to continue the assistance activities humanitarian and social-health and educational services of the Center. To the displaced families, already assisted by ZAM previously, other families were added in need from the surrounding areas.

The role of social actor of Zahret Al Madan, has grown over the years, leading the association to be an important reference point at the city and regional level.

This has allowed the creation of an important network between the ZAM Center and other organizations, first of all the Centro Protesi and Rehabilitation of the Ibn Al Nafis Hospital, whose technicians (physiatrists, physiotherapists, paediatricians) support the activities through both voluntary training and operators of Zahret Al Madan, both carrying out specialist visits to users who come to the Center.

Other actions and projects are being promoted, including an intervention aimed at training social-health workers from local associations on the co-construction of integrated social services and on issues related to early diagnosis and autism spectrum (proposed project at Unicef Syria) . A starting point for involving Syrian civil society associations in the activities, starting to replicate the path taken with Zahret Al Madan in the last 6 years.

In this framework, after a year of joint work with Syrian partners and Italian territories (including the Open Group Cooperative, the ASPHI Foundation of Bologna and the non-profit organization Anladi), on September 16, 2018, in Damascus, the agreement was finalized between the Al Manara University of Latakia and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia for the establishment of the first Degree Course in Occupational Therapy in the Syrian territory.

The three-year course will see the professors of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (Unimore) at work and is open to Syrian students and professors. In addition to representing an innovative training opportunity for young graduates, the course will contribute to the creation of a lasting and concrete relationship between the Syrian and Italian academic world. At a time of particular scientific and strategic value, during a scientific conference dedicated to the values and practices of Occupational Therapy and innovative techniques and policies for the assistance and inclusion of people with disabilities, aimed at professionals and associations of the damascene society.

Occupational Therapy (TO) is a healthcare profession of rehabilitation that promotes health and well-being through employment. It is a rehabilitative process that, using as a privileged means the doing and the multiple activities of daily life, through an individual or group intervention, involves the whole person, with the aim of helping their physical, psychological or social adaptation, to improve overall quality of life even in disability.

Employment is the goal of the TO but also the means by which one tries to modify the bodily functions of the person (motor-sensorial, perceptive-cognitive, emotional-relational capacity); generally, there are three areas within which we can find occupations: personal care, work (school) and leisure time.

Occupational Therapy is practiced in a wide range of areas, including hospitals, health centers, homes, workplaces, schools and retirement homes.

Patients are actively involved in the therapeutic process and the results of Occupational Therapy are diversified, patient-led and measured in terms of participation or satisfaction derived from participation.

Occupational Therapists take into account all physical, psychological, social and environmental needs by giving a support that makes a difference in the patient's life, with a renewed sense of purpose and opening up new horizons. Occupational therapists put themselves at the service of users by giving them the power to make decisions: they provide their medical, psychological, cognitive, social and technical skills and support the person in the choice of objectives and the form of treatment that they share most, giving power to their voice.

The TO considers the basic activities of a person's life: dressing, washing, eating, managing one's own home, cultivating one's own vegetable garden. During the therapeutic process, the TO supports the person to allow them to return to participate in these life roles by enhancing the skills of the person or adapting the activities, objects or spaces.

Some proposed intervention modalities:

- Training of activities highlighted as important by the person.
- Adaptation of activities at the level of sequence, structure, posture.
- Introduction of particular objects (aids) also electronic to make activities easier and compensate for the person's deficits.
- Modification of furnishings and removal of architectural barriers to ensure accessibility and usability of the home.
- Caregiver education to become a stimulus or facilitation tool in the home environment.

The TO considers productive activities. After an analysis of the motor-sensory, perceptive-cognitive, emotional and relational skills of the person, the TO supports the user in the identification of a suitable job and accompanies him to the re-insertion of work by acting as a link with the employer.

After an analysis of the motor-sensorial, perceptive-cognitive, emotional and relational skills of the person, the TO supports the person and his caregivers (parents, teachers, educators) to allow them to participate competently in these roles that the social environment of life is expected of her, enhancing the person's skills or adapting activities, objects or spaces.

The motivating engine of our life: sports, manual activities, artistic activities, social relations, use of the media. During the therapeutic process the TO supports the person to allow them to return to perform such activities that give satisfaction, relax and motivate them to live with serenity.

A scientific investment and a bet to be able to achieve it in a context of peace and cooperation.

2. In September 2018, in Syria...

It now seems that it is possible to reunite the country under the leadership of the current government. The possibility of a total victory of Assad, united to the result of the recent elections in Iraq in which a government that has sympathized with Iran triumphed, prospect for USA, Israel and Saudi Arabia a gloomy scenario in which an Iranian Shiite Shia block controls the entire Middle Eastern region, from the borders of Pakistan to Lebanon.

For five years, the UN Security Council hopes to launch a transition process that will lead to the cessation of armed conflict.

The Council has asked all parties to “put in place a political process led by the Syrians that leads to a political transition capable of embracing the legitimate aspirations of the people” of that country. The transition involves the formation of “a transitional government with executive powers, which will be formed on the basis of mutual sharing while the continuity of government institutions is assured”. The UN document articulates the three-step solution process: negotiations, transitional phase and final definition of a new Syrian state structure.

The duration of the negotiation phase is left to the Syrians themselves, but must be based on the first Geneva Declaration, which provides for a “transitional arrangement” for the “permanent cease-fire” and “collaboration and merger of the fighting forces, excluding terrorist factions; security apparatus reform up to the “formation of transition authorities”.

The duration of the transition phase will also be established by the Syrians. In the framework of a “permanent truce”, “measures to rebuild trust” between rebel groups and the government will be launched. The two parties must identify a “deadline for the termination of any support to all foreign fighters” who in the meantime will have to leave the country. Rebels and government representatives, both represented on the government council, will have to “guarantee respect for the truce, jointly combat terrorist organizations and regain control of the national territory”.

“Immediately after its establishment, the transitional government body will have absolute powers for all military and security matters and will oversee the Joint Military Council,” reads the document.

The transitional government and the military council are delegated the task of proposing a document for the establishment of a “Syrian National Congress” that will replace the current parliament and will have to launch “a national dialogue and a constitutional reform”. The document also provides for the reform of the army, security and justice system, which are “maintained”, as well as explicitly stated that the Baath governmental party will not be dismantled, contrary to what happened in Iraq.

The transition phase will end with the convocation of “presidential and legislative elections sponsored by the United Nations, which will also have to offer technical support”.

The success of the process to bring Syria finally to a permanent peace, underlined in the draft plan, depends on the “support that will be given by the regional and international parties” through “a contact group” that will help the UN envoy.

But the difficulties in implementing this plan have pushed Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey to autonomously take on a role of mediation and signed a memorandum (in Astana) where they agree to create four areas for the reduction of armed conflicts (de - escalation), between the conflicting parties.

The four identified areas are:

1. The Governorate of Idlib (until Latakia, Aleppo and Hama) on the border with Turkey.
2. The area north of Homs that has been controlled by jihadist components for a long time.
3. The eastern part of Damascus (East Gouta) now under the control of the Syrian government.
4. The area of Dare Al Quneitra close to the Golan where, however, Israel is intended to prevent direct access to the Golan of pro-Syrian Shiite groups (Hezbollah above all).

Four areas of different international influence that does not facilitate the return to a single nation - state as Syria was before the conflict.

The defeat of Daesh in almost all areas of Syria leaves the problems of the Kurds (who demand an independent state that none of the other parties involved wants) and of the security areas with Israel and Turkey unresolved. And even more worrying is the uncertain picture of international influences involving Russia, Iran, Turkey; but also China, the USA, Saudi Arabia and Europe.

On 17 September 2018, according to Russian spokesman Igor Konashenkov, “Israeli fighter airstrikes on Syria and a Russian aircraft were shot down, killing 15 Russian soldiers”.

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, announced on September 23 that Turkey will act in Syria, east of the Euphrates River, and will establish safe areas as it did previously in the northwest of the country. The region in which, according to the Ankara leader, Turkey will soon commit itself is currently controlled by the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the Syrian Kurdish forces which, by virtue of their proximity to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a terrorist organization is considered by Ankara. The “Euphrates Shield” operation was launched by Turkey on 24 August 2016.

This is a military campaign in northern Syria aimed at “securing the Turkish-Syrian border from the threat of ISIS and to curb the expansion of the Kurds of the YPG and the militants of the Islamic State east of Afrin.

Currently, YPGs control areas of Syria located east of the Euphrates River, which explains the Turkish interest in the area. However, the expansion of the Turkish military campaign in the Kurdish territory east of the Euphrates risks causing friction between the Turkish forces and the troops of the United States, allied with Turkey within NATO and, however, deployed alongside the YPG in the Syrian conflict. Ankara does not look favourably on the partnership between the United States and the YPG which, however, were Washington’s main ally in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria.

In this regard, Erdogan said that the support of the United States for these groups “must cease”, as these measures “damage the regional balance and peace among the peoples of the region”. In this regard, the Ankara leader said he expected “Russia to support Turkey in its efforts against terrorist groups, in particular the PKK, the PYD and the YPG”.

Some units of air defence specialists of the “Corps of Guards of the Islamic Iranian Revolution” (IRGC) oversee in Syria the missile program indispensable for the Syrian army to achieve the successes so far obtained on what even the UN calls “terrorists”.

Russia will deliver to the Syrian government an air defence system S-300 that will serve to “protect the Russian military”. “Delivering such a weapon system means stopping Israel’s presence in the sky of Syria. Equivalent to an act of war, declared by those who possess these weapons. The defence system, said Moscow, is capable of intercepting air strikes at a distance of over 250 kilometers and simultaneously striking several targets.

On September 17, in Sochi, the Turkish president and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, have concluded an agreement that, by October 15, a demilitarized zone will be established, between 15 and 20 kilometers wide, between the armed groups of opposition and the troops of the Syrian regime in the north-western province of Idlib. A rebel group, located in Idlib, the last major bulwark of the opposition in Syria, has accepted the agreement proposed by Moscow and Ankara to prevent an attack by the Syrian armed forces of Bashar al-Assad, supported by Russia, in the northern province -occidental. The other two main groups in the area, on the other hand, do not see the agreement favourably. The rebel alliance of the National Liberation Front (NLF) said it accepted the agreement, reached on Monday 17 September, but also declared that the rebels remain on guard. They declared “full cooperation with our Turkish ally”. “But we will be alert for any treason on the part of the Russians, the regime or the Iranians,” the NLF warned. The Front also expressed its concern regarding the fear that the agreement could be “temporary”. “We will not abandon our weapons, our land or our revolution” against President Bashar al-Assad and against the forces supported in the Syrian territory by Russia and Iran, the rebels said.

Under the agreement, all factions in the planned demilitarized zone will have to hand over heavy weapons by October 10 and armed groups will have to retreat by October 15th. Both rebel groups of Hurras al-Deen and NLF would be in this buffer zone, as well as the HTS alliance, which dominates the province.

According to some US estimates, there are about 30,000 opposition fighters on the territory of Idlib, but according to other estimates the number would be around 100,000. According to the foreign press of many countries, a military operation aimed at the conquest of Idlib could be the most demanding and complex battle of the entire war. Which unfortunately does not end and the horrors continue.

3. Humanitarian aid in Syria

Over seven years of war have created in Syria the biggest humanitarian crisis of the last 50 years. About 13.1 million people in Syria require humanitarian aid.

Of these, 5.6 million people are in dire need due to a convergence of vulnerabilities resulting from shifts, exposure to hostilities and limited access to basic goods and services. 2,300,000 people, in the city of Damascus alone, are at risk of malnutrition due to the impossibility of access not only to quality food, but to the minimum vital requirement.

The immediate and long-term consequences of the conflict continue to be the main drivers of humanitarian needs, with the civilian population in many parts of the country exposed to significant risks of protection that threaten human life, dignity and well-being on a daily basis.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), more than half of the population was forced to leave their homes: 4.8 million people sought refuge in neighbouring countries and elsewhere; 6.3 million are internally displaced (of which almost half are minors); 13.5 million need different forms of assistance and many Syrians have fallen below the poverty line, seeing themselves forced to make choices that endanger their dignity and their rights.

Exhausting the possibility of using safe and dignified means of self-maintenance, people are led to implement survival strategies that expose them to high risks such as sexual exploitation, child labour, forced marriages and minors. Children, young people, women, people with disabilities and the elderly are the most vulnerable groups. Minors are both witnesses and victims of experiences of extreme violence due to the deployment of heavy weapons in civil areas, for the bombings and the recruitment by the various groups involved in the conflict.

More than 5.8 million children under the age of 18 require humanitarian assistance and specialized services to protect their protection. It is estimated that between 2015 and 2016 1.75 million children have not had access to school services, 1.35 million continue to be at risk of dropping out and about 2 million school-age children are been displaced several times.

Young people, which comprise 56% of the population, grow isolated and without prospects for the future, given the lack of opportunities in the scholastic/academic field and in the workplace; factors that do nothing but increase the development of dangerous survival strategies.

Women who become heads of families due to the absence of husbands, because they are dead, sick / disabled or committed to the front, usually suffer greater pressure than men, given the systematic discrimination against them on the labour market, also caused by patriarchal traditions disseminated in local communities. The context of deep insecurity also makes women more vulnerable to physical abuse and the risk of sexual exploitation.

Older people, people with physical or mental disabilities, especially those who cannot count on sufficient family or community support, are at risk of social exclusion, poverty, extreme violence due to lack of mobility, discrimination and lack of availability and access to services to meet their specific needs.

According to the United Nations, Syria's development situation has regressed for about four decades, and today four out of five Syrians live in extreme poverty, while life expectancy among Syrians has fallen more than 20 years since the beginning of the crisis in 2011.

All 12 indicators of the Millennium Development Goals have reversed, while the Syrian economy has experienced a recession of around 40% as a result of the sharp devaluation of the national currency, economic sanctions, price hikes food and fuel, the collapse of domestic production and damage to social infrastructure. It follows that the communities still present in Syria have lost access to the usual livelihoods.

To create the conditions for providing emergency humanitarian aid to civilian populations throughout the Syrian territory, such aid must respect the code of conduct based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Humanitarian aid is unrelated to any political purpose and is aimed at the neediest, regardless of nationality, religion, gender, ethnic origin or political affiliation.

So states and humanitarian entities cannot choose priority territories based on political sympathies but only with the criterion of urgency and drama of situations.

4. Syria: understanding the uselessness and the horror of a war

The 73rd UN General Assembly met in New York on 25 and 26 September 2018. 120 heads of state and government and hundreds of ministers participated, discussing the theme chosen for this year: "Making the United Nations relevant to all people: global leadership and shared responsibility for creating a peaceful and equitable society". During the Assembly, an important document "Action for peacekeeping" was approved, illustrating in the lines of reform what will be the role of the United Nations in the near future, to relaunch peacekeeping activities and the very role of multilateral organization.

It is hoped that the approval of this document will contribute to finding a solution to conflicts in the Middle East and, above all, in Syria.

A tragedy that for over seven years continues to cause deaths, invalids and general destruction of all that allows civil coexistence. UN statistics present us with the bleak picture:

Over 500,000 people have lost their lives. 1.5 million civilians reported permanent disability due to the conflict. Among them, 86,000 people were mutilated in their legs or arms. 5.3 million Syrian children urgently need humanitarian assistance. 170,000 minors live in areas currently under siege.

In the eastern Ghouta area, 12% of children under 5 years suffer from acute malnutrition: the highest rate ever recorded since the beginning of the war. 2.8 million are displaced children within the Syrian borders, and another 2.6 million are refugees in neighbouring countries. In 2017 they were recruited to fight a minor number of minors compared to 2015.

Almost 10,000 Syrian children and adolescents find refugees abroad without family members in tow: many of them are exposed to the risk of various forms of exploitation, including child labor, due to the lack of legal documentation. In 2017, the United Nations tested 175 armed attacks against personnel or health and educational facilities. Among Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, 80% of injuries are a direct consequence of the war.

At the end of May 2018, an estimated 13 million people need humanitarian assistance, including 5.2 million people in desperate conditions. As in the previous seven years, the violence, the insecurity and the change in the control of areas by the various actors, are the main engine and migration flows, internal and external to the country, with a consequent increase in humanitarian needs.

The capacity of humanitarian partners to reach the millions of people in need has continued to be hampered by intense hostility, interruption of the main access routes, unexploded objects, administrative impediments, restrictions by control bodies and scarcity of funds by the international community.

From the Mid-Year Monitoring Report (June 2018) compiled by the Whole of Syria, it is clear that compared to the estimates in the Humanitarian Needs Overview of November 2017, only 72% of those in need have been reached by interventions to restore food security. Even more dramatic data concern the interventions concerning Child Protection and Gender Based Violence (respectively, reached only 6% and 3% of vulnerable individuals).

Moreover:

- Less than half of the health complexes (hospitals, clinics, health posts) are operational, due to the heavy destructions resulting from the conflict.
- Approximately 6.5 million people are in conditions of food insecurity. It is estimated that an additional 4 million are at risk of food insecurity, due to the exhaustion of economic resources necessary for the purchase of food.
- 97% of the communities monitored need protection from one or more risk factors and 59% of communities in the area urgently need services and protected areas due to risks inherent in violence and sexual abuse against women and children.

In the genesis of the conflict, in 2011, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey organized and financed the entry of the Sunni radicals in Syria in order to destabilize the Bashar Al Assad government. They are called Al Nusra, Al Qaida and finally called ISIS.

The United States and Europe wished to strengthen the presence of moderate forces, democratic rebels for a change of government in Syria. An inadequate evaluation because most of these rebels were Jihadists and even NATO has supported groups that then became part of ISIS.