



CEMOFPSC

Seminar on humanitarian aid effectiveness: new humanitarian actors in in the Middle East

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Fundación
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Mental Health Reform and Syrian Crisis

09/03/2016

MONS. ANTOINE AUDO

Chaldean bishop of Aleppo and President of Caritas Syria

I. INTRODUCTION

I consider that I am among you in my capacity as Bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church in the whole of Syria for 25 years, and as such, I am deeply affected, like any Syrian, by the scale of the war that is devastating my country by destroying it and making it poorer, day after day! That's why I say to all of you: Thank you for all of what you do in the humanitarian field to alleviate the suffering of thousands of people, but furthermore, I call on you for peace and reconciliation. A country should not be destroyed to be given, thereafter, something to eat, but we should build peace so that every person, every family, every religious or ethnic group may be nurtured on the friendship of neighborliness, solidarity, human dignity and the common good.

I am also among you as President of Caritas Syria since the beginning of the war in Syria and, therefore, I am involved in humanitarian work as well, with its emergency and professionalism conditions. In this respect, I would like to assure you that, within Caritas, we are witnesses of communion bonds generated by our commitment to the most vulnerable, and to all categories of the Syrian society. And as a Catholic NGO, Caritas, through its services for the last 5 years, developed its own humanitarian, religious and social vision all over the Syrian territory. Our maxim has now two orientations: in a highly pluralistic country at ethnical, religious and cultural levels, we as Christians want to say first: "Together become Christians" Similarly, at national level, we seek to promote the culture of citizenship, namely: "Together become citizens" With respect to our humanitarian work as Caritas, we are therefore seeking to promote a vision of the Syrian man (human), based on human dignity, fraternal solidarity and common good.

II. CRISIS RESPONSE IN TERMS OF PROJECTS

- Caritas Syria (C-S) works on behalf of the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Syria, at the service of all people of Syria, without discrimination of any kind (religious, ethnic or confessional),
- C-S works in all regions of Syria: Aleppo, Damascus, Horns, Latakia, Aleppo and the coastal region.
- The head office is in Damascus where the Director and President are based.
- Each region can count on a professional team of 5 staff members: a Director, a Project Coordinator, an Accountant, a Social Worker, and volunteers (150 in total for the 6 the regions). Additional staff members are occasionally recruited to implement specific projects.
- The Syrian crisis has pushed C-S to improve its professional skills. Before the war, Syria (as a country) was not prepared for humanitarian aid: everything was administered by the Government. There was no professionalism in humanitarian work. For the last 5 years, C-S had to improve its professional skills to reach international standards.

Since 2013 regular trainings are being organized for the staff of C-S either in Lebanon or Syria on topics such as finance standards, project management, proposal and report writing, stress management etc. This professionalism has allowed C-S to gain the trust of local and international partners.

The Caritas network (CRS in particular) is involved financially and in providing human resources to facilitate these trainings, Continuous education remains a priority for Caritas Syria, not just to acquire technical skills but also to contribute to a mentality change (getting out of sectarianism, promoting citizenship, accepting and respecting differences, not to be in a position of doing charity to beggars but to treat every person with the dignity every human deserves). Changing the mindset of the people involved in Caritas is very important.

Since the beginning of the conflict, Caritas Syria has developed 5 main projects:

1. Food Basket:

This is an important project because the war in Syria has plunged 80% of its people into poverty—even doctors and engineers ask and receive their food baskets.

Inflation:

- before the war: \$ 1 = 50 Syrian pounds
- now: \$ 1 = 450 Syrian pounds

Inflation = X 10 while salaries are the same for those who are still working!

Ex.1: In Aleppo, C-S distributes monthly 5,000 food baskets.

Ex.2: In Damascus, 1,271 families (6,355 individuals) are receiving food baskets.

2. Medical Project:

After 5 years of conflict: most hospitals are either destroyed or not functioning resulting in a large portion of the population lacking access to basic health care. Furthermore, the majority of doctors have left. In Aleppo, for example, 80% of doctors have moved out of the country! The price of medicine has doubled when they are still available. Health services are deteriorating which contributes to the deterioration of the psychological and physical health of the population. C-S had to take action in this field, because it often means life and death for the people!

C-S covers a large % of the expenses for the surgeries (open heart, eyes, fractures, war injuries, etc.)

Ex.1: In Aleppo, around 100 surgeries per month are being sponsored by Caritas.

Ex.2: 1,694 families (2,313 individuals) in Damascus availed from Medical assistance.

Caritas Syria covers a significant part of the cost of the surgeries and the cost of medicines.

3. School Project:

Education in Syria is in a state of collapse: 3 million children have no access to education because the schools are either destroyed, damaged or occupied, families fleeing violence are displaced and the whole population is facing drastic decrease of income.

In Aleppo, for example there is a program that financially supports (through grants) 6,000 students (2,000 university students, 2,000 public schools students tuition and material, and 10 private schools).

4. Program for Displaced (IDPs):

C-S provides rental assistance for people in all regions of Syria; the program has been running for 3 years.

Ex.1: 700 families in Aleppo and: 4,593 families (2,2597 individuals) in Hassakeh benefit from this aid.

5. Elderly:

C-S focuses on reaching the most vulnerable—especially the elderly. This program is being implemented in Aleppo only with 600 beneficiaries. Every month, C-S

distributes medicines, clothing, towels, and organize special event during feast with meals and distribution of gins.

III. EFFECTIVENESS AND COORDINATION OF THE RESPONSE

After five years of conflict, we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, Around 13,5 million people in our country need humanitarian assistance!

“What we are doing, as St, Teresa of Calcutta used to say, is a drop of water but it is an essential one.” C-S has done a lot in terms of training (capacity building), it has developed its capacities and programs and we gained the trust of partners locally and internationally. We are willing to continue in the same vein.

One of the challenges in this disintegration of Syria (at all levels: political, religious and ethnic) is to be able to join forces and work together, not to exacerbate divisions and not to pull the sheet back towards anyone, we must instead create a dynamic of communion and this is the role of the Church and Caritas one of the top priorities: to become citizens together, promoting a true citizenship that accepts the differences.

Historically there is a national unity in Syria but it was unfortunately smashed with the war: we must find again this unity, deepen and consolidate it.

What are C-S's calls? Once the situation stabilizes (in a post-conflict context), C-S must shift from emergency aid to promote development projects. Priorities could be formulated as follows:

- Supporting Micro-Projects that are creating jobs for Youth: to help young people find a job and go back to a normal life. EX: loans to small businesses, etc. Unemployment is very high now in Syria and there is a mass exodus of the youth. We must stop the population drain and the exodus of youth.
- To collaborate in the house reconstruction process (with a defined strategy). The destruction of infrastructure and houses are very important because of air strikes.

IV. THE BEST POSITIONED ACTORS TO RESPOND TO THE CRISIS

- The Government through the Ministry of Social Affairs
- The leading local and international NGOs

With the following objectives: material, psychological and social reconstruction of the country and its people and the re-building/consolidation of the Syrian citizenship-unity, Caritas is an interesting actor because C-S is present in all regions of the country, through its churches networks. In addition, through the Confederation, Caritas is also a bridge with the international community. C-S is therefore a valid partner at the local and international level.

Examples of leading actors in Syria: Red Crescent, UNICEF, WFP, the European Parliament (aid agency), FPSC, JRS, St Vincent de Paul, OCHIA, UNHCR, UNFPA, AVSI (Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura).

Moreover, the local (civil) society, the trade unions, can play different complementary roles.

First of all, a sustained humanitarian work in order to allow families and individuals to simply exist! In addition, we can make several proposals:

- Create small loans to young people allowing them to work and ensure their future.
- Work at the psycho-social level, especially with women and children, in order to heal their trauma and help them regain confidence.
- Set up specialized workshops to promote the production of prostheses (50,000 cases in Syria ...).
- Work on solving pending problems, exchange of prisoners, exchange of killed people's bodies; all this through neutral mediators.
- Problems of water, electric power, vaccines, etc.
- The Red Crescent is a local and international organization (the correspondent of the International Red Cross enjoying autonomy as regards the Syrian State), and working all over the Syrian territory.
- Mediation of the various local and international NGOs; more particularly the Red Crescent and Caritas are the best experts on the ground and will be able to meet local needs. This policy will help to respect regions and their peculiarities, their realities, while recognizing at the same time the unity of the Syrian territory. Finally, it is also the best way to fight corruption, cause of wars and violence.

CONCLUSION

I would like to thank all of you who have listened to me, especially the FPSC (Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura). Indeed with the FPSC, we as Caritas have been able to achieve different programs in the service of Iraqi refugees between 2010 and 2012. We are always available to work together, within the framework of the humanitarian crisis our country is facing today.

Since we are in Spain, I would also like to extend my thanks to Caritas Spain for its commitment by our side in different programs. Similarly, I also avail myself of this opportunity to thank the international solidarity organization of the Trinitarian Fathers that supports us in the field of education, as well as in the support to vulnerable families. Finally, just recently, the Spanish Bishops Conference has expressed the desire to fund medical projects in Damascus and Aleppo.



SEMINAR CEMOFPSC
ON HUMANITARIAN AID EFFECTIVENESS
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Many thanks to the Arab and Muslim World Centre that hosted us to debate such an important topic for the future of Syria, the Middle East and the world. May our efforts contribute to peace building, the ultimate good of mankind (humanity).