



**Development Prospects
Forum in Syria**
“Unifying Visions and Enhancing Impact”
Damascus - May 17, 2025

An Overview of the Development Sector in Syria (2023–2025):

The development sector in Syria faces immense challenges as a result of the past Syrian crisis and its consequences, which have led to a widespread economic collapse, extreme poverty, and massive humanitarian needs. Nevertheless, the year 2025 carries cautious prospects for recovery, driven by renewed international engagement and political shifts that suggest a pivotal turning point for the country's development future.

The Syrian economy shrank to less than half of its 2010 value by 2024, experiencing inflation 200 times higher after fourteen years of conflict.¹ Currently, 90% of Syrians live in poverty, and unemployment has tripled, with one in four people unemployed. Three out of every four individuals depend on humanitarian assistance.² In a major development, the World Bank resumed its operations in Syria in May 2025 after a 14-year halt, following the settlement of debts exceeding \$15 million, supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) appointed its first mission chief to Syria in over a decade, with initial efforts expected to focus on improving electricity access.⁴ Simultaneously, President Trump announced the lifting of U.S. sanctions on Syria, including the Caesar Act, which could reshape trade and investment relations.⁴ The new Syrian government (since March 2025) is targeting corruption, rebuilding state institutions (with an emphasis on education and healthcare), boosting economic growth, and creating a favorable investment climate, relying on Gulf countries to finance reconstruction.⁵ However, UN estimates indicate that the Syrian economy may not return to its pre-2011 GDP level until 2080 if current conditions persist without structural interventions.

Despite these transformations, the humanitarian crisis in Syria is far from over.⁷ Hostilities and economic hardship continue, including cash shortages and electricity outages, increasing humanitarian needs.⁷ The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 16.7 million, including 7.5 million children.⁵ The UN and its partners appealed for \$1.97 billion for the period from January to June 2025, targeting 8 million people.⁷ Yet humanitarian appeals suffer from a severe funding gap. The 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan was funded at only 35.6%, while the Response Priorities Document for January–March 2025 received only 11.7% funding (88.9% gap).⁷ UNICEF’s appeal for Syria in 2025 is currently funded at just 19%.

Since last December, more than 1.07 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 472,963 refugees have returned to their homes.⁵ However, many of the returnees are facing destroyed or uninhabitable houses, a lack of services, and insecurity.⁹

Syria’s Human Development Index (HDI) ranking dropped significantly from 115 in 2010 to 157 last year,¹ wiping out nearly four decades of progress.² The HDI score declined from 0.661 in 2010 to 0.557 in 2022, pushing the country backward in terms of health, education, and income. The healthcare system has collapsed, with one-third of health centers damaged and almost half of ambulance services disrupted.¹ The education system has disintegrated, with 40–50% of children aged 6–15 not attending school.² The country also faces a water and sanitation crisis, with over half of water treatment plants and sewage systems damaged or non-functional, leaving around 14 million people without clean water.¹ Energy production has dropped by 80%, with more than 70% of power

plants and transmission lines damaged.¹ Years of war have devastated vital infrastructure across all sectors. Surveys show that nearly half of returnees found their homes completely destroyed or uninhabitable, with many lacking property documentations.⁹ The inability to fully rebuild, water and power shortages, overcrowded schools, insecurity, and unexploded ordnance all hinder the possibility of a safe and dignified return.³ Reconstruction efforts suffer from chronic underfunding.⁹

In conclusion, Syria is undergoing a political transition and renewed international financial engagement in 2025, offering a cautious shift toward long-term recovery. Nevertheless, the country continues to face dire economic and humanitarian conditions, with massive needs and severe funding gaps. Rebuilding basic services and infrastructure is crucial to enabling the safe and sustainable return of millions of displaced Syrians. Optimistic scenarios suggest that, with a comprehensive political settlement and strong international support, Syria could achieve an annual economic growth rate exceeding 10%, potentially restoring GDP to around 80% of its pre-war level by 2030.

Sources

1. Accelerating Economic Recovery is Critical to Reversing Syria's <https://www.undp.org/syria/press-releases/accelerating-economic-recovery-critical-reversing-syrias-decline-and-restoring-stability>
2. UN calls for rapid economic recovery in Syria to reverse losses from 14 years of conflict,, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2591027/amp>
3. Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-response-priorities-january-june-2025-march-2025>
4. World Bank says Syria eligible for new loans after debts cleared <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2025/5/16/world-bank-says-syria-eligible-for-new-loans-after-debts-cleared>
5. UN warns Syrian economy needs over five decades to recover to 'pre-war level',, <https://thecradle.co/articles/un-warns-syrian-economy-needs-over-five-decades-to-recover-to-pre-war-level>
6. Syria's economy could take 55 years to recover at current growth rates: UNDP | Arab News,, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2591317/business-economy>
7. Syria's economy could take 55 years to recover at current growth rates: UNDP | Arab News,, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2591317/amp>
8. Syria Regional Refugee Resilience and Response Plan 2025 <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/syria-regional-refugee-resilience-and-response-plan-2025>
9. The Impact of the Conflict in Syria - United Nations Development https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/undp-sy-seia-final-24022025_compressed.pdf
10. Syria's Post-Conflict Recovery: Challenges and Prospects for <https://www.policy-center.ma/publications/syrias-post-conflict-recovery-challenges-and-prospects-reconstruction-and-stability>

Introduction

The “Prospects for Development in Syria” Forum was held in Damascus at the Dionys Hall – Al-Jalaa on Saturday, May 17, 2025, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

- Organizing side: Manar Foundation for Community Engagement, represented by Mr. Ibrahim Daqmaq.
- Facilitator of the Discussion Session: Mr. Wael Bilal
- Minute-Taker and Report Preparer: Mr. Nasser Al-Qadi

	التوقيت	Reception and Introductions
1	9:30 – 10:00	Reception and Introductions
2	10:00 – 11:00	Part 1: Getting Acquainted and Networking
3	11:00 – 12:30	Part 2: The Development Reality in Syria – An Analytical Perspective
4		Short Break
5	12:45 – 13:45	Part 3: Prospects for Cooperation and Integration among Local and International Actors
6	13:45 – 14:30	Part 4: Recommendations and Final Outcomes
7		Closing

Introduction and Summary of the Forum:

In light of the transformations Syria is witnessing—particularly following the lifting of economic sanctions—there has emerged a pressing need to reassess the current state of development and its future prospects. Accordingly, **the Development Prospects Forum in Syria “Unifying Visions and Enhancing Impact”** was convened as a dialogue platform bringing together representatives from various sectors active in the fields of development and community work. The objective was to analyze the current situation, explore available

potentials, and redefine development priorities.

The forum was held on Saturday, May 17, 2025, at the Dionys Hall – Al-Jalaa, Damascus, organized by the Manar Foundation for Community Engagement, with participation from over 40 representatives of international and local organizations, private companies, financial institutions, and youth initiatives.

The goal of the forum was to provide a constructive dialogue platform bringing together the different active stakeholders in the Syrian development landscape to assess the current situation, explore opportunities, and define pathways for cooperation for Syria's future.

At the beginning of the forum, a presentation was delivered by Mr. Ibrahim Daqmaq, representative of the organizing body, Manar Foundation, in which he outlined the foundation's vision and its diverse areas of work, aiming to promote active community engagement and leave a positive and sustainable impact in the communities it serves.

Daqmaq also highlighted that the foundation's work is based on strategic pillars that include: supporting social innovation, activating corporate social responsibility, developing the capacities of the development sector, and responding to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this, the foundation has launched several specialized platforms:

- **“BEDAR”** for Social Ventures
- **“SARY”** to Advocate Volunteering
- **“IMKAN”** for Social Empowerment

The presentation also noted the foundation's efforts in emergency response, such as supporting earthquake victims in northern Syria, and programs that support entrepreneurial projects in Gaza despite severe challenges.

The forum stood out for the diverse and high-quality attendance, which reflected a wide range of experiences and interests in Syria. Participants included representatives from the Syrian private sector, including software and information technology companies such as “Bee Order “ and “Tradinos”, both of which rely on Syrian talent and contribute to development initiatives. Established financial institutions such as “Al Baraka Bank”, known for prioritizing corporate social responsibility with budgets exceeding marketing expenditures, also participated. In addition, startups in e-commerce like “Teriaq”, which aims to provide training and employment opportunities for youth, were present.

The local civil society was also prominently represented through charitable associations and NGOs active in various fields. These included organizations focusing on social development and professional ethics, such as “Al Baraka Society for Social Development”, and others providing health, educational, and awareness services like the “Circassian Society in Rukn al-Din.”

Participants also included organizations specialized in education, early recovery, livelihoods, and protection of children and women, such as “Al-Nada Association”, as well as institutions working on community empowerment, charitable housing, and youth support, such as “Ammerha Foundation.” Organizations contributing to capacity building and governance of charitable associations were also present, like the “Union of Charitable Associations” through its

“Bunyan Center.” Lastly, institutions focused on child rights and juvenile rehabilitation, such as the “Child Rights Foundation”, were involved.

The forum also welcomed business incubators and entrepreneurship support platforms, including “Afkar Plus”, which aims to create a dynamic economic environment for entrepreneurs, and “Qudra Organization”, which works on economic and social empowerment of youth and institutions. Initiatives like “Core Istanbul – Core Damascus”, providing vocational training and small project funding, also took part.

In addition, the forum was enriched by independent experts and consultants specializing in economic and social consulting, capacity building for non-profit organizations, governance, and lawyers who offer legal support for entrepreneurs and emerging associations.

The forum also had a partial international dimension, with participation from representatives of international NGOs operating in Syria, such as “Onsur Organization”, “Action for Humanity”, “Shafak Sham”, the “Swiss Agency for Development”, the “European Institute for Cooperation and Development” (IECD), and “Geneva Call”; as well as representatives from UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Damascus.

Volunteer groups such as “Molhem Volunteering Team”, active in humanitarian and relief efforts and increasingly focused on economic empowerment, were also present.

This wide diversity in backgrounds and expertise created a fertile ground for deep and honest discussions around the challenges and opportunities facing development work in Syria. The forum succeeded in gathering key development actors from different regions of Syria (Northeast, Northwest, and the South of Syria) to exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and enhance joint cooperation toward achieving sustainable and inclusive development in Syria. Discussions focused on analyzing the current development context and exploring means of collaboration between local and international entities.

The forum addressed four main themes: The current state of development in Syria, prospects for cooperation among stakeholders, future recommendations, and networking between involved.

At the end of the forum, participants stressed the importance of shifting from emergency relief work to sustainable development, emphasizing the need to establish a unified national framework that rebuilds trust, leverages local human and financial resources, and produces practical, actionable recommendations to unify efforts and enhance development impact.

Main Themes and Key Points:

The forum was divided into four main themes, each addressing an important aspect of development.

Part One: Introduction and Communication



Diversity and Inclusiveness of Attendance:

- **Geographic diversity:** Representatives attended from various regions across Syria—including the northeast, northwest, and southern areas—marking a significant milestone in bringing together stakeholders from these different areas in one place to discuss development issues.
- **Sectoral diversity:** The attendees represented a broad range of sectors:
 - **Private sector:** underscoring the importance of engaging this sector in development efforts.
 - **Public sector:** ensuring coordination with governmental entities.
 - NGOs and civil society organizations: fundamental pillars in development and community work.
 - **Organizations:** including both local and international operational agencies in Syria.
 - **Expertise:** participants brought varied experience in different development fields, contributing deep insights and analyses on the topics discussed. This diversity of backgrounds enabled a comprehensive understanding of development challenges and opportunities from multiple perspectives.

Participant:

1. Mr. Ibrahim Daqmaq – Representative of the Manar Foundation for Community Engagement: Presented the conceptual framework of the forum, emphasized moving from isolated projects toward sustainable specialized platforms, and shared successful field experiences from Ghaza and northern Syria.

2. Mr. Wael Bilal – General Facilitator: Skillfully led the discussion sessions, stimulating deep thinking and helped shape discourse around challenges and opportunities post-barrier removal.

3. Mr. Nasser Al-Qadi – Meeting Recorder: Documented the proceedings, key points, and major contributions of the forum.

4. Mr. Firas Hamada – Nonprofit Consultant and Trainer: Expert in governance and capacity building; trained over 500 NGOs across Syrian governorates. Formerly led the national education program under Erasmus+ and collaborated on curriculum development with higher education institutions in Syria, Lebanon, and Europe. Founding member of charitable organizations including Al-Rasheed Charity, now Chair of the Board of Trustees for the new “Ma’aref” Foundation. Advocated for a root analysis for traditional development models in Syria toward independent, locally governed models.

5. Mr. Khaled Al-Issa – Director General, Ata’a Association: Asked probing questions about UN mechanisms in Syria and stressed the priority of Syrians leading the development agenda.

6. Ms. Lama Al-Jamal – Lawyer and Legal Advisor: Addressed legal obstacles hindering civil society, particularly association laws and banking limits, and emphasized the need for flexible legislation.

7. Mr. Obada Al-Lahham – Entrepreneur and Founder of “Teryaq”: Noted the misalignment of vocational training programs with labor market needs and the necessity of private sector involvement in planning.

8. Dr. Maher Al-Rozz – Economic Researcher and Consultant: Provided an analytical reading of the Syrian context and contributed to building national vocational and technical education strategies in partnership with international organizations.

9 Mr. Hamza Abdullah – Executive Director of “Onsur” Organization: Emphasized the need to create independent, Syrian funding instruments and highlighted the diaspora as alternative funding partners.

10. Ms. Nidal Bitar – Representative, European Institute for Cooperation and Development: Presented key data on their work in Syria, focusing on harnessing available local and digital resources.

11. Mr. Malik Al-Muzayen – Co Founder of Tradinos (software services) and Bee Order (a food-ordering and delivery startup): Both companies focus on strong corporate social responsibility, attracting Syrians, supporting developmental activities and training inside Syria, and building an integrated ecosystem to uplift Syrian youth, in collaboration with civic institutions like “Support Youth” and private-sector partners like Bank Al Baraka.

12. Mr. Fadi Al Hariri – Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility, Bank Al Baraka: Bank’s CSR budget is three times larger than its marketing budget and plays an important social role in Syria.

12. Mr. Oqba Al Qorbi – Head of Marketing, Bank Al Baraka.

14. Mr. Nazem Youssef – Executive Director, Al Baraka Association for Social Development: Aims at empowering youth morally and professionally, supplying qualified graduates to the job market,

offering specialized training in professional ethics and other activities for passionate individuals.

15. Dr. Yanal Ramadan – Pediatrician and Scientific Assistant, Health Institute – Damascus Branch; Secretary of the “Sharqasyah” religious welfare association: Works across religious communities, providing medical services through multiple clinics plus educational and awareness workshops. Currently collaborating with organizations like Maternity & Childhood; planning service improvements pending sanction relief.

16. Mr. Mohammad Nour al Idlibi – Program Manager, Ideas Plus Business Incubator (based in Hama): Focused on fostering an economically vibrant environment for entrepreneurs and freelancers through support, training, and mentorship. Recently launched the “Ershad for Entrepreneurs” platform connecting youth with mentors and experts.

17. Mr. Mohammad Berro – Office Director, Qudra Organization (formerly in northern Syria, now in Damascus): Works on community development, economic and social youth empowerment, and administrative capacity building through a consulting team. Notably led the “Startup Scope” initiative to train youth, incubate their businesses, finance them, and integrate them into institutions with six month salary support.

18. Dr. Lina Al Yafi – Industrial pharmacist and national NGO representative in the humanitarian medical team under the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria. Joined Al Nada Developmental Association in 2005, working in education, early recovery, livelihoods, protection (PSS, women and child empowerment). Leads “CO”

project to support start up associations, coordinates volunteer teams to assess needs, and currently partners with UNICEF to support children with disabilities at home.

19. Mr. Mohammad Al Jadu'h – Co Founder, Omraha Foundation: Operates in development, housing, charitable work, and community building; focuses on promoting volunteer culture, community empowerment, and youth training through development and human capacity building courses.

20. Ms. Sarah Obeid – Pharmacist, volunteer, and board member of Ammerha Foundation: Focuses on community empowerment, improving living conditions, and youth support through university interventions, development and educational training, specialty courses, and support for micro and small enterprises. In 2018, led “Laki” initiative to empower women in business; the foundation responded to emergencies (earthquakes, COVID 19) and provides monthly aid to registered families.

21. Mr. Haitham Saltaji – Secretary General of the Federation of Charitable Associations; Chair of the Board of Trustees, Child Rights Foundation: Launched “Bunyan” in 2018 (now “Bunyan Center”) to develop capacities of charitable associations; trained 22 associations in Damascus on governance and association law, preparing to train 42 more. As head of the Child Rights Foundation, oversees training, protection, empowerment programs for mothers and adolescents, vocational training for juvenile rehabilitation and labor market integration, and leads the “Bee Path” project for children deprived of family care.

22. Mr. Abdallah Al Khateeb – Head of Media & Fundraising, Mulham Volunteering Team (humanitarian and emergency): Operates in

northern Syria focusing on relief and camp construction, small scale projects, and planning current economic empowerment and youth driven community initiatives.

23. Mr. Ahmed Abu Sha'er – Co Founder, Mulham Volunteering Team (founded in 2012): Seeks to empower youth and create opportunities in humanitarian, development, and emergency response; current focus is economic empowerment, along with relief response, school renovation, educational system improvement, and economic empowerment in schools.

24. Mr. Faisal Al Aswad – Representative, Syrian Development Organization (formerly Syrian Al Amana for Development Foundation): Works on community and economic development, youth special projects, activation of social participation, with presence in multiple Syrian governorates.

25. Ms. Salwa Al Mahdi – Works in humanitarian sector at Swiss Development Agency: Selects and engages in Syrian projects in coordination with the Swiss government, supporting urban community projects, empowerment, and early recovery interventions. She noted that Swiss government representation helped ensure needs-based and culturally appropriate support.

26. Mr. Omar Al Idlibi – UNDP (Small & Medium Enterprise Support), Youth Projects Manager.

27. Mr. Tawfiq Nahlawi – Works at the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Damascus since 2012 on youth development and empowerment.

28. Mr. Ya'rub Al Asfari – From Action for Humanity (operating in multiple countries; began work in 2012 via local associations),

focusing on humanitarian, relief, and development work—especially in northern Syria—and supporting many community and entrepreneurial initiatives.

29. Mr. Ma’az Barakat – Executive Director, Syrian Society for Social Development (SSSD, founded in 2009): Responds to youth needs, supports childhood, empowers local communities, cares for minors, emergency response, and aids school dropouts in partnership with UN/international organizations. SSSD runs 53 community centers across Syria, has diverse interventions across sectors, and has recently pivoted to human development, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. They’ve also moved into investment initiatives like “Ibra wa Kheit” for sustainability, in partnership with Bemo Bank’s micro finance unit.

30. Mr. Mustafa Al Yamani – Co Founder, Shafaq Sham (est. 2014 in northeast Syria): Specializes in humanitarian response in northern regions.

31. Mr. Youssef Suleiman – Chair, Board of Directors, Shafaq Sham (since 2014; operates in northeast Syria across core sectors including humanitarian work, building and developing schools and infrastructure, mobile clinics, and aiding around 1,500 camp beneficiaries). Founded “Insan Academy” in business and entrepreneurship skills (digital, health, agricultural, small projects, engineering, humanitarian) targeting university students, aiming to support research, award grants, and teach research fundamentals to address weaknesses in Syrian universities.

32. Mr. Hussain Al Hassan – Executive Director, Civil Cooperation Organization in Raqqa: Works in community cohesion, development, peacebuilding, and youth capacity building; played a major role in youth conflict resolution, mediation, and cooperation with youth leaders in Raqqa governorate.

33. Mr. Awad Al Khalil – Executive Director, Total Company, operating in Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Hasakah, and Aleppo: His company is active in community development, livelihoods, sanitation, and development of the Syrian Jazira region.

34. Mr. Yasser Aleyan – Master’s in Islamic Economics, representative of Core Istanbul–Core Damascus developing (continuation of Core Istanbul in Damascus). They run specialized vocational training for entrepreneurs and are launching two main programs: one for micro-and small-business financing, and another for training in social entrepreneurship.

35. Mr. Safwan Qaddoura – Executive Director, Blue Ocean: His organization focuses on teaching and developing English-language skills to help youth build their future and access opportunities.

36. Mr. Mohammad Al Debbas – From the Core Istanbul–Core Damascus team, a leading entrepreneurial institution in Istanbul, recently launched the STEP program and built new partnerships in Qatar in collaboration with the Kuwaiti Bank to foster entrepreneurship.

37. Mr. Ahmed Al Khalil – Deputy Executive Director, General Authority for Development (Onsur), working in development support.

38. Mr. Mustafa Othman – From Geneva Call (Swiss NGO based in Geneva), responsible for development in northeast Syria (active for more than 7 years), working to strengthen international and humanitarian law, training military factions to respect such law and protect civilians and cities during conflicts in northeast and northwest Syria.

39. Mr. Mu'ayyad Hijazi – Chair of the Board of Trustees, Sand Al-Shabab Developmental Foundation: Works on providing and designing integrated solutions to support youth to become active in their communities across Syrian governorates.

Summary of the Part One:

This part focused on breaking down barriers and building common ground among participants. Key points addressed included:

- **Building Trust:** Emphasis was placed on the importance of establishing trust among stakeholders as a first step toward fruitful collaboration.
- **Understanding Needs:** The necessity of a comprehensive and unified understanding of both the current and future needs of Syrian society was highlighted.
- **Importance of Planning and Cooperation:** The central role of joint planning and effective cooperation in ensuring the sustainability of development projects was underscored.
- **Overcoming Challenges:** It was noted that collaboration is the primary means to overcome the challenges facing development work.

Part Two:
**The Development Reality
in Syria – An Analytical
Perspective**



The discussions began with a sincere attempt to describe and understand the current developmental reality in Syria. Several participants pointed out that the period preceding the recent transformations (referred to by the facilitator as of 8/12/2024, marking the fall of the Assad regime) was characterized by a predominance of humanitarian and relief efforts over development work. Often, this work was directed and constrained by the prevailing military and political contexts. Some noted that the fall of the former regime opened new opportunities, as the independent civil society began to emerge as a key player in reconstruction and development efforts.

During the participants' discussions, it was mentioned that these transformations contributed to reconnecting Syrians from different regions. Collaborative initiatives and responses have begun to form, albeit still in their early stages and in need of better organization and clearer direction.

The decision to lift sanctions on Syria was a central point in all discussions. Most attendees considered it a major turning point that opens new horizons, though it also carries numerous challenges.

Expected Opportunities:

Participants expressed cautious optimism about the possibility of new financial resources flowing into the country, and the facilitation of international money transfers through Syria's reintegration into systems such as SWIFT. This could encourage new donors and investors, offering a chance to rebuild and reshape relationships with international partners and the private sector on new foundations. Some saw this transformation as a historic moment through which Syrians can shape the future of their country.

Challenges and Concerns:

On the other hand, serious questions arose regarding the readiness of Syrian institutions—financially, intellectually, and technically—to deal with this openness and meet the expectations of potential new donors. Concerns were raised that this openness might lead to a repetition of past issues, such as donor agendas dominating local priorities. There were also fears that inadequate preparation could turn Syria into a consumer market rather than an attractive destination for productive investments, especially with the expected entry of major international companies that may not find the required local expertise, prompting them to bring in external professionals.

In addition to the impact of lifting sanctions, several structural obstacles and challenges continue to hinder development efforts in Syria.

- **Funding and Sustainability:** Participants noted a decline in funding from traditional international organizations, creating an urgent need to seek alternative and innovative funding sources and to approach new or non-traditional donors. The issue of “donor fatigue” was also discussed as a current challenge.
- **Administrative and Legal Barriers:** The legal and administrative environment was a major point of criticism. Participants harshly criticized outdated laws governing associations and institutions, such as the Associations Law of 1958, describing it as disastrous and leading to legal violations. They also highlighted the complex bureaucracy, excessive centralization in decision-making, and illogical or illegal ministerial circulars, which impede work and limit effectiveness.

Participants called for the creation of a new, flexible, and supportive legal environment for civil society work, emphasizing the need to change old administrative mindsets that still cling to rigid routines and instructions.

- **Development Disparities and Regional Gaps:** The discussions confirmed the existence of significant developmental disparities between different Syrian regions—between rural and urban areas, or between northern Syria and the interior. Some pointed out that international support and developmental interventions often concentrate in certain areas while neglecting others, not based on actual needs assessments but on factors like available funding or donor agendas. Attendees stressed the importance of developing a clear “needs map” for each Syrian region to define priorities and necessary interventions based on local context.
- **Ownership of Development Work and External Agendas:** Strong voices during the forum stressed that development in Syria must be “Syrian in origin and vision,” with its plans and programs grounded in the real needs identified by Syrians themselves, away from externally imposed plans or those that primarily serve donor agendas. Criticism was directed at some international organizations and UN agencies for being, at times, disconnected from reality or adopting top-down approaches that fail to consider the local context. Participants called for genuine partnerships based on mutual listening and respect for local expertise.
- **Capacity Building and Coordination Among Actors:** There was a strong emphasis on the urgent need to build the capacities of local organizations and institutions, especially those that operated under the former regime and may lack experience in dealing with

modern administrative and financial standards, compared to organizations that worked in northern Syria or abroad and engaged with international bodies. The idea of overcoming what some referred to as a “crisis of trust” was discussed—this crisis exists on multiple levels: between organizations themselves, between organizations and beneficiaries, and between organizations and official authorities.

Some participants also called for the establishment of effective Syrian platforms for coordination, experience-sharing, and knowledge exchange, taking advantage of the diverse experiences of Syrians both inside and outside the country and across different regions.

- **Transition from Relief to Sustainable Development:** Participants emphasized that a significant portion of past development efforts focused on addressing the immediate impacts of crises and disasters—essentially acting as “reactions” rather than true and sustainable development building. They called for the establishment of a new phase focused on transformative change and real development that addresses root causes of problems and aims to build a better future.
- **Importance of Digital Tools:** It was noted that digital tools can play a crucial role in improving development work—whether through data collection and analysis, remote service delivery, or geospatial tracking of projects and interventions. Emphasis was placed on the need to keep up with the global digital transformation and harness its capabilities.

Summary of the Second Part:

This part was dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the developmental situation in Syria and the identification of key problems and priorities. The main points discussed included:

- **Identification of Development Problems:**

- **Lack of Transparency:** Insufficient clarity in operational mechanisms and resource allocation.
- **Conflicting Priorities:** Absence of a unified vision for development priorities among various actors.
- **Lack of Effective Coordination:** Weak coordination between entities working in the same sectors or regions.
- **Focus on Short-Term Projects:** Tendency of some efforts toward projects with limited temporal impact.
- **Redundancy of Efforts:** Implementation of similar or overlapping projects by different actors.
- **Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation:** Weak mechanisms for assessing impact and following up on projects.

- **Defining Development Priorities:**

- **Infrastructure:** An urgent need to support projects related to water, electricity, and roads.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Supporting local communities through income-generating and employment opportunities.

- **Education and Health:** Vital sectors in need of investment and support.
- **Protection:** Creating a safe environment for communities.
- **Importance of Data and Statistics:**
 - Emphasis on the necessity of collecting accurate and up-to-date data to identify the real needs of the community.
- **Role of the Private Sector:**
 - Call for greater involvement of the private sector—not only as financial supporters but as partners with expertise and adaptability.
- **Impact of External Challenges:**
 - Discussion of the effects of economic sanctions and blockades on the developmental reality, and the need to find innovative solutions.

Part Three:

Prospects for Cooperation and Integration between Local and International Entities



After diagnosing the developmental reality—its challenges and opportunities—in the first part of the forum, the discussion moved toward exploring prospects for cooperation and integration among various stakeholders in the coming phase. There was consensus that the old ways of working are no longer sufficient, and that there is an urgent need to innovate new strategies and tactics suited to the changing Syrian context.

Toward Effective and Unified Syrian Coordination:

Repeated calls were made by various participants for the necessity of establishing a unified Syrian platform to coordinate all development actors. It was proposed that this platform could be modeled after the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), but in a Syrian version—"OCHA Syria"—or by enhancing the role of existing bodies such as the Union of Associations. This would enable a unified Syrian voice, joint planning for interventions on the ground, and collective negotiation with donors and governmental bodies.

Development Work Based on Needs and Local Strength:

Speakers emphasized the importance of organizations committing to their core vision and areas of strength, and ensuring that their interventions are based on well-studied needs assessments within the local context, rather than following donor-imposed "trends" such as economic empowerment or entrepreneurship—areas that may not align with actual ground priorities.

Redefining the Concept of "Reconstruction":

Some participants raised deep intellectual discussions about the term "reconstruction," warning against interpreting it as a mere return to the pre-Syrian revolution state, with its urban chaos, flawed planning, and

policies that destroyed vegetation and planted sectarian enclaves in rural areas. Instead, they called for adopting a concept of “building Syria” through a new, participatory vision that addresses past mistakes and establishes genuine, sustainable urban and rural development—taking into account social and environmental justice.

Importance of Setting Quality Standards and Ethical Codes:

There were proposals to develop clear quality standards for the work of developmental organizations in Syria, possibly including a code of ethics or a charter of honor that these organizations would commit to. Participants also stressed the need for precise definitions of key concepts such as social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, and microfinance. These measures aim to regulate practices, prevent harmful competition, and ensure high-quality services, especially in sensitive sectors like microfinance, which has previously seen harmful practices causing major issues for some associations and beneficiaries.

Ensuring Civil Society Independence and Strengthening Its Role:

A group of participants called for the need for a clear and modern legal framework that guarantees the independence of civil society organizations, facilitates their registration and operations, and enables them to play their role as true partners in development—not merely implementers of predesigned policies or programs. They also emphasized the importance of coordinating roles between civil society and various authorities to avoid conflict or restrictions on organizational work.

Activating Partnerships with the Private Sector:

The private sector was recognized as an indispensable partner in the development process. Many participants urged a shift away from the traditional view of the private sector as merely a source of funding.

Instead, it should be actively engaged not only in project implementation but also in planning and design from the start. Examples were given highlighting the need to align vocational training and rehabilitation programs with actual labor market needs—needs best defined by the private sector—to bridge the gap between training outputs and employment requirements.

Achieving Financial Sustainability and Diversifying Funding

Sources:

This topic was one of the most discussed. Repeated emphasis was placed on the necessity for Syrian organizations to strive for financial sustainability and reduce their near-total dependence on traditional donors, especially given fluctuations in funding and changing donor priorities. Several experiences and proposals were presented in this regard, including:

- Engaging with local and international private sectors and encouraging them to activate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) roles.
- Attracting contributions and donations from Syrian businessmen and expatriates, who represent a significant financial and human resource that can be directed to support development in Syria.
- Developing income-generating projects for non-profit organizations, enabling them to produce revenues that help cover operational expenses and fund their programs, as permitted by some licenses and regulations.
- Utilizing Crowdfunding mechanisms through online platforms, with a strong focus on transparency in project presentation and fund management, allowing for direct donor engagement. A successful

example of this was shared by “Molham Volunteer Team,” which managed to raise millions of dollars in small individual donations thanks to credibility, field presence, and responsiveness to people’s direct needs.

- The importance of diversifying funding sources and not relying on a single mechanism to avoid disruptions due to unexpected changes or restrictions—such as the previous ban on PayPal in Turkey, which forced some organizations to obtain licenses in multiple countries to ensure operational continuity.

Summary of the Third Part:

- In conclusion, this part focused on ways to strengthen collaboration among actors at both local and international levels. The most prominent points discussed include:
- Participatory Collective Planning: Adopting planning approaches that include the participation of all parties to ensure project effectiveness.
- Effective Coordination Mechanisms: Developing clear and effective mechanisms to enhance communication and knowledge exchange.
- Identifying Shared Priorities: Working to determine common priorities among all parties to unify efforts.
- Capacity Building of Local Organizations: Supporting and strengthening the capabilities of local organizations to help them achieve autonomy and sustainability in development work.
- Challenges in Accessing Donors: Discussing the difficulties local actors face in obtaining support from international donors, and exploring ways to overcome these challenges.

Part Four: Recommendations and Final Outcomes:



Final Recommendations, Outcomes, and Next Steps: Towards a Unified Syrian Vision for Development

The closing session of the forum offered participants a valuable opportunity to present their practical recommendations and proposals. These can be considered a distilled synthesis of the ideas and perspectives shared during the extensive hours of discussion. The resulting recommendations laid out a clear outline for a potential roadmap that could guide development efforts in Syria in the coming period. The key recommendations focused on the following axes:

1. Building a National Participatory Strategic Vision for Development:

Many participants emphasized the urgent need to develop a comprehensive, Syrian-led national development strategy that arises from the genuine needs and aspirations of the Syrian people, free from external impositions or agendas.

A proposal was made to hold a “Specialized Forum for Strategic Planning at the Level of Development NGOs in Syria” after Eid al-Adha, with the aim of producing a “unified and integrated Syrian identity” for development work—transcending regional and sectarian divides.

Participants also called for the creation of a clear and unified Logical Framework (Log Frame) for the work of associations and institutions, potentially based on internationally recognized quality standards such as ISO 9000 (management quality) and ISO 26000 (social responsibility), while adapting these to Syria’s cultural and local context. The goal is to re-engineer administrative processes and develop clear and effective work methodologies.

2. Enhancing Networking, Communication, and Integration Among All Stakeholders:

This recommendation was a common thread among nearly all contributions. Participants stressed the critical importance of building trust and fostering systematic and effective communication among all actors in the Syrian development field.

This includes local organizations across different Syrian regions, NGOs operating in northern Syria, the Syrian diaspora, the private sector, and relevant governmental entities.

The goal of such networking is to bridge existing gaps, unify terminology and concepts, and promote the collaborative and secure exchange of expertise, information, and data (while overcoming the culture of data withholding that has previously prevailed). It also aims to coordinate efforts to avoid duplication and achieve greater and more sustainable impact.

A proposal was made to establish joint platforms for the exchange of knowledge, information, and strategic planning among organizations.

3. Investing in Institutional and Individual Capacity-Building:

Participants emphasized the urgent and ongoing need to enhance the competencies of staff within Syrian organizations—particularly in administrative, financial, and technical areas. This includes training on engaging with new donors and meeting their requirements, drafting proposals and reports according to international standards, managing projects efficiently, and using digital tools effectively in development work.

They also underlined the importance of improving language skills—especially English—to facilitate communication with external parties and international donors, and to overcome the language barrier that may hinder some staff members.

Participants called for turning proposed ideas into concrete reality on the ground and monitoring the actual impact of interventions.

4. Achieving Financial Sustainability and Diversifying Income Sources:

Attendees recommended that Syrian organizations work seriously and strategically to achieve greater financial sustainability by diversifying their income sources and not relying entirely on traditional donors or a single funding source. Proposed approaches included:

- Strengthening partnerships with local and international private sector actors to benefit from corporate social responsibility programs.
- Attracting contributions and donations from Syrian expatriates and businesspeople.
- Developing revenue-generating investment projects for institutions and associations.
- Leveraging innovative crowdfunding mechanisms.

5. Reforming the Legal and Administrative Environment Governing Civil Society:

The recommendations emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to update and reform laws and regulations governing the work of civil society organizations in Syria, to make them more flexible, supportive, and empowering—rather than restrictive or obstructive.

Participants also called for reducing bureaucratic obstacles that organizations face in dealing with official bodies and for strengthening principles of transparency and sound institutional governance within the organizations themselves.

6. Promoting National Ownership and Focusing on Local Needs:

Participants reiterated that development programs and projects in Syria must be built on a scientific and accurate assessment of actual local needs in all regions. They stressed the importance of actively involving these communities in identifying priorities, designing interventions, and evaluating outcomes to ensure sustained impact. They emphasized that the vision and leadership of the development process must be entirely Syrian-led.

7. Investing in Syrian Human Resources and Empowering Youth:

The recommendations highlighted that Syrian people—especially youth—are the true and most important wealth of the country. Therefore, investment in youth, developing their capacities, empowering them, providing opportunities, and raising their awareness should be at the heart of development strategies in the next phase.

8. Promoting a Culture of Development Work and Advocacy for Social Issues:

The recommendations called for greater efforts to raise awareness among younger generations about the importance of developmental and social work, and to advocate effectively for urgent development issues. There was an emphasis on transforming humanitarian and volunteer work into a deep-rooted and widely embraced social culture within Syrian society.

9. Thoughtful Preparation for the Transitional Phase and Its Challenges:

The recommendations advised each association and organization to conduct a thorough internal review and rebuild their strategies and action plans to align with the current situation and recent developments in Syria. They must also be prepared to deal flexibly and effectively with the challenges and opportunities of the transitional period.

Conclusion – Cautious Optimism and Hope for a Better Future for Syria:

The forum **“Development Prospects in Syria: Unifying Visions and Enhancing Impact,”** held in Damascus on May 17, 2025, concluded successfully. It marked an important step toward strengthening cooperation and coordination in development efforts in Syria. The diversity in the backgrounds and expertise of participants, alongside open and constructive discussions, contributed to the precise identification of problems and the formulation of practical and actionable recommendations.

This forum clearly reflected a sincere and profound desire among Syrian stakeholders to move beyond past challenges and advance toward a better future. The intensive and frank discussions revealed the enormous opportunities made possible by current transformations—especially the potential lifting of sanctions—while also acknowledging the deep structural challenges that continue to face Syria on all developmental levels.

The final recommendations issued by the forum serve as a kind of “declaration of intent” and an open call for serious and coordinated action. It is therefore fair to say that translating these recommendations

into tangible reality will require the concerted efforts of all parties, a spirit of responsibility, genuine partnership, and a shared belief that building a new Syria is a collective responsibility for its people—both inside and outside the country.

Amid the cautious optimism that prevailed during the forum, hope remains strong that this initiative will be the first step in a long journey—one that will be followed by concrete actions and impactful initiatives contributing to sustainable and comprehensive development, restoring Syria's vitality and cultural role, and securing a future worthy of its people's sacrifices and aspirations.

Take action...
For a better
community



 www.manar.org
 info@manar.org
    
[@manarfoundation](#)



MANAR
Community Engagement