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# SYRIA REGIONAL PROGRAM

## FINAL REPORT



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**Contract No. AID-DOT-I-00-08-00033, Task Order No. AID-OAA-TO-13-00003**

**Cover photo: A woman paints over ISIL graffiti and propaganda. When ISIL withdrew from these areas, SRP supported a public campaign for residents to cover the propaganda with messages promoting tolerance and moderate values. (Credit: SRP grantee)**

### DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States government.

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# ACRONYMS

ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit
BIS	Bureau of Industry and Security
CSO	civil society organization
DTO	designated terrorist organization
EAF	Emergency Action Fund
FAP	Food Assistance Program
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IDP	internally displaced person
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
JAN	Jebhat Al-Nusra
LAI	Liberated Areas Initiative
LCC	local coordination committee
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MOLARR	Ministry of Local Administration, Refugees, and Relief
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PKK	Kurdish Workers' Party
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SOC	Syrian Opposition Coalition
SRP	Syria Regional Program
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Unit

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Peaceful protests in Syria in March 2011 gave little indication of the turmoil and complex challenges devastating the population and spilling across the country's borders nearly five years later. Fear and pessimism have replaced hope as Syria's war has resulted in continually shifting lines of military control and little extant infrastructure in opposition-held areas. The conflict has also destabilized bordering countries, leading to a massive refugee crisis affecting European countries and beyond.

**"We chose to establish local councils in order to fill the vacuum left when the revolution overthrew the regime, and to send people the message that we have a government and can build a state."**

**— Member of a local council**

Bashar al-Assad's regime committed violence against its people and hindered the efforts of local community groups working to initiate a new, democratic Syria, and deteriorating conditions raised the urgency of assisting these groups. By 2013, this need was amplified by the presence of encroaching extremist groups that tried to co-opt the revolution's original moderate values and take advantage of the widening power vacuum inside Syria. Nearly five years after the start of the revolution, Syria's moderate actors continue to work to provide desperately needed services and promote democratic governance to communities in areas under opposition control, ensuring they will play a role in a post-Assad Syria. Early in 2013, moderate local governance bodies were still in their infancy, but today a wide range of experienced local, provincial, and national institutions work to maintain and expand moderate voices and goals.

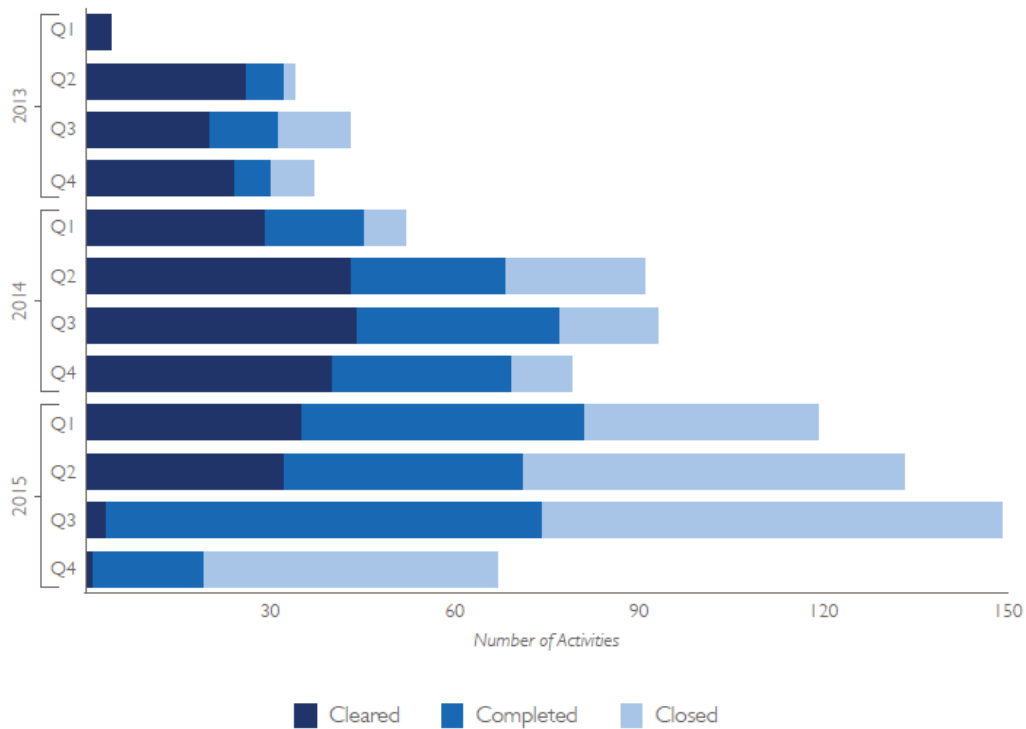


Figure 1: Activities cleared, completed, and closed per quarter over the course of SRP.

USAID’s support of these bodies contributed to their development over the past three years. USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provides fast, flexible, short-term assistance to take advantage of windows of opportunity to build democracy and peace, supporting local initiatives through adaptive and agile programming.<sup>1</sup> Launched in January 2013, USAID/OTI’s Syria Regional Program (SRP) sought to preserve and expand space for these moderate actors in Syria, promoting principles of democratic governance including accountable, representative, and responsive civilian bodies. SRP worked to achieve this goal through meeting the country objectives of 1) increasing public confidence in civilian governance structures and civil society organizations and 2) enabling communities to promote tolerance, dialogue, and coexistence. The program pursued its objectives by providing grants to moderate Syrian civilian entities, enabling them to increase their effectiveness in providing services to their communities. SRP’s strategy maintained that improved service delivery, mitigating the vital lack of infrastructure and other needs in opposition-held areas, would lead to increased support for the councils providing the services. This strengthened the role of the local-, provincial-, and national-level structures supporting this work, allowing for the establishment and consolidation of a countrywide network of moderate opposition bodies.

When the program launched, SRP anticipated an imminent political transition from Assad’s rule to a democratic structure, and directed programming at bolstering

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/political-transition-initiatives/background>



## OUTPUTS BY THE NUMBERS

**301** activities completed

**559** schools supported

**332,079** media products printed

**245** shipments (since Nov. 2013)

**169** heavy equipment, including ambulances, tipper trucks, and water tankers

**719** trucks of assistance (since Nov. 2013)

replacement structures. As attempts for a diplomatic solution failed, opposition groups grew in number, and extremist groups took advantage of the growing power vacuum; hope for a quick, viable, and peaceful solution faded. In response to the shifting political and military environments in the country, SRP adapted the goals of its program to also counter the potential rise in influence of extremist groups, which were making significant military gains in eastern and northern Syria. To maintain the relevance of the revolution’s original moderate actors, the program targeted areas where emerging opposition institutions competed with extremist actors for recognition within the community. SRP-led media and communications activities supplemented this strategy, increasing the outreach of emerging moderate structures and enabling media organizations to expand their coverage of moderate actors and civil society to reach a larger Syrian audience.

From January 2013 through December 2015, SRP implemented **301 activities** valued at **\$45.9 million** with **141 primary grantees**. These grantees then reached an additional **481 Syrian organizations and entities** as sub-partners on selected activities. An additional 45

activities were partially implemented but later cancelled due to changing political and security environments. To build and strengthen a network of moderate opposition bodies and civil society, SRP partnered with four national-level bodies, five provincial-councils, 67 local councils, 33 civil society organizations (CSOs), 16 media groups, and eight emergency response centers. SRP activities targeted these objectives through two categories of programming: “Top-down” initiatives supported national-level bodies to conduct assistance, engaging local councils, CSOs, and other partners inside Syria. “Bottom up” activities were local-level efforts responding to analysis of local realities and targeting specific needs of each community or area.

### PROJECT VALUE BY TYPE OF INITIATIVE

- Top-down assistance: \$31,084,318
- Bottom-up assistance: \$15,178,913



Key accomplishments under the program’s objectives include:

*Increasing public confidence in civilian governance structures and civil society organizations.* The program supported local councils to provide bakery services, waste management, electricity repairs, and water network repairs to residents in their communities, garnering local support; strengthened a national structure of emergency response teams that provide services following regime attacks in areas under the control of the moderate opposition; and facilitated greater collaboration between provincial and local councils.

“By God, their services are excellent. I mean, there is never a day when the town is bombed and they don’t rush to fix the electricity. They do everything: water pipes, excellent health services, providing flour for ovens, very good services.”

—Resident describing the work of the SRP-supported local council in his town

*Enabling communities to promote tolerance, dialogue, and coexistence.* The program supported community-led initiatives to reclaim moderate space and paint revolutionary messages over extremist propaganda; launched cleanup campaigns bringing together residents of diverse backgrounds; and facilitated celebrations of moderate values during the revolution’s anniversary. SRP activities worked to link emerging moderate governance structures with residents and with each other to maintain their central relevance to Syria’s future. SRP support allowed these bodies to sustain their work and grow despite the numerous and growing challenges facing their efforts on a daily basis. As the Syrian conflict continues to escalate and threatens the operating space of these actors, support to these bodies has become increasingly vital.

On March 12, 2013, OTI activated Ramp-Up Phase 1: Other Countries of Chemonics’ SRP Task Order to establish the Jordan Food Assistance Program (FAP) in Amman, Jordan. FAP’s objective was to address acute food shortages through the provision of flour and yeast to bakeries in food-insecure communities throughout Dar'a and Quneitra Governorates in southern Syria. Funded by USAID's Office of Food for Peace and managed by OTI, FAP worked with a local NGO, to provide this critical humanitarian response. FAP’s total value was \$41,882,778, distributing a total of 70,056 metric tons of flour and associated yeast and providing for the daily bread needs for over 283,000 Syrians.

## SECTION I

# COUNTRY CONTEXT: BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

After years of harsh authoritarian rule under Assad's Ba'athist regime, the Syrian revolution began in March 2011 following the arrests in Dar'a province of schoolchildren who had written anti-Assad graffiti. The arrests sparked a nonviolent movement seeking to force Assad's regime to pursue democratic reforms. Activist-led protests, street art, and awareness campaigns quickly spread, signaling Syrians' intent for a transition to democratic governance. Inspired by the "Arab Spring" movement in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, these protests sought to pursue representative, fair, and inclusive systems of governance. Many activists formed local coordination committees (LCCs) to organize events and support the revolution's values of tolerance, freedom, and political determination. But as the movement grew, the regime responded with overwhelming force, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties at protests. Random arrests, detainments, and torture of those who participated in the revolution grew. Despite this, demonstrators maintained a mostly nonviolent approach.

When regime violence showed no signs of receding, members of the Syrian army, opposed to killing unarmed protestors, defected and formed the first units of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in July 2011. This development transformed a largely peaceful movement into today's violent war, leading the regime to withdraw from areas under the control of opposition forces (known as liberated areas), and target civilian areas with bombs and shelling. The sudden halt of government services in these areas crippled communities that once depended entirely on centralized services, such as waste management, water, electricity, and food subsidies. In response, members of the newly formed LCCs stepped in to manage public services temporarily. These LCCs supported the establishment of local councils, entities that represent residents of a specific town or city and oversee its municipal functions, filling the administrative and management vacuum. In the struggle against the Assad regime, local councils began to represent a pillar of the moderate opposition. Recognizing this, the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), the external opposition group recognized by the international community, facilitated the establishment of provincial councils to oversee and coordinate the work of local councils in each province. This process was later transferred and is now overseen by the Syrian Interim Government's (SIG) Ministry of Local Administration, Refugees, and Relief (MOLARR).

These organizations' resources were limited from the start and became increasingly so as the war dragged on and conditions deteriorated. To increase their ability to provide vital services, USAID/OTI identified local councils as key bodies to target with programming when SRP launched in 2013. SRP also found strategic value in launching activities with

the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), the SOC's body for coordinating and delivering assistance to opposition-controlled areas. In total, SRP implemented 33 activities valued at over \$22 million, aimed at providing in-kind support to local councils and other organizations inside opposition-controlled Syria, through the ACU. SRP also worked with the SIG, provincial councils, and emerging CSOs and media organizations — key actors strengthening the presence of capable, responsive, and moderate actors.

SRP targeted the gap between national and local bodies that arose from the fact that some national partners operated from bases in Turkey rather than Syria. While many opposition bodies collaborated loosely on a local level, a lack of coordination and competition existed between national- and local-level bodies. In 2014, political challenges arising from this lack of unity became more complex with the collapse of the Geneva II talks, the rise of extremists, and increased regime aerial attacks against opposition entities. These developments continue to challenge the role of the moderate Syrian opposition in the revolution and in Syria's future.

U.S. and coalition airstrikes on ISIL-held areas in August 2014 further changed the landscape of the conflict. A year later, Russia also became directly involved, supporting the regime by striking areas Russia claimed were targets belonging to ISIL and other "terrorist" groups, but which were instead areas of moderate rebel control. US State Department Spokesman John Kirby noted that more than 90 percent of Russian airstrikes in Syria have not targeted ISIL. With ISIL's gains in territory and increased coverage by local and international news outlets, the original conflict at stake — that of the moderate opposition fighting the dictatorship of the Assad regime — fell more into the background of the international perspective on Syria. This caused many Syrian citizens, and their representative opposition groups, to wonder about the future of their co-opted revolution, and to whose hands the future country would belong. The program's moderate partners found their operation space increasingly squeezed between radical extremist groups and an authoritarian regime backed by Hezbollah and supported by Russian airstrikes.

Tensions at Syria's northern border with Turkey showed the potential to spill over and affect programming as well. While the Turkish government was sympathetic to the Syrian opposition since the beginning of the revolution, the situation at the border grew increasingly tense as ISIL's control of northern border areas increased and the group directly threatened Turkey, allegedly carrying out attacks in Suruç, a Turkish town with a Kurdish majority opposite of Syria's Kobane, and the Turkish capital of Ankara. Around the same time, Turkey's decades-old conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) flared up, and Turkey became suspicious of the affiliated Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forces in many positions along the Turkish-Syrian border. Military movements along the borders prompted Turkish officials to tighten border security and close crossings unexpectedly, sometimes affecting the progress of SRP's shipments into Syria and ultimately limiting SRP's Syrian partners from traveling to Gaziantep for in-person meetings. Over three years of programming, SRP adapted and responded to rapidly changing conditions inside Syria and to somewhat unclear regulations and

restrictions in Turkey. The program's flexibility has allowed it to shift approaches, strategies, and objectives to deliver assistance and programming that was relevant, necessary, and effective for Syria.

## SECTION II

# PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: STRATEGY AND RESPONSE

SRP's program goal aimed to promote principles of democratic governance and support accountable, representative, and responsive civilian bodies. This goal encompassed two country objectives and three sub-objectives, adapted and redefined from six earlier sub-objectives. These objectives were collapsed to allow enough flexibility for SRP to adapt its activities and partners depending on quickly changing needs while still structuring its interventions around a common strategy and goal. SRP's underlying assumption, confirmed over the course of programming by activity impact and polling during site visits, maintained that increasing the ability of emerging moderate governance structures to respond to needs in their community would build local support for these bodies, thus increasing their credibility and legitimacy as capable governance structures.

Over the course of programming, SRP adapted strategies and the articulation of its goals as necessary. As LCCs developed into local councils, and provincial councils began to form throughout 2013, SRP took windows of opportunity to design programming that took into account these developments. In response to changes on the ground in mid-2014, particularly the rise of extremist actors who often competed for recognition with local civilian bodies through service provision, SRP revised one of its goals to “preserve and expand space for moderate actors in Syria, to promote principles of democratic governance.” This was adjusted from a previous goal that sought “a credible and legitimate political transition, resulting in governance structures that reflect the will of the people.”

Following a strategy review in spring 2015, SRP decided to shift its strategy to focus more directly on channeling assistance through provincial councils. This was a result of research indicating that while local councils generally achieved recognition by their communities, provincial councils were still widely viewed as being distant from their constituents. This strategy aimed to increase linkages between provincial councils and local councils through collaboration on visible services, thereby strengthening the credibility of the provincial councils on a local level and, in many cases, taking advantage of economies of scale on service delivery. Recognizing the continued reluctance of some actors to recognize the SIG due to its being based in Turkey, OTI focused on strengthening the in-country presence of the body through increased collaboration with provincial and local councils, allowing its rapid response to shifting developments in strategic areas. SRP activities were designed to be responsive, timely, and carried out effectively by Syrian partners.

### SECTION III

# OPERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

While OTI originally aimed to set up operations within Syria over the course of SRP, the worsening security situation in the country required that the program continue to operate from across the border in Turkey. The location of Gaziantep, the program's base city where many key stakeholders were also located, enabled relatively easy travel for key partners to visit the program's offices from Syria, and its proximity to other large Turkish cities allowed procurement staff the ability to inspect items purchased before shipment across the borders. Shipments could be exported to Syria usually through two border crossings from Turkey into Syrian provinces Idleb and Aleppo. Although these crossings were sometimes closed temporarily due to fluctuating relationships between Turkish authorities and the Syrian groups managing the crossings, the shipments were able to maintain a regular schedule.

During the start-up phase, SRP's operation team established the office and Chemonics' legal and financial presence in Turkey, while its program team immediately began meeting with potential partners. Early on, some Syrian program staff traveled to liberated areas in northern Syria, meeting with members of local councils and activists to collect valuable information about the situation in these areas and needs on the ground. Staff returned with proposals for potential activities and suggestions for potential partners. Program leaders led an extensive analysis of different areas in Syria via outreach to local partners and third party reports. They then were able to develop strategies specific to each region, identifying target areas and partners.

Activities per geographic region were designed and overseen by respective grants management units (GMUs), program teams dedicated to creating and overseeing all activities in a region or a group of regions. The GMU teams consisted of program development officers, grants managers, procurement specialists, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team members, who all worked together to identify concepts, then develop, implement, and close-out grant activities. The integrated nature of the teams increased overall efficiency and allowed staff to build expertise in particular subject-matter and/or in geographical areas. An additional communications team, part of the national-level GMU, helped integrate outreach elements into activities, and also identified and implemented a wide range of grants to media organizations to produce and amplify coverage of partners, increasing project impact.

Apart from initial visits by SRP staff, no SRP employees were able to travel to Syria over the remainder of the program. The remote operation and management of the program, therefore, necessitated strong M&E systems to ensure effective programming and account for valuable resources. Identifying and verifying information was doubly complicated because security concerns sometimes limited standard M&E practices such as photo and video documentation, which in certain instances would have endangered

program partners. To bolster the program's connections to Syria, SRP established a robust M&E and research team to provide accurate, real-time situational updates that informed and influenced the program's direction and ability to adapt quickly. Feeding into this monitoring, the communications team ensured that reporting of key events, achievements, challenges, and opportunities reached program staff and OTI.

Remote implementation of the project required a strong network of trusted individuals and organizations to monitor program outputs and impacts. SRP engaged field personnel to assist with program development, monitor implementation, and track cross-border shipments into Syria and accompany them to their final locations. The field staff utilized multiple point verification, ongoing assessment and social media to monitor the impact of SRP project activities. By relying on the field staff as the program's eyes and ears in Syria, the program retained close access to the areas in which it worked despite remote management. The field team, in addition to independent research organizations, also provided analysis of the larger impact of programming by conducting surveys of local residents, collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This data was supplemented by large-scale surveys that helped to track changes in attitudes and perceptions over time. Up-to-date information from the field aided in understanding whether project activities were achieving impact and how activities could be redesigned or retargeted in future efforts, as well as in verifying that program objectives were in line with the reality of what was possible inside Syria.

SECTION IV

# ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS



## PARTNERS BY THE NUMBERS

**323** local councils

**104** CSOs and CBOs

**105** emergency response teams

**3** national civil authority institutions

**18** media organizations

**10** provincial councils

\*indicates total number of bodies that have received or collaborated with SRP support, including those that were not direct grantees

Over three years, SRP implemented a large number of activities with a wide variety of partners: local councils, provincial councils, emergency response teams and other national-level bodies, CSOs, and communication/media organizations. Working through multiple levels and different platforms, SRP aimed to strengthen and unify a countrywide moderate opposition structure and increase the collaboration between these bodies, beginning primarily from the bottom up.

### SUPPORTING LOCAL GOVERNANCE BODIES IN CRITICAL SERVICE SECTORS

In 2013, local councils with limited capacity inside Syria were still just emerging, pushed forward by the revolutionary ideals of fair governance. Three years later, they are often viewed by residents as the most reliable and credible bodies in their communities, and as integral symbols of the Syrian revolution and its democratic goals. Over the course of the

SRP, the core and majority of the program's activities worked to strengthen community perceptions of local councils by supporting these bodies to provide vital support to their communities, thereby increasing connections between councils and residents.

**Number of Activities: 134**  
**Value: \$5,770,202\***  
**Number of partners: 67**

\*\$ value is approximate

In its approach encouraging local governance from the bottom up, SRP carried out the majority of its activities over the life of the program with 67 local councils as direct



grantees. Survey research across Syria indicated that residents placed more confidence in local councils than in other moderate opposition entities, but despite the relatively positive reputation of local councils, limited resources paired with worsening humanitarian conditions widened the gap between community needs and what local councils could provide. To bridge this, SRP continued to support local council services in a number of sectors, including waste management, bakery support, electricity and water network repair, education, transportation, and civil records.

SRP often carried out several activities simultaneously with key councils to improve their reputation among communities through increased service provision. SRP implemented seven activities in southern Syria directly with one local council, a critical moderate entity in an opposition-held area that has been besieged and under constant regime airstrikes for over three years. With severe damage to infrastructure and disruption of civil and municipal services in the town of approximately 200,000 residents, a number of civilian and military actors had attempted to step in to manage services, including a powerful extremist Salafi group.

SRP’s activities aimed to bolster citizen recognition of the local council as the central civilian authority and strengthen its ability to resist the influence of armed actors. SRP first provided financial assistance for the repair of 11 vehicles for its waste management department in an initial activity. This allowed the council to continue carrying out much-needed trash collection. Numerous citizens recognized this vital service, one of whom noted that the local council was “the only body managing the waste management situation.”

SRP also supported the operations of the land titling department of this local council, allowing it to offer a vital government service previously provided by the regime. Under this activity, the local council launched a “single window” system in which residents could request various types of legal records, including real estate records authorizing sale and purchase and transfer of inheritances. Residents were given case numbers, which allowed them to check the status of documents and gave them next-day appointments. The resulting system was hailed by local residents as efficient and an improvement over the services that the regime previously offered.

“The [land titling] project is excellent, especially the treatment of staff, unlike the Assad days. The most important and fantastic thing is the speed of processing applications, as I have filed many applications and they took just 24 hours to process.”—40-year-old resident interviewed by SRP about the local council’s performance

SRP also supported the same council to issue and house civil records, including birth, death, and marriage certificates, and maintain management of its cemetery as death tolls increased, helping the local council to support residents at critical times. Through SRP support in the provision of municipal and civil services, the local council increased its popularity among residents. The council cited management of service projects as a factor that “enhance[d] its role and position within the community.” The council also

“The cemetery management situation has improved a lot over the past six months. Three of my sons were martyred at different times, and there was a change in the cemetery management, burial process, and the speed.”—48-year-old resident interviewed by SRP about the local council’s performance

strengthened its reputation as an entity that put community priorities first. One local news outlet reported a story, for example, of a waste management worker who went on strike to protest his salary, only to discover later that his monthly payment was actually twice that of the council’s president. Through its work, the local council became widely known as a reliable service provider even outside of its town, and is often cited as an example of a successful local council for others to follow.

SRP also engaged a number of other local councils to provide support in the education sector by facilitating connections with teachers, students, and parents through the provision of critical school supplies to keep children in school. In one activity, SRP supported more than 3,900 students in six schools, in addition to 214 teachers and school directors, by providing nine months’ worth of school supplies. The council reported that this activity restored education for the city’s students, and many teachers and residents credited the local council, as the activity helped to increase the office’s visibility as the provider of education, a vital need as resources are continually strained and education loses priority to basic emergency response and humanitarian aid. By supporting the education sector through local councils, SRP is also supporting local efforts to ensure that a generation of children do not lose out on valuable years of education despite the ongoing war.

In one critical city, SRP supported the local council to maintain the electricity grid, which had been severely damaged by shelling and bombing, leading to a lasting electricity shortage. Provision of repair materials enabled the local council to provide maintenance for more than 45 service complaints in over 25 neighborhoods across the city, benefitting around 17,000 families. The council’s work was highly visible through branded uniform workers and signs hung in repair areas, provided by SRP, leading to widespread resident acknowledgement of the council’s responsibility for restoring electricity. This recognition is especially important because the council competes for resident support via service provision with another DTO-affiliated local service body. The local council’s success in the electricity sector, therefore, helped to establish its authority as the primary civilian governance structure.

By building the capacity of local councils across the country, SRP strengthened residents’ belief in local councils as critical governance institutions that would play essential roles

in a post-Assad Syria. The continued work of local councils in the country, despite desolate conditions, stands as a remarkable achievement of Syria’s moderate opposition.

## STRENGTHENING PROVINCIAL COUNCILS

As provincial-level actors coordinating and overseeing the work of local councils in each province, provincial councils were also vital SRP partners over the course of the program. When SRP launched in early 2013, most provincial councils had not yet been formed.

Today, however, provincial councils operate in all major areas controlled by the moderate opposition and have gained credibility, in part due to SRP assistance. OTI worked directly with five provincial councils, and four others indirectly, over the course of SRP, aiming to increase their presence inside Syria by strengthening their coordination of local councils while also increasing their visibility and thus credibility. In many cases, these activities targeted provincial-local council relationships that were strained, leading to limited public support of the provincial council from both local councils and residents in the province and in turn limiting material and financial support to local councils from provincial councils.

**Number of Activities: 45**  
**Value: \$3,964,149\***  
**Number of partners: 5**

*\*\$ value is approximate.*

To bring these councils closer together, OTI and SRP launched a number of province-wide activities aimed at building relationships between local and provincial councils. For example, SRP partnered with one provincial council to conduct a waste management campaign that brought together a range of smaller councils in one area. The result of the activity was to increase positive engagements between local and provincial councils around a shared objective. In another province, SRP helped the provincial council conduct activities in partnership with area local councils. These activities included cleaning up irrigation canals; supporting schools; and facilitating transportation, agriculture, and road repair. The collective effect of these activities was to help solve rifts between dozens of local councils and CSOs and the provincial council. “We have developed a very good relationship with most of the members from the [other local councils] and the provincial council,” one local council member reported after the conclusion of one major activity. These strong relationships have been sustained beyond the end of SRP assistance.

SRP also supported continued collaboration between the provincial council and local councils in an activity that provided financial assistance to harvest, transport, and distribute wheat on 100 hectares of farmland alongside 38 local councils. During this activity, the provincial and local councils carried out a unified outreach campaign that facilitated direct interaction with residents, distributing fliers in the street and hanging posters by farms, schools, hospitals, and shops. The next election for the provincial council brought many representatives of the key local councils SRP had supported into the provincial council as members, further solidifying these ties.

Other activities implemented with provincial council partners included waste management campaigns, bakery installations, and material distribution projects. SRP provided financial support allowing one provincial council to repair a part of a critical road, which had been damaged by intense shelling and constant use by large trucks, for example. The provincial council collaborated with three local councils, which helped to identify sources for heavy machinery rental as well as the workers for the repairs. Members of the local civil defense team also participated in the repairs. Because they took place on a frequently used road, the repairs represented a visible instance of collaboration between the provincial council, local councils, and other local entities. The activity was covered by several local media outlets, one of which cited it as the most important project in the province.

SRP also set the stage for the formation of the provincial council in a province that had not seen an active provincial council for over a year. Recognizing the role of local councils in cooperating to elect the province's political representation, SRP focused on partnering with as many local councils in the province as possible, designing high-profile activities aimed to facilitate communication and joint implementation, such as water network repairs and waste management campaigns. The connections sparked by this work paved the way for collaboration one year later in electing the provincial council, whose membership was made up of many former local council members, thus legitimizing its role in the province as a body with widespread local connections.



**SRP provided equipment and start-up costs for the installation and operation of a central bakery for 20 towns and 20 IDP camps, addressing a critical need while boosting the visibility of the provincial council in the region.**

## SUPPORTING A UNIFIED NATIONAL CIVIL DEFENSE

Emergency response teams were another critical partner in SRP’s activities. After the withdrawal of the Assad regime from parts of Aleppo in the second half of 2012 and the start of barrel bombing campaigns, volunteers began forming emergency response teams to save lives. These initial teams were not well-equipped or trained. Similar volunteer teams also formed in other parts of the country. In mid-2013, SRP launched its first assistance to emergency responders in Aleppo with the provision of uniforms, light equipment, and training. In parallel, other donors also started training teams and providing equipment and uniforms.

**Number of activities: 40**

**Value: \$19,026,964\***

**Number of partners: 107**

*\*Value calculated for SCD assistance includes the value of all activities that supported civil defense efforts, including activities that were implemented directly through national, provincial, or local entities in cases in which the grant awardee was not a civil defense directorate but assistance delivered was intended for and ultimately supported local civil defense efforts. As such, some of this assistance overlaps with that counted under national-level, provincial council, and local council activities.*

In early 2014, SRP supplied a first tranche of heavy equipment under the *Hayah* (Life) campaign, coordinated via the ACU. Over the life of the project, SRP provided more than \$19 million in assistance to emergency response teams. Assistance included firefighting vehicles, ambulances, wheel loaders, backhoe loaders, water tankers, rapid response vehicle, skid-steer loaders, spare parts for heavy equipment, medical equipment for ambulances, search-and-rescue kits, and firefighting supplies (foam, uniforms, and fire extinguishers). With other donors, SRP also helped the emergency response leadership provide limited stipends to more than 2,800 volunteers (\$150 per month). Assistance allowed the teams to expand, save more lives, and help local and provincial councils restore and maintain basic services in the community.

By the end of the project, the emergency response teams had formed into a national organization, called Syria Civil Defense, known internationally as the “White Helmets.” This independent, Syrian-led organization has an eight-member management board representing each of the eight provincial teams. The board sets the organization’s policies and priorities and divides resources based on need between the eight provinces. Syria Civil Defense is not affiliated with any political party or group, and all of its members sign a pledge to follow international humanitarian principles when carrying out their duties.

**“We started to see [the emergency responders] a lot in the streets, especially when the regime drops barrel bombs. [When] we hear the sound of the ambulance often, we know that there are wounded and that civil defense is headed to the regions of shelling.”**

**—Resident of Homs, describing the civil defense response**

From its original volunteer teams, the Syria Civil Defense is now recognized across Syria by its logo and workers’ white helmets, inspiring hope in residents who are reminded of

the values of tolerance and coexistence when they see brave volunteers respond to all residents fairly. The organization’s work has also been covered extensively in international press, as it symbolizes a nonviolent body that offers a moderate voice and alternative narrative to the Syrian conflict. Its members serve as the country’s “heroes,” in the words of many residents — one of the only actors on the ground saving lives instead of taking them. An October 3, 2016, editorial in *The Guardian* recommends Syria Civil Defense for the Noble Peace Prize, concluding, “What the White Helmets accomplish may seem like a drop in the ocean, but what they represent is immense: resilience and bravery in the face of barbarism... They [Syria Civil Defense/White Helmets] also embody a spirit of civic resistance — upholding some of the ideals of the peaceful, popular uprising of 2011 and exemplifying courage and solidarity in the face of state-sponsored terror.”

## FACILITATING NATIONAL-LEVEL COOPERATION

At the start of SRP programming, national-level bodies affiliated with the moderate opposition were still emerging. Because these organizations were operating mostly from outside of Syria, many people viewed them as distant and out of touch with residents’ needs; therefore, Syrian residents saw them largely as illegitimate. In response, SRP activities worked to enable national-level bodies to respond broadly and efficiently to the needs of provincial councils, local councils, and other partners, thereby also strengthening a large cross section of Syrian organizations.

**Number of activities: 36**  
**Value: \$27,828,604\***  
**Number of partners: 2**

\*\$ value is approximate.

To promote a unified and stable national-level opposition governance structure, SRP implemented activities to improve community perceptions of moderate national-level entities and increase linkages between national-level bodies and local bodies inside Syria. SRP focused on providing much-needed goods and equipment to national bodies, which then distributed them to important partners across Syria at critical times. National-level activities took advantage of the economy of scale by distributing a wide variety of assistance across large areas much more quickly, and in fewer individual activities, than could be achieved by working directly with smaller entities. These activities increased linkages at the national, provincial, and local levels to support a strong network of moderate opposition actors.

Early on in the program, OTI partnered with the ACU to design a series of Liberated Areas Initiative (LAI) activities worth approximately \$10 million, providing needed equipment to newly liberated areas, where the ACU delivered the assistance to local councils and civil defense centers. These activities aimed to increase the ACU’s connection to local residents, who at the time did not find the body responsive. Equipment included refrigerated trucks, generators, skid-steer loaders, tipper trucks, crane trucks, ambulances, fire trucks, and water bladders. This equipment allowed local councils to react quickly to local realities: For example, firefighting vehicles were used to respond to regime aerial attacks and car bomb attacks by extremist groups, and

refrigerated trucks were used to distribute 3,000,000 polio vaccinations in a national campaign. In interviews with recipients of tipper and crane trucks from more than 50 different local bodies, key community members recognized the role of the ACU in delivering this equipment. Most of this equipment was still in use by local councils and civil defense teams at the end of the project.

SRP also developed a \$10 million Emergency Action Fund (EAF) to enable the ACU to respond to needs in emergency situations by providing items like commodity baskets and winterization kits (including blankets, mattresses, winter clothing, heaters, and pomace) to local communities. In one activity under this fund, SRP provided the ACU with education supplies that it delivered under a joint campaign to 218 schools in 117 towns and cities across four provinces, allowing students to continue their education. During Ramadan in 2013, the EAF also supported the ACU to deliver 80,000 food baskets to residents of all religious backgrounds in 44 areas. Assistance during Ramadan enabled local councils to reach residents during a time of the year when community activities peak. Following the six-month period of the implementation of these activities, third-party research captured an increase in positive perceptions of the ACU among residents, indicated by a 10.6 percent change in Syrians who supported the body in September 2014. Many residents interviewed by SRP’s field staff about the ACU could list services they had directly seen provided by the ACU, both equipment and commodities, and many reported that its performance had improved over the last three months. More importantly, provincial and local councils also saw the ACU as a more legitimate body as a result of this assistance, a critical factor determining the growth in credibility of a national-level institution.

SRP later transitioned to working directly with the SIG, as part of a larger effort to increase the SIG’s outreach on a national level. In a coordinated campaign with the SIG’s In Green office in 2015, SRP delivered six garbage trucks, 1,000 waste bins, and other light waste management equipment to six regional local councils in one province, each of which then worked with smaller councils in their area to strengthen waste management services. The provincial council was also involved in this effort. The effect of the activity was to strengthen the relationship between the Gaziantep-based SIG and local entities inside Syria, as well as to strengthen relations between provincial and local councils, and between local councils themselves. “The garbage truck significantly contributed to meeting the local council needs and it saved a lot of time. From the economic perspective, the garbage truck is much better than the tractor that was used by the local council to collect garbage,” said the

**“In Green is garnering a lot of interest and support, from Syrians and the international community, as it aims to revive social and economic life, rebuild the destroyed and in-need areas, and is based on the rehabilitation of all the internal components of society: relief, services, economics, health, education, and others. The most important thing is that In Green is not only a relief project supplying food baskets... more importantly, it also supports local councils, strengthening them so the people can manage themselves in liberated areas.”—Orient TV reporter, discussing a project supported by SRP**

head of the services office of one participating local council. In a survey conducted by the SRP M&E team, 34 of 36 local council partners polled agreed that there was coordination between the local councils and provincial councils during implementation of the activity, and 15 of 24 stated that the assistance had changed their opinion about the SIG positively.

Under two activities supporting the SIG to respond rapidly to political developments in Syria, SRP developed a program with the SIG's In Green office facilitating the procurement, storage, and delivery of in-kind assistance for eventual distribution by local and provincial councils. For example, during the liberation of the last regime-held positions in one province, SRP supported the SIG to deliver food baskets, hygiene kits, blankets, generators, and other equipment to the provincial council in support of internally displaced persons (IDPs), part of an effort to assert itself as a major player in governance in the province. This activity reinforced the importance of moderate opposition civilian bodies at a time when the popularity of military groups, some of which are classified as designated terrorist organizations (DTOs), was on the rise.

Facebook posts highlighting the SIG's collaboration and assistance received thousands of likes and high circulation, and local news outlets covered the SIG's quick response to local communities on many occasions. "May God bless you for doing good work," one user commented on the In Green office's Facebook post publicizing its activities. In another case, the SIG was able to replace the main bakery in an Idleb town after it was destroyed in a regime air strike. By replacing the bakery, the SIG ensured that the community would not be susceptible to influence by armed groups or DTOs that may have leveraged their own resources to provide a bakery to gain community support, as these groups have done in other areas.

## **INCREASING AWARENESS OF MODERATE OPPOSITION BODIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

One of the largest challenges facing SRP partners on all levels was the communication of their work to residents in Syria. Despite the daily work of these moderate opposition bodies to respond to the needs of their communities on the ground, accurate information about this work and the governing bodies behind it did not often reach the average resident. As local

and international news outlets mainly focused on military developments, positive news was rarely circulated to Syrians inside the country. In addition, extremist groups like JAN and ISIL are known to have very effective and comprehensive propaganda networks and outreach initiatives, thus often overpowering the news and successes of moderate actors. While in 2013 outreach was a critical area in which local councils, provincial councils, and national bodies had limited experience, today many SRP partners work to strengthen their relationships with residents through daily Facebook posts about their work, town hall meetings, and suggestion and complaint boxes.

**Number of Activities: 24**

**Value: \$808,520\***

**Number of partners: 16**

*\*USD value is approximate.*



To bridge the gap between SRP partners and the communities they work to serve, SRP’s outreach and communications strategy was twofold. The first element included building outreach and branding, such as posters and signs advertising the LC, directly into activity implementation plans, from the circulation of branding and outreach materials, meetings with key community actors, or door-to-door distribution of needed commodities. By better publicizing their efforts, SRP activities assisted partners in gaining recognition for their services and work in their communities.

“I didn’t know things were happening this way in my country. I was only seeing killing and destruction and everything depressing from the media. I want to participate with you.”—Female resident responding to SRP-supported coverage of local councils

The second element of SRP’s communication strategy involved design of separate activities providing resources to independent media organizations that had emerged out of the revolution. SRP activities enabled these media organizations to cover the work of moderate governance bodies and CSOs in magazines, newspapers, websites, and television reports, leading to greater public awareness and knowledge of their efforts. This increased circulation also facilitated knowledge-sharing between the bodies they covered, which learned from the stories of one another’s projects, challenges, and accomplishments. “I read two articles about the work of local actors, and I found it very beneficial to learn about others’ experiences,” stated one resident interviewed about a media outlet that was supported by SRP. The program assisted a media group to launch a national advocacy campaign on social media highlighting the work of moderate actors inside Syria, focusing on unified national messaging allowing moderate opposition actors to reach a broad audience. One media partner stressed the importance of this type of news coverage: “The increase in violence in Syria has a significant impact on peoples’ lives and their culture and awareness,” the organization reported to SRP, “and to avoid these negative effects the media must focus on the civil works that bring hope in the heart of Syrians...and employ their energies in building the Syrian government at all levels.”

## EXPANDING MODERATE CIVIL SOCIETY

To counter growing violent extremism in the country, SRP identified partnerships with CSOs as an effective means of mobilizing the community and promoting moderate space and values. Street art and graffiti represented one outlet to spread ideas of tolerance and peaceful coexistence over the extremist ideologies. Street art played an important role in vocalizing and spreading ideas during the early days of the protest, and across Syria, activists still utilize graffiti as a mean of promoting the revolution’s original goals and hope for a better future. To leverage this practice, SRP launched “Coloring the Black” campaigns with local CSOs in various locations. Providing paint, equipment, and other financial support to these organizations, SRP

**Number of activities: 36**  
**Value: \$996,063\***  
**Number of partners: 33**

*\*USD value is approximate.*

helped CSOs paint bright, positive messages in a number of towns from which ISIL had recently retreated, replacing its signature black messaging in public spaces. These campaigns depended on the participation of a wide group of activists, LCCs, and other revolutionary groups, fostering collaboration to promote a common goal.

In another activity focused on promoting community engagement, SRP partnered with a CSO to launch a cleanup campaign promoting coexistence in a predominantly Kurdish area that had seen a recent influx of Arab IDPs. The movement of refugees into the region threatened to strain resources in the community, leading to possible tension between the communities, highlighted by recent disputes between Arab and Kurdish-affiliated military groups. Provision of supplies for a waste management campaign, including uniforms and paint for beautification, supported the CSO to summon over 80 volunteers from both residents and IDPs, who cleaned streets, painted street dividers, and painted positive slogans in both Kurdish and Arabic on walls. By linking men and women of different ages and backgrounds together for a common cause, the campaign promoted peaceful coexistence in a diverse region.

As the revolution approached its fourth anniversary, SRP partnered with a local CSO to host celebrations of moderate values inside Syria. These events included street art campaigns, public ceremonies, performances, and festivals. Local residents reported the participation of a large number of local government institutions and other CSOs, in addition to many residents, including women and children. “The activities were great and revived the spirit of the revolution in people’s hearts,” one participant reported. By bringing together a diverse group, these events facilitated collaboration between different bodies and residents. SRP field staff reported, for example, that one event in an ethnically diverse neighborhood stressed cooperation between Arab, Kurdish, and Assyrian communities by showing that people stood up for each other regardless of their backgrounds. Slogans circulated on posters and street art read, “no to sectarianism,” and “we have one flag.” Together, these activities worked to further cement the role of civil society in promoting revolutionary values and maintain the manifestation of these values, such as coexistence, at a grassroots level.



Residents paint slogans in public spaces previously covered by the signature black graffiti and propaganda of ISIL. When ISIL withdrew from these areas, SRP supported a public campaign for residents to paint messages promoting tolerance and moderate values. Credit: SRP grantee

## SECTION V

# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

SRP's most far-reaching challenge was the volatile military and security situation inside the country. Shifting areas of control and political allegiances forced SRP to adjust not only the targets and goals of its programming continually, as described above, but also the regions in which it worked. SRP remained sensitive to areas in which DTOs were active, limiting programming and risk in these areas so that OTI assistance would not be co-opted by the wrong actors while also identifying key areas in which it could strengthen moderate space. To respond proactively and flexibly, SRP approached the war environment with adaptable regional strategies. For example, when ISIL infiltrated Ar-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor province halfway through 2014, eventually consolidating its control and forcing its influence on program partners, SRP cancelled activities in the two provinces. To counter this, the program diverted its resources by expanding its operations into Hama and Homs provinces, which had not previously been targeted with activities. SRP also increased its engagement with moderate CSOs and media groups to produce and broadcast material promoting the revolution's original moderate and peaceful ideals in areas that were contested by extremists.

Operating in an active war zone placed significant limitations on the program's communications with its partners in Syria. Due to widespread electricity and internet outages, regular communication with partners was difficult, and hard deadlines were nearly impossible to set and enforce. For M&E purposes, the volatile security and political environment in Syria made it impossible to collect a random or representative sample of data concerning opinion of opposition bodies used to inform SRP's programming. The war environment also made it impossible to control for multiple external factors that may be responsible for local shifts when surveying communities. Despite these limitations, SRP implemented a standard and repetitive polling system to gauge the effects of its projects on local communities and used weekly reporting to stay updated on shifting circumstances.

Increasing regime airstrikes over the course of the war threatened programming and partners on a number of fronts. The regime, and then Russia, quickly became known to target civilian areas in opposition-controlled regions with attacks destroying some equipment and supplies provided to SRP partners. In a few instances, aerial attacks directly targeted council headquarters and civil defense offices; at worst, attacks injured or killed members of organizations that OTI supported. SRP responded to intensified attacks by increasing its assistance to civil defense teams, which continue to provide emergency response services during the chaos that follows these attacks. The increase in Russian and regime airstrikes on liberated areas in the fall of 2015, for instance, crippled communities and devastated resources. SRP again reacted by providing surge support to the most hard-hit areas, supporting civil defense teams, local councils, and provincial councils to deliver emergency assistance.

Activities conducted at all partner levels demonstrated that the activities most successfully achieving the program's objectives were those that held widespread local recognition of the target organizations. Because SRP's success depended in large part on the ways activities were messaged and communicated to residents, the program took great care for both the security and visibility of its partners. Security always took priority over visibility, however. Because the security situation often barred the possibility of formal or publicized meetings as well as widely circulated information (for fear that locations or events might be targeted with airstrikes), SRP and its grantees faced significant challenges in approaching how to publicize completed work. Therefore, SRP worked closely with each partner to develop activity-specific outreach plans, from branding of worker uniforms to door-to-door distribution of goods.

Another significant challenge to the program's operation was political disunity that often hindered the ability of a coherent and unified opposition front to respond to the escalation in violence and extremism in Syria. Internal conflicts between different groups in the SOC erupted into public view on multiple occasions and affected its affiliated bodies, such as the ACU. Within the course of three months, for example, the ACU had three different chief executive officers. This type of political infighting was common within and among SRP partners, sometimes causing delays or even the halt of activities. In addition, many opposition bodies did not establish an in-country presence, leading to local disregard for their efforts. Fluctuating opinions from Syrian residents about opposition bodies, reflected in third-party perception research, echoed growing long-term disillusion about the situation in general, expected after years of brutal war. Shifts in perceptions were likely influenced by the consistent violence of the war and terrible humanitarian conditions in the country. As the war drags on, citizens became wearier and their needs grew larger, as did the gap between local demands and what many local governance entities were able to provide. These perceptions demonstrate the volatility of public opinion in an environment influenced by many factors over which SRP partners had little to no control.

SRP worked diligently and creatively to ensure that U.S. government resources did not go to DTOs and other actors contrary to U.S. government foreign policy. Restrictions over what SRP was able to ship to partners also significantly affected its distribution of assistance across Syria. Due to U.S. sanctions on Syria, all exports containing U.S. components or technology, regardless of where they are purchased, require an export license from the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) before they can be transferred to Syria. To ensure full compliance with BIS rules and regulations, items or equipment exported to Syria were evaluated by SRP field and Chemonics home office staff. These restrictions barred SRP from providing cash assistance to partners purchasing items that require a BIS export license inside Syria. Because provision of in-kind assistance was not possible in besieged areas of rural Damascus, SRP faced challenges in providing adequate assistance to this critical area. SRP instead identified innovative ways that partners in southern provinces could still carry out effective activities despite these restrictions, such as through provision of financial assistance for equipment rental.

## SECTION VI

# LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of three years of programming, SRP accumulated valuable lessons relevant to programming remotely in a complex conflict and active war zone. Overall, the results of SRP's programming in Syria, as measured in site visits and research, were in line with the program's assumption that increasing service delivery to Syrians is a vital means of both increasing resident recognition of the moderate opposition bodies providing the service and fostering the body's role as a central governance structure. Increased support for bodies with which the program has worked indicated that confidence in these groups are dependent on their visible support of residents' needs and priorities, especially as conditions worsened and resources deteriorated inside Syria. In addition, instilling hope in residents and promoting the revolution's original values became increasingly vital to sustaining its goals of promoting principles of democratic governance, encouraging residents and these bodies to continue their efforts.

Working in an environment with a large number of actors required that SRP recognize the importance of collaborating with other donors about funding priorities and joint strategies for assistance, a best practice that should be continued in future projects. In addition, programming has shown the importance of facilitating collaboration between local governance structures and CSOs, sparking linkages between the two types of organizations as critical partners targeting the same goal. Designing programming that allowed disparate bodies to work together often laid the groundwork for future cooperation and positive relationships among these bodies, critical for the establishment of a resilient network of moderate government institutions and civil society. Future programming should also tap into segments of society and key community figures that have not yet been engaged, recognizing the centrality of local politics in building governance from the bottom-up.

Ultimately, SRP's experience found that the faster local government institutions could respond to changing circumstances and shifting needs on the ground, the greater the scale of residents who recognized their centrality to the communities in which they served. In addition, highly visible provision of services, such as waste management campaigns and distribution of bread via bakeries and agricultural activities, increased public recognition and confidence in these bodies.

The successes of these local bodies, combined with the growing needs of residents inside Syria who turn to them for support, highlights the necessity of continued rapid and flexible assistance to these structures. This need is compounded by the fact that these actors increasingly find themselves caught in between a brutal dictatorship with growing Russian support on one side and radical extremist groups on the other. These conditions further demand the strengthening of an overarching national structure of coordinated moderate bodies that can withstand outside threats and support other local partners.

Despite the increasing challenges in Syria, SRP’s programming contributed to building the capacity of emerging moderate entities to respond to residents’ needs, as well as to the formation of linkages between these bodies by enabling them to communicate, cooperate with, and rely on each other. Their continued work and expanded linkages represent critical steps in the growth of a unified moderate opposition governance structure that residents will support to play a role in a democratic post-Assad Syria.



A celebration of the revolution's anniversary, led by an SRP partner CSO. Credit: SRP grantee

## ANNEX A: IMPORTANT MILESTONES POLITICAL EVENTS AND SRP EVENTS

**March 2011** | The Syrian revolution begins as a nonviolent movement calling on the regime of President Bashar Assad to pursue democratic reforms. Protests and awareness campaigns spread across the country. After police respond with overwhelming force, the protests become increasingly deadly.

**April-May 2011** | The number of deaths at protests rises due to increasing government crackdowns and arrests, and the Syrian army increases its presence across the country. International concern and criticism of the regime's tactics grow.

**July 2011** | Deserters from the Syrian army form the Free Syrian Army (FSA) with the intention of fighting the regime, and the uprising escalates into a war.

**Jan. 2012** | Jebhat Al-Nusra (JAN) forms as a militant group opposed to the regime and Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria.

**Nov. 2012** | The Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), a coalition of opposition groups, is formed in Qatar.

**Dec. 2012** | The SOC establishes the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) as the official body for coordinating and delivering assistance to opposition-controlled areas of Syria.

### March 2013

- Rebel groups take control of Ar-Raqqqa city as the first provincial capital from which regime forces withdraw; the liberated province is Syria's first.
- The SOC forms the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), based in Gaziantep, Turkey, to function as the political opposition's representative body.
- The first civil defense team is established in Aleppo in response to the regime's increasing aerial attacks on the city.

**May 2013** | The Aleppo Provincial Council is formed as Syria's first provincial council to oversee and coordinate the efforts of local councils in the province.

**Aug. 2013** | The Assad regime targets opposition-held Eastern Ghouta with a chemical attack using sarin gas, killing more than 1,000 residents.

**Dec. 2013** | During the third week of the month, regime barrel bomb attacks on liberated areas of Aleppo city alone result in more than 125 casualties. The number of civilians fleeing from aerial attacks on opposition-held areas in Aleppo continues to rise as the regime increases its use of barrel bombs in areas of Idleb, Damascus suburbs, and Homs City.

**Jan.-Feb. 2014** | The UN-backed Geneva II peace conference is held between the SOC and the Assad regime, aiming to end fighting in Syria. Negotiations end with no agreement.

**March 2014** | After first crossing from Iraq into Syria a year earlier, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues consolidating its control in Ar-Raqqqa and Deir-ez-Zor.

**April 2014** | A new Rural Damascus Provincial Council (RDPC) is elected under the supervision of the SIG.

**Nov. 2014** | Members of civil defense directorates meet to form the unified Syrian Civil Defense (SCD), and all directors sign the body's statement of principles.

**Dec. 2014** | The third year of the conflict ends as its most devastating year thus far: 76,000 Syrians have died in 2014, 7.6 million are internally displaced, and 12.2 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, the UN reports.

2012

2013

2014

**Jan. 2013** | USAID/OTI launches the Syria Regional Program (SRP) to respond to developments in Syria. USAID/OTI anticipates an imminent political transition from the Assad regime to a democratic and representative structure. SRP opens its office in Gaziantep, Turkey, and begins developing programming targeting specific areas of Aleppo, Ar-Raqqqa, Damascus suburbs, Deir-ez-Zor, Hasakeh, and Idleb provinces.

**March - May 2013** | SRP approves its first interventions supporting civil defense teams in liberated areas of Syria with training and basic equipment.

**June 2013** | SRP launches its first activity with the ACU as part of its Liberated Areas Initiative (LAI), supplying trucks for the ACU to deliver to local councils and provincial health directorates.

**Dec. 2013** | An SRP activity brings members of civil defense centers in Idleb together to coordinate priorities in their first collective meeting.

**April 2014** | In response to ISIL's advances, SRP shuts down its programming in Ar-Raqqqa and Deir-Ez-Zor provinces.

**June-July 2014** | SRP launches its first direct activities in Hama and Homs, two provinces not previously targeted by the program.

**Aug. 2014** | SRP revises its program sub-objectives to respond more effectively to changing circumstances inside Syria. SRP modifies its scope to preserve and expand space for moderate actors while allowing for the establishment of accountable, transparent, and responsive government structures in the country.

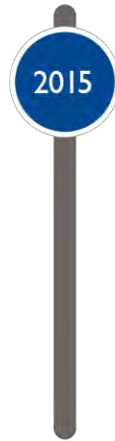
**Jan. 2015** | A new Idleb Provincial Council (IPC) is elected, replacing the largely defunct council first elected in 2013.

**March 2015** | Rebels coordinating under the Jaish Al-Fatah operations room gain control of Idleb city from regime control and soon move to liberate nearly all remaining regime-held areas in the province.

**Aug. 2015** | A regime barrel bomb attack targeting a busy market place in the center of Duma, outside of Damascus, kills 100 civilians and injures at least 200 more. This marks one of the deadliest regime attacks in Eastern Ghouta, which has been besieged since 2013.

**Sep. 2015** | Russia launches direct military involvement in Syria, bolstering the regime by carrying out raids on what it claims are terrorist groups but largely targeting areas under the control of opposition brigades and some SRP partners.

**Nov. 2015** | International leaders meet for peace talks in Vienna, discussing the possibilities of a ceasefire and solution to the conflict in its fifth year.



**Feb. 2015** | SRP holds a rolling assessment to update its strategies per province. The program shifts its focus to work with provincial council partners in an effort to boost their legitimacy.

**Aug. 2015** | SRP responds to increased regime attacks in Eastern Ghouta by providing surge assistance to partners in the area.

**Sep. 2015** | The program launches SRPII, a follow-on initiative to continue USAID/OTI's work in Syria.

**Nov. 2015** | USAID/OTI sends its last shipment delivery under SRPI into Syria.

**Dec. 2015** | SRP closes out and completes its programming, transitioning fully to SRPII.



# ANNEX B: ASSISTANCE BY PROVINCE INFOGRAPHIC

## ALEPPO

113 partners, 29 of which are CSOs, 70 of which are national or local governing authorities



## IDLEB

167 partners, 14 of which are CSOs, 150 of which are national or local governing bodies



## HAMA

26 partners, 3 of which are CSOs, 29 of which are national or local governing bodies



## DAMASCUS | RURAL DAMASCUS

110 partners, 12 of which are CSOs, 98 of which are national or local governing authorities



## AR-RAQQA

15 partners, 4 of which are CSOs, 10 of which are national or local governing authorities



## AL-HASAKEH

38 partners, 29 of which are CSOs, 9 of which are national or local governing authorities



## DEIR-EZ-ZOR

14 partners, 7 of which are CSOs, 7 of which are national or local governing bodies



## HOMS

22 partners, 1 of which is a CSO, 21 of which are national or local governing bodies



Schools supported	Meetings between governance bodies and residents	Community events and campaigns	Health centers supported
Infrastructure systems repaired	Civil authority offices supported	Shelters supported	Printed outreach products



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