Strategic Plan
2024-2025

SARD

Sustainable Resilience and Community Development in Northwest Syria.

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Foreword:

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Advocates,

It is with a great sense of purpose that we introduce our organization's 2024-2025 strategic plan in northwest Syria in the face of severe challenges after 12 years of conflict, recent earthquakes, an economic crisis, and climate-related challenges. This year, 4.1 million people are in need in northwest Syria, the highest number since the onset of the crisis in 2011. With immense needs and humanitarian funding for Syria declining, we need a strategy that invests in sustainable self-reliance.

Our strategic plan focuses on human rights-based resilience building for the most vulnerable individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, and community mobilization and development. From innovative livelihood initiatives to school rehabilitations, our activities aim for short-term outcomes that translate into resilience and self-reliance. We embed protection, gender, environmental, and safeguarding considerations across all activities, enhancing the safety and dignity of individuals, fostering inclusivity and equality, and reducing vulnerability to climate change.

Our vision is ambitious but achievable - it revolves around a shift towards community-level interventions to ensure communities have the infrastructure, systems, and capacity to meet their own needs. This is not merely a plan; it is a commitment to community-based development and recovery for Syrians. We recognize that lasting resilience, self-reliance, enhanced protection and dignity can only be achieved when entire communities are collectively supported.

As you delve into the details of our strategic plan, we invite you to join us on this transformative journey. Your support, engagement, and advocacy are integral to the success of these initiatives. Together, we can create lasting change for the communities in northwest Syria.

Thank you for your continued partnership and for being a vital part of our mission.

Sincerely,

SARD Senior Management

Alaa Wafai, Fares Al-Saleh, Graziella Ito-Pellegri

Who we are:

SARD is a nongovernmental organization dedicated to building resilience and self-reliance in those affected by conflict and natural disasters while championing the localization of humanitarian assistance. We strive to provide critical resources and innovative opportunities to affected people and communities so they can reach a future in which they can thrive.

- **Our Mission:** We build resilience and self-reliance among individuals and communities affected by conflict and natural disasters while championing the localization of humanitarian assistance.
- **Our Vision:** A future in which all individuals and communities are self-reliant and thriving.

- **Our Values:**

Integrity: We take our responsibility very seriously to carry out every decision and action honestly and transparently. While integrity means being good stewards of our finances, it goes beyond that to include honest and open communication and conduct amongst our team and the people we serve.

Inclusion: We are not all the same. We recognize, value, and celebrate differences. As an organization, we can only serve everyone by including everyone. We promote inclusion and diversity in the communities we serve.

Independence: We are a non-governmental organization (NGO) that operates independently. In complex operating environments, we are steadfast in our commitment to function independently of any government, militia, or political influences, ties, and agendas.

Innovation: In a rapidly changing environment and evolving humanitarian crisis, we believe an innovative spirit is the only way to address our complex challenges. We encourage creativity and innovation in our team culture and advocate for our partners to fund innovative solutions.

- **Our principles:** We are non-political and non-sectarian, and provide humanitarian assistance based solely on need, without discrimination of race, faith, age, or gender.

Situation: Northwest Syria's Humanitarian Overview
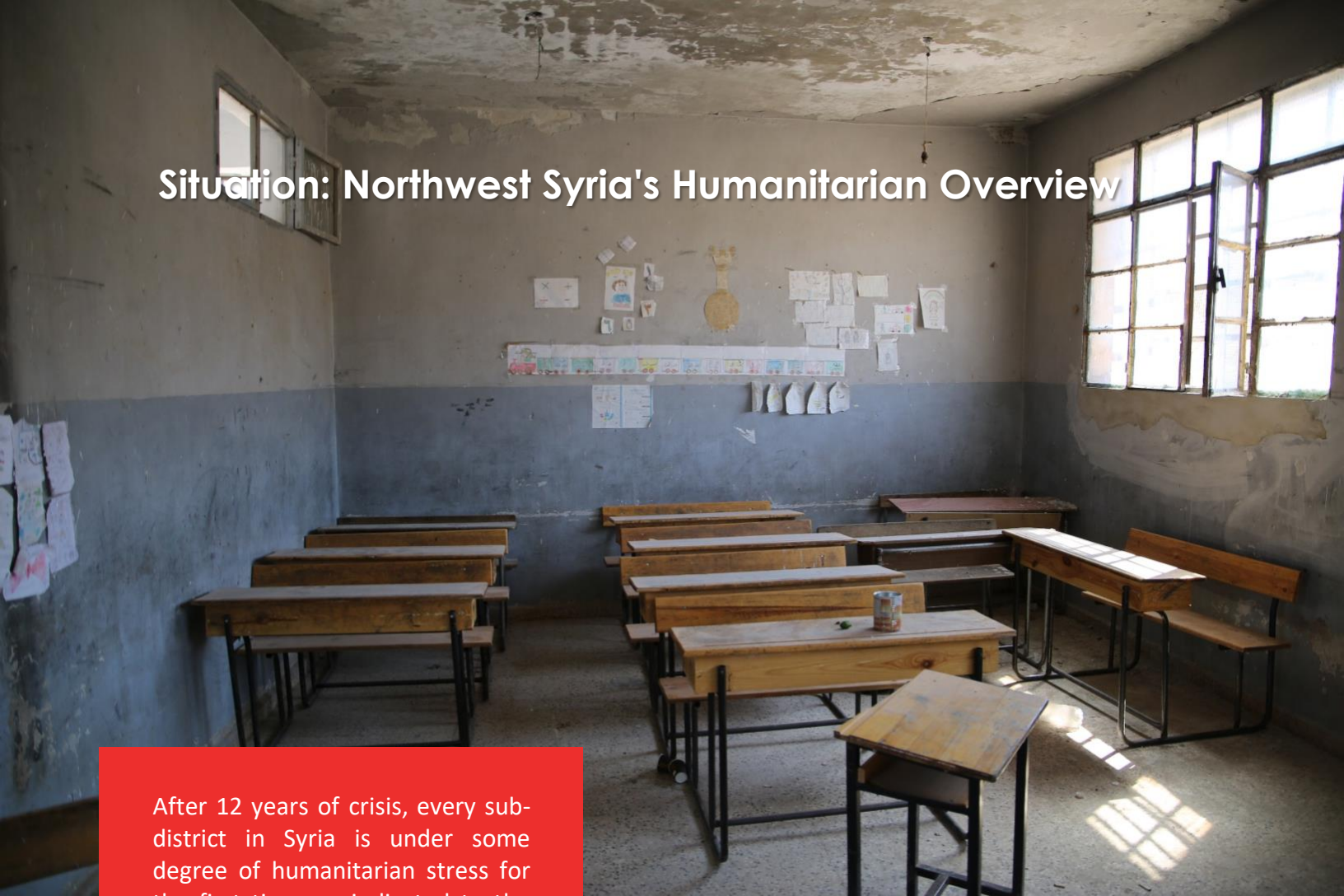
After 12 years of crisis, every sub-district in Syria is under some degree of humanitarian stress for the first time, as indicated to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview.[1] Even before the devastating earthquakes of February 2023, Syria was grappling with a multitude of challenges, positioning it as one of the *"world's most complex humanitarian and protection emergencies"*.

Today, although northwest Syria faces ongoing hostilities, the most pressing challenges are the indirect consequences of the protracted crisis such as deepening economic crisis, which were compounded by this year's earthquakes and climate-related challenges. Among the 4.5 million residents, 4.1 million people urgently require humanitarian assistance, with 2.9 million internally displaced and 2 million residing in IDP camps, and 800,000 still living in tents. [2]

4.5M Population in northwest Syria

2M Internally displaced people living in camps

4.1M People in need in northwest Syria

2.9M Internally displaced people

[1] Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2022)," OCHA,
[2] OCHA. "Situation Report North-west Syria." December 21.

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The February 6 earthquakes left 4,500 people dead and 10,400 people with injuries in northwest Syria alone. Over 148 communities were affected, and 10,600 buildings destroyed, leaving a third of health facilitates nonfunctional, 1,000 schools destroyed, and 265,000 people homeless. [3]

One of the primary drivers of need is the deepening economic crisis, increasing reliance on humanitarian assistance and harmful coping mechanisms. The region saw continued currency depreciation and rising prices of fuel, food, and water. Alongside the challenges to the agriculture sector posed by drought and aridity, the war in Ukraine and the global supply of wheat and vegetable oil also contributed to growing food insecurity[4]. The national average price of the World Food Programme's standard food basket doubled in 2023, and in August 2023 reached a new record high, increasing by 41 percent compared to just one month earlier. Notably, Idlib and Western Aleppo have experienced heightened hostilities, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement exceeding 120,000 people since October 5. While nearly half were able to return within the month, the situation remains volatile[5].

The prolonged crisis has left essential services and infrastructures destroyed and neglected, affecting entire communities in northwest Syria. The lack of access to safe drinking water, damaged or inefficient WASH systems, inability to afford hygiene supplies, insufficient waste management systems, and the effects of climate change have compounded health outbreaks.

[3] OCHA. "Situation Report North-west Syria." Last updated: 21 Jul 2023.
[4] Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2022)," OCHA
[5] Relief Web. "North-west Syria: Escalation of Hostilities - Flash Update No.4, 27 October 2023 [EN/AR]
[6] Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. "Education Under Attack 2022."
[7] OCHA. "Situation Report North-west Syria." Last updated: 21 Jul 2023.

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Schools remain unsupportive for learning because of overcrowding, teacher shortages, lack of flexibility and solutions for children who drop out for a medium-long term periods, political challenges in the use of education curricula, inadequate school supplies and furniture, insufficient lighting and heating, and limited access to quality WASH facilities. Systematic attacks on schools (the Global Coalition to Protect Education under Attack "identified over 85 reported attacks on schools during the 2020-2021 period, with most incidents reported in Idlib and Aleppo in early 2020")[6], and financial challenges contributed to 800,000 out-of-school children, while the earthquakes increased the number to an estimated 1 million out-of-school children out of a total 2.2 million school-aged children in northwest Syria.[7]

![SARD logo]

Syrians face ongoing protection challenges, impacting households' safety and well-being. Child labor increased as children dropped out of school to support their families. In particular, unaccompanied and separated children face a complex array of challenges. These challenges include trauma and psychosomatic problems, exposure to violence and displacement, disrupted education, inadequate healthcare access, engagement in negative coping mechanisms highly dangerous for children's well-being (child marriage, labor and recruitment to military services), in turn further increasing their susceptibility to exploitation and abuse, malnutrition and disabilities, and more.

Despite the catastrophic humanitarian situation, as of 27 December, the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria, which asks for $5.41 billion, is still only a third funded. This year, there was a 50 per cent decrease in funding of the World Food Programme resulting in a scale-down of its operation, including suspension of the General Food Assistance programme for the whole of Syria in 2024
[8]

Context| Analysis of Geo-Political Scenario

In order to understand the operational context and adapt its modus operandi, SARD constantly monitors the interaction between the situation in the field and its operations, coordinates with all concerned stakeholders, and analyzes reports by analysts, think-tanks, and other relief agencies. SARD has based its 2024-2025 strategy on its hands-on experience, internal and external discussions, and on a critical report, *Syria's Long-Term Outlook 2021-2024*, released April 2021 by Mercy Corps Humanitarian Access Team[9]. In the report, Mercy Corps proposes three scenarios and their relative likelihood and impact:

SCENARIO I - High probability and severe impact

The first scenario holds that the geopolitical and military situation will remain unchanged, while the economic situation will continue to deteriorate over the next three to five years.

SCENARIO III - Moderate probability and severe impact

The second scenario assumes that both the Syrian and Turkish governments will seek to achieve their immediate, strategic goals through a combination of military campaigns, security agreements, and mutually beneficial compromise.

SCENARIO III - Low probability and high impact

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[8] OCHA. "Situation Report North-west Syria." December 21. [Online]. Available: https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/syria/#cf-5SkOCnVLmVEo1BuilTOfnc. Accessed on: 27 Dec 2023.
[9] Mercy Corps Humanitarian Access Team, "Syria's Long-Term Outlook 2021-2024," April 2021.

The third scenario presents the possibility of a political resolution to the Syrian crisis is reached, leading to a political agreement between the Syrian government and Self-Administration for northeast Syria and an internationally recognized ceasefire in the northwest.

SARD's 2024-2025 Strategic Plan is grounded in scenario planning, specifically focusing on adaptability to changing circumstances. The strategy acknowledges the dynamic nature of geopolitical, military, and economic factors. This adaptive strategy ensures that SARD remains responsive and proactive in navigating the uncertainties of the region.

Context: Coordination and Gap Analysis

In the complex landscape of humanitarian response, coordination and gap analysis is not just necessary; it is fundamental to the effectiveness and efficiency of our efforts. At SARD, we understand the importance of collaboration, information sharing, and alignment with broader humanitarian strategies to address the multifaceted challenges faced by vulnerable communities.

SARD is an active member of the Shelter and Non-Food Items (SNFI), Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL), and Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) clusters. Additionally, we are an active member of the Global Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and Technical Working Groups (TWGS), such as the Cash Working Group (CWG), Social Cohesion Technical Working Group (SCTWG), and Business Programming Technical Working Group (BPTWG). This ensures that SARD's actions and proposals are in line with cluster guidelines and priorities, fall under international humanitarian guidelines, and harmonize with other programming happening in the same areas. SARD's coordination with clusters and local stakeholders ensures coverage is guaranteed and overlap does not occur.

In each sector, SARD maintains active communication with the respective cluster, contributing to and reporting through the 4 and 5Ws matrix. This meticulous approach ensures not only comprehensive coverage but also mitigates the risk of operational overlap. The process includes thorough service mapping and coordination with other partners within each sector, fostering a collaborative environment.

SARD conducts consultation sessions with community representatives and local authorities to gain insights into their needs, discuss challenges, select activities aligning with the allocation strategy, and address identified gaps. SARD ensures that its areas of operation do not overlap and sign Memorandum of Understandings with local councils to ensure the commitment of local authorities.

This collaborative effort is designed to ensure that all identified gaps in each sector are not only acknowledged but effectively addressed. Our commitment to coordination is rooted in the belief that a unified and synchronized humanitarian response is the key to maximizing positive outcomes and creating a sustainable impact on the ground.

Justification: Needs Analysis

In northwest Syria, we are seeing the highest people in need since the beginning of the crisis twelve years ago. Among the 4.5 million residents, 4.1 million people urgently require humanitarian assistance, with 2.9 million internally displaced and 2 million residing in ID camps, and 800,000 still living in tents.[210]

SARD's 2024-2025 Strategic Plan is based on needs identified in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syria Republic (HNO) 2023*, SARD[11] and Welthungerhilfe's *Joint Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment for Northwest Syria 2023-2024*, and recent situation reports from OCHA. SARD'S assessment was conducted in the Idlib and Aleppo Governorates in October 2023 using a cross-sectional mixed method design.

According to the findings of the *Joint Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment for Northwest Syria 2023-2024* conducted by SARD and WHH, as presented on the interactive WHH-SARD-JMSNA-Dashboard, the humanitarian situation in northwest Syria remains precarious and a significant proportion of households lack financial capabilities to respond to unforeseen events, primarily relying on casual labor. The assessment underscores deficiencies in access to essential basic services and healthcare, disruptions to and a lack of livelihood opportunities, significant increases in food prices, and the disorderly state of educational institutions.

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[10] OCHA. "Situation Report North-west Syria." December 21.
[11] OCHA "Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview" (December 2022)

The WHH-SARD JMSNA Analysis of the priority needs of the households revealed that **limited food access (97.1%), winterization support (90.1%), NFI-household items (86.9%), hygiene items (85.4%) and education (80.7%) needs were the top five pressing needs of all the households across all the governorates.** The disaggregation of the household priority needs by population type demonstrates no discernible difference between the host, IDP communities and the returnees. The same trend was observed in Aleppo and Idleb governorates. Analysis of the priority needs of the households revealed that limited food access (97.1%), winterization support (90.1%), NFI-household items (86.9%), hygiene items (85.4%) and education (80.7%) needs were the top five pressing needs of all the households across all the governorates. The disaggregation of the household priority needs by population type demonstrates no discernible difference between the host, IDP communities and the returnees. The same trend was observed in Aleppo and Idleb governorates.

ALEPPO AND IDLIB GOVERNATES PRIORITY NEEDS BY COMMUNITY TYPE

SARD AND WHH JOINT MULTI-SECTORAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR NORTHWEST SYRIA 2023-2024

CATEGORY	PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2	PRIORITY 3	PRIORITY 4	PRIORITY 5
HOST COMMUNITY	Limited food access	NFI-household items	Winterization support	Hygiene items	Education needs
	95.7%	**89.7%**	**89.2%**	**83.2%**	**82.2%**
IDP COMMUNITY	Limited food access	Winterization support	Hygiene items	NFI-household items	Education needs
	98.4%	**90.4%**	**88.3%**	**85.1%**	**78.7%**
RETURNEES	Limited food access	Health care needs	Winterization support	Education needs	Limited water access
	100%	**100%**	**100%**	**90.9%**	**81.8%**

As indicated in OCHA's H*umanitarian Needs Overview: Syria Republic 2023*, the ability of people to meet their basic needs has continued to deteriorate and income gaps have widened, and notably *"deterioration in humanitarian conditions is also increasingly driven by ongoing lack of access to basic services and civilian infrastructure".* While both food and non-food items were listed in the top three most reported unmet needs for both Idlib and Aleppo governorates confirming our own need assessment, the addition of **electricity assistance and livelihoods** were also listed in the top five unmet needs in both governorates.

Throughout the HNO, **the report stresses the importance of comprehensive, longer-term or durable responses across sectors to address increasing needs.** It showcases how the shelter sector, in years past had to prioritize emergency shelter support for lifesaving purposes, However, with existing needs and a potential increase in the rate of return (IDP and refugee), they recommend a comprehensive, longer term or durable shelter response. While in the WASH sector, "*the prolonged deterioration of existing systems caused by damage over years of conflict, wear from long-term functioning at high capacity, limited or no maintenance, continuous drain*

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of technical staff, weak system management and poor natural resource management"[12]. Despite the initial higher cost of investment in WASH systems, the report underscores the economically benefits over the mid-term and its crucial role in mitigating public health risks, preventing protection incidents, and enhancing equity of service access and poverty reduction.[13]

Anticipating the continued rise in needs across sectors amid declining humanitarian funding, SARD believes that it is imperative to strategically allocate available resources, steering **away from the constant cycle of immediate response and instead investing in long-term resilience building, community development, and capacity building interventions.**

Strategic Plan: Theory of Change

Our strategic plan targets the most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, and communities, with resilience building and community development and capacity-building interventions, fostering sustainable self-reliance and the fulfilment of their human rights. Activities and interventions will be integrated across the sectors of Child Protection, Food Security and Livelihood, Shelter and Non-Food Items, Education, Early Recovery, and WASH, with crosscutting themes of gender, protection, environment and safeguarding. At the core of our strategic approach is a dynamic Theory of Change that envisions a progression from immediate outcomes to long-term impact and recognizes that sustainable self-reliance and fulfilment of human rights can only be achieved with the inclusion of community-level interventions and a focus on individuals who are a protection risk.

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[12] OCHA "Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview" (December 2022)
[13] Ibid

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Strategic Plan: Scope and Priorities

Impact, Objectives, and Outcomes:

Overall Impact:

Northwest Syria's conflict and/or natural disaster-affected individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, and communities gain resilience, essential infrastructure, and enhanced protection and dignity, fostering self-reliance and the fulfilment of their human rights.

Objective1:
Empower the most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, to build resilience; and enhance their protection and dignity to fulfill their human rights.

Long-Term Outcomes: Most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, have increased resilience and enhanced protection and dignity.

Short-Term Outcomes: Conflict/disaster affected communities have improved community access to infrastructure, goods and services.

Long-term Outcomes: Communities affected by conflict/disaster have essential infrastructure and effective systems, leading to increased self-reliance.

Short-Term Outcomes: Most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected individuals, , particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, (including unaccompanied/separated children and children at risk of separation) have basic needs met, livelihood skills and resources acquired, protection and dignity enhanced, and the capacity to respond to crises strengthened.

Objective 2: Implement community-driven infrastructure development and capacity-building interventions for conflict/disaster-affected communities.

Short-Term Outcomes: Conflict/disaster affected communities have improved community capacity to maintain systems and infrastructure.

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Interventions:

Proposed Interventions under Resilience Building:

Our strategy for resilience building encompasses a range of initiatives designed to address the multifaceted needs of the most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected individuals, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk, leading to increased resilience and enhanced protection and dignity to fulfil their human rights. These interventions include a Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) framework made available in cash which is the modality beneficiaries prefer. Diverse livelihood activities will include income-generating activities (IGA), cash-for-work opportunities, cash grants, start-ups/entrepreneur support, vocational training, and job placement. Additionally, child protection interventions will include parenting and protection awareness sessions, case management, psychosocial support (PSS), special needs funds, emergency shelter and foster placement and reunification processes for unaccompanied and separated children, and more. Pilot interventions in the education sector, to foster the cross-sectoral work between CP and education, will also be implemented such as PSS support in learning spaces, school kits deliver, and more. House rehabilitation and repairs form integral components of our resilience-building strategy.

It's important to note that households will have access to interventions that will be tailored to meet their unique needs, taking into account the specific circumstances and challenges each household faces.

Proposed Interventions under Community Development and Mobilization:

Our community development and mobilization efforts are designed to ensure communities affected by conflict/disaster have essential infrastructure and effective systems, leading to increased self-reliance.

The strategy includes road graveling and rehabilitation of transportation services to improve infrastructure accessibility. The rehabilitation of socio-economic infrastructure, including schools, parks, and markets are central to our community-focused initiatives. Interventions also include the rehabilitation and extension of water and sanitation systems, renewable energy projects, and potentially hazardous waste management. Large scale livelihood initiatives, specifically agriculture programs like livestock initiatives, contribute to improving food security. Social-cohesion initiatives further underscore our commitment to comprehensive community development. Housing sector reconstruction and the rehabilitation of public administration buildings would be critical to improving, however funding for these large-scale initiatives would need to be secured. Furthermore, to improve systems concerned with child rights, advocacy for a legal framework for alternative care and awareness raising at the local community and authorities will be pursued. Through these initiatives, we aim to improve community access to infrastructure, goods and services and the community capacity to maintain the improved systems and infrastructure, leading to increased self-reliance.

Crosscutting Themes:

Protection Mainstreaming Impact:	Protection mainstreaming enhances the safety and dignity of individuals and communities, ensuring that their rights are safeguarded, and they are shielded from harm and exploitation.
Gender Mainstreaming Impact:	Gender mainstreaming fosters inclusivity and equality, allowing all community members, regardless of gender, to actively participate and benefit from development initiatives, creating a more inclusive and balanced society.
Environmental Mainstreaming Impact:	Environmental mainstreaming leads to a healthier environment, reduced vulnerability to climate change, and the preservation of natural resources for future generations, contributing to overall community well-being.
Safeguarding Impact:	Safeguarding includes Child Safeguarding and PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse). It actively puts in place measures to safeguard the life and well-being of targeted children and communities, preventing and responding to any forms of harm from SARD, associates, or service providers.

Safety, dignity and do-no-harm principles are priorities in SARD's work. With its Protection Mainstreaming Programming Policy, SARD is committed to ensuring humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, and participatory manner, with a reliable indicator in all output, to measure its implementation. Over the past two years, SARD on has made significant strides in advancing our commitment to gender and protection mainstreaming as outlined in our last strategic plan. Protection mainstreaming is a commitment to ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of vulnerable individuals and communities as fundamental considerations integrated into every aspect of our program activities. While Gender Mainstreaming promotes gender equality and ensures that the needs, perspectives, and priorities of all genders are integrated into program design and implementation.

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SARD's Protection Mainstreaming Strategy prioritizes safety and dignity, aiming to minimize negative impacts on communities and staff. Emphasizing meaningful access, accountability through a CRM system, and active participation of local communities, SARD demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive protection measures. M&E activities, including post-implementation monitoring and data protection measures, ensure compliance with protection principles. SARD extends its commitment to Safeguarding (Child safeguarding and PSEA), through an exhaustive work plan (updated annually) and action points designed and gradually implemented, encompassing improving the policies and Code of Conduct to include an internationally adopted terminology according to standards; working with SARD staff on trainings, refreshers and case scenarios; working with service providers to broaden safeguarding understanding and application; strengthening community's understanding and trust in reporting mechanisms. The Duty of Care is evident through psychologist-led awareness sessions and ongoing support to field teams since 2018. During implementation, SARD consistently provides essential safety equipment for staff and cash-for-work workers, conducts awareness sessions on PSEA, code of conduct, and CRM, in addition to Unexploded Ordnance training. This training equips staff and project participants with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to potential hazards related to unexploded ordnance, such as landmines and explosive remnants. In monitoring, SARD remains vigilant, ensuring all parties involved adhere to protection mainstreaming principles, promoting a safe and harm-free project environment. In conducting thorough protection risk assessments, SARD identifies vulnerabilities in project activities. Mitigation measures include targeted awareness campaigns, tailored safety protocols, and close collaboration with local communities to address identified risks promptly. SARD prioritizes inclusive selection criteria, ensuring the inclusion of women, vulnerable individuals, and female-headed households.

In the face of escalating climate-related challenges in northwest Syria, our strategic approach includes Environmental Mainstreaming to ensure that the environment is protected, natural resources are conserved, and the long-term well-being of the community is maintained, with a specific focus on ecofriendly considerations and the integration of climate change resilience into our development projects. For instance, under the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) sector, we can introduce native plants and drought-resistant trees in socio-economic rehabilitation projects. This not only enhances the aesthetic appeal but also contributes to climate resilience. In the Shelter sector, our initiatives can include the integration of rainwater collection systems in house rehabilitation projects, promoting water sustainability, but also increasing households access to water. Shelter rehabilitations are committed to use locally available materials, no use of asbestos, no plastic sheeting and water tanks, and minimum use of polycarbonates. Additionally, our awareness-raising campaigns will encompass environmental topics, ensuring that communities are informed about sustainable practices. By addressing climate change vulnerabilities, we not only enhance the immediate well-being of communities but also contribute to the creation of a more resilient and sustainable environment for the generations to come. Our commitment to environmental mainstreaming reflects a forward-looking approach that acknowledges the intricate interplay between climate change, vulnerabilities, and the long-term prosperity of northwest Syria's communities.

Geographical Coverage:

Our strategic efforts will be centered on addressing the communities most severely impacted by the earthquakes in the **Aleppo and Idlib governorates of northwest Syria**. Embracing our community-based and area-based approach, we recognize the significance of tailoring our initiatives to the unique characteristics and challenges of each locality. The exact communities served will be determined in coordination with the cluster, taking into consideration pre-liminary needs assessments, security risks, climate, community willingness, and more. Thus far, we have interventions planned, but not limited to, the communities of Dana, Suran, Sarmada, Dabeq, Azaz, Termanin, Jandairis in both Aleppo and Idlib governates. By prioritizing specific communities in these governorates, we aim to deliver targeted, impactful, and multi-sectoral interventions.

Our Approach:

At the core of our strategic approach is a holistic and participatory method that integrates both **community-based, area-based, and human rights approaches**, placing communities at the center of our development and humanitarian initiatives with a strong emphasis on dignity and active participation. We recognize that effective and sustainable development should be driven by the needs, priorities, and active involvement of the communities being served and aligned with the principles of human rights. Our approach involves engaging local communities at every stage of our interventions, from Community Committees to a robust Complaints and Response Mechanism. This approach ensures inclusivity, considering the diverse needs of all population groups, and encourages a participatory modality. Additionally, our area-based approach includes a multi-sectoral response that addresses various needs across.

In 2022 and 2023, SARD took a significant step by establishing Socioeconomic Empowerment Community Committees for our Early Recovery activities. These committees played a pivotal role in facilitating direct and proactive participation from the affected communities in the planning, design, and execution of projects. Due to the success of this model, in our 2024-2025 strategy, we are expanding the Socioeconomic Empowerment Community Committees' role to serve as the entry point across all our activities, in particular as an entry point for Child Protection activities. This evolution underscores our commitment to ensuring direct and proactive participation of affected communities in the planning, design, and execution of a wide spectrum of projects.

The selection criteria for these committees and our interventions adhere to the guidance provided by the Protection Cluster, ensuring representation across diverse age and gender groups, with a specific focus on potentially marginalized individuals. As outlined in the section on Mainstreaming Protection and Gender, SARD is committed to fostering inclusive engagement, particularly emphasizing the involvement of women, girls, boys, and people with disabilities.

During the implementation of projects, monitoring activities allow community members to provide feedback through interviews, meetings, FGDs, and surveys during targeting verification. During and post-implementation, the M&E team takes the lead of M&E activities with direct observation of activities, household-level interviews, and, whenever relevant, conducts qualitative interviews to enrich quantitative evidence.

Complaint Response Mechanism (CRM), including WhatsApp number, CRM disk, complaints boxes, social media, and field visits, is also advertised and implemented in all targeted locations. In the current Covid-19 context, WhatsApp channels are the preferred and encouraged modality for raising any concerns. Issues raised are logged and tracked to facilitate responses. SARD will establish a common methodology to ensure that feedback from the affected population will feed into management decisions and designs of future interventions on a regular basis.

Emergency Preparedness Response Mechanism

We have an Emergency Preparedness and Response Mechanism and guaranteed stock of emergency supplies, which ensures that in the face of emergencies that we are able to facilitate rapid and effective responses. Although emergency response activities are not a core objective of our strategy, we understand the critical importance of being proactive and well-prepared in the face of unforeseen challenges. Since the earthquakes, we have improved our Emergency Preparedness and Response Mechanism and plan to provide trainings to our team members to ensure they are ready for unforeseen emergencies. Our Emergency Preparedness and Response Mechanism reflects our commitment to the life-saving duty we uphold.

Establishing a Referral System

To address the right location and beneficiaries, SARD is committed to establishing several referral systems with various stakeholders such as:

- Partners implementing similar actions will refer to SARD.
- Within the SARD sectors, there will be a referral of people in need or at protection risk.
- Community approach will ease/enable referral through stakeholder coordination.
- Cluster Coordination.
- Self-referral through SARD CRM.

Acknowledging Vulnerabilities and Capacities

SARD classifies Syria as a high-risk operating environment, and as such, all SARD interventions are implemented based on a program risks analysis in relation to the modality of assistance modalities selected. In addition, SARD undertakes TMP and external evaluation, and financial audits on a regular basis for all its programs. SARD undertakes and regularly updates its Local Security Plan (LSP) including Risk Analysis (last updated in October 2023) to ensure programming and activities are carefully designed to minimize and mitigate risks associated with operating in sensitive areas. SARD is taking proactive steps to minimise any negative impact of its intervention on targeted communities and its staff.

Targeting Vulnerable Populations at Heightened Protection Risk

We will target the most vulnerable conflict/disaster affected households, particularly individuals including children at heightened protection risk (including unaccompanied/separated children and children at risk of separation).

Women and girls are at high risks of protection violations, such as early marriage, sexual abuse – including rape, and domestic violence as protection risks, harassment at local markets, at night, within their (shared) shelter or on the way to school, both in the community and within the household realm. These protection issues impede women and girls' freedom of movement and access essential services. The main reasons contributing to such problems included: (i) deteriorating economic situation, (ii) severity of needs and poverty and (iii) lack of awareness.

Children (e.g. every human being between the ages of 0 and 17 years) are at special risk of abuse, violence, and in general, protection violations. SARD will work with children starting from 5 years and will include teenagers (e.g. age group 12-17 years) who, for cultural reasons, are at increased risk as they are considered adults, and not as children protected by the international human rights legislation.

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People with no documentation suffer from reduced access to assistance, denial of fundamental rights, including freedom of movement and access to services and employment, and jeopardized rights to property, inheritance, and child custody.

Older persons and persons with disabilities are also at risk. SARD ensures the needs of persons with disabilities are constantly considered and dedicate staff and action/response targeting the most vulnerable. SARD's social and monitoring team always includes staff trained to engage with persons with disabilities. All Program staff is regularly trained on inclusion and adequate program response tailored for persons with disabilities. All SARD actions are based on a vulnerability assessment to ensure target beneficiaries are among the most vulnerable. The vulnerability assessment includes inclusion questions to assess and consider the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities.

Another risk identified is the increased sensitivity between host communities and IDPs. SARD mitigates this risk by ensuring social cohesion principles are reflected in its programming across sectors and following community-based approach. Social activities are conducted based on communities' initiatives, with inclusive participation of all targeted groups. The social activities are culturally and contextually appropriate, identified and implemented by the recipient community themselves, ensuring respect of cultural norms and values. The risk of eviction, especially for IDPs, is very high. SARD will facilitate dialogue with the local communities and the IDPs. In extreme situations, SARD will report the case to the relevant cluster (CCCM and ESNFI) as well as the Access Working Group to seek support.

Localization

Localization refers to shifting the focus and decision-making power from external actors to local actors. It emphasizes the involvement and empowerment of local communities in all stages of humanitarian action, from needs assessment and program design to implementation and evaluation. The localization of humanitarian assistance is an essential step towards ensuring that aid is effective, efficient, and sustainable. By involving and empowering local actors, aid can be delivered in a more timely and culturally appropriate manner, responding to the specific needs and contexts of the affected populations. Localization not only increases the ownership and accountability of humanitarian assistance by the affected communities but also builds the capacity of local actors to respond to future crises, creating a more resilient system.

We prioritize procuring goods and services locally, to not only reduce the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation but also to support the local economy and promote self-sufficiency. By sourcing materials and supplies from local markets, we boost local businesses and contribute to the long-term economic development of the affected areas. By prioritizing the use of local resources and investing in local economies, SARD contributes to building stronger, more resilient communities that are better equipped to withstand future crises.

Strategic Plan: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning

SARD's monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) system is composed of manuals, guidelines, data protection, a verification process, and a robust complaint and response mechanism. Our MEAL plans will be designed to track short-term outcomes and long-term impacts across our objectives.

The plan will consider indicators and sources of verification that will be assessed and documented according to the time sequence and relevance to the achievement of the target and objective. Regular evaluations ensure our initiatives align with community needs, providing the flexibility to adapt and improve our strategies based on real-time feedback.

The MEAL department is composed of a mix of technical and field staff independent of the implementation team. Spearheaded by the Turkey-based MEAL Coordinator, it comprises of the below key functions:

SARD

- The MEAL team is responsible for verification, needs assessment management, and data collection. Support on the dissemination of selection criteria and CRM. As well as monitoring the implementation of project activities through specific tools designed for each action like direct observation and conducting the post-implementation monitoring activities with the beneficiaries like satisfaction surveys, key informant surveys, and PDMs to help track project progress, results, impact, and outcomes in line with the logical framework, then take the lead on the lesson learned under each action.

- The Complaint Response Mechanism (CRM) team is a separate and independent unit within the MEAL unit that reports directly to the MEAL Coordinator, the team has several responsibilities including promoting the mechanism during community meetings between SARD and stakeholders.

  Collect complaints and feedback, document them in the CRM database, and respond to them consistently, promptly, and efficiently in collaboration with the program teams whenever relevant and support investigations whenever required as well as analyze CRM data and prepare monthly CRM report. Moreover, conducting the consultation and information-sharing sessions with the local authorities, local people representatives, and IDP representatives and mobilization sessions in public gathering areas (e.g., markets, mosques, health centers, schools, etc.) to ensure that households, including those less likely to attend community meetings, are aware of the project and their ability to apply. The complaint response mechanism (CRM) will be deployed for all project activities offering various channels for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries to express concerns, provide feedback, or register complaints about the program or activities. Potential modalities include a hotline, WhatsApp line, complaint boxes, complaint email and face-to-face interactions during field visits.

- Data management system is managed by the MEAL team: it includes a quality check for the beneficiary list along with the implementation dataset. In addition, SARD robust IM system also includes harmonized database template for all activities and all the program database, shared with MEAL on a monthly basis for quality check After verification and validation of the dataset, the MEAL incorporates the data set within the SARD master database and publish on a monthly basis a power BI dashboard.

The MEAL system relies on a range of quantitative and qualitative tools, namely the M&E plan, the indicator's plan, and the Indicators Tracking Table (ITT). The MEAL Coordinator leads the development of standard M&E tools and approaches that serve the monitoring purposes for each action, including baseline, routine, and end-line data on outputs and outcomes, DM, PDM, pre/post-training surveys, and beneficiaries' satisfaction tools. Essential monitoring approaches will include spot visits, observation checklists, and exit interviews with samples of beneficiaries.

Data quality is assured by the triangulation of multiple quantitative and qualitative sources and the use of electronic data collection software (Kobo) to minimize errors and allow for real-time data quality checks.

Launching a Comprehensive Master Dashboard

As part of our MEAL framework, we are dedicated to the development and maintenance of a comprehensive master dashboard. This dashboard will serve as a centralized hub for real-time data, key performance indicators, and project progress. Regularly updated, the master dashboard provides a dynamic and accessible tool for both internal stakeholders and external partners to track and assess the impact of our programs. This commitment to data visualization not only enhances our organizational learning but also ensures that our supporters, donors, and the communities we serve have transparent insights into the outcomes and effectiveness of our initiatives.

Strategic Plan: Funding Strategy

We seek to create a funding ecosystem that aligns with our vision of building resilient and self-reliant communities. We invite donors to join us in this transformative journey, recognizing that their support can be a catalyst for lasting change in northwest Syria. We seek diverse funding sources, including grants, individual donations, and partnerships.

Over the past year, SARD has expanded its network of supporters, welcoming eight new funders including Solidar Suisse, Welthungerhilfe, Malteser International, Choose Love, Caritas Czech Republic, and two new private donors. These additions complement our existing funders, such as OCHA, Luxembourg Aid and Development, and ECHO. In addition, in the aftermath of the earthquakes, SARD launched an individual giving program and received our very first donations from individual supporters. We were recently approved by Global Giving to accept individual donors and partnerships with the added benefit of tax deductibility.

The support and growth thanks to our partners has been very encouraging, and we continue to develop our internal capacities in order to align with the trajectory of our programmatic expansion.

Funding for Development Projects:

We acknowledge that while projects addressing immediate needs of individuals are easier and more convenient to fund, in the context of the protracted crises in northwest Syria they do not address vulnerabilities and long-term resilience and development. Our funding strategy prioritizes projects that bring about sustainable impacts, prioritizing community infrastructure development and capacity-building. We ask that our funders partner with us to invest in long-term resilience and self-reliance for the communities in northwest Syria.

Diversification of Funding Sources:

To ensure sustainability and reduce dependency on a single source, we actively seek to diversify our funding base. This involves engaging with a variety of donors, including governmental agencies, international organizations, philanthropic foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors who share our vision and commitment.

Transparent and Accountable Financial Practices:

We adhere to transparent financial practices to build trust with our donors. Our financial reports are readily accessible, providing a clear breakdown of how funds are allocated across various projects. This transparency is essential in demonstrating accountability and showcasing the tangible outcomes of donor contributions.

SARD

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Partner.Donate.
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