

## **The Development Challenge**

In June 2017 the International Coalition and its local partners, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), launched a military offensive to recover ISIS occupied territory in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor provinces in northeastern Syria. While successful in defeating ISIS, the coalition forces devastated local infrastructure - leaving a gap in service provision and elevating the need for recovery and governance efforts. The SDF installed Kurdish-led civilian councils to oversee the administration of the area, but given historical grievances between the Arab and Kurdish populations, this complicated the political environment and created perceptions of exclusion among the local Arab population from the benefits of recovery efforts. As a result, USAID/OTI's Syria Community Stabilization Initiative (SCSI), implemented by Chemonics, sought to create a model that would allow for effective remote management and a community driven approach to addressing priority needs.

## **The Model for Recovery and Stabilization**

Funded by USAID/OTI and implemented by Chemonics, SCSI partnered with the Eastern Mediterranean Institute (EMI) in an effort to rapidly mobilize and respond to basic needs in the newly liberated territories. Under the direction of OTI and SCSI, EMI established the Early Recovery Team (ERT) and the Community Recovery Group (CRG) as mechanisms to deliver assistance and provide a space for inclusive priority identification. This relationship is critical to the model's success because it relies on the synergy between local technical expertise, and community input and engagement rather than donor or government priorities, which may be out of touch with local needs.

The ERT is mostly composed of engineers, but also relies on general administration and management personnel to successfully organize and implement interventions across Tabqa, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor. Meanwhile, the CRG is composed of community leaders, identified through local networks for their leadership within the community. Their role is to inform the ERT's programming by hosting community forums to discuss local priorities and share results with EMI and SCSI. In addition, one spillover effect of the CRG's work has been the value of the first hand atmospherics provided by the local community to OTI. Since the model has been in operation, the program has disbursed nearly \$ 8 million USD over more than 50 interventions aimed at recovery and stabilization of the target areas. The ERT/CRG model, therefore, is the program's foundation for successful remote management and implementation of local priority needs.

SCSI's recovery and stabilization assistance can be categorized into two types: provision of basic services and social recovery. The provision of basic services took place through two subsets of activities: first, temporary provision of basic necessities such as potable water and distribution of bread, and second, restoration of physical service assets for sustainable service delivery – such as through the restoration of water networks, or debris removal and road rehabilitation to facilitate resident mobility. Social recovery activities, while less of a focus than basic service provision, included the establishment of community centers in towns and IDP camps as well as supporting civil society organizations to increase community engagement.

## **Impact**

To measure impact the program defines 'recovery' as the perception by residents in newly-liberated areas from ISIS that they are able to meet their basic needs, and 'stabilization' as the perception by the same residents that their ability to meet their basic needs is equal to or better than it was in comparison to ISIS times. To collect impact on the program's model for recovery and stabilization in Syria, SCSI conducted intervention level monitoring and both activity and cluster level evaluations.

This was done by SCSI's M&E team, and through the assistance of third party qualitative and quantitative data collected by the Navanti Group in April 2018.

Results indicate a statistical relationship between perceptions by residents of satisfaction with key services that SCSI has worked to improve and participants reporting positively about being able to meet basic needs, and meet their basic needs in comparison to ISIS times. Moreover, our data suggests that the more citizens are involved in service provision decision making (such as through the CRG's outreach activities for the ERT), the more likely they are to agree that their needs are better met today than under ISIS. The impact of the ERT/CRG model proves Chemonics can successfully manage a program remotely while responding to community priorities without being co-opted by divisive government or extremist entities.

### **Lessons on the operating model of the ERT/CRG**

Increasingly, programs are facing political and security risks that force them to manage outside of their operational context. Below are lessons that SCSI has used to navigate this challenge:

1. Establish an apolitical actor: An actor that is not politically associated with other major actors creates a voice within the community for those who feel marginalized from the political process and provides an alternative to the status quo. This empowers residents, encourages collaboration across social divides, and provides valuable local services - no strings attached.
2. Bottom-up approach: SCSI's approach to programming has been to solicit feedback and priorities from residents to inform interventions. These meetings take place through the CRG and are comprised of local voices who understand local dynamics, can provide access to communities, and have a deep network and understanding of local familial situations. The approach involves local communities in decision making, and protects and bolsters the reputation of the ERT.
3. Recruitment: The success of the ERT/CRG model requires the right people for the job, and recruitment for the ERT and CRG presents different challenges. For the ERT, conflict zones often lead to a mass migration of capacity outside of local communities, leaving few people capable of conducting technical work. SCSI places this responsibility on the grantee to utilize local contacts and transparent recruitment methods to successfully identify members. Meanwhile, CRG members require heavy formal and informal vetting to determine eligibility and capacity to bring the right skills, network, and personality for the role. To identify these candidates SCSI developed long lists that it narrowed down through information on connectivity and views provided through local networks.
4. Collaboration with local government: One valuable lesson emerging from SCSI's work with local councils is the value in cultivating a positive working relationship with local government in exchange for security, access, and independence. The key to SCSI's approach to local government relations has been to identify gaps in local government capacity that overlap with program objectives and pursue a working relationship to address them.
5. Grant operations: With SCSI's office in one country, the grantee based in a second, and the ERT operating locally in northeastern Syria, effective coordination is paramount to success. As a result, SCSI has learned to establish clear expectations with the grantee and collect the right documentation. To streamline expectations, and through trial and error, SCSI has developed detailed templates for grantee deliverables, particularly financial reporting mechanisms. Similarly, SCSI's grants team has identified kickoff meetings as a valuable resource for grantees to ask questions and ensure that they understand SCSI's documentation needs. These mechanisms facilitate smooth communication between the grantee and SCSI while speeding up approvals for deliverables.