

Pathways to Achieving Human Dignity - Partnering with Faith-Based Organizations

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Speech of Giampaolo Silvestri, Secretary General of AVSI Foundation

Good Afternoon, first, I would like to thank the Secretariat of State to the Holy See and the Embassy of the United States to the Holy See for giving me the opportunity to attend this important Symposium.

I'll be speaking to you about the importance of Faith Based Organizations in the development process.

AVSI PRESENTATION

I will start by giving you some information about AVSI. AVSI is a non-governmental organization founded in 1972; we have a history of over 45 years of activity in developing countries. AVSI was born within the Communion and Liberation Movement, a proposal for education in the Catholic faith.

Today we work in 32 countries especially in Sub Saharan Africa and the Great Lakes Region, in the Middle East and Latin America, with about 200 projects and with 3.7 million of direct beneficiaries and a staff of 1700 people; in 2018 we managed around 68 million of euros.

A feature of AVSI is to work together **with local partners, most of them are Faith Based Organizations**, in different fields: education, child protection, urban development, agriculture and interventions for refugees and migrants.

Mission –

Our mission and method are born from our identity, our catholic faith, in particular from the experience of Communion and Liberation Movement, and from our history. Following our mission, we implement cooperation projects in various sectors with a preferential focus on education, meaning that the person is accompanied towards self-discovery and recognition that the other person is a resource.

Method –

We try to realize our projects considering these important elements:

- to start from the value of the person, who is never defined by the circumstances in which she lives
- to consider the person always in her family and community context
- to do with: accompany and let ourselves be accompanied, recognizing that we all share the same human experience
- to involve all stakeholders: encourage the participation of beneficiaries, providers, partners, donors, and the private sector

Secondly, I would like to explain these points by giving you three brief examples of what it means for us to work with and for Faith Based Organizations.

The first example is the SCORE project: SCORE means Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for Vulnerable Children and their Families, set in Uganda in different districts and concluded a year ago after 7 years of activities. SCORE was funded by USAID within the PEPFAR Program with a budget of 38 million of USD.

The aim of the SCORE Project was to seek sustainable responses to the needs of vulnerable children and their families resulting in:

- 200 thousand people involved,
- 34 thousand families reached,
- 50 partners for the implementation of the project,
- 1.600 villages and saving groups for a total of 37.000 members

(One of the SCORE's goals was to develop relationships within the communities, facilitating links with local institutions, rather than focusing on the mere distribution of goods or services).

The most important element of this project was the Graduation Approach, where the groups of beneficiaries, mainly women, were supported not by the distribution of goods but with training activities and technical assistance, in particular for income generating activities, within a set path at the end of which people graduate. They were able to become financially independent by starting a small business and, therefore, exit from the project because they overcome the poverty line.

(Usually people are afraid of leaving a development project because they will no longer receive any good or service, but in this case, it was surprising to see their happiness when they graduated for becoming independent). (The project was successful; thousands of families have graduated and are now able to provide for their needs but first to the needs of their children, by paying for school and healthcare).

The Graduation model worked especially with the groups that were also Faith Based Organizations because they were able to support women more effectively in this path of human and professional growth.

The second project I would like to present today is titled *A virtuous production cycle to relaunch a city and its economic fabric for IDPs and returnees to the Nineveh Plain*, that AVSI is implementing in Qaraqosh, financed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration - US Department of State (BPRM) with a contribution of 3 million of USD.

The main objective of the project is to provide livelihood opportunities and create the pre-conditions for the economic recovery of the area, and the full return of IDPs to their homes through the reconstruction of farming businesses.

The most important activities are:

- (1) Strengthen local community organizations and establish conditions for a community-driven project;
- (2) Restore economic livelihoods by reactivating 100 small and medium household farms;
- (3) Foster civic engagement and social cohesion through inclusive life skills training and the reconstruction of a community garden.)

The beneficiaries are 3.000 Iraqi returnees and Iraqi IDPs.

The role of the local partner is being crucial: the Church Supreme Board for Construction of Baghdeda (BfCB), led by a Chaldean Priest, is the organization in charge for the reconstruction of Qaraqosh. It is thanks to the action of this Faith Based Organization that is possible to reach the beneficiaries and accompany them to resume the economic activities. In our experience, the presence and the role of this Faith Based Organization is a solid guarantee to achieve the objectives of the project.

Another example is the **Open Hospitals Project**, promoted by His Eminence Card. Zenari, apostolic nuncio in Syria. Through this project, AVSI is supporting three Catholic Hospitals, two in Damascus and one in Aleppo, run by Congregations of Sisters.

Since the end of 2017 these hospitals have been providing free treatments to 27.000 people in need.

An important element of this project is that most of the people treated are Muslim who receive free care from Catholic Hospitals. This is building social cohesion between different ethnic and religious groups, and it is an evident contribution of the Faith Based Organizations for the reconstruction and pacification of Syria.

I would like to conclude offering some considerations from these experiences:

1. The hallmark of a Faith Based Organizations is being **open to every single person**, without distinction or prejudice based on culture, faith, nationality, tribe or race.
2. Faith Based Organizations foster **inclusiveness**: no one is left behind, as the Faith Based Organization is interested in the destiny of the single person, always considered as a part of a community or family. Faith Based Organizations are able to include and involve not only beneficiaries, but also other partners, raising awareness.
3. **Proximity**: a Faith Based Organization is close to the reality of people. This grants the opportunity to understand their true needs, to identify them and build a bridge between institutions or governments and the individuals, between policies and life on the field.
4. A **new culture**: Faith Based Organizations create a new culture of respect for people, as they propose a different approach to the issue of human rights considered from a real perspective, not ideological; they inspire new ways to protect childhood, to fight child labor, promote women empowerment.
5. A Faith Based Organization is able to **recognize the relevance of the “religious sense”**: there is no true development if we do not consider the importance of the religious belief of beneficiaries and the implications of this belonging in their everyday life. Above all in the Middle East or in some regions in Africa or in Latin America, only a Faith Based Organization has the “tools” to act taking into account the role of religion in the life of the person (in the way to educate, to create relations, to work, to love, to eat ...). A secular approach could be sterile in some contexts or, even worse, counterproductive.
6. It is a **long-term investment to increase support and funding by governments** and other stakeholders for Faith Based Organization, considered as “partners” in the promotion of a sustainable development according to the SDGs.
7. **Select in the right way the subjects that deserve to get the funds** of donors: the selection should be based not only on the quality and structure of a project, but also considering the reliability, the accountability, the capacity of the organization and its positive track record. On these key points, a Faith Based Organization can bring an great added value.

Thank you very much for your attention, now I am happy to answer any question you might have.