

2016

# UN Global Compact Initiative

**COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT**  
**2016**

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## CONTENTS

CONTENTS .....	1
STATEMENT: COMMITMENT TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT INITIATIVE .....	2
ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN THE REPORTING PERIOD .....	3
BACKGROUND .....	3
NEW SEBC ROLE DURING THE CRISIS .....	3
ACTION BY PRINCIPLE ISSUE AREAS.....	4
HUMAN RIGHTS .....	5
SNDP AND CIVIL COMMUNITY .....	5
UNDP AND NGOS .....	5
LABOUR .....	5
PROVISION OF KEY LIFE-SKILLS AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING .....	6
THE ENVIRONMENT .....	6
NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR WATER CONSERVATION .....	7
COME ON BIKE .....	7
MEASUREMENT OF OUTCOME .....	8
ANNEXES .....	9
LETTER PUBLISHED ON SEBC WEBSITE .....	9

## STATEMENT: COMMITMENT TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT INITIATIVE

Five years of warfare and escalated fighting in Syria have negatively impacted the application of the UN Global Compact Initiative in the country. Advocating human rights, labour equalities, environment friendly practices and anti-corruption schemes appear redundant in an atmosphere of mass massacres motivated by ethnic discrepancies, unprecedented unemployment rates that drive for more labour related abuses, heavy artillery and air bombardment that add yet another challenge to efforts exerted at preserving the environment, and a war economy that creates the most ideal conditions for corruption to grow and prevail.

Despite the above, the Syrian Enterprise & Business Centre is still fully committed and solidly rooted in advocating the UN Global Compact Initiative, and creating increasing awareness on the side of businesses and the community at large of its main principles and the practices relevant to consecrate such ideals.

Re-iterating our belief in WEF statement that says that “economic progress without social development is not sustainable, while social development without economic progress is not feasible”, we have sought to re-adapt our mandate in accordance with the new conditions necessitated by the ongoing crisis in the country, to become a business support institution with a social dimension. Our business incubator and SKILLS training centre were heavily involved during the past two years in supporting and promoting local community initiatives aimed at mitigating the humanitarian suffering and livelihood hardships brought about by the crisis.

During the past two years, we have become home to numerous initiatives of humanitarian outlook, and we have, most notably, partnered with UNDP and OXFAM to deliver two major projects aimed at provision of vocational training services and promotion of WASH, respectively. We are still providing continuous support to Mobaderoon in terms of advocating Active Citizenship and are still pushing for environment friendly practices through supporting the “Come on Bike” initiative.

On a final note, I would like this opportunity to reassert SEBC’s full support and utter commitment to the UN Global Compact Initiative, MDGs and SDGs, assuring that we will work as usual to make things happen.

Yours Sincerely,

Noha Chuck

CEO

## ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

### BACKGROUND

The Syrian Crisis broke out in March 2011 and is still ongoing by time of preparing this report. Simulating the scenarios adopted by the so called "Arab Spring" in Tunisia and Egypt, but not taking into consideration the religious and ethnic diversities that greatly distinguish Syria from the previously mentioned two Arab Spring states, the righteous calls for freedom of expression and political democratic practices were soon to materialise in a wide-scale conflict that was soon to draw the intervention of regional and international powers, and make Syria the scene of the "worst humanitarian disaster since World War II", according to Staffan de Mistura, special UN envoy to Syria.

The unfortunate events that hit the country have brought about dramatically negative consequences and led the country to decline in virtually all political, social and economic aspects. The sounds of guns and smell of gunpowder became commonplace, and likewise the sight of beheadings and other atrocities committed by Islamic fundamentalist militias, most notably ISIL.

The desperate situation led huge capitals to flee to neighbouring and off-shore destinations in Europe and the world at large, and caused an exodus unprecedented even in comparison to Iraq. Closed down businesses led unemployment to surge to over 50%, while international sanctions and the emerging humanitarian situation impacted heavily on government resources and resulted in great economic deterioration and eight-fold depreciation of the Syrian Pound, leading to the decline of virtually all economic and services sectors, especially education and health.

Against this backdrop, SEBC prospects were not encouraging. The institution which took huge efforts in the making came to suffer lack of financing especially with the EU suspending its technical assistance programmes to Syria, the economic ones of which were mandated to SEBC to implement in its capacity as implementation agency of international partners' programmes. Problems in financing and the deteriorating situation of the business marketplace caused some SEBC staff members to leave the country in search of off-shore career prospects, while the security situation in Aleppo brought the activities implemented in SEBC Aleppo to a standstill.

Despite the above and with a sizeable number of core staff, SEBC managed to regain momentum and re-adapt its strategies in line with emerging conditions by expanding its mandate to accommodate social community initiatives and by deploying schemes to ensure self-financing.

### NEW SEBC ROLE DURING THE CRISIS

To adapt to the emerging needs of the Syrian crisis, SEBC resolved to change its mandate to better satisfy these new circumstances. Gradually, it has transformed itself from Syria's premier economic-reform programme implementation agency into an integrated catalyst of socio-economic development by reengineering its goals. Furthermore, it has adopted a new trifold strategy to achieve the following results:

1. **Preservation of the economy:** The Syrian crisis has affected dramatically the Syrian economy. Sanctions, security situation and economic strains were immediate obstacles facing the Syrian

Business sector. Therefore, SEBC has reshaped its former services from expansion and internationalisation into protection and preservation of current business. This includes:

- a. Providing different type of consultancy and business information services (e.g. alternative raw materials, new markets, and technical expertise to develop products based on crisis implications).
  - b. Reallocation of business advisory services from war areas to new safer areas.
  - c. Developing policies and initiative to support the Syrian economy and business sector and that comply the period's needs, e.g. the commercial mission to Russia and Belarus, Barter paper, etc.).
  - d. Participation and representation of Syria in different events, e.g. EXPO, BtoB, workshops, etc.
2. **Livelihood support:** As many Syrians lost their livelihoods, SEBC had the responsibility as the main business development leader to support the creation of livelihood streams for affected people. Of these initiatives:
- a. Vocational training for people in war affected areas (IDPs) aiming to provide them with new skills to start new careers.
  - b. Encouraging entrepreneurship through consultancy and advice, business training, incubation and acceleration of new start-ups and promotion of social entrepreneurship.
3. **Readiness to post-war period:** planning and preparation for the post-war period should start from day one of the crisis. SEBC has confirmed that through a number of actions and projects:
- a. Support to third sector organisations and NGOs as they are the vehicle of post-war recovery, e.g. SNDP, NGO training.
  - b. Studies to identify and assess the losses and potential recovery scenarios, e.g. lessons learned from the reconstruction of other countries, ESCWA NAFSP, etc.
  - c. Enforcing recovery agents through the creation of its needs so the necessary factors are ready to start with the rebuilding of Syria, e.g. training of social actors on peace and citizenship, SKILLS for reconstruction, training of trainers, training of engineers, the observatory of Syrian outbound FDIs, diaspora programmes, etc.

#### ACTION BY PRINCIPLE ISSUE AREAS

SEBC implemented and supported a number of major projects and community-based initiatives that generally fall in Principle Issue Areas 1, 2 and 3.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

NGOs and Syrian NGOs in particular are viewed as the main advocates of human rights and the true voice of the most excluded classes of the society. Hence, SEBC has opted to provide indirect support to human rights endeavours by supporting local NGOs to better manage themselves and optimise their service delivery. Thus, Both principles 1 and 2 were highly promoted and incorporated in these activities by raising awareness about internationally proclaimed fundamental human rights through our targeted programmes and helped to set-up measures restricting such abuses

Within this perspective, SEBC has completed the following:

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## SNDP AND CIVIL COMMUNITY

SEBC has concluded the Syrian NGO Development Programme funded by GEF-Small Grants Programme (hosted by UNDP Syria). Within this programme, SEBC has provided capacity building support to more than 35 local Syrian NGOs (from different sectors, i.e. humanitarian relief, healthcare, children, culture, women, environment, etc. The training consisted of 14 modules targeting NGOs' management units. Through the programme, SEBC was able to build a contacts database comprising more than 600 NGOs from all over Syria. Around 100 of them have participated in TNA survey, training workshops, focus groups, evaluation visits and coaching services that were part of the project. This programme have set-up the initial platform for civil society work in Damascus. Furthermore, it paved for many later UN funded interventions and programmes.

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## UNDP AND NGOS

SEBC has implemented a UNDP project aimed at the provision of Capacity Development to Syrian NGOs on Project Cycle Management and NGOs Management, by providing advanced level training to senior staff of local NGOs in Syria, in order to foster their capacities to plan, develop, execute and monitor their day-to-day activities and projects related to achieving early recovery and livelihoods programmes.

The project covered a number of training modules and was delivered in both Tartous and Damascus. The training employed a highly interactive learning methodology, case studies, and exercises, and was delivered in Arabic to assure that the full message has reached all participants. Some international terminology was used in English with the necessary explanation. During these two workshops, SEBC experts have succeeded to underline some practices of abuses of human rights and elaborated with the NGOs on how they can be able to fight them. (i.e. projects and initiative related to kids right of accessing education, citizens to clean water and sanitation services, and employment).

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## LABOUR

As a business support organisation, SEBC understand the importance of healthy labour market (a market that respects principles ,4, 5 and 6). Whereas the crisis in Syria have had its tough impact on Syrian business (many has closed down) raising unemployment rates dramatically. Accordingly, SEBC's intervention have been in two main level: First in empowering and qualifying skills labour and second support to businesses by enforcing modern HRM measures. From another hand, SEBC has launched a

project on livelihood that fall in this area by creating the needed labour forces required for reconstruction process of the country.

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#### PROVISION OF KEY LIFE-SKILLS AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Partnering with UNDP Syria, SEBC managed successfully to implement an ambitious project aimed at supporting the livelihood of Syrian crisis-affected households through the provision of key life-skills and vocational training to 1,000 Syrian young male and female individuals in a span of 6 months.

To implement the project, SEBC resolved to adapt its SKILLS for Construction Programme to the requirements and time constraints of the project, and managed to prepare curricula for three vocational training modules, namely:

1. Residential electric installations and maintenance,
2. Maintenance and repair of household appliances, and
3. Plumbing and piping.

SEBC also developed 6 key life-skills training modules dealing with professional skills, emotional intelligence, entrepreneurship, personal skills, finance and customer care.

The project targeted providing 600 young male and female individuals in Rural Damascus and Aleppo with 100/hour training each in one of the vocational training modules, and providing 400 others in the same afore-mentioned areas with 30/hour training each comprising all 6 key life-skills training modules.

SEBC managed to successfully deliver the project by making use of its extensive trainer database, and usage of its own training rooms located in its main Head Office and affiliated SKILLS training centre in Damascus, and most importantly using its Aleppo Branch Office despite the worsening security conditions there.

Against all odds, the project has had a wide appeal especially amongst females, and it is worthy to mention that the majority of trainees were university students or graduates, contrary to local stereotyping of these professions as the medium for the non-educated.

The success achieved and the long waiting list of young individuals who aspired to join the training drove UNDP to extend the project and add another 200 individuals to vocational training, taking the total number of project beneficiaries to 1,200 individuals.

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#### THE ENVIRONMENT

SEBC have supported principles 7, 8 and 9 though benefiting from its partnerships with the EU and International business support organization. During the last year, SEBC has participated in a number of initiatives under the EuroMed Invest Programme related to empowering Renewable and green energy, environment-friendly industry, new responsible transport industries and many others. They were a chances were SEBC to introduce Syrian business to such environmental approaches. In addition, in a new action undertaken by SBEC, the principle issue of the environment has been also tackled by the centre through two other major direct and indirect interventions. SEBC partnered with OXFAM to deliver an awareness raising campaign advocating commitment to WASH, especially with regards to

promoting healthy practices of water consumption, and delivered support via its Incubation facility to a community-based initiatives such for the one calling for the usage of bicycles for daily commuting.

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#### NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR WATER CONSERVATION

SEBC partnered with OXFAM to deliver a three-phased water conservation media campaign with the aim to raise public awareness and advocate the Syrian target audience on responding to drought & shortage of water by using comprehensive methods of preserving water, while boosting the positive comprehension of water usage and personal hygiene.

The campaign came following the draught recorded in 2014 and the exploitation of water resources by armed militias as a means of pressuring government forces to accept hard compromises. This was evidently the case in Aleppo, which suffered almost complete lack of potable water for some extended durations.

The planning, design and delivery of the campaign started during the first quarter of 2015 and targeted generally the public, with specific focus on women and children, as the former are usually thrifty when it comes to water consumption for household purposes, while the latter may influence their parents and drive them to respect healthy water consumption practices if properly targeted.

The campaign started with the design and delivery of a comprehensive survey to decide on most negative practices of water consumption and decide on the most relevant messages to counter these practices and have them replaced with healthy ones.

The implementation phase of this project made use of all possible local media channels, and used numerous tools, including press conferences, Interviews with selected spokespersons, featured articles, by-liners, success stories, press releases and photo captions, and a number of advertising media, e.g. video documentary, direct TV messaging, radio ads, online banners, outdoor and indoor advertising, newspaper ads, magazine ads, flyers, etc.

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#### COME ON BIKE

SEBC Business Incubator played a key role during the past couple of years in translating SEBC new strategic shift to community based initiatives into action. It provided incubation services to scores of social initiatives aimed mostly at adequately responding to emerging humanitarian needs and psychological problems resulting from the crisis.

The Incubator extended its support to Active Citizen Initiative, and provided incubation services to a unique initiative called “Come on Bike”. This initiative aims to appeal to the public to use bicycles instead of cars or public transport means for their daily commuting, and is motivated by two main factors:

1. The increasing pollution resulting mostly from acts of war and the overcrowding of major safer cities due to deteriorating security situation in rural areas, and
2. Fuel shortages resulting from unilateral international sanctions imposed on Syria.

SEBC Business Incubator provided strategic orientation, mentoring and logistic support to the initiative and managed to successfully organise three massive bike rallies that were delivered in Damascus during 2015. The initiative proved a success and had the government start officially licensing bikes, in addition to creating a strong appeal for bikes among the public.

#### MEASUREMENT OF OUTCOME

SEBC managed during the past five years on conflict in Syria, and more specifically during the last two years to abide by its commitment to the principles of the UN Global Compact, despite the unfavourable conditions emerging from the crisis. In more specific terms, SEBC managed to:

- a) Modify its engagement strategy by moving from a business-oriented support institution with a mandate to implement international partners' programmes aimed at economic reform and development, into a socio-economic vehicle for growth, recovery and reconstruction, with a particular focus on community based initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of the ongoing crisis in Syria.
- b) SEBC proved a survivor and managed to arrive at self-financing with the prospect to sustain its future operation on the medium and long term.
- c) Developing the business role from the traditional one into more responsible and role-playing actor and a partner in facing the overcomes of the Syrian crisis.
- d) SEBC managed to build credible alliances and partnerships with major international organisations still active in Syria, with the aim to jointly deliver relevant actions contributing to the socio-economic development of the country and the welfare of Syrian individuals.
- e) The interventions implemented and/or supported during the reporting period have contributed to sustaining SEBC's commitment to UN Global Compact Initiative, whilst having a positive note on local and international efforts exerted in an endeavour to leverage on the country's strengths and human capital necessary for the recovery of post-crisis Syria.
- f) SEBC broke new grounds, most notably vocational training and environmental awareness raising, and managed to deliver successful projects that enjoyed wide public appeal.

## ANNEXES

## LETTER PUBLISHED ON SEBC WEBSITE

**10 principles of UN Global Impact Initiative**

The UN Global Compact asks companies to embrace, support and enact, within their sphere of influence, a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption.

SEBC would hereby like to take this opportunity to encourage all partners to contribute to the United Nations Global Impact Initiative by committing to its 10 principles as follows:

**Human Rights**

- Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
- Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

**Labour**

- Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
- Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and
- Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

**Environment**

- Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
- Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
- Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

**Anti-Corruption**

- Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

For further information, guidance material, please visit the Global Compact website: [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)