

Reversing the Brain Drain

The Role of Syrian-Americans in
the Human, Cultural and
Economic Development of Syria

History

- Syrian migration to the US started in the 1880s it slowed down in the 1920s because of US immigration laws (no quota or specialized labor)
- Until the 1960's (through the late 90's) when a second wave of migration took place (highly educated, gifted Syrian professionals)

The Problem

- 1- Exodus of highly qualified Syrians escaping political and economic hardships
 - 2- Lack of opportunity to fulfill potential (internal and external aspects)
- Corruption and lack of freedoms is only a manifestation not the root cause

- The problem of corruption and political control is only one aspect of the problem
- In fact, political development is high up on the chain hierarchy of needs Abraham Maslow pyramid: (Survival: Food, shelter, security, then opportunity, self actualization)
- The root cause is societal/cultural (poor work ethic, lack of critical thinking abilities, lack of ambition, non-science based education, and societal strategic planning)

The reality of Syrian Americans

The Brain Drain resulted in a de facto affluent, highly educated Syrian American community

Who are Syrian Americans?

- 3.5 million Arab American 12 percent Syrian Americans
- Second largest nationality among Arab-Americans.
- 59.2 % American born.
- Concentrated in Chicago NY Houston DC Dearborn
- Economically:
 - Median family income \$58,204 (surpassing both the Arab (\$52,318) and national (\$50,046) medians).
 - 35 % with a bachelor's degree or more (higher than national average (24.4)).
 - 41.9 % work in managerial or professional capacities.

*According to the United States Census brief "The Arab Population: 2000"

- A proposal to study them (power, money, influence, etc.) Chicago alone 300000 cair Chicago budget comes from 10 Syrian doctors.
- We need to support that by a study commissioned by professional entity.
- Research will go empower Syrian Americans in the US domestically and in Syria. (imagine the power that this organization will have) Billions of US dollars under control of Syrian Americans.

- Germany and Japan post WWII left what was not in their control and focused on what was: The development of German and Japanese individual and society.
- Malaysia: in the span of 20 years moved from a third world country (including politically) on its way to a first world country

Problem in Syria

- We have a third world problem (how many are satisfied (non political) with where Syria is at right now? Society, people, country, (per capita income, books per population, education level
Reference: UNDP report on Syria
- Reality of Syrian youth (an assessment of education, literacy, economic prospect, job prospects, opportunities (anecdotal stories and information about the types of things that excite Syrian youth (hookah cafes, music videos, obsession with mobiles,

Stark Contrast

- Highlight the stark contrast between the two communities

Proposed Solution

- Our community is developed here so we don't have to start from scratch
- Our challenge is to organize the talent and a way to give back
- Should not organize around politics but around issues/service that bring together the secular and the religious, the Damascene and the Aleppoan, the ...
- "Civil Service" type program bringing Syrian American professionals/Academics back for a sabbatical period to serve
- Need the infrastructure there and here to organize
- Should have a domestic development program

Proposed Solution

- So, you came to this country, you made it , congratulations
- If the same resources that you already invest by coming back every year if invested systematically and in the most efficient fashion (organized) Syria will be in a different place..
- We are short changing ourselves from not lifting Syria to becoming a developed country

- Development institution here in the US with grant structure and program and scholarship structure
- Socially responsible economic projects that work (introduce and promote the idea of the intellectual café culture Barns and Nobles to the Syrian youth (hip, cultured, reading oriented, affordable/subsidized, fully literate with concentration on English AND Arabic literacy)
- Establish a multi million dollar fund that reads through proposals through a competition of business ideas.
- Relay on our social networks at the beginning to then build these local networks as loose federation of small networks

Development Tracks:

- **Academic/Educational Development**
 - Faculty/Student exchange programs
 - Support for new comers to the US
 - Building support networks for developing private educational institutions
 - Critical thinking development programs
 - Scholarship programs
- **Technical Trainings**
 - Medical trainings for medical staff
 - Computer literacy
- **Linguistic Skills Development**
 - Subsidized English improvement programs for indigent youth
- **Business Development**
 - Approaching State governments willing to break the trade embargo with Syria (similar to Cuba-Illinois trade)
 - Business consulting
 - Management consulting
 - Banking and finance consulting

- **Tourism Development**
 - Organizing regular tours to Syrian cities
- **Civic Skills Development**
 - Traffic classes
 - Public conduct
- **Cultural Exchange Programs**
 - Artistic exchanges
 - Promotion of sister city programs
- **Empowerment of civil society**
 - Institutionalization of existing organizations

- 1.5 generations motive to help and engage Syria that isn't informed by the trauma that brought the first generation to the west and the US

SAMS

- Objectives are to promote general health, disseminate medical information, and increase partnerships between physicians in the U.S. and Syria.
- More than 600 members
- Provides free medical services and supplies to disadvantaged patients and runs workshops to transfer vital medical skills to Syrian physicians.

Has it all been done already?

- Ministry of Expatriates is not fulfilling this:
- projects potentially conflict of governmental interest) political considerations
- they don't reach the masses (how many of you been contacted by them?)
- Private education is NOT doing it either
 - System needs to be strengthened
 - Quality issue
 - Accessibility issue (only for the rich and therefore not a meritocracy)
 - Stability (commercial

- What about UNDP and charities and philanthropies?

Band aid solution the deal with the very basic of needs but not true development to move this country forward – and they are tied to political agendas

- Long term agenda: about designing and building a new generation (Mahatir Mohamed example Malaysia where they had tons of instability)

- Syrian-Americans have much to accomplish in the years to come, but the magnitude of the tasks ahead of them should not overshadow their achievements thus far. As Al-Jijakli explains, “Right now, many of us suffer from setting unrealistic expectations for ourselves. We’re in a state of infancy. Only when we mature will we be able to impact larger issues.”