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## Strategies for Promotion and Rural Development : the olive road in Idleb

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**SUMMARY** - The Italian cooperation project for the "Technical assistance for the improvement of olive oil quality in Syria" was also intended to foster among other activities the Syrian olive oil promotion through specific initiatives related to the quality adding of the territory of Idleb. Within this frame, the verification for the basic condition for a basic rural development activity based on a participatory approach and on preliminary appraisal for the territory resource has been accomplished.

The final result has been the achievement of an integrated promotional tour named "Olive road" as per similar initiatives presents in the Mediterranean regions and in Apulia in particular (Italy), has been built through the integrated and participative approach joining together the Syrian implementing Agency, the GCSAR, the "Al Adyet" Society, a local NGO, and the Institutional involvement of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Governorate of Idleb, the Ministry of Tourism in the same protocol of intent signed in Aleppo on 21 February 2007. The agreement signed between the Apulia Region and the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture on 12 May 2006 represented the first official step for the official application of the LEADER MED project agreement to the region of Idleb, making as consequence available the support of 2 Apulia Local Action Groups, (LAG) "Terre d'Arneo" and "Alto Salento", that have been supporting with their expertise on the rural integrated development, the whole initiative.

**Key words:** Rural integrated development, LAG (Local Action Group), Syrian Ministry of Agriculture, GCSAR, Apulia Region

**RESUME** – Le projet de la coopération italienne intitulé: "Assistance technique pour l'amélioration de la qualité de l'huile d'olive en Syrie" avait entre ses objectifs la promotion de l'huile d'olive à travers des initiatives spécifiques qui concernaient le territoire d'Idleb. Dans ce cadre d'action, ont été vérifiées les conditions pour une activité de développement rurale basée sur une approche participative et sur une analyses diagnostique préliminaire du territoire impliqué, en considération surtout des ses ressources physiques et humaines disponibles.

Le résultat final a été la réalisation d'un parcours promotionnel intégré intitulé: «La route de l'Olivier», qui ressemble des initiatives pareilles activées dans les régions de la Méditerranée et spécialement dans la région des Pouilles en Italie que a été mise en place grâce à une approche participatif et intégré qui a valoriser les efforts de la contrepartie locale du projet, la CGRSA, l'ONG locale «Al Adyet», le Ministère de l'Agriculture, le Gouvernorat d'Idleb et le Ministère du Tourisme qu'ont signé un protocole d'accord in Alep le 21 Février 2007 sur la base d'un accord préliminaire signé entre le Ministère de l'Agriculture Syrien et la Région de Pouilles en Italie le 12 Mai 2006.

Ces accord a représenté la base sur la quelle a été possible appliquer la méthodologie LEADER dans le contexte syrien pour la première fois dans la région d'Idleb, avec le support garantis de deux Groups d'Action Locales («Terre D'Arneo» et «Alto Salento») qu'ont fourni leur appui d'expérience dans le domaine du développement rural intégré.

**Mots-clés:** Développement rurale intégré, Group d'Action Local (GLA), Ministère de l'Agriculture Syrien, CGRSA, Région des Pouilles

## **Introduction**

The project for the “Technical assistance for the improvement of olive oil in Syria” in addition to its technical goals, has inserted another goal: the verification of the essential condition for a basic rural development project grounded on a participatory approach and on preliminary appraisal of the territory’s resources.

Thus, was developed the aim of carrying out in Idleb an integrated tour named “Olive road” as per similar initiatives present in Italy and in Apulia in particular.

The ability to produce olives and oil in Syria has been the object of interactions with the territory through a preliminary appraisal having as specific goal to describe the main socio-economic aspects and peculiarities.

Multi variable analyses have been activated including the idea of a social progress politic and dynamic through which the organization achieves some objectives such as:

- improving quality of life via an increased availability of goods to satisfy community needs
- better distribution of welfare
- increasing work opportunities
- increasing availability of socio-cultural services
- increasing environmental sustainability
- increasing the self confidence of the groups and of the individuals

In order to define a rural development project, like the Olive Road in Idleb, the following issues have been addressed:

- Difficulties linked to the emigration and the degree of population aging and education level
- The socio-productive characteristics
- Presence of private and public projects influencing, through their presence, the local rural development
- Presence of infrastructure, projects, private and public investment
- Presence of vital institutions both associative and economic
- Presence of archeological relics
- Preservation of folkloric customs
- Needs, habits, opportunities, laws, and regulations which can influence positively and or negatively the local development

This analysis developed from June 2005 to the end of the project has allowed the setting up a frame of knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the local potential, but also a better knowledge of needs and expectations. These factors have influenced the conception and establishment of the Olive Road as a pilot local development project.

## **Project activities**

### **Cooperation project Leader Med**

In this phase the cooperation of Apulian LAG with some Mediterranean countries among those, Syria, has begun.

This presence, facilitated by the technical and scientific support offered by the CIHEAM IAM B has involved also the Apulia Region (Photo 1).



Photo 1: Meeting of Apulia Region representatives with the Syrian Minister of Agriculture

The Leader MED Project aims to increase the know-how exchange between the European and Mediterranean countries in order to share a common regulation context related to the animal welfare, environmental protection, food security, basic elements for the development of the rural areas.

This is considered of primary importance as a base for the implementation of the cooperation between Italy and the TMP. The project foresees the appreciation of the importance of local production with an aim to deepen the knowledge of the productive supply chain, through the recognition of the value of local resources and typical products of the environment, culture, art and crafts.

For this reason the purpose is to create a “system” and make a network around a typical and traditional product representative of the whole territory of Idleb.

An image of the territory should be represented this way, in order to develop a network of positive relationships, with the objective of the economic development of the territory.

In other words, an expression of natural connection among different the following sectors:

- artisans
- agro-industry

#### **Farming in multi sectorial**

- handicrafts
- Commerce
- Natural resources
- Human resources
- Tourism

In the following chart the possible interconnections are highlighted



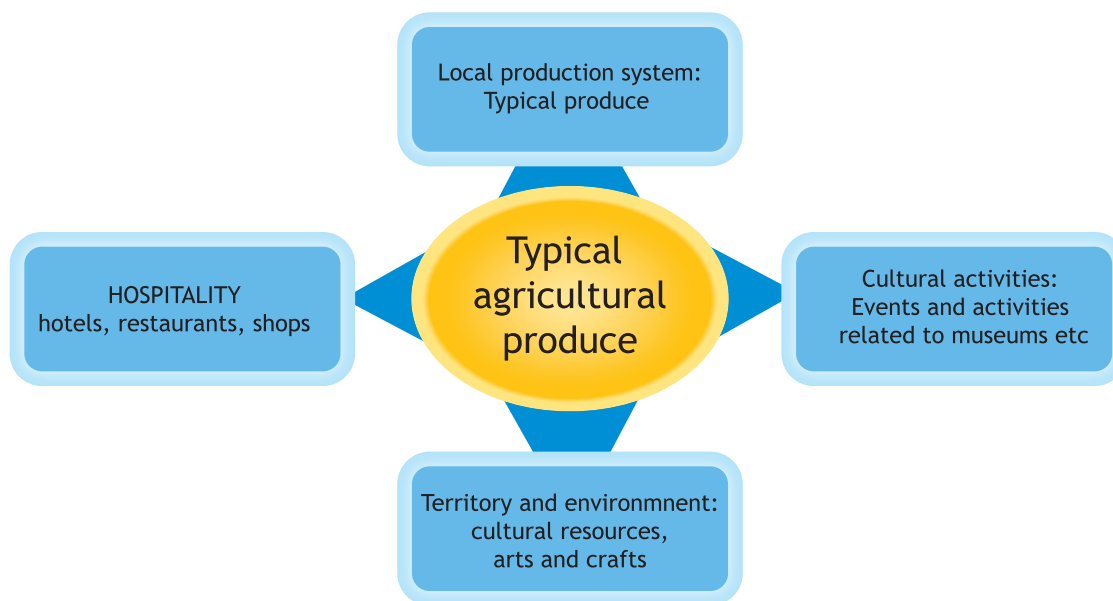


Chart 1: The integrated approach orbiting around a typical agricultural produce

For this purpose, through the collaboration of two Local Action Groups of the Apulia region (ALTO SALENTO di Ostuni (Br) and TERRA D'ARNEO di Veglie (Le)) and IAMB, a work plan has been prepared with detailed description of the activities to be carried out.



Photo 2: Meeting between Apulia and Idleb LAGs

In particular the specific objectives have been :

- i) Preliminary appraisal for a development agency on the NGO model
- ii) Analyses of infrastructure conditions for establishing an “Olive Road” in Idleb

### **The Olive Road in Idleb**

The implementation of the following activities allowed the achievement of the main goal to create an Olive Road in Idleb:

- Agency of development
- Path located and localised
- Tools to sustain the project implementation



Chart 2: The natural inter-connection between the different productive sectors

We now briefly describe and comment on the above cited activities

- Establishment of a development agency.
- Its aims to build up a mixed partnership with public and private sector in order to ensure future sustainability and viability in order to provide also a legal framework for the rural development policies, since it is a pilot activity is important the definitions of such legal frame aspired to the Leader principles.
- Training and sensibilization support consisting of favouring the spreading of the rural policy and of principles of rural development through proper training of the agents.
- An administrative support to foster these aspects of the “Olive road” (authorization, infrastructures, services, etc.); to ensure also the presence of a specific office that, in addition to the normal activities of technical and administrative assistance, will actively promote the development policies and undertake most of the pilot initiatives.
- A management related to the “Olive Road” in order to make realistic the management and the logistics of the project.

The core of the development agency has been built up through different meetings with participation of different institutions (Ministry of Agriculture Idleb Governorate and GCSAR of Idleb) and a local NGO operating in socio-cultural domain “Al Adyat” (Association for the Valorization of the Story and Tradition) and to the presence of the Apulian LAG and of CIHEAM IAM Bari.

During those meetings has been highlighted the need to gain the participation of the involved stakeholders for the administrative, financial and managerial roles of the initiative.

For this purpose, the work group has written an agreement for the constitution of a mixed partnership including representatives from involved institutions and private bodies involved in carrying out the initiative.

A work plan has been defined together with an action plan for the future involvement and management of the “Olive Road” with the related intervention of the Local Action Group.

## Setting up the “Olive road” path

With regard to the second point, the organizational support offered by the CIHEAM IAM Bari in collaboration with the GCSAR which has been supporting technically the initiative through the program “Technical Assistance for the improvement of the olive oil quality in Syria” has been fundamental, selecting also the first options for the implementation of the path itself.

As main leitmotiv for the setting up of the path, the production of olive oil and the presence of olive trees was considered as typical of the Idleb rural territory.

An integration process has been activated for the main resources and produce typical of the Idleb Territory. In other words, a path has been located as expression of a natural inter-connection between the different productive sectors:

- i) agricultural sector in its multi functional purpose
- ii) arts and crafts
- iii) historical - archaeological
- iv) commercial
- v) tourism - hospitality

The path has been implemented and set up through a thorough study of the territory carried out by the GCSAR Engineers together with AL Adyat and Ministry of Agriculture representatives with the collection of the main information (historic, geographic and cultural).

Later on an exploration of the territory was done in order to set up a map with the description of the path. During this phase, the direct contact with the rural families of the region has been fundamental. The significance of the initiative has been explained to the people and among those the most endowed have been involved.

Some criteria used in selection of the sites, the activities, produce and people to involve in the olive road are summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Main criteria, actors and choices made for the first set up of the “Olive road”

<i>Archeological sites and museums</i>	Viability Historical relevance Presence of relics linked with the rural territory and heritage (e.g. Hypogea oil mills, different tools)
<i>Activities and produce</i>	Viability Importance in the rural economy of the region Typical produce Quality features Respect of hygienic basics Respect for the basic safety requirements Appreciation of the role of women and youth
<i>Human factors</i>	Availability Character Hospitable Mentality Appreciation of the role of women and youth

According to those selection criteria from 30 original sites, only 15 have been chosen and approved to be part of the “Olive road” others have been approved even if not directly involved in the “Olive road” as official providers of rough materials and basic ingredients or packaging tools/materials (e.g. blown glass and pottery, both typical of Armanaz).



Photo 3: Meeting potential beneficiaries

## Tools for the implementation of the activity

Once the set up phase was achieved some tools have been predisposed in order to give more visibility and concrete ratio to the “Olive road”. The main instruments and practical tools/outputs were:

### • Promotional material

3000 Chart maps (Chart 2) have been printed out in 4 colour and double face (45cm x 25cm) with the “Olive road” map and visual representation of the of the main sites to visit, the project main chosen sites and the logo of the “Olive road” as continuous leitmotiv for the tourists.

Those brochures are written in English and Arabic and have been distributed to tourist agencies in order to promote the initiative.

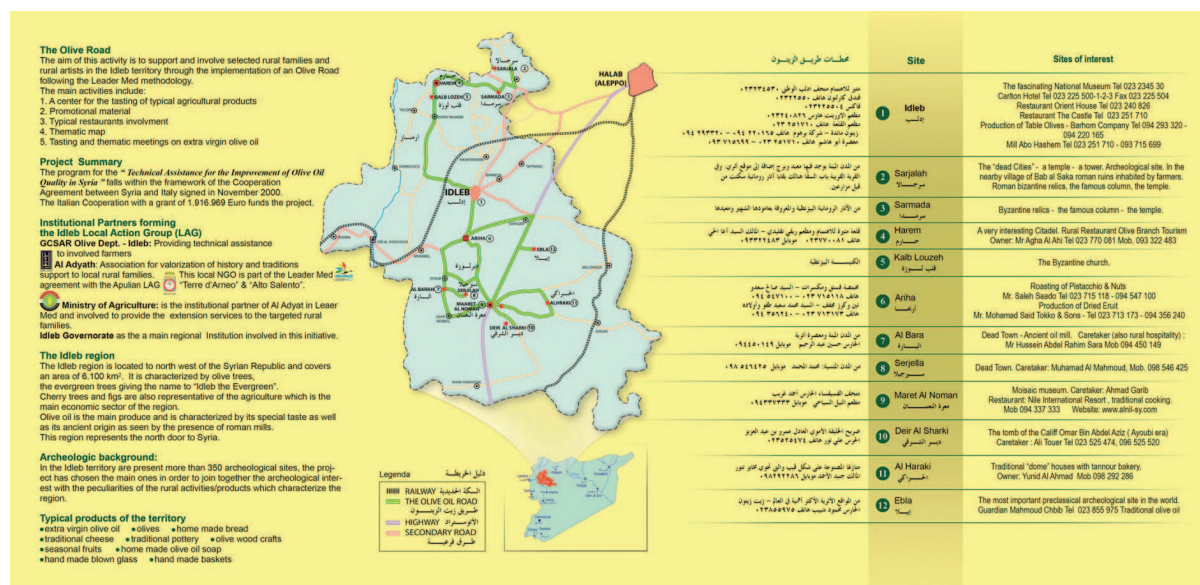


Chart 3: The olive road map

### • Road Signs

3 Road Signs have been installed (3 x 2m) on the main 3 entrance roads within the tour.

1 Highway Sign 6 x 4m has been installed on the main highway Damascus-Aleppo at the entrance of the Idlib territory and just after the main entrance of the Ebla Archeological site.

These signs show the Olive road logo.





Photo 4: Olive road promotional sign

- **Setting up of a visitor's centre "Olive Road" at the Idleb Museum**

The Idleb Museum has been selected and chosen as visitor centre for the Olive Road initiative.

This centre will provide the information, showing as well the typical produce of the Olive road.

Within the centre tasting will be organized in order to promote the sale of the typical produce obtained from the associated producers of the Olive Road. Moreover, this centre will distribute information material of the Olive Road and it will be able to organize guiding services to explore the Olive Road.

The Local Action Group will interact strictly with the museum management in order to achieve those results.

- **Showcases and plexi glass signs**

3 Showcases have been hand made by a specialised carpenter using an exclusive design especially made for the Olive Road to show the produce and the promotional/information material. Those 3 showcases will be placed and installed in the main strategic places where tourists will group (Museum of Idleb).

Plexi signs 40 x 40cm have been made to promote the logo of the Olive Road and will be placed at the entrance of each site/workshop.

- **Correct production disciplinary and distinctive stickers logos**

In order to ensure the traceability and quality of the Olive Road special produce and to avoid speculations a guideline has been prepared to record the correct procedures through which the Olive road product has been obtained in order that the applicant of the Olive Road is ready to follow it and including also the information about the producing farm, on the typology of the produce, on the modality of making and production costs.

On each piece of the "Olive Road" produce, a sticker (3, 5 or 8 cm diameter) with the silver logo of the Olive Road. This logo is registered through the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture in order to protect it from speculations and imitations.



Chart 4: Security sticker for Olive Road produce

#### • Promotional events

Different events have been organized to promote the Olive Road initiative such as:

- Participation at workshop (Ain Atieh December 06)
- Participation at international Expo ("Mediterre" Sept 06)
- Participation in local Agricultural fairs (Aleppo Agricultural Fair – October 06)
- Promotional dinner for olive oil and tasting of typical Olive Road produce (Damascus January 2007)
- Final seminar of the project (January 2007)

## CONCLUSIONS

This project activity demonstrated that is feasible and possible to carry out an integrated rural development in a Syrian region through the participative approach methodology joining together public and private stakeholders.

Actually 13 producers are part of the Idleb "Olive road" and one tour operator is supporting the initiative to give to participants, an internal regulation is ready and a promotional office has been equipped and made operational.

This has been possible and successful for the reasons described below:

- Strong administrative support offered by the Minister of Agriculture
- Positive acceptance from direct beneficiaries of the integrated approach methodology implications
- Vocational background for the concerned GCSAR technical involved personnel
- Proper communication skills adopted during the preliminary survey and the group discussion
- Specific expertise offered by the Apulian LAGs
- Whole and integrated support frame given by the CIHEAM-IAM Bari.

We would like to remind that this represents the first activity in Syria of integrated rural development with the LEADER methodology implementation, however, similar initiatives might be developed in other Syrian regions by valorizing local produces and taking into consideration the proper human and physic factors that may affect or emphasize the final results.



## A glimpse of life on the Olive Road

