STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP REPORT
# NW Syria - November 2022

INTRODUCTION

Concern Worldwide, with funding from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) has begun a 24-month research project examining the barriers to the progression of localization of humanitarian aid in 5 country contexts (Bangladesh, Malawi, NW Syria, DRC, and Somalia). Aimed at transferability and opportunities for scale-up, this program seeks proactive, operational solutions to funding and human resource barriers, with particular attention to the impact of power dynamics in the system.

A central part of the research in each country context is a full day workshop involving participants from local, national and international NGOs, as well as UN representatives. Data presented in this report comes from the workshop pre-survey and information collected during the workshop activities. The workshop was held in Gaziantep on 24 November 2022. There were 17 local and national NGOs, 5 diaspora Syrian NGOs, 12 INGOs and 1 UN agency represented. The first two parts of the workshop took place in the morning where the group was split in two - local and national actors in one room, international actors in the other. They rejoined in the afternoon for the next sessions.

This workshop aimed to build on the workshops implemented by the NGO Forum in April 2022. This workshop provided a series of recommendations to improve localization in NW Syria. The research team adopted the methodology to incorporate these recommendations and analyze progress on the concrete actions, as well as set milestones.

The workshop covered the following activities: **Defining the Destination**, an analysis of where the power is today and where it would be in an ideal situation. **Barriers to Localization** looked at how the participants collectively ranked localization challenges in the pre-workshop survey.

The **Trust Exercises** explored the most important components to building trust in a partnership and asked participants to identify and reflect on interactions with other stakeholders in the humanitarian sector that have contributed positively and negatively to building trust. **Individual Brainstorming** allowed participants to begin thinking creatively about solutions to the barriers to localization. **Proposed Solutions and Rose/Thorn/Bud** provided participants with an opportunity to provide feedback on their peers' recommendations. **Concrete Action Milestones** was based on the solutions identified in the NGO Forum 2022 localization workshop. It delved deeper into what actions should be taken and how they could progress that even further.

LOCALIZATION SCORES (OUT OF 5)

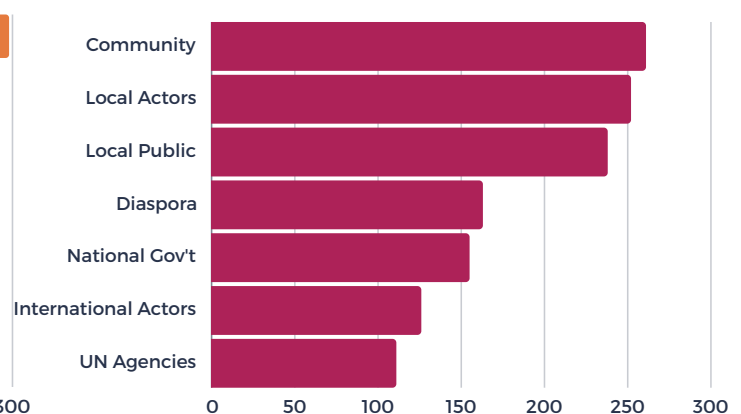| **2.19**	**2.40**	**2.67**
National Syrian NGOs	Diaspora	INGOs and UN
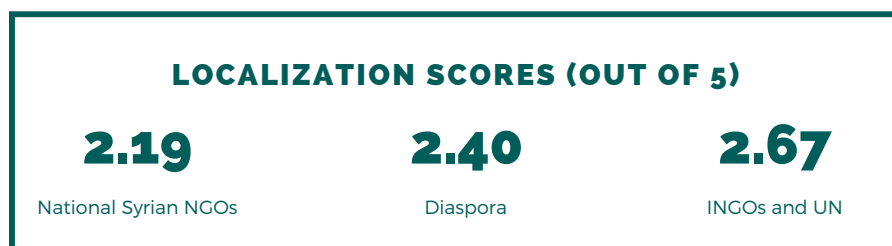
DEFINING THE DESTINATION

The participants were asked to rank by stakeholder who they believed currently has the power in the humanitarian system in NW Syria and where they believed the power should be in an ideal scenario.

Power Now
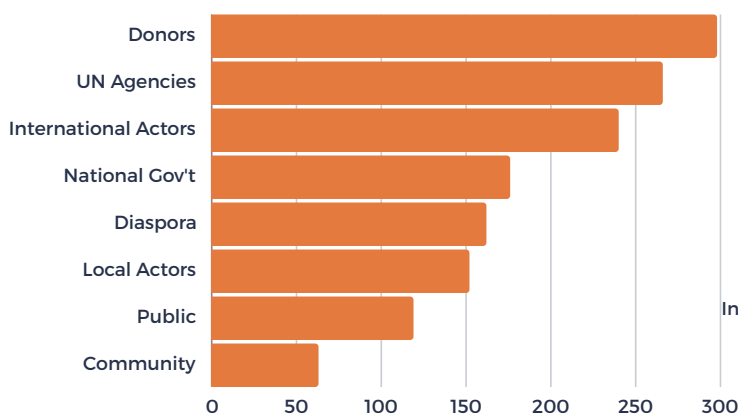
Power Ideal

The above results show that the participants believe that the power in the humanitarian system mostly rests with the donors and the UN agencies, whereas in an ideal situation, affected communities would hold the most power, followed by the local actors. The results indicate that the ideal power situation is effectively the inverse of the current situation.

International Group

In the current humanitarian structure, the international actors set the framework and agenda for response and then the local actors adapt to fit in. However, trust remains an issue on who should take the initiative in shifting the power, as well as how this power can be shifted to the communities. The international actors acknowledged that the affected communities have always been the first responders and the most knowledgeable when it comes to the local context and the needs of their own communities. However, when the international actors came in with their regulations and donor requirements, the lack of flexibility destroyed a lot of the community-led responses. Locally-led response groups also run into the issue of not being registered, which remains a problem for donors given the risks associated working with non-registered groups. Communities cannot do it alone and the national NGOs are best equipped to act as the intermediary between donors and the affected communities.

National Group

In discussion with the local actors, they emphasized that the voices of the Syrian community are not being heard. Operations are donor driven and not community driven. NGOs are viewed as "service providers" not partners. Rather than talking about shifting the power from donors to communities, this power dynamic will continue to persist until there is a mechanism in which to measure the progress of localization. One participant acknowledged that important decisions like the cross-border resolutions are made at the political level, in which they have no input, despite the fact that it affects them and the communities that they serve the most.

Both groups acknowledged that prior to the Syrian conflict, there was no NGO system in place and local capacities could not even receive funding safely at the beginning of the crisis. Yet, international actors still applied the same due diligence standards and criteria used by the Global North organizations to the Syrian context. The NGOs have developed the necessary capacity over the last decade and the localization actions needs to happen now.

One participant noted the importance of clarifying the new role of INGOs in order for these institutions to cede control to local actors. Another participant mentioned the lack of trust as the root of the problem. The way that the humanitarian system currently operates is a demonstration of this lack of trust between local and international actors. Very few direct funding opportunities flow to local NGOs, who are simply treated as contractors.

Participants also emphasized the distinction between localization and risk transfer. Because international actors were unable to get access to North West Syria, they left that responsibility to local actors without providing the tools and protections to counter the risks.

BARRIERS TO LOCALISATION

The following were the top ranked barriers per category in the pre-workshop survey by the participants.

FINANCE

1. Funding doesn't go directly to local and diaspora organizations, but is passed through intermediaries
2. Local and diaspora organizations must compete with international organizations for funding
3. Only short-term funding options are available, limited quality, multi-year funding

POWER

1. Current partnerships between international and local actors are not equitable or complementary – including international NGOs and donor agencies.
2. Significant risk is transferred to local actors when partnering with international actors
3. Program planning/design/implementation are not inclusive or participatory

HUMAN RESOURCES

1. Capacity strengthening is often programmatic in nature, not institutional
2. Lack of pay parity and/ or discrepancy between salaries and employment benefits of local and international staff
3. There is little or no programmatic budget allocated for training and capacity strengthening needs

Barrier Rank Disagreements

This below table illustrates where there were differences in opinions between the local and international actors. The number under each stakeholder group denotes how they ranked that particular barrier i.e. "Overhead or core costs not provided in sub-granting" was ranked 4th most important by the local actors, while ranked 8th most important by the international actors.

| Local Actors	International Actors	Barriers to Localization
6	2	Award management, compliance, and donor reporting requirements are overly burdensome and difficult
2	8	Local actors have little to no relationship with donors and donor agencies and it is difficult to build those relationships
4	8	Overhead or core costs not provided in sub-granting, no unearmarked/non-programmatic funding available

TRUST EXERCISE

The Trust Exercise aimed to explore the concept of trust within the context of partnerships, both at the international and local levels. The section consisted of various activities and discussions to identify the behaviors and factors that break or build trust, as well as to determine the most important components of trust in such partnerships.

A framework of trust categories was presented to the participants, which helped them understand the different aspects that contribute to building trust. The framework consisted of 23 components, organized under 5 overarching categories, including ability, benevolence, predictability, integrity, and transparency.

Ability	Benevolence	Predictability	Integrity	Transparency
Competence Reputation Conscientiousness Media Literacy Proactivity Positive Humor Friendliness Feedback Culture Participation	Task Support Autonomy Emotional Care Loyalty/Solidarity	Keeping Commitments Availability Consistency	Confidentiality Ethical Values Being Respectful	Information Transparency Responsibility Assignment Sharing Private Information Openness

Participants were asked to reflect on the 23 components and select the top 5 categories they felt were most important to the success of the work in partnership with other stakeholders.

As seen in the pie chart below, participants ranked Ability and Transparency as the most important categories, followed by Benevolence, Integrity, and Predictability.

Transparency 24.8%
Ability 24.8%
Integrity 14.9%
Predictability 12.9%
Benevolence 22.8%
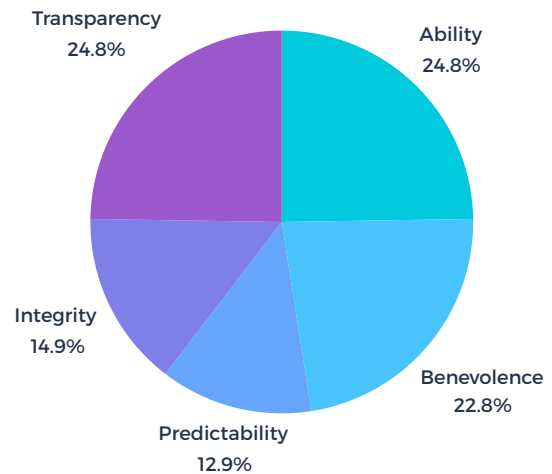
Examples of Foundational Components of Trust in Partnership

LOCAL	BOTH	INTERNATIONAL
Competence	Equity in decision making	Feedback culture
Conscientiousness	Ethical values	Responsibility assignment
Autonomy	Loyalty	Proactivity
Consistency	Information transparency	

Participants were then asked to think of 2 incidents across their careers in the humanitarian sector, one which contributed positively to the trust they had in a stakeholder and one which contributed negatively to the trust they had in another stakeholder. Below are a few examples that participants reported that build and broke trust in partnerships.

Positive and Negative Critical Incidents

LOCAL

- Advocating on behalf of the local partner to the donor
- Willingness to listen, receive feedback, and adjust
- Trust in the local partner's capacity and knowledge of the context

INTERNATIONAL

- Honesty and transparency regarding limitations or when things go wrong
- Proactive in asking for additional capacity support
- Competency and consistency

- Lack of communication and transparency on changes to project
- No room for input or collaboration
- Lack of risk sharing

- Lack of transparency and failure to communicate
- Failure to keep project commitments

INDIVIDUAL BRAINSTORMING

Participants were asked to individually brainstorm quick solutions to the barriers identified in the pre-workshop survey. They were given 5 minutes to come up with different solutions to the problem and to convene with their group to collectively decide on the best solution. Below is an example.

BARRIER:
Capacity strengthening is often programmatic in nature, not institutional

SOLUTION 1:
Focus on quality capacity strengthening programs that target LNGO needs and not donor requirements

SOLUTION 2:
Decrease donor rules and regulations for giving direct funds to LNGOs

SOLUTION 3:
Donors should set standards on required percentage of overhead that should go to LNGOs

SOLUTION 4:
Allow LNGOs to invest more on their internal needs and systems

SOLUTION 5:
Specify the role of INGOs to be more focused on monitoring and compliance and have their budget reflect this role

SOLUTION 6:
Unify the partnership standards between donors so the local partner will be able to meet one standard

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS + ROSE/THORN/BUD

In this exercise, participants gave each other feedback on the proposed solutions presented in the last exercise. This reflection was facilitated through the Rose, Thorn, Bud activity. A rose represented positive feedback they had about the proposed solution, a thorn presented an opportunity to reflect on how the solution could be improved, and a bud represented an idea that would be grown further. An example is shared below.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Changing organizational policies at local and international levels to include shared ICR when signing partnership agreements

ROSE

Overhead allows LNGOs to build increased capacity and achieve sustainability

THORN

Donor has to agree on the percentage split

BUD

Responsibility of the donor to ensure equal split between LNGO and INGO of the overhead based on efforts

Proposed Solutions

FINANCE

- Establish pooled funds exclusively for LNGOs
- Consider the graduation approach in the funding and partnership strategies for LNGOs
- Strengthen LNGO capacity by focusing on their real needs and invest in their institutional capacity
- Ensure that LNGOs receive a fair percentage of overhead + unify donor standards

HR

- Establish a standardized system of salary scales
- Invest in internship, secondment, and other learning opportunities
- Programmatic + organizational capacity strengthening along with participation in strategic decisions
- Respect for NNGO culture, experience, and risk sharing
- Advocate for shared ICR

POWER

- Joint risk ownership analysis between INGOs + NNGOs
- Joint advocacy to governments on sanctions, anti-terrorism, and money transfers

CONCRETE ACTIONS MILESTONES

This exercise is an extension of the NGO Forum 2022 localization workshop. It delved deeper into what actions should be taken and map out how they could progress even further. The categories for the concrete actions are listed below as well as a few examples from the workshop.

Categories

1. **Risk**
2. **Promote the Principles of Partnership**
3. **Capacity Strengthening**
4. **UN/INGOs as Localization Enablers**
5. **Enable LNGOs' Access to Funding**
6. **Promote Local Actor Influence and Participation in Decision Making**

ACTION
Risk

Concrete Action #1
Work with INGO + NNGOs to explore ways of providing the local partners with overhead costs + how to properly implement with risk mitigation structure

Concrete Action #2
Ensure continuous development of internal systems with focus on accountability, risk mitigation, HR, duty of care, and internal financial controls (avoiding excessive use of cash)

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Adopt with the recommendation of IASS interagency standard community report

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Strong internal control system, accountability, segregation of duties, audits, policies and procedures should be in place to enhance reporting and cross cutting issues

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Policies/procedures/SOPs for overhead spending should be in place

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Strengthen the internal control system by using external/international experiences

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Secure overhead from all donors/partners to cover all institutional capacity building requirement

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
The local partner should be prepared to receive funding directly from prime donors through more awareness about donor regulations

ACTION
UN/INGOs as localization enabler

Concrete Action #1
Standardize the overhead process to be more consistent and comprehensive in coordination with donors and partners

Concrete Action #2
Develop a transparent partnership and localisation strategy

Concrete Action #3
Consider creative criteria for partner selection, including access, field input, reputation, and potential

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Establish standardized policies and consult with the donor on minimum standards.

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Mobilisation of resources - funding and human resources, agreeing on priorities and strategy

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Identify new selection criteria nad publish new tool

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Introduce and implement the new policy

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Implementation and evaluation

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Launch, evaluate impact, and make revisions

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Develop a transparent partnership and localisation strategy

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Revise strategy based on feedback

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Follow up and update

ACTION
Enable LNGOs' access to funding

Concrete Action #1
Impose a percentage of the grants INGOs receive to go directly to LNGOs

Concrete Action #2
Explore ways to introduce direct funding from donors to national NGOs

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Policies and overhead and duty of care need to be developed and updated by INGOs first, LNGOs next, and then shared with donors

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Increase capacity strengthening process that incorporates real need of LNGOs to make sure that they can reach a level where they can directly acquire funds

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Developing tools to monitor and control the 25% grand bargain policy and splitting the overhead between INGO and LNGO based on level of effort

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Establish platform for LNGOs to receive direct funding and simplify pool funding process

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Increase direct funding to LNGOs

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
LNGOs lead the strategic plan of the platform

ACTION
Promote Local Actor Influence and Participation in Decision Making

Concrete Action #1
Explore possible improvements to existing practices and measures to ensure the effectiveness of cluster co-leads in fostering collective decision-making

Concrete Action #2
Explore ways of setting up consortium and work together to share experiences and capacity. Improve the quality of both implementation and advocacy components.

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Advocacy with donors to allocate budget for this position in LNGO grants

Short Term Milestone (1 yr)
Organizational capacity strengthening and development policy by donors

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Revise the co-coordinator TOR balance the co-lead role

Medium Term Milestone (2-3 yrs)
Capacity development implementation with partners

Long Term Milestone (5+ yrs)
Include consortium as a mandatory criteria in CFPs

PLENARY DISCUSSION

Risk Sharing

NNGOs claimed that international actors transfer risk to them all the time, without covering any overheads. This system of transferring risk has been developed according to a framework developed by international actors, which the NNGOs are not invited to participate in the development of. However, they are still expected to take on the risks that have been transferred. The result of this is that as soon as issues arise, NNGOs are suspended immediately and any investigation that occurs is done after costs have been excluded.

NNGOs are operating in an extremely risky environment in NW Syria. The likelihood and impact of the risks are high. This requires international partners and donors to find a way to accept these risks and have meaningful engagements with NNGOs on how these risks can be shared. It is believed that ignorance of the context among international actors and donors contributes to this inequity of risk sharing.

There is little focus on the safety and security for NNGOs from their international partners and donors. Not understanding or accepting the daily security risks faced by NNGOs and their staff members adds to the feeling that risks are not being shared. Policies on duty of care between partners need to be agreed upon, however, it was claimed that these are the first components of a budget to be removed by a donor.

Transparency and Information Sharing

NNGOs believe that they are required to share everything with donor and international partners, but that it does not work the other way around. INGOs do not always share the final reports with NNGOs but send straight to donors. There were similar points raised with regard to budgets, costs and salaries. NNGOs never receive this information about their international partners.

Capacity

There was frustration expressed by the NNGOs that the level of capacity being expected of them was constantly changing making it impossible to always meet the criteria. It was also claimed that capacity strengthening was important but that donors are reluctant to fund it. The NNGOs acknowledged that they have learnt a lot from INGOs and they are not "trying to or want to push the INGOs out".