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BEYOND BARRIERS

NW SYRIA CASE STUDY:
DOOR BEYOND WAR

Lead Authors

Bekah Curtis-Heald

Contributors

Mark Johnson, Melody Wei, Oona Mitchell, Elisabeth Ashley Haugen

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Door Beyond War (DBW) was established as an NGO in Syria in 2015 and registered in Türkiye in 2018. As the organization's name suggests, DBW is focused on enabling peace-building in Syria through the support of civil society in the country. A critical component of its work is helping grassroots-level individuals and organizations find and fulfill their role ("door" means "role" in Arabic) in moving the country forward, enabling Syrian communities to take responsibility for decision-making and implementing change for themselves.

DBW sees themselves as a strategic partner for grassroots-level communities and civil society; they respond to the needs of these groups and as a financial and legal entity registered in Turkey, are able to provide them with the support to play a larger role in societal change.

To support Syrian civil society, DBW has two main programmatic areas: community development and economic empowerment. Under the community development program, DBW focuses on strengthening the capacities of youth and community-based organizations. Under economic empowerment, DBW focuses on micro-finance and other economic empowerment programs, as they believe that economic development will enable communities to be able to do more and function more independently.

DBW derives its main funding sources from major bilateral donors and development agencies including the European Union (EU), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in partnership with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). They also get some private funding from foundations, including the Asfari Foundation, as well as funding from private individuals.

DBW has been implementing a project with direct funding from the EU for over 30 months. The structure of this project represents a notable success story for several reasons. First, DBW itself is receiving direct funding from the EU, rather than having to work through an INGO or other intermediary. Second, the project involves a local partner, the Youth of Change Network, who is not registered in Türkiye and is only registered with the local council in North Aleppo. The Youth of Change Network is a network that includes 26 local development committees and 240 community organizers throughout NW Syria. In partnering with Youth of Change Network, DBW has overcome a barrier that often arises for Syrian NGOs who are not registered in Türkiye but would like to participate in projects with international funding.

This partnership is notable as it is structured such that the Youth of Change Network was a co-applicant for the funding alongside DBW, rather than a sub-grantee or beneficiary of the funding. DBW described a 3-year process to advocate for this funding to be shared with the Youth of Change Network (YCN). They emphasized that to truly support community-based groups and youth, donors need to fund organizations within Syria and not only those with Turkish registration or headquarters.

In conversations with the donor, DBW drew an important distinction between CBOs and NGOs, noting that civil society in Syria does not necessarily equate with formal organizations like NGOs, who are often viewed as civil society organizations. Instead, to truly work with civil society, donors need to go a level deeper and look at less formal organizations, who are run by and embedded in local communities. In the case of this project, the donor had the will to support this level of organizations and was able to be convinced to change their typical funding practices to make this project possible.

DBW noted that some donors have shifted their strategies over time, enabling greater support of local organizations. First, donors began to give money to NGOs to support CBOs as programmatic beneficiaries. The strategy then began to slowly shift towards viewing CBOs as partners, acknowledging their unique capacities and greater on-the-ground knowledge.

While DBW is the primary recipient of the funding for this particular project, this still represents a significant departure from traditional funding strategies from bilateral donors. Until recently, organizations were not allowed to have a co-applicant who was not registered outside Syria. Under this arrangement, though the Youth of Change Network is a mostly voluntary organization, trainers will be given an allowance, and a Field Officer will also be paid a salary to manage the project activities. Since the network does not have a formal bank account, DBW is providing funds in a flexible manner, utilizing their legal methods of transferring money.

This case study represents a tangible example of capacity sharing, whereby two entities (an NGO and a CBO) are contributing their respective capacities to a partnership, rather than one entity building the capacity of the other in a unilateral fashion. In describing the partnership, DBW emphasizes that the Youth of Change Network is leading the implementation of many of the project activities. DBW also emphasizes the importance of shared ownership, highlighting that sharing decision-making power with the Youth of Change Network strengthens their capacities in program delivery. DBW asserts that acknowledging the inherent legitimacy of CBOs is the first step of capacity strengthening, as CBOs are given the opportunity to step up when others recognize their legitimacy and importance.

DBW reports that they are doing well in terms of human resources; though they have a small staff, the majority of whom are located in Syria, including the CEO, their partnership with Youth of Change Network means that they have a great deal of human capital to rely on due to the large array of volunteers working in the Network. This allows them to do a lot of work with limited budgets. Moreover, DBW collaborates with several youth-led voluntary teams whose representatives lead initiatives from the design phase onward, fostering ownership. Local Development Committees (LDCs) of YCN also contribute to monitoring and evaluation efforts.

**CONTRIBUTING RESPECTIVE
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Additionally, the nature of their work can incentivize people to stay in Syria instead of leaving to find other opportunities. Namely, the work that DBW is doing with the Youth of Change Network promotes strong social ties and networks within NW Syria, allowing community members to do work that has meaning and importance for them. Working with these projects can also give people the skills to work with NGOs in the future, creating job prospects. A tangible example of how DBW's work creates social cohesion is its revolving loan fund, whereby borrowers play a role in funding other projects through the fund as they repay their loans, creating a mechanism where different projects can support one another financially.

DBW also provides an important and notable example of an organization receiving bilateral funding while being allowed flexibility in how they plan and report their activities. In their partnership with SIDA, DBW uses outcome mapping tools instead of a logical framework for their activities. This gives DBW more flexibility to be responsive to local priorities throughout implementation instead of being more prescriptive from the start. Additionally, they have been able to report their impacts through the highlighting of success stories that can illustrate their unique approach and the effects this approach has on local organizations and communities, rather than reducing this impact to quantitative measurements alone (for example, number of people trained vs. impact and significance of the training).

DBW provides an example of how donors and local organizations can work together to support critical work that strengthens the capacities of local networks, organizations, and individuals over the long term in protracted conflict and/or humanitarian contexts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **DBW takes on a role as a strategic partner for grassroots-level communities and civil society. As a registered NGO in Türkiye, they can leverage this position to support these community groups.**
- **DBW receives funds directly from the EU without an intermediary for a project, in partnership with the Youth of Change Network, who are a co-applicants, despite the mostly voluntary YCN not being registered in Türkiye. This acknowledgement of the legitimacy of non-registered entities by the donor is key.**
- **The partnership between DBW and the Youth of Change Network is built on principles of shared ownership. The Network shares decision-making power and leads on the implementation of many activities.**
- **The case study provides an example of capacity sharing, where DBW has developed capacities on program delivery by partnering with the Youth of Change Network.**
- **DBW describes the flexibility of measuring impact by outcome mapping, which is afforded by another donor, SIDA, as being more conducive to locally-led action. Success stories of actions are better captured in this way from communities, compared to the logical framework approach.**

