

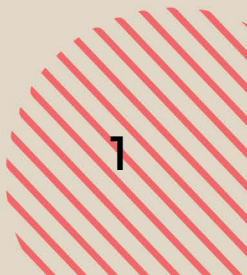


Partnerships with Grassroots

In North-West Syria



January - 2023





This research is conducted by Door Beyond War organization in collaboration with Youth of Change Network. It is written by Amal shaiah Istanbouli and supervised by Karam Hilly. It was also reviewed by participating volunteering teams and organizations.

Data collection and Analysis was carried by the research team at Youth of Change Network.



Executive Summary

This research discusses partnerships with and among grassroots and organizations in Northwest Syria. Grassroots in the course of the research means volunteering teams and CBOs only, and the concerned organizations are those who are establishing or supporting partnerships in Northwest Syria.

The research focuses on the motivations of partnering and draws a line between internal motivations and external motivations.

It also analyses the benefits and the challenges of partnerships at different stages as well as foundation and dissolving procedures. This research sheds light on the cross-conflict partnerships as a new model which is receiving conflicting reactions within the Syrian context. The role of partnerships in localization the human response is also uncovered thoroughly.

Finally, recommendations from the Grassroots and the concerned organizations are presented to improve professionalism and sustainability of partnerships to foster localization.





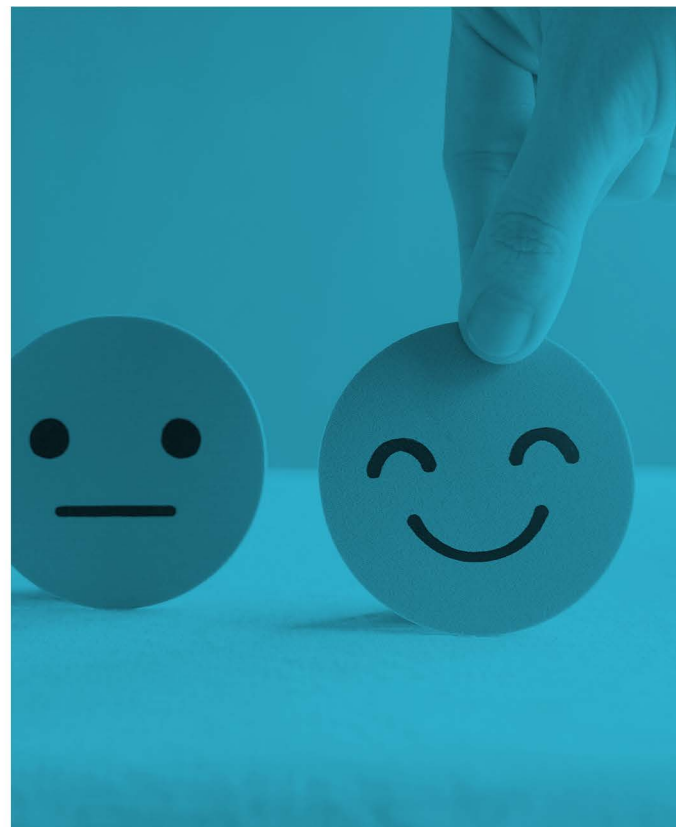
Design and Methods:

The research adopted a mixed method design to uncover partnerships from different aspects using both primary and secondary data sources. Several toolkits issued by international actors were studied in addition to academic papers on partnerships and networking in general.

Qualitative data was collected by conducting 27 semi-structured interviews with grassroots in/out partnerships and 4 representatives of concerned Syrian organizations were also interviewed. At a later stage, 3 FGDs with team leaders were run to further explore certain themes such as; partnership challenges and localization via partnerships. A thematic approach was conducted to analyse collected data and produce the findings.

Most Important Findings:

Majority of the grassroots understand the partnership commitments in general as they highlighted certain aspects such as cooperation, coordination, time and effort management in order to realize a specific goal shared among different partners. They differentiated between different models of partnering including network, coalition, forum and others. However, no clear definitions of these examples were reached due to context variations and because the partnerships model is still growing in the Syrian context.



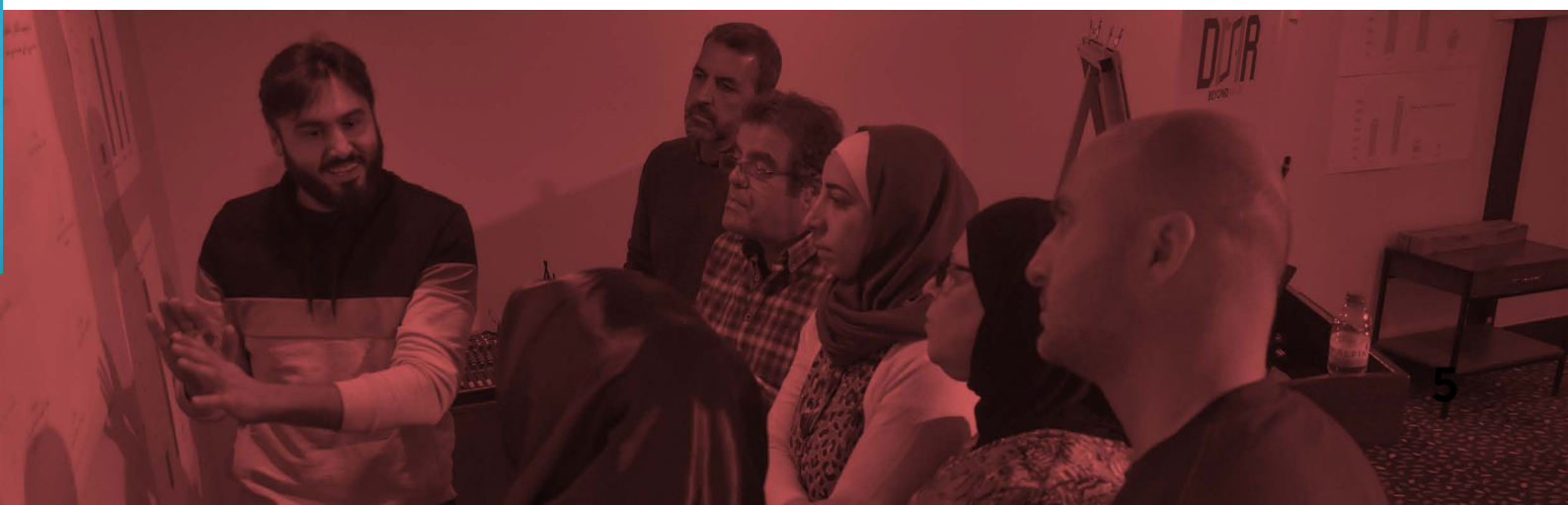
Most Important Findings:

Partnerships motivations for grassroots included increased accessibility for a bigger geographical scope, avoiding duplication at work and increased resources. The financial component was highly stressed as a main trigger for grassroots. The research presents an analytical study by comparing the role of the financial component from different perspectives.

It was found that although it is a very effective trigger for partnering, several successful examples of finance free partnerships were found. A good example is huge advocacy campaigns that require efforts in wide geographical lands and the protective coverage provided via multi partners. Organizations' motivations included a strategic aim to empower the Syrian civil society and realising long-term development goals; moreover, working in collaboration with grassroots was a demand by several donors.

Partnerships have many challenges that vary according to each stage. The first challenge is identifying the suitable partner who shares the vision, goal and values for the specific period. Then follows the foundation challenges of getting formal papers and permission to found a new entity. Such challenges escalate when the partners operate in different geographic location with different controlling authorities.

During implementation, reaching an agreement regarding the vision, the goals and the work mechanisms in a way that grant space for all partners without the hijack of a dominant partner was identified as the biggest challenge. Grassroots also stressed that writing a Memorandum of Understanding to clarify roles and duties of contracting partners helps maintain a sustainable partnership.



Most Important Findings:

The research highlighted cross-conflict lines partnership as new experience in the Syrian context. The civil society expressed contradicting views. Organizations running these partnerships stressed the role of such models in getting people together to find more comprehensive solutions.

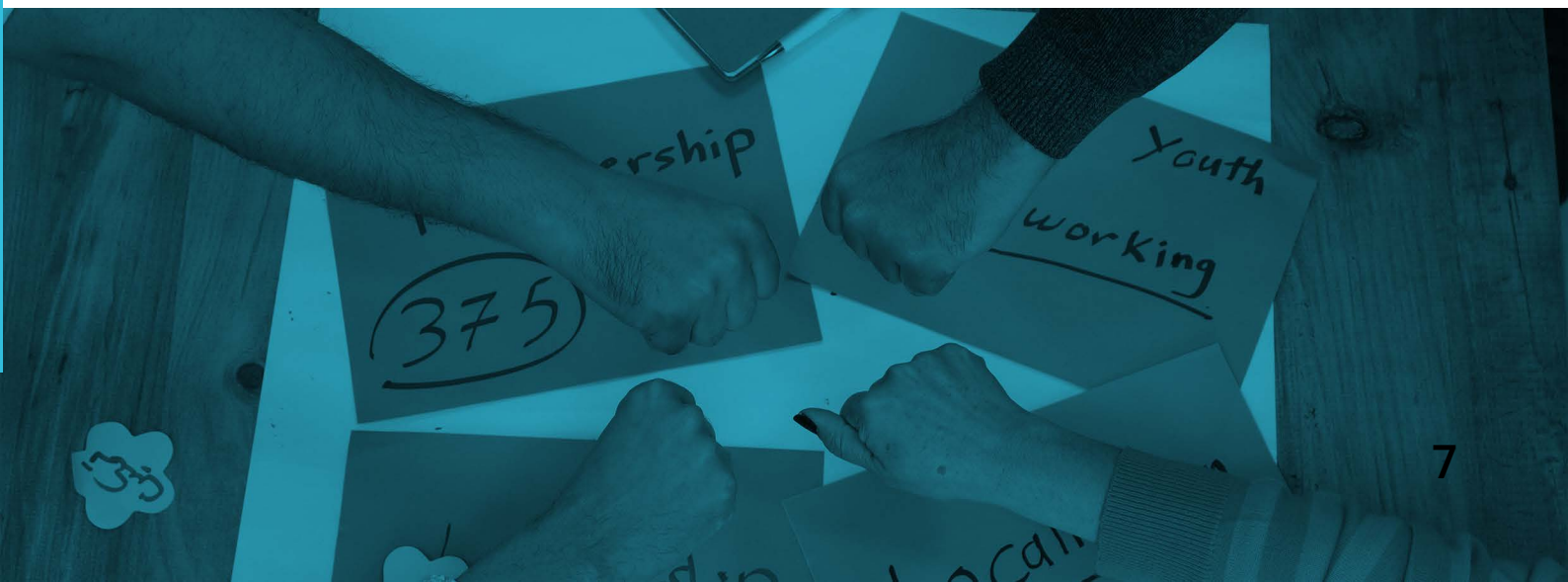
Contracting partners were always recognized as separate from the de facto authority in their areas. On the other hand, rejecting voices stressed lack of trust as a main gap. Partnering with grassroots in this model should be completely restricted among independent entities and to serve civilians only. Yet, such practices are unattainable, according to them.

Localization of humanitarian response through active partnerships is a new concept that has been called upon in the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. This concept is still fresh for most actors, in particular for grassroots in Syria. On the other hand, organizations presented a strategic view and practical pathways to foster localization. The research expanded in discussing grassroots' opinions in these pathways.

At the end, although localization is internationally recognized as a necessity, its implementation is hindered by several challenges in the field. The research presents recommendations for localization through active partnerships.

Recommendations

- Replace capacity building by capacity sharing concept and find creative and sustainable ways to provide unique long term training programs that enhance learning and good practices among grassroots.
- Avoid rigidity or bias to certain groups or certain areas when dealing with grassroots and provide safe spaces that grant more freedom for all partners.
- Consider local actors as equal partners rather than implementing partners and ensure contracts identify each partner's roles and responsibilities.
- Acknowledge the added value of complementary partnerships and prioritise sustainable partnerships that is tailored to meet the needs of all partners rather than partnering for short projects only.
- Facilitate partnering with youth-led or women-led teams and find creative ways to facilitate issuing formal papers and founding new partnership entities through active networks and decision makers.



Recommendations

- Foster grassroots- donor direct communication and increase core budget for grassroots.
- Avoid superiority when dealing with grassroots and increase the sense of ownership among all partners to empower grassroots and increase projects that widen the civil society space in particular in areas where the civil society is highly limited.
- Show more interest in proposals coming from grassroots as they mirror the community needs. and conduct proper participatory need assessment.
- Although ongoing funding for grassroots is critical, funding requirements should be reconsidered to maintain more space, flexibility, and creativity and to avoid financial fund domination.





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