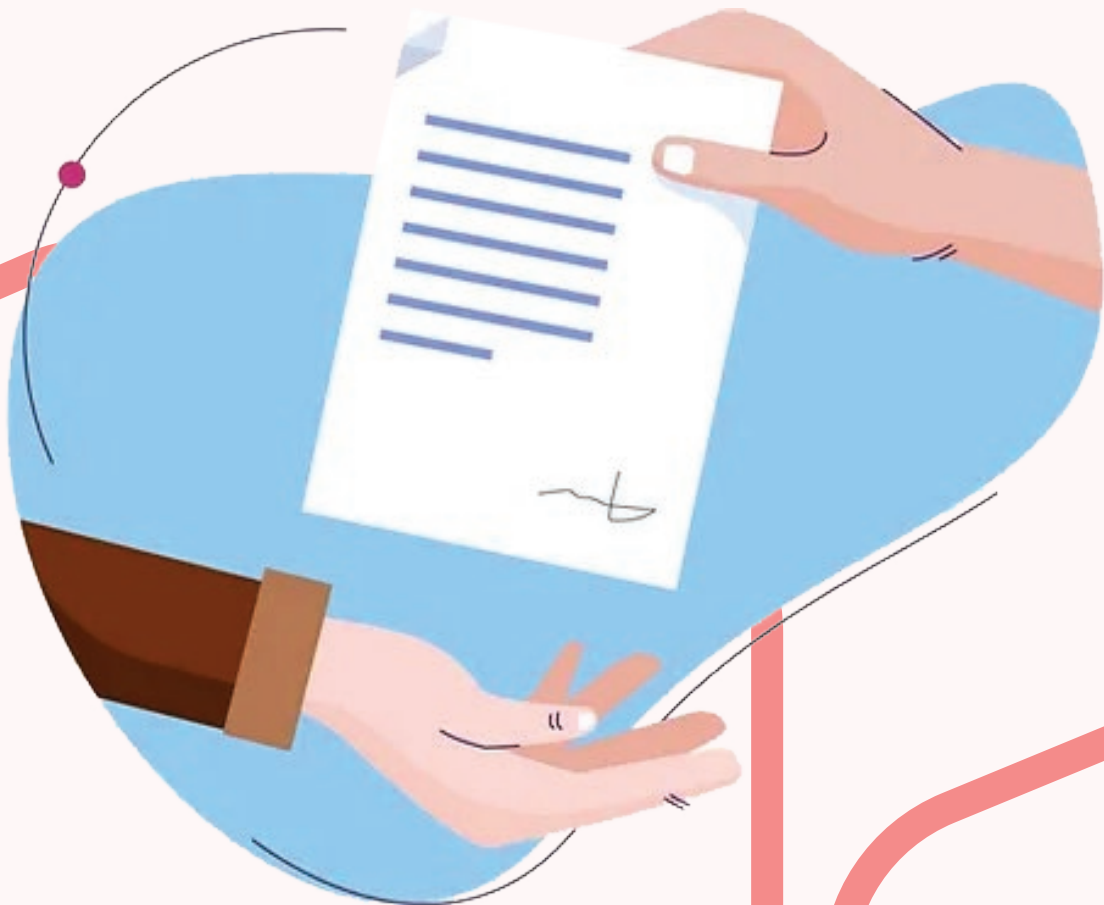




Accountability Executive Summary





About Door Beyond War (DBW)



Door Beyond War (DBW) organization is a civil society organization registered in Turkey since mid-2018, working with the Syrian community structures to reach its vision of a decent society capable of overcoming challenges through creative utilization of available resources. To this end, **DBW** is committed to working within the scope of community development programs and economic empowerment, building the community strength to effectively organize and assemble its resources through capacity-building, self-sufficiency, and microfinance projects. **DBW** is motivated by its belief in community work and the importance of building strong relationships between the Syrian people parts by the means of dialogue and advocacy in promoting community cohesion. **DBW** is experienced in projects that aim at increasing community cohesion, activating dialogue, and distributing roles among the various segments of the Syrian society. Through these projects, **DBW** has also focused on building the capacity of CBOs and grassroots, enhancing their self-sufficiency opportunities, and enriching their ability to launch initiatives using their local resources.

About Youth of Change Network (YCN)



Youth of Change Network (YCN) is a voluntary community-based organization established in Northern Syria in 2015. **YCN** works to enhance the role of community initiatives and volunteer work and to achieve its vision of an empowered and effective society capable of making change and contributing to decision-making. Therefore, **YCN** has been working through its community committees spread in Idlib, Western and Northern countryside of Aleppo and parts of Hama countryside to launch community initiatives that serve and empower the Syrian society to face the harsh conditions created by bombardment and displacement. **YCN** consists of 27 community development committees in addition to 7 technical teams; training team, research team, campaigns and advocacy team, women team, self-sufficiency projects team, forcibly displaced team, and media team. The Network has launched many campaigns and initiatives and organized several capacity-building programs in the fields of education, social cohesion, and psychological support, safety and security, and public interest services.

SAY platform



This platform was established as a joint project between the **DOOR organization** and **Youth of Change Network**, which is a youth platform that seeks to enhance citizenship by opening spaces for dialogue, participating in public affairs issues, and contributing to decision-making.

Team Work

Researcher and data analyst

Amal Istanbuli

Research supervision and review

Karam Hilly

Data collection and field research

Research team at the Youth Change Network

Administrative coordination

Nazir Şerif

Design

Muhammad Salem Suleiman

Image source

Door organization activities in Syria
Artificial intelligence

الأدوات

- 1- فؤلات فر
- 2- جلسات حوار
- 3- وسائل الأ
- 4- بدو شورات
- 5- استبيانات
- 6- ونهمة الكثر

الأدوات التي نقوم من خلالها

- 1- جلسات الفردية والجماعية..
- 2- استبيانات
- 3- جلسات الرأي
- 4- تقارير مرئية.
- 5- مواقع التواصل
- 6- ...

The volunteers teams that raised in the Syrian context serve as a vital link between humanitarian organizations, civil society, and the local population. Despite being a relatively new concept in Syria, partnerships among these teams offer benefits like broader access, resource exchange, and learning opportunities. The research focuses on the role of accountability in partnerships between volunteer teams and funding organizations and presents this concept from various angles, at the end it provides a set of recommendations for enhancement.

This paper is part of the a series research papers conducted by Door under the title of: Assessing the Functionality of Partnership at Empowering Youth in Syria; the partnerships between volunteer teams and the funding organizations

The study developed a semi-structured interview tool for qualitative data collection from volunteer teams in NWS, undergoing internal testing and pilot interviews. The research team conducted 25 physical interviews, ensuring diversity in gender, housing status, team age, members, and support received. Initial data analysis led to **conduct six focused discussion sessions with new team representatives** that were also analyzed. The paper includes quotes from interviews and discussions to amplify the voices of Syrian youth volunteers, enriching the discourse on partnerships in the Syrian context.

Methodology

Discussion

The concept of accountability involves the duty to take responsibility for decisions and actions without reservation. While there is a theoretical emphasis on the importance of accountability in partnerships, its practical implementation is often hindered by a lack of clear delineation of responsibilities. Accountability is further defined as the active commitment of workers to empower participating groups in influencing their priorities and dealing with disasters, focusing on the rights, dignity, capacity, and safety of these groups. In organizational contexts, accountability requires the organization to take full responsibility, considering the community's needs and concerns, and transparently explaining its decisions and actions to them.





Findings

Responses from representatives of volunteer teams in northern Syria indicate that the concept of accountability between volunteer teams and supporting organizations is relatively recent and somewhat limited for many teams. Many emphasize accountability towards targeted communities rather than between funding organizations and partners. This calls for an examination of volunteer teams' readiness to embrace accountability towards funding organizations or other partners, starting with theoretical understanding before discussing practical implementation

Are volunteer teams

held accountable by the organizations?

Firstly, the table below illustrates the extent to which the accountability principle is applied on volunteer teams in reality, based on research results, by posing the following question to the teams: Has your team ever been held accountable by the supporting organization under any circumstances?

Answers	Number	Percentage
Never	40	%72
Once Only	10	%18.5
Twice and more	5	%9.5
Total	55	%100



The table shows that %72 of teams have never been held accountable by funding organizations, a notably high percentage given the complex context in northern Syria. Explaining these numbers requires detailed information beyond this scope. However, they highlight a mutual culture between volunteer teams and organizations, indicating a non-mandatory nature of accountability for various reasons.

YOUTH

It's worth noting that adhering to the accountability principle becomes more challenging when working with volunteers. However, it is crucial to uphold accountability as a valid and applicable principle for all involved in service provision. While volunteers must be held accountable, the methods differ from those used with other paid workers. Holding volunteer teams accountable is necessary to ensure the effective execution of tasks that serve the cause without causing harm to any group.

Therefore, any claim that volunteer teams are not accountable is rejected. Accountability is independent of monetary compensation, and even if volunteer teams don't receive wages, they must adhere to work principles. This contradicts the view of some team representatives who believe there is no accountability for voluntary work.

"In general, volunteer teams at the moment do not have accountability because their work is voluntary. Participants can choose to work or not; there is no mechanism that forces anyone in volunteer teams to work or be held accountable. Since the work is voluntary."

Leader of a volunteer team in northern Syria



Are Funding organizations held accountable by volunteer teams?

We posed this question to volunteer teams to find out if any of them had actually held funding organizations accountable in practice. The data obtained from participating teams revealed that only %7 resorted to activating accountability systems repeatedly

Answers	Number	Percentage
Never	31	%65
Once Only	20	%36
Twice and more	4	%7
Total	55	%100





DOOR
BEYOND WAR

شباب التغيير
Youth of Change

أصوات شابة

تعزيز مشاركة الشباب السوري وإدماجهم
في التنمية المحلية وعملية صنع القرار

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+90 501 326 36 67
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Funding organizations serve as the link between the donor (often external) and the volunteer team in the field. Some teams highlighted the authoritative role played by these organizations, as they are the ones bringing funds to the teams. Consequently, these organizations become immune to accountability. One prevalent form of accountability absence in the field is restricted access to information related to the projects undertaken by the volunteer teams. This practice leads to a deficiency in understanding and a lack of ownership by the team of the projects they execute. As a result, the team's role is confined to execution, becoming a blind instrument in the hands of the higher authority, the organization.

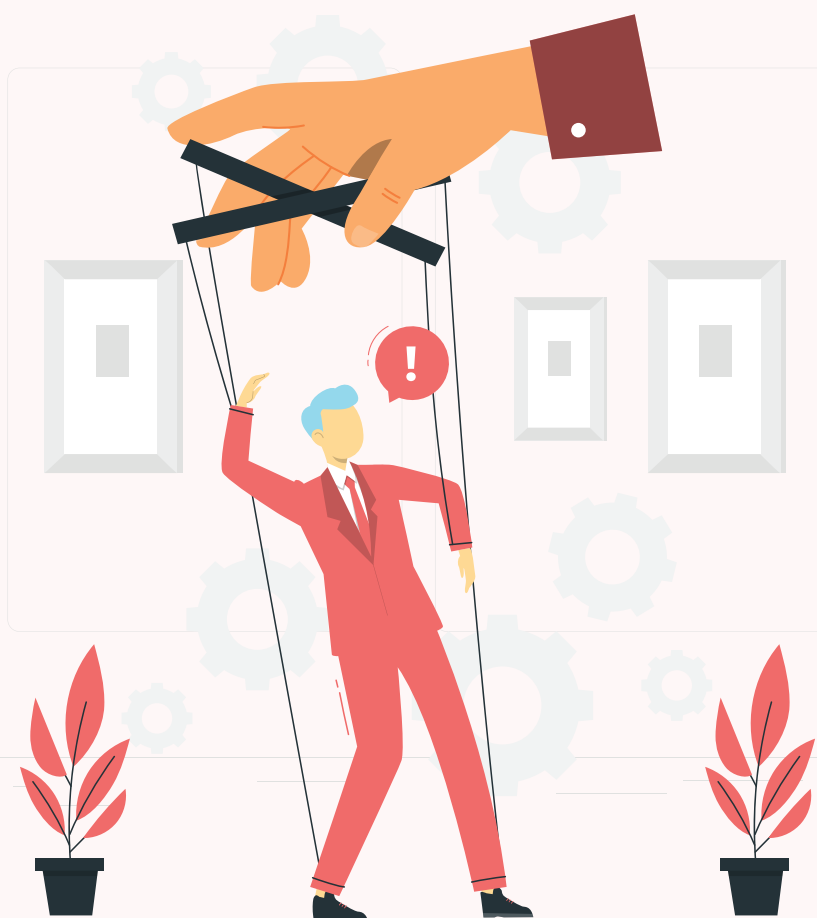
"The volunteer team is compelled and is under pressure from this funding organization for this work. In general, organizations operate as if I am the supporter, and you work for me. You execute everything I ask for."

Representative of a volunteer team in Idlib countryside.



"Typically, we may not know the clear background of the project, the working mechanism, the resources, or anything. We are asked to implement this work, and we often cannot ask many questions about these matters."

Volunteer team in Idlib





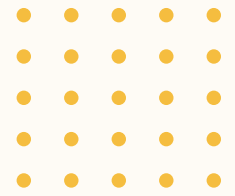
Examining the roots of these practices involves looking at the approach of both parties: organizations and teams. Organizations may sometimes adopt a hegemonic approach, assuming more expertise, but teams, especially experienced ones in the field, have to take the initiative and hold the organization accountable. The memorandum of understanding plays a crucial role in clarifying responsibilities, tasks, and rights in the partnership.



"The volunteer team is the weakest point. There are mechanisms for accountability and complaints against the organizations we dealt with. Some organizations showed indifference or sluggishness in responding to complaints, leading to frustration among the team"

A volunteer team in Idlib Countryside





The Importance of Accountability



First, it should be clarified that accountability is a principle used to avoid mistakes as much as possible. It is a tool that ensures rights for all parties involved. It is a principle that does not diminish the value of any party or question its capabilities or performance. On the contrary, accountability corrects the work and removes doubts about any action. One of the benefits of accountability among all parties is that it enhances trust, as participants in the interviews emphasized.



|| "First, trust between the parties increases, strengthening the bonds of teamwork, promoting a volunteer culture as a volunteer team. Additionally, there is a creation of initiatives for new projects between the parties and an increase in mutual respect."

A volunteer team in Salqin



|| "Formal or superficial projects that only benefit the team will eventually collapse"

A volunteer team in the camps



"It limits corruption, reduces errors, and teaches us integrity. So far, there is no governance in organizations. Accountability teaches us to work on a high-level governance policy."

A volunteer team in Salqin.



On the other hand, the absence of accountability has a negative impact on the volunteer team and activities, affecting the philosophy of volunteer work in the community. Teams cited numerous instances of injustice due to the lack of implementation of this fundamental principle. Examples include being deprived of grants given to less competent teams, creating fake teams to secure grants in agreement with the organization, and exploiting teams, among other instances. Participants expressed a close connection between accountability and trust, highlighting how the absence of accountability leads to a lack of trust.

"A volunteer team attended training sessions with us, along with several other volunteer teams. They cited an example where they attended training with a certain organization, made promises, and submitted a project proposal. However, in the end, that organization withdrew and awarded the project to others. They created a volunteer team at that moment and took away their rights because there was no memorandum of understanding, no contracts, or any signed paperwork between them"

Representative of a volunteer team in the camps



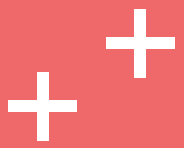
"Grant-worthy teams are often denied in favor of others, based on previous experiences. Through emerging networks formed by organizations, fake teams are selected that may not even exist or may be created within four or five months with the sole purpose of obtaining a grant. Afterward, the team dissolves, depriving another deserving team of the grant they need."

Volunteer Team in A'zaz





Accountability barriers



In an attempt to understand whether accountability is universally accessible or if there are barriers that need to be explored, we posed the following question to the participating teams: "**Were there cases when the team felt the need to hold the organization accountable but could not?**"

Answers	Number	Percentage
Never	40	%72
Once Only	10	%18
Twice and more	5	%10
Total	55	%100

The results indicate that %72 of the teams have not encountered situations requiring accountability, which is an unexpectedly high percentage considering the challenging Syrian context, marked by earthquakes, waves of displacement, and other emergencies. This discrepancy may arise from teams' lack of awareness regarding the need for accountability and its importance in specific situations due to an immature understanding within the teams. Volunteer teams may resort to silence regarding what they perceive as unfair practices and avoid holding organizations accountable. The reasons behind this misguided behavior could stem from various issues. According to the research findings, many teams mentioned various barriers to accountability, which can be categorized into two sections: reasons related to the volunteer team and reasons related to the organization."



Barriers related to volunteer Teams

lack of understanding of accountability concept and insufficient information on mechanisms

Absence of a legal accountability expert and inadequate documentation

Negative past experiences, fears of non-response and loss of trust

Blind acceptance of projects and memoranda of understanding without thorough examination

Absence of standards or protective laws for volunteer teams

Concerns about the cessation or non-renewal of support

Leaders fearing repercussions for holding the organization accountable

Internal divisions between supporters and opponents of accountability

Barriers related to funding organizations

Lack of attention to volunteer teams due to their perceived weakness

Neglect of complaints by the supporting organization

Weak coordination and absence of specific points of contact

Absence of trust between the supporting entity and volunteer teams

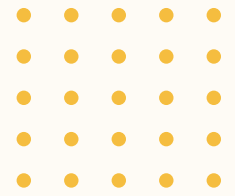
Lack of a clear understanding of collaboration by the organization

Difficulty accessing relevant individuals within the organization

Administrative corruption within the organization

Organization's ability to retaliate and deprive teams of funding





**Recommendations
to Enhance
Accountability**



The Theoretical Framework of Accountability

- Defining and conceptualizing accountability in the context of civil and volunteer organizations
- Emphasizing the importance of considering social gender standards and ensuring transparency and justice
- Upholding accountability involves rejecting the violation of values and disrespecting the region's norms
- Designing a manual containing contact information for organizations and volunteer teams and designating an accountability officer

Investing in Awareness and Training

- Investing in awareness and training regarding the concept of accountability equally among teams and organizations.
- Gradual inclusion of accountability in internal policies and partnership policies

Building the Capacities of Volunteer Teams

- Designing cognitive tools, practical exercises, and training for accountability within volunteer teams
- Making accountability maturity for volunteer teams a fundamental requirement before dealing with organizations or donors
- Training volunteer teams to activate the complaint mechanism and means of accountability, and applying them internally at the team level
- Recognizing that volunteer teams are the foundation of society and civil work
- Efforts to enhance the role and status of teams without linking power to support

Protecting Team Rights

- Focusing on protecting the rights of teams in the accountability process
- Ensuring that accountability measures do not violate the rights of individuals and teams and do not result in punitive reactions that harm the teams holding accountability

Empowering Internal and social responsibility

- Enhancing accountability to eliminate paternalistic operations within teams
- Ensuring that individuals joining teams have sufficient awareness of their roles, responsibilities, and rights
- Involving civil society and local authorities in the accountability issue and enhancing the role of social community responsibility

Establishing a Reliable Accountability Entity

- The importance of having a reliable entity specialized in promoting accountability.
- Confirming the entity's endorsement by all teams as a crucial element in the accountability process.

Enhancing Transparency Mechanisms

- Emphasizing the crucial role of transparency in accountability
- Activating necessary measures to enhance transparency mechanisms within organizations, teams, and partnerships

Legal Aspects and Partnerships

- Expanding legal aspects within teams, highlighting the importance of having legal specialists to review contracts, understanding the team's role in partnerships and taking proper action to deal with entities that do not adhere to their commitments.

Preventive Measures and a Culture of Collaboration

- Implementing a preventive approach through regular meetings between teams and organizations
- Promoting a culture of cooperation, understanding, and reaching solutions before resorting to formal procedures
- Using feedback and benefiting from previous experiences, especially for volunteer teams
- Sharing success stories among volunteer teams to reinforce the concept of accountability
- Writing an official clause in the memorandum of understanding regarding organizational and team accountability in case of any contractual violations
- Adopting a written memorandum of understanding between the team and the organization and adhering to all its clauses





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