SAY

2023

Funding Executive Summary

Exploring the Impact of Funding on Partnerships while Empowering Youth in Syria

2023

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 Istanbouli

Research supervision and review

Karam Hilly

Data collection and field research

Research team at the Youth Change Network

Administrative coordination

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Design

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Image source

Door organization activities in Syria

Artificial intelligence

Volunteer teams in Syria work according to available funding from Organizations that act as a bridge to the donors. Within the ongoing lack of fund within the recent years, funding became more competative and volutneer teams were to face various challenges. This paper examines the negative impacts of relying on the shrinking fund available for volunteer teams in oppositon held areas in North West Syria.

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 partnerhsips between volunteer teams and the funding organizations

Mythodology 01

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, team age, members, and financial support received. Initial data analysis led to conduct **6** focused discussion sessions with new team representatives that were also analyised. **The paper includes quotes from interviews and discussions to amplify the voices of Syrian youth volunteers, enriching the discourse on partnerships within the Syrian context.**

Discussion

02
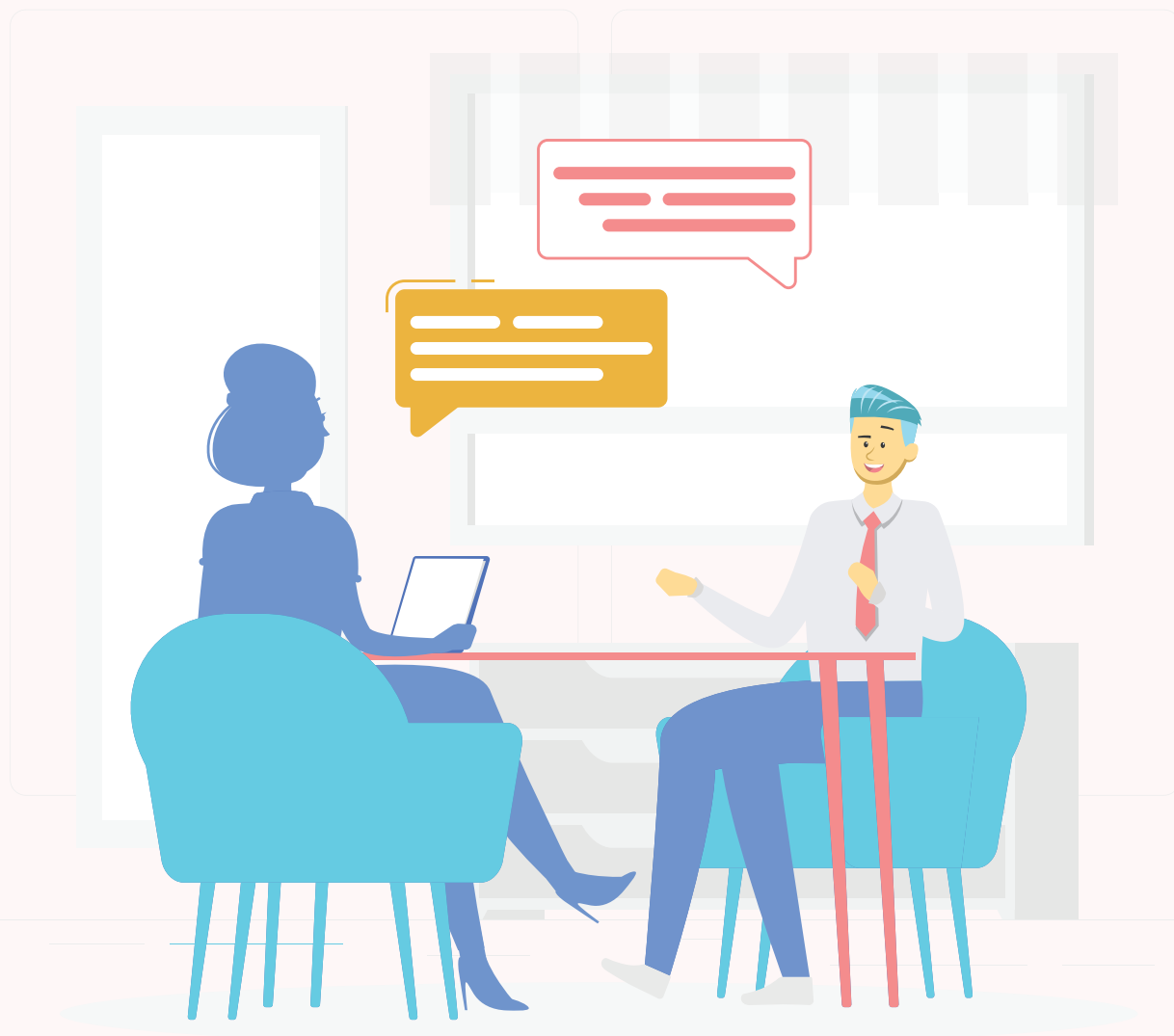
The Role of Fund within the Syrian Context

Financial support is crucial for humanitarian and developmental work in northern Syria, but recent declines in the support have raised concerns. Over the past three years, support decreased from $2.82 billion in 2020 to $2.38 billion in 2023, leading to a rise in unmet requirements from %38 to %70. This decline has directly impacted the Syrian context, worsened by insecurity and the aftermath of earthquakes. Small volunteer teams are particularly affected, as their indirect financial support is limited and any reduction poses a threat to their activities and partnerships. The unique challenges in Syria warrant a thorough examination of the experiences of these volunteer teams.

What is Volunteering?

Volunteering, practical training, and fellowship are all forms of experiential learning or participation, but they differ in their nature, purpose, and how individuals engage in them. Volunteering is a type of experiential learning where individuals participate in activities with/without monetary compensation, aiming to provide a service or support to the community or organizations. **On the other hand, practical training refers to learning through practical experience and the actual application of skills. Fellowship, meanwhile, involves individuals participating in an academic or professional program to develop their skills in a specific field.**

The confusion between the three concepts mentioned above and their interchangeable use is common in the Syrian context. Therefore, the lack of clarity leads to misunderstanding, resulting in consequences and problems for the volunteer teams. **Consequently, when joining any volunteer team and working under the umbrella of a funding organization, it is essential to clarify all matters and designations to avoid any potential negative effects.**

Findings

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Support as a Foundation in Building Partnerships

Support plays a fundamental role in shaping and sustaining partnerships, which is evident. However, the roles that financial support plays in partnerships vary. Sometimes, it serves as the attracting factor for teams to enter into a specific partnership, while at other times, it acts as a factor for continuity and expansion of the volunteer team.

It is essential to note and distinguish between various types of partnerships, especially in terms of support. There are partnerships that rely on support, particularly financial support, meaning their continuity is linked to the presence of support, and the absence of support inevitably leads to the termination of the partnership. However, another type of partnership is connected to shared values and goals that unite the partnership entities . In this type of partnership, non-material support, such as logistical support, advocacy, and knowledge exchange, takes precedence.

"Honestly, there are associations and teams whose goal is to establish partnerships based on financial support, while there are organizations that do not necessarily need financial support but seek to expand their relationships and build their initiatives on the integration of knowledge and expertise. Initiatives built on financial support may collapse, whereas those built on empowering knowledge have greater sustainability."

Volunteer team in Maarat Misrin

While another group of participating teams distinguished between the continuity and effectiveness of the partnership. **This means that the partnership may continue in the absence of financial support but becomes ineffective, and communication continues between the parties but with limited real-world impact.**

It is noteworthy how teams deal with partnerships and funding. The research results reveal that partnerships can be a means to obtain financial support. Teams see partnerships as a bridge to secure funding that enables them to cover expenses and carry out activities. On the other hand, **some teams use partnerships to secure additional financial support,** while others see partnerships as a way to compensate for a lack of direct financial assistance.

Strategies of working under shrinking financial support

Operating in an environment with limited support has been a major challenge for volunteer teams in Syria over the past **12** years. The constant threat of reduced or discontinued funding poses a daily reality, potentially leading to burnout for these teams. Despite the challenges, **research findings show that volunteer teams adopt various alternative strategies to maintain the continuity of their activities in times of support scarcity or discontinuation.**

Volunteer teams, with their limited capabilities and insufficient resources, refuse to surrender and strive diligently to continue providing services to the exhausted community. Recognizing the close association between funding scarcity and weakened or suspended services, **these teams aim to preserve the momentum of their activities through alternative strategies.**

Despite not having the luxury of halting or suspending activities, volunteer teams innovate with alternative strategies to maintain the flow of services, crucial in the current humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey earlier this year, impacting infrastructure. Consequently, volunteer teams have resorted to innovative strategies to ensure the continuity of their activities.

Coordinating efforts internally between volunteer teams is one of the proposed solutions. Teams often collaborate, utilizing available resources and repurposing them to execute activities that do not require substantial budgets.

"You may have to resort to alternative methods, such as seeking assistance from local partners to stay in a specific location and making specific arrangements to maintain your presence. Additionally, you can continue by undertaking self-sustainable projects, like a sewing project to support women for a period of five months. Even if the support stops, having the machines and the presence of women provides the opportunity to continue the work."

A voluteer team in Aleppo Countryside.

Youth

Despite the variety of alternative strategies, they have limited impact. For instance, a team might resort to relying on alternative income sources such as donations, but these cannot be considered as useful and effective support sources like the funding obtained from partnerships with organizations. **This is primarily because they are not continuous, and they often result in limited amounts.**

Negative impacts of financial Support

Support is the backbone of developmental work in the current conditions in Syria. Recognizing and understanding the negative effects on relying on Funding clearly is the first step to resist and reduce these impacts. Accordign to the research they can be discussed on several levels; **those affecting the individual volunteer and those affecting the team as a whole,** in addition to a set of effects that reflect on partnerships and the culture of volunteer work in the community as a whole. Before expanding on these effects, it should be noted that the quality of the services provided is also influenced by relying on support. Usually, programs and projects become temporary to align with the available support and focus only on the short term. **The following table presents a set of negative effects according to the mentioned levels:**

Negative Impact
On The Volunteer Level

- Coupling volunteer work with obtaining financial support
- Exploitation of the volunteer concept to reach employment by non-serious engagement, affecting the dedication of other volunteer
- Creation of sensitivities and conflicts in financail support Distribution
- Difficulty in volunteers returning to work without compensation

Negative Impact
On The Volutneer Team Level

- The team transforming into an executive entity to achieve various goals for organizations through support and losses its freedom and creativity at work.
- Altering the team's policies to align with the donor/supporter.
- Implementing projects that do not align with the team's values solely for the purpose of obtaining support.
- Diminished quality of services provided when support is tied to activities beyond the team's specialization.
- Collapse and disintegration of some teams due to financial problems among members.
- Inability of the team to bear operational expenses after the discontinuation of support.
- Forcing the team to adopt strict financial procedures to align with organizations and donors, but losing flexibility and failing to maintain it after the end of support.
- Dissolution of the team structure, turning it into a quasi-organizational form close to organizations. This places it midway when support stops, making the team smaller than the organization and making it difficult to return to volunteer work.

Negative Impact
On The Partnership Level

- Intense and unfair competitio among teams.
- Increased nepotism, favoritism, and the preference of some teams through illegitimatly.
- Resorting to malicious complaints and defamation.
- Collapse and dissolution of partnerships due to financial issues between teams.
- Unsustainability of material-linked partnerships

Negative Impact
On The Volunteer Culture Level

- Working to change the perception of volunteer teams.
- Disseminating a culture of volunteerism.
- Enhancing the concept of community ownership for projects implemented within it.
- Distinguishing between volunteer work, training, and fellowship, as outlined in this paper in the discussion section.
- Avoiding confusion between the tasks of governmental entities and the tasks of organizations.

Recommendations

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Recommendations for Volunteer teams

To Find of Methods to Ensure Support Sustainability

- Implement effective accountability mechanisms to maintain team integrity and achieve specific goals
- Increase netwosxrsxccddsavaking and build positive relationships among teams, as well as with organizations and donors

To Develop Tools for Achieving Sustainability of Volunteer Teams

- Participate in relevant conferences and events to expand the network and expand the team's work.
- Prepare transparent periodic reports outlining progress, challenges, and successes to maintain donors' and community trust.
- Expand communication tools with donors, building relationships based on understanding and trust to enhance continuous support.

To Balance Realities and Available Support

- Set goals that empower the team's independence while encouraging integration with the community and partners
- Develop sustainable funding plans considering the assessment of needs and future developments

Recommendations for organizations

To Secure Support for Volunteer Teams

- Mobilize and advocate for issues supported and worked on by the teams
- Conduct meetings with teams to introduce and discuss new concepts in work, development, and improving results

Team Selection Process

- Establish a shared database among organizations targeting volunteer teams to exchange information about teams and enhance selection processes
- Develop mechanisms to ensure clear selection criteria and share them with all teams operating in the same field of expertise

Recommendations for Donors

Fair Percentage of Support for Collaborative Initiatives

- Define and allocate specific percentages of grants in each sector fairly, dedicating a defined proportion for initiative and CBOs
- Establish mechanisms to monitor the selection process of partner organizations for funded teams to ensure compliance with specified criteria

Developing Support Policies

- Enhance team participation in project design and implementation processes to increase effectiveness and impact
- Ease restrictions and grant criteria to encourage more diversity and innovation within teams

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