



INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ETUDES INTERNATIONALES
ET DU DEVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



Workshop Concept Note

Date: March 23rd

Location: Maison de la Paix, Chemin Eugène-Rigot, 1202 Genève, Pétale 5, Conference room C2

Localizing Humanitarian Response: Re-thinking Avenues of Support for Syrian Organizations

Summary and Background

The localization of humanitarian response is gaining increasing recognition by the humanitarian community. Supporting and working with local communities, civil society organizations and NGOs is being progressively regarded as a solution with the potential to enhance the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response. With their proximity, access and contextual knowledge, local actors “can overcome the challenges of shrinking access, fragmentation and incoherency in operations and the gaps between response, recovery and development.”ⁱ Similarly, local actors, which are to remain in the country once the crisis is over, are well placed to adopt a more sustainable response. However, despite the recognition of their potential, in reality local actors remain largely side-lined and are afforded little space by the international community.ⁱⁱ

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Syria. The potential of local actors in delivering humanitarian aid is magnified in such a complex political emergency, where direct access for international humanitarian actors is limited. Yet, precisely due to the complexity of the situation, many organizations struggle to identify suitable local partners. Nonetheless, field research conducted at the Graduate Institute by a team of postgraduate students for the organization *Geo Expertise* indicates that there are indeed a number of capable Syrian organizations actively demonstrating their capacity to take ownership and run sustainable humanitarian projects.ⁱⁱⁱ

The aim of this workshop is to identify strategies for key humanitarian actors, based in Switzerland, to capitalize on the potential of local Syrian actors currently working to deliver humanitarian assistance inside Syria.

Main Objective

The main objective of the workshop is to seek potential strategies of collaboration between the Swiss and Syrian humanitarian communities. The inputs and takeaways from the workshop will be integrated into an action plan. The workshop and action plan will address the overall objective through focusing on the following strategic goals:

- 1. Identifying ways of securing capable and trustworthy local Syrian partners.**
- 2. Exploring best practices to work with local Syrian partners** that maximize on their contextual proximity and knowledge, and builds on their existing capacities, allowing for a more localized and sustainable humanitarian response.
- 3. Finding best avenues of connecting international, Swiss and Syrian humanitarian organizations.**

Approach

Presenting key findings of the postgraduate research team and seeking the expertise and input of invited organizations to address the overall objective of the workshop.

1. **Organizing a workshop and moderate a discussion on the key areas of focus.**
This will include a brief presentation by postgraduate research team of their key findings relevant to each topic, and an interactive discussion by the invited organizations on each topic presented.
2. **Taking detailed minutes of the workshop, synthesizes and summarizing the key takeaways on each topic.**
3. **Using the shared inputs and takeaways of the workshop to create an action plan on how to link Swiss and Syrian organizations and best provide support for local Syrian humanitarian organizations.**

Audience

The target audience of the workshop is Swiss and Syrian humanitarian organizations. The participants of the workshop will consist of relevant and experienced members of Swiss and Syrian humanitarian organizations. Additionally, some interested stakeholders will be present to share in the results of the workshop. These organizations are invited based on their current expertise, interest and engagement with activities related to the Syrian crisis.

List of participants:

- Swiss Solidarity
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- Terre des hommes
- Medair
- HEKS/EPER
- Caritas
- Vivere
- UOSSM
- Help Syria
- Aga Khan Foundation
- Koenraad Van Brabant (Senior Peacebuilding Consultant)
- Smruti Patel (Localization Expert)

¹ International Federation of the Red Cross. *World Disasters Report: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness*. Lyon: International Federation of the Red Cross: p.11.

² Ramalingam, Ben, Bill Gray and Giorgia Cerruti. (2013). *Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses*. London: ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund: p. 4.

³ Dixon, Steven, Elsa Romera and Amal Sadozai. "Syrian Civil Society and the Swiss Humanitarian Community: Challenge, Opportunity and the Future of Syria." Report commissioned by Geo Expertise.