Roundtable on NGO Partnerships in Jordan

Summary Report

September 28, 2014
Executive Summary

At the request of some NGOs working in Jordan, the Middle East and North Africa hub of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies held a roundtable on NGO partnerships in Jordan, inviting community-based organizations, national NGOs and international NGOs. This one-day event provided an introduction on learning to date on partnerships in general, based on the latest experiences and research from around the world.

The participants had been invited to complete a survey expressing their understanding of partnerships and their motivations for engaging in partnerships, their hopes for the roundtable, their priorities and challenges, and their needs in making their partnerships more effective, among other things.

Two pairs of NGOs (one national and one international) currently working in partnership in Jordan presented case studies and outlined some of the successes and challenges they experienced in these partnerships.

The five Principles of Partnership were explored in groups, and challenges and solutions were discussed. Based on the participants’ feedback, the following were the priority solutions recommended for improving partnerships:

- Real engagement of CBOs in program design, including community involvement;
- Building on each other’s strengths (partners, CBOs, community);
- Starting the partnership with a workshop on expectations (MoU, roles and responsibilities of each, code of conduct, ethics), and defining results together;
- Starting with pilot projects and working together from the beginning of project cycle;
- Internal awareness-raising of each organization, training on representation & communication;
- Instilling a culture of sharing within individual organizations, and giving permission to be transparent with others;
- Strengthening communications mechanisms through meetings, experience sharing, feedback for improvement, all in a timely manner;
- Displaying honesty and truly caring about the partnership, acknowledging and trusting each other;
- Improving accountability through a shared monitoring plan.

The feedback of the participants on the roundtable was generally positive and there was a desire to continue the momentum gathered by this introductory event. Some of the recommendations for next steps included: creating a community of practice on partnerships; further involving local actors (CBOs) in such discussions; organizing further workshops involving both management and non-management staff involved in partnerships; introduction to partnership tools and methodologies; and, creation of a platform/forum of national NGOs.
Participants

There were 22 participants from national and international organizations working in Jordan. A full list of participants can be found in Appendix A. The roundtable agenda is in Appendix B.

Opening remarks

Mr. Reza Kasraï, ICVA’s Middle East and North Africa Regional Representative, welcomed participants to the roundtable. He gave a brief overview of ICVA, mentioning that ICVA’s membership is also a group of organizations working in partnership together with a certain set of aligned objectives. He said that ICVA was interested in the way NGOs engage in partnerships, and briefly went over some of the expectations of the participants, as they had expressed through the pre-roundtable survey. He hoped this roundtable would be the beginning of a continuous dialogue with the final aim of having a more positive impact on the lives of affected populations living in Jordan.

He urged participants to use the event as an opportunity to learn from each other and said that ICVA was ready to support the process of improving partnerships in Jordan, emphasizing that the motivation and the initiative had to come from organizations, through their commitment to partnerships.

Mr. Edward Kallon, the UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator in Jordan stressed the importance of durable partnerships between international and national NGOs and the relevant contributions of each in terms of knowledge, and technical and financial resources. He provided an overview of the humanitarian and resilience assistance in Jordan, mentioning that Jordan is a unique context (majority of refugees living in host communities, in a middle income country) and that the response modalities had to be appropriately adapted. He gave an overview of the strategic response planning, both on the humanitarian and resilience sides.

He also stressed that improved coordination, partnership and dialogue between international actors and national NGOs has been identified as an area that needs further improvement in Jordan. Mr Kallon concluded by reiterating the key role of NGOs (and particularly national NGOs) in humanitarian response and development assistance, especially given their proximity to local communities and affected populations.

Mrs. Dima Khleifat the Secretary-General for the national registry of societies in Jordan and representative of the ministry of social development stressed that the government in Jordan recognises the importance of working with NGOs in partnership. She added that the government welcomes the energy, dedication and resources all of national and international NGOs invest in Jordan, and they remain committed to harness this to even greater effect in securing a better partnership based on shared values and mutual respect.

She also pointed out all the challenges that Jordan is facing now and into the future, including increasing demand on social services, demographic changes within Jordan, rising forced displacement in the region, increase in poverty and social exclusion, and the role and engagement of all the relevant stakeholders.

She concluded by stating that government alone cannot respond to all of these challenges. Above and beyond the Principles of Partnership, she suggested that the principles of interdependence and cooperation (between civil society and government), individual citizens’ participation, representation and influence of civil society on government policies and learning from good practices should also inform partnerships.

The full text of the three opening remarks can be found in Appendices D, E and F.
Setting the context for working in partnerships: What We Know about Partnerships

Catherine Russ gave a presentation on what is currently known about partnerships and the challenges faced by partnerships. Research across all sectors indicates that the failure rate of partnerships is between 60-70% and this is particularly prone to occur where partners do not invest sufficient time and resources to maximize their potential. The humanitarian sector in particular faces more challenges than other sectors due to time constraints, funding cycles and the changing nature of disasters. A body of knowledge on best practices has been collected over the past two decades and this has culminated in the promotion of the idea that partnerships that are well-supported (or brokered) have a much better chance of going beyond just delivering on projects but to be in a position to innovate and co-create solutions in real-time. The presentation outlined the premise that well-performing partnerships require a fundamental shift in thinking away from mere project-management and towards recognizing partnerships as entities requiring a balance between the transactional, inter-personal and values-based approaches.

Introducing Partnership working in Jordan

Two case studies highlighting the successes and challenges of partnership working in Jordan were presented.

The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) presented a good example of how partnerships improve effectiveness, speed and coverage.

The successes:

- Combining international knowledge/experience with best local practices in intervention in the delivery of programs: maintaining international standards in humanitarian response in an effective and timely manner.
- Improved and stronger capacities: proven by the improved capacities of local partner’s staff in the implementation of programs and the significant outreach to vulnerable communities in the geographical areas of operations.
- Cost effectiveness: working in partnership with JHCO as a national partner has proven to be cost effective by using available capitals in both partner organizations such as political capital and technical expertise.

Some challenges:

- Maintaining each organization’s identity: their experiences show that one organization’s image reflects on both, whether the image by local communities is negative or positive.
- Staff lack of partnership understanding (rather seen as competition): both have had staff that has clashed at a personal level. This was overcome through good supervision and effective systems of practice which promote joint work. At times, internal staff conflict was reflected as tension between the two organizations when they were actually caused by personal issues.
- Unstable funding: which hinder the process of strategic and long-term capacity building plans.
- There were also difficulties in the start-up phase where readiness for change and partnering could have been better, and the way in which the differing perspectives and practice bases would come together were not sufficiently unpacked between the partners to explain how structures and models developed would assist the partnership.
Sanabel Al Khair and CARE then presented a good example of *strategic* partnership working.

**Partnership Objectives:**

- To share information and to establish a foundation of knowledge and understanding about the needs, rights and entitlements of children, women, youth and families.
- To identify the strengths, capacities, values, goals and visions and to build a network of relationships that promote caring and understanding between those in need and those with access to resources. To complement existing services and other supportive initiatives that are working to address needs in these communities.
- To take a lead role in providing a capacity building program for partners and create a mutual learning platform.
- To approach governments, voluntary agencies, foundations, civil society organizations, local community-based organizations, educational institutions and corporations, along with other potential contributors for the resources required to address identified needs, in addition to creating the required alliances for advocacy.

**Lessons learned and recommendations:**

- Potential and readiness, scalable;
- Community Assessment Planning Tool;
- Participatory approach from the needs assessment stage, proposal writing stage, etc.;
- Enough time for partners to build meaningful relationships;
- Strategic partnership not sub-contracting relationship.

At the end of the session the president of Sanabel Al Khair mentioned some challenges they faced as CBOs in general, along with some recommendations:

- Funding is insufficient;
- Ineffective communication with INGOs or donors (the delayed response from the donor side delays the project process);
- The refugees’ perceptions about CBOs (that they will be able to respond to all the needs);
- Funding must be equal for the host communities and the refugees;
- To communicate effectively;
- The INGOs partners must coordinate effectively with their national partners.

**Introduction to Principles of Partnership—Group work**

The participants separated into 5 groups, each focusing on one of the Principles of Partnership. In each group they listed the challenges in applying the Principle in partnerships in Jordan. In a world café exercise, the lists were then visited by other attendees for comments or additions.

The next step was for the same groups to list solutions to these challenges, following which all participants were given the opportunity to vote on the solutions they found most relevant.

Below are the lists of challenges and solutions (with the number of points received for each solution).
Group 1: Equality

Challenges

- Understand the concept (equality or equity?): CBOs as stakeholders, not tools for implementation
- Lack of understanding of rights and obligations
- Mistrust of CBOs’ capacity
- Donor-driven partnerships
- Culture, norms, gender biases
- Is it really possible to achieve equality?
- Depends on what each partner is offering ($$ talks louder).

Solutions

- Real engagement of CBOs in program design. 8 Points
- Awareness (community involvement) on the importance of:
  1. Rights/Obligations; 2 Points
  2. Capacity-building / CBOs + local community; 5 Points
  3. Building on others strengths (partners, CBOs, community). 8 Points
- Reinforce equality principles. 1 Point
- Respect partnership standards/agreements. 3 Points
- Empowering gender equality. 1 point
- Partners are independent (Equality is a humanitarian factor). 2 points

Group 2: Complementarity

Challenges

- One organization tends to be more dominant (depending on issue + topic).
- Visibility & credibility (Power game, prime & sub)
- Cultural acceptance & mutual respect.
- Relationship building & working on personal problems linked to trust + transparency, sharing information.
- Risk management.
- Knowledge and competencies exchange.
Solutions

- Start with workshop on partnership expectations (MoU, agreement, roles and responsibilities, code of conduct, ethics). **7 Points**
- Pilot projects (work together from the beginning of project cycle). **6 Points**
- Internal awareness, training on representation & communication. **6 Points**
- Frequent coordination meetings/workshops, trainings. **3 Points**
- Visit partner countries. **5 Points**
- Belief that partnership is an added value. **6 Points**

Group 3: Transparency

**Challenges**

- Poor definition of roles and responsibilities.
- Raising expectations.
- Hiding information → funding/budget (both ends).
- Lack of trust on both ends/suspecting motives.
- Overprotective approach of each organization → concerned about individual sustainability.
- Superiority / inferiority → power imbalance.
- Ignorance of what should be shared / slack / different standards.
- Lack of respect for knowledge / capacity → more often from “stronger” partner.
- ‘Culture’ / politics.

**Solutions**

- Improve communications / meetings, experience sharing, feedback (for improvement) in a timely manner. **7 Points**
- Written agreement with defined roles and responsibilities with possible amendment (living document). **4 Points**
- Commitment of engagement.
- Really care (honesty), acknowledgement, and trust. **7 Points**
- Both organizations making sure appropriate staff involved engaged (→ capacity, relationships). **4 Points**
- Setting culture of sharing in individual organizations → giving permission to be transparent with others. **11 Points**
- Employ multiple communication channels + methods. **1 Point**
- Instill openness as an organizational culture (not focused on relationships).

Group 4: Responsibility

**Challenges**

- Written agreements.
- Setting goals and expectations / scope.
- Accountability.
- Communication / focal points + to end-beneficiaries.
- Open door policy + transparency (mistakes).
- Respect: contribution, expertise, culture.
- Alliance / collaborative problem-solving.
- Acknowledge donor’s requirements.
- Sharing risks (e.g high turnover of staff).
Solutions

- Agreement: Access to a universal template. **4 Points**
- Setting goals: **5 Points**
  - Workshop at beginning of the project.
  - Will feed the agreement content.
  - Regular meeting for goals / achievements review.
- Accountability: shared monitoring plan. **6 Points**
- Communication: Identify focal points (persons) + define communication mechanism. **1 Point**
- Respect of Expertise: Induction workshop + inputs in “scope of agreement”. **1 Point**
- Alliance: Strengthen communication mechanism. **8 Points**
- Donor’s requirements: Specific training during induction workshop on guidelines.
- Sharing risks: setting risk-management committee (include in the agreement). **4 Points**

Group 5: Results-oriented approach

**Challenges**

- Differing systems, organizational cultures (bureaucracy)
- Lack of communication (channels)
- Understanding different perspectives (agendas)
- Reporting and sharing results (documents)
- Resources + capacity

**Solutions:**

- Enhance understanding **3 Points**
- Communication / awareness of system gaps
- Encountering gaps
- Capacity-building **5 Points**
- Sharing resources **2 Points**
- Setting communications framework
- Formalized agreement
- Defining results together **9 Points**
- Flexibility **2 Points**
- Community involvement **5 Points**
- Transparency **4 Points**
- Relationship-building
- Enhancing communications **1 Points**
Action planning and next steps

Participants suggested the following action points as next steps:

- Involve local partners in such workshops or in our discussions (and address language barriers);
- Establish a contact list (emails or knowledge-sharing platform) / a community of practice for support and information-sharing;
- Organize a series of capacity-building workshops for understanding partnerships, including different levels of staff (not only management);
- Include tools so as to share within organization;
- This roundtable was a good introduction, but hold sector-specific workshops, including CBOs, NNGOs, INGOs, going into further detail (similar to this but by sector to come up with something more tangible);
- Create an online resource / platform to serve as way of sharing experiences and learning from each other;
- Follow-up meetings for this discussion (perhaps using the participants from this roundtable as the nucleus?)
- Partnerships community of practice meeting (organized by ICVA in Geneva);
- Staff training on partnerships, providing access to tools;
- Partnership/coordination platform/forum for CBOs;
- Advocating to INGOS for better partnerships (at global level vis-à-vis member states/donor governments);
- Donor monitoring directly at CBO level to ‘check in’;
- Need more government involvement in such workshops/discussions since we are not always clear on their rules and requirements, so they can also hear about our challenges and the impact on partnerships;
- Need these types of meetings in the governorates with CBOs, not always in Amman (simplify / ‘translate’ our mechanisms to adapt from our way of thinking);
- Consider media as partners (need them to cover more positively our work).
## Appendix A: Full list of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Aversenq</td>
<td>Emergency Head of Mission</td>
<td>Handicap International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hom.jd@hi-emergency.org">hom.jd@hi-emergency.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Byrne</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Jack.Byrne@rescue.org">Jack.Byrne@rescue.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Weir</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
<td>Medair</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pc-jor@medair.org">pc-jor@medair.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthanna Khreisat</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
<td>Questscope</td>
<td><a href="mailto:muthanna@questscope.org">muthanna@questscope.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Amoush</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development /PBYRC</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mohammad.a@johud.org.jo">mohammad.a@johud.org.jo</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manal Tahtamouni</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Noor Al-Hussein Foundation/IFH</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dr.tahtamouni@ifh-jo.org">dr.tahtamouni@ifh-jo.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maysoon Alkhalaylih</td>
<td>Head of Public Relations</td>
<td>General Union of Voluntary Societies</td>
<td><a href="mailto:maysoon@guvs.org.jo">maysoon@guvs.org.jo</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salam F. Kanaan</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
<td>CARE International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Salam.Kanaan@jo.care.org">Salam.Kanaan@jo.care.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eman Ismail</td>
<td>Program Director/Urban Emergency Response Program</td>
<td>CARE International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Eman.Ismail@jo.care.org">Eman.Ismail@jo.care.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Rashdan</td>
<td>Program Assistant</td>
<td>CARE International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Sara.rashdan@jo.care.org">Sara.rashdan@jo.care.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaké El Turk</td>
<td>Field Coordinator</td>
<td>Handicap International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:program.region@hi-emergency.org">program.region@hi-emergency.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigitta Kunz</td>
<td>Cooperation Delegate</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bkunz@icrc.org">bkunz@icrc.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felomain Nassar</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>IOCC</td>
<td><a href="mailto:FBatshone@iocc.org">FBatshone@iocc.org</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanin Odeh</td>
<td>Deputy Director-General</td>
<td>Royal Health Awareness Society</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hodeh@rhas.org.jo">hodeh@rhas.org.jo</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noor Snober</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghada Abu El-Rous</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Madrasati</td>
<td><a href="mailto:g.abualrous@madrasati.jo">g.abualrous@madrasati.jo</a>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Organization</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souzan Sami</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>ARDD-Legal Aid</td>
<td><a href="mailto:somohareb@ardd-legalaid.org">somohareb@ardd-legalaid.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra’ad Al Hadid</td>
<td>Disaster Management Director</td>
<td>Jordan Red Crescent Society</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rad.hadid@jrncs.org">rad.hadid@jrncs.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paco Maldonado</td>
<td>Head of Operations, Jordan</td>
<td>International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies</td>
<td><a href="mailto:francisco.maldonado@ifrc.org">francisco.maldonado@ifrc.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issam Zayed</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>Danish Refugee Council</td>
<td><a href="mailto:issam.zayed@gmail.com">issam.zayed@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilit Manukyan</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>ACT/JSL forum</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lilitmanukyan.act.jsl@gmail.com">lilitmanukyan.act.jsl@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Appendix B: Agenda**

**Chair of workshop:** Reza Kasraï, ICVA Regional Representative, Middle East and North Africa  
**Facilitator:** Catherine Russ, Independent Partnership Broker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>8.30 – 9.00</td>
<td>Arrival and coffee</td>
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<td>9.00 – 9.10</td>
<td>Welcome and overview of the day: Reza Kasraï</td>
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| 9.10 – 10.15| Opening remarks:                                   
|             | UN Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator - Mr. Edward Kallon                                          |
|             | Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation - Omar Nuseir                                  |
|             | Ministry of Social Development                                                                    |
|             | Presentation: What research tells us about partnerships in the humanitarian sector - Catherine Russ |
| 10.15 – 10.30| Coffee                                                                                          |
| 10.30 – 11.30| Short group exercise on Partnership working                                                    |
|             | Introducing Partnership working in Jordan                                                        |
|             | Two presentations on the successes and challenges of partnership working in Jordan               |
|             | *Case Study:* Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization and Danish Refugee Council                    |
|             | *Case Study:* Sanabel Al Khair and CARE                                                           |
| 11.30 – 12.45| Feedback on Survey Results                                                                       |
|             | Introduction to Principles of Partnership exercise                                                |
|             | Group work                                                                                       |
| 12.45 – 13.30| Principles of Partnership cont'd                                                                |
|             | Plenary feedback and participant prioritization exercise                                          |
| 13.30 – 13.45| Coffee                                                                                          |
| 13.45 – 14.30| Introduction to Partnership Brokering and the Partnership Cycle                                 |
|             | Laying the ground for partnership management and troubleshooting                                 |
| 14.30 – 15.00| Action Planning and next steps                                                                    |
|             | Summary and end of workshop                                                                      |
| 15.00       | Lunch                                                                                           |
Appendix C: References

- International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)  
  https://icvanetwork.org/resources

- Partnership Brokers Association  
  www.partnershipbrokers.org

- The Partnering Initiative  
  http://thepartneringinitiative.org/

- Principles of Partnership tools - Global Humanitarian Platform, (tools to implement their principles of partnership as a result of Humanitarian Reform Process)  
  http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/pop.html#tools

- State of the Humanitarian System Reports (criticises lack of effective partnerships among other issues)  
  Feb 2010 - http://www.alnap.org/resource/5769  
  July 2012 - http://www.alnap.org/resource/6565

- Building Trust in Diverse Teams – The Tool Kit for Emergency Response - ECB  

- Partnerships for Humanitarian Aid, VOICE, (newsletter dedicated to partnership articles)  
  NGO Voice Newsletter, Issue 14, Oct 2011  

- Humanitarian Partnerships Humanitarian Exchange, ODI, (Whole issue dedicated to partnerships) Issue 50, April 2011,  
  http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-50

- What We Know About Collaboration - ECB Guide, July 2012  

- ELRHA Guide to Constructing Effective Partnerships, 2012 (online interactive guide or downloadable report)  


- Missed Opportunities: The case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-based Humanitarian Responses, 2013 published (Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, Tearfund, Action Aid)  
  http://www.alnap.org/resource/8890


• A number of **Partnering Tool Books** can be accessed / downloaded (for free) from [www.ThePartneringInitiative.org](http://www.ThePartneringInitiative.org), including *The Partnering Toolbook; Talking the Walk – A communications Manual for Partnership Practitioners; The Case Study Toolbook – case studies as tools for change.*