

WHAT IS AN NGO FORUM AND WHAT IS AN NGO CONSORTIUM?

Similarities:

- An NGO consortium or NGO forum is a collective initiative promoted by NGO in order to promote collective NGO action. Its NGOs coming together to try to move forward with their issues of common interest.
- They can both be different in size and structure (could be very small with only a volunteer doing that in addition to their usual work, or it could be a more structured organization (a secretariat with a dedicated staff).
- Their issue and focus can vary on what the NGOs decide to actually invest on as a collective.
- The members: can be international NGOs, national NGOs, or a composition of both.

Differences:

NGO Fora: they operate mainly at country-level where there is a humanitarian response taking place.

- An NGO fora aims to support NGOs undertaking humanitarian action in the specific country. They usually operate in a country focused on supporting NGOs to navigate the national administrative and legal frameworks in a country. For example, how an NGO can register in a country, what are the legal requirements for an NGO to operate in such country.
- An NGO fora usually focuses on facilitating collective NGO representation with key fora and stakeholders — uniting a country team or representing NGOs before the administrative planning in a country.
- They facilitate and support collective NGO advocacy issues in a country.

NGO consortia: they operate mainly at regional and global level.

- Thematic oriented.
- Focus less on country specific topics and more on regional and global issues and policies.

- Their objective is really to echo NGO perspectives and to facilitate participation in key regional, global and thematic debates.
- In this webinar, an NGO consortium is referred to as a large number of NGOs coming together to create a structure that will look at improving NGO collective action and advocacy.

Example of a consortium

Voice: bringing together European NGOs and one of its main focuses is to partner and work with the EU and especially ECHO to bring forward a new perspective.

Near Network: (created during the World Humanitarian Summit last year) to bring together local organizations.

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network: based out of Bangkok which works with different NGOs on promoting rights for refugees.

ICVA: is a consortium: the only global network of humanitarian NGOs (about 100 members) – a bridge between the NGOs and the global level of the humanitarian sector trying to put forward NGO voices so that NGOs could actually shape the future of the humanitarian system. (forced displacement, humanitarian coordination, humanitarian financing and humanitarian partnerships).

IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTIVE NGO ACTION:

- Shape humanitarian action, especially in a mainly UN and donor-led system.
- Brings forward diverse perspectives reflecting different views of the community and investing in collective action and sharing lessons learned.
- Promote collective interest over organizational interest – a balance is required.

MYANMAR CONTEXT

Cyclone Nargis provided the opportunity for significant development in Myanmar's civil society.

- civil society operationalized, more organized and interacts better with different stakeholders.
- stronger networks and better trust-building, especially between the external actors as well as the internal actors.
- civic space is bigger, it is more complex and more integrated.
- civil society learned to work together in a more coordinated and systematic manner especially with the international community and other stakeholders.

In Myanmar, there are diverse civil society organizations (10,000 active CSOs and local NGOs). The cyclone was really a wakeup call for the government to give more space to the civil society. The government also operates its own NGOs – Government Operated NGOs (GONGOs) which are funded by the government and are not independent due to funding received. The other type of NGOs are not receiving any funding from the government.

Challenges:

- Restrictive laws and policies especially in relation to freedom of assembly, association and expression.
- With the influx of donor funding, it created more competition rather than improve coordination among the civil society.
- Lack of communication and coordination between NGOs.



Needs:

- Build better relationships and increase coordination efforts among the local civil society organizations.
- Gain the trust of the government.
- Adhere to the Principles of Partnership.
- Adhere to principles of equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility as well as complementarity.
- Unified front to have a collective effort from all humanitarian actors.
- Joint advocacy and constructive dialogue.
- Inclusive coordination structures – Local CSOs are challenged by their exclusion in the International NGO Forum. This was dividing the international and locals to work together so the local civil society continued advocating. Today there are 4 local CSOs as Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) members (highest number in the world).

BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF A FORA SUCH AS THE LOCAL RESOURCE CENTRE

- NGOs have indicated it gives them an opportunity to participate and share expertise/experience.
- A method of receiving up-to date information and regular resource materials.
- Connected to the regional and international initiatives.

Opportunities:

- Local NGOs representatives are able to connect and coordinate better with the INGOs when working through the HCT.
- In order to get more buy-in from the government could be to include a tri-partite agreement between Government-NGOs-Private sector.

SOMALIA CONTEXT

Representation: explore changes in representation, Somalia NGO Consortium has a seat on the Humanitarian Country team, a standing seat different from the NGO seats.

Coordination: Engagement of members takes place through platforms in all of the regions through monthly and ad-hoc meetings where common challenges are being faced, latest updates on operations and policy development and issues arising from the humanitarian and development work are discussed.

Advocacy: Active advocacy on the risk of famine in Somalia and are present on a number of platforms and conferences.

Information sharing: Sharing and making sure that members have all relevant information regarding their operations, the latest updates on working with NGOs, the UN, the government and the international stakeholders.

A new strategy in Somalia:

- 1. Enabling the environment humanitarian resilience and development outcomes through multi-stakeholder and multi-level engagement:** Engagement with all the actors and ensuring that there is a space for NGOs to be able to operate in the right way with limited amount of challenges and raise them at the appropriate level so they can be addressed. (Bureaucratic impediments, illegal requests of taxation from different regional states, registration and costs).
- 2. More accountability and transparency in Somalia through the application of international good practices and standards:** In a country of a high-risk environment with the potential of corruption such like Somalia for example, there is a potential for a diversion. This is about being able to assist NGOs in better understanding the dynamics but also better dealing with those dynamics.
- 3. Ensuring that there's promotion and implementation of global, regional and national commitments:** Focus on localization, how the voice and capacity of local actors can be enhanced, not just the national NGOs but there's the government that's more involved in humanitarian and disaster management and how they too can benefit from these discussions around localization. Act also as bridges, in making member agencies aware of what will be discussed at the global framework (e.g. WHS, CRRF) what international committees are agreeing, and the standards being developed and how they can be put into practice.

This can be achieved when there is a mix of local and national NGOs. Good leadership is essential in terms of having support from country directors. Being responsive to

memberships, so whenever there are issues that are raised by our members, don't challenge it, be there to deliver them. More regional interaction with organisations such as IGAD and regional platforms and international platforms.

Weakness: expectation and managing expectations and needs of memberships. Limited local representation at decision-making level. At present more reactive than proactive and need to improve on this.

Some of the challenges faced overall are around bureaucratic impediments:

Insecurity: access concerns – many parts of the country are inaccessible, high risk of shocks and famine, Concern of losing focus on humanitarian principles and perceptions of neutrality in the humanitarian development discussions, and obviously, corruption and overall risk management.

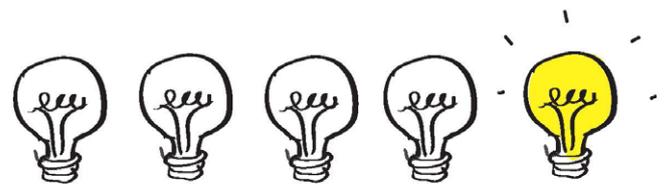
FUNDING FOR NGO FORA AND COLLECTIVE ACTION:

Opportunities:

Collective NGO engagement with government development plans, NGO Act.

Advocacy:

- Gained respect and credibility from the number of stakeholders while continuing to highlight the issues that Somalia faces.
- More work on awareness raising, but also on making NGOs understand where they fit best and how they can help implement with these dynamics.
- A consortium needs to know the balance of having local and national NGOs and how to navigate between international and national NGOs and overcoming these challenges.
- Need to promote as many platforms as possible where the different range of stakeholders can talk to each other - between donors and local NGOs, and the government and INGOs.



SYRIA CONTEXT

From 2011 until July 2014, coordination was totally NGO-led and changed when the Security Council adopted the Resolution 21/65 authorizing the cross-border response. There are many stakeholders involved working as networks at local, regional and global level, even before OCHA arrived in 2014. NGO Forum started in 2012 – Syria INGOs Fora, Cluster system started with the Whole of Syria Approach.

ADDED VALUE TO JOIN A FORA:

- Speaking the same language working towards a response. Dedicated advocacy support.
- SNA (Syrian NGO Alliance – largest NGO working in Turkey, and NGO Fora more INGO fora but also accepts local NGOs.
- Speaks with one voice and makes it louder.
- Networking to meet and improve relationships with partners and donors.
- Better coordination.
- Lessons learned, best practice and information sharing.

Networking:

Is not only for meeting colleagues working in other local NGOs but also improving our relationships with partners and donors. Enables one to share lessons learned, experiences, gain support in coordination and discuss issues that are likely to arise in the future.



Challenges:

- There are many competing and different priorities, especially between local and international organizations, it is always a challenge to try and bring everyone together.
- Decision making and facilitation mechanism are different. Very often one has to act and respond or to take a stand very quickly and some organizations have to refer back to their own HQs for decisions to be approved or not approved.
- Time constraints: usually it is a very fast turnaround for inputs on advocacy.
- Limited resources of both staff and funding.
- Travel restrictions for Syrians to attend discussions about Syria.

Good coordination:

- Local level Aleppo evacuation – whatsapp groups created and local NGOs responded.
- Regional level – At the beginning, NGOs were not happy with how the Whole of Syria review and assessments were taking place and the UN and NGOs started collaborating together to have a better analysis.

LEARN MORE: Visit www.icvanetwork.org for the webinar, video, further information and references.

JOIN ICVA: Contribute to Working Groups, Task Teams and Humanitarian Financing Policy Development.