

Partnerships: Experiences and Ways Forward

Louise Julin
Funding Officer ARDD-Legal Aid

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ARDD-LEGAL AID
Arab Renaissance for
Democracy & Development

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Partnerships with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are very beneficial for local actors. Through partnerships, local organizations can receive expert capacity-building, access high-level stakeholders otherwise inaccessible, and can amplify outreach and advocacy to a regional and international level. On the other hand, these partnerships are also very valuable for INGOs. They enable big organizations to get closer to the situation to the ground, learning from local partners about the realities of the people they are trying to help. ARDD-Legal Aid has a long history of successful partnerships with international actors, including Oxfam GB and UNHCR. These partnerships have helped the organization expand and develop, both through capacity-building and direct funding. However, the power dynamic between large INGOs and smaller local organizations is starting to shift. The capacities of local non-governmental organizations have increased significantly, not only in the Middle East, but globally. However, many international actors assume that local organizations don't have the skills and experience to play a greater role in international development, and that the perceived weak systems can lead to ineffectiveness and a lack of quality in overall programming. Partnerships between INGOs and local actors should be based on mutual trust and integrity, however, new concepts such as 'project brokering' are also becoming increasingly evident the formation of partnerships. Involving third party brokers adds a commercial element to the development of partnerships, and impedes on the ethical standards of development that have been developed over time. It also raises several questions regarding whether these partnerships can be sustainable if they require a third-party to draw out the parameters of cooperation.

Naturally, the scope and capacities of INGOs and local NGOs differ, but it is necessary to acknowledge the changes that are taking place, and to develop and adapt the way partnerships are conducted between INGOs and local organizations. All partnerships are unique and vary from one context to another, and recognizing this will enable partnerships between local organizations and INGOs to continue to thrive, enhancing the way international development is conducted overall. The first step is to adapt programming to the capacities of local organizations, giving them more responsibility and independence to implement programs on the ground. Local organizations have first-hand experience in what is happening on the ground within communities. This experience needs to be acknowledged and capitalized upon, as development is done best when it emerges from local communities. This includes empowering local organizations to play a greater role in project design and allowing more flexibility and decision-making authority in project implementation.

Donors also play a key role in the way partnerships between local and international actors are carried out. Donor strategies help define the way funding is disbursed and play a key role in defining what roles different recipients play in international development. Therefore, donor strategies should reflect the realities on the ground, which includes recognizing the enhanced capacities of local organizations and how these organizations play a much greater role in the way development and humanitarian work is carried out. If donors begin to recognize the augmented role of local actors it will help enhance the current frameworks of cooperation between INGOs and local organizations. Supporting local movements will enhance the sustainability of projects and will help ensure long-term impact.

In the long-term it also will help sustain the longevity of local organizations and will strengthen civil society at large.

Recommendations:

1. INGOs should recognize the capacities of local actors and should develop their partnership frameworks accordingly on an individual basis.
2. Donor should put local actors in the center of development strategies. Funding should not only be given to larger international organizations, but should also target local organizations, either through partnerships or direct funding.
3. Increasing unrestricted funding to local organizations, enabling donors to support organizations beyond just projects. Unrestricted funds would allow for more flexible, innovative and responsive approaches to development. It moreover gives local organizations greater stability and will help ensure their existence beyond current projects.