

Brussels Conference VI: Local Organizations' Brief

Amidst an unprecedented economic crisis, a pandemic and political turmoil in Lebanon, local non-governmental organizations are facing an array of challenges that are impeding their missions. The Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis (WG-PASC) is a network of 24 local organizations that work on humanitarian aid, protection services and policy reform to improve the situation of refugees and vulnerable host communities in Lebanon. A survey of PASC members was conducted to collect information on the obstacles faced by local organizations supporting vulnerable Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians.

Challenges around funding:

PASC member organizations cover the following scopes of work: Humanitarian assistance (cash-based assistance, food items, shelter, etc.), protection services and case management, educational/vocational training, and policy reform and advocacy.

Many of these organizations have project partners: 42% are partnering with local organizations, 33% are partnering with International NGOs, and 25% are partnering with UN agencies. In terms of funding, 56% of these organizations receive support in the form of sub-grants from larger NGOs, 33% from foreign aid by members of the international community and 11% from private donors. The following brief will shed light on the obstacles faced by these organizations internally, vis-à-vis their beneficiaries and the role of donors in alleviating the burdens imposed on local organizations in Lebanon.

The deteriorating effects of the crisis have directly affected the day-to-day operations of local organizations. Notably, a staggering 75% reported a decrease in capacity to deliver on their mandate and strategic goals. This reduced capacity was reported to emanate primarily from the increasing blackouts and interrupted internet connection (84%), followed by a decrease in donor funding and increase in transportation costs (67%). Furthermore, there was a reported increase in rent costs and insufficient resources to secure supplies (42%). Besides logistical difficulties, 58% of participants reported lack of capacity due to personnel burnout. Moreover, the majority of participants reported a decrease in their number of personnel, namely due to high staff turnover (17%), and brain drain (33%).

The majority of participating organizations have sought the implementation of longer-term sustainable solutions (67%). Amongst the solutions pursued, many resorted to installing solar energy as a sustainable alternative amidst the electricity and fuel crisis. While others resorted to purchasing private generators, but struggled in finding and funding the fuel it requires. Some have adopted remote working in order to alleviate the burden of increasing transportation fees. Eight percent of participants sought temporary non-durable solutions, for example having staff take on multiple tasks and work overtime to cover for the shortage of staff (8%). However, it is worth noting that 25% of respondents did not seek any solutions, due to limited resources and strained capacities.

Most organizations have shared their grievances with their donors and partners with regards to capacity obstacles. The overwhelming majority of organizations reported support and understanding from partners regarding the challenges faced (92%). Some donors expressed sympathy, showed flexibility/accommodation and supported in suggesting alternative solutions. Seventy-five percent offered flexibility around project activities and methods of implementation; 50% were flexible with reporting deadlines; 42% adjusted their funding to meet changing needs and 33% provided cost extensions; 17% provided knowledge support in the implementation of changes. However, 30% reported facing ambiguous responses from donors in their support for solutions, or donors indicated that they could not help in any way due to their internal policies.

Obstacles to program implementation:

Besides facing internal operational/capacity issues, 92% of responding organizations reported having experienced difficulties in their programming and provision of aid towards beneficiaries due to the current situation in Lebanon. Fifty percent of the organizations reported experiencing a decrease in donor funding over the past two years. As a result, 55% of the respondents resorted to decreasing their programming or number of beneficiaries.

The following obstacles hindered the implementation of intended programs as a result of the economic crisis/pandemic:

- Accessing beneficiaries due to transportation costs (67%).
- Accessing beneficiaries due to loss of contact – no internet, no phones, etc. (75%).
- Accessing beneficiaries due to checkpoints or curfews (25%).
- Beneficiaries accessing offices/service centers due to transportation costs (58%).
- Beneficiaries accessing offices/services due to checkpoints or curfews (25%).
- Inability of holding in-person trainings /activities due to transportation costs (67%).
- Inability of holding in-person trainings/activities due to Covid-19 measures (42%).
- Rising community tensions and increasing security risks around programming (50%).
- Lack of resources to help all beneficiaries in need of services (42%).

In the face of such obstacles, organizations were compelled to seek the following measures:

- Decreasing the amount of aid/assistance to beneficiaries (42%).
- Decreasing the number of staff members (31%).
- Reducing the number of areas of work (15%).
- Reducing the number of beneficiaries (8%).

Perceptions of Brussels Responsiveness to Local Needs:

When asked about their perception of whether donors have been delivering on their commitments from the previous Brussels conference, only 25% of responded positively. While 50% of respondents did not believe it to be the case. The remaining 25% of were unsure about whether the commitments were fulfilled. Members who work in all sectors (Humanitarian protection and assistance, case management, advocacy and research) complained of being overlooked in terms of the importance of their work and in receiving adequate support. In fact, according to the [UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service](#) for Lebanon, local and national NGOs only received roughly \$12 million out of over \$1 billion in donor funding for the year 2021. By contrast INGOs received \$113 million, and UN Agencies received nearly \$862 million. As a result, many organizations believe that donors have not adequately committed to localization, which requires the meaningful inclusion of local organizations at all levels of programmatic planning and budget allocation.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations were proposed for improvement and increased support. With regards to **short term solutions**, local organizations have asked for an allocation of a portion of their funding to the mitigation of current and future unmet operational challenges. This is particularly relevant to supplying the core needs for an efficient operation of their organizations (electricity, transportation, staff retention, etc.). Furthermore, organizations request increased flexibility and understanding from donors and sub-granters regarding the implementation of activities and deadlines for deliverables.

With regards to **long term solutions**, the majority view that it is crucial to have an increase in sustainable, flexible, multi-year and renewable funding, and a long-term investment in the human resources of local organizations. Long term support for local NGOs is fundamental to sustaining beneficial projects and programming in the country, maintaining knowledge and skills within local organizations, and improving the outcomes of said programs, which often require years of continuous work to reach their full potential and ensure durable solutions.

In conclusion, it is evident that local organizations are struggling to achieve their programmatic goals and maintain their crucial support to vulnerable communities in Lebanon. Their missions have been compromised in part by the dire economic crisis in Lebanon, shortages in all public services, and emergency situations such as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut explosion. These and other contextual challenges are made even more difficult for local organizations to overcome due to the reduction in donor funding, which could not have come at a worse time. If the situation continues, the capacities of local organizations will continue to suffer, vulnerable populations that rely on these organizations will find themselves without the protection and advocacy they need. As such, the PASC network would like to convey the following recommendations to stakeholders and donors participating in the Brussels conference:

- Provide sustainable, long-term, flexible and innovative funding and approach to humanitarian assistance in the MENA region that presupposes a feminist methodological approach to crisis management.
- Encourage the localization of aid. Allow local organizations to benefit directly from donor support, rather than through sub-granting or limiting the role of supporting INGOs to technical assistance, such as on MEAL, PSEA, and auditing procedures, allowing organizations to lead on the delivery of assistance and strengthen their institutional structure to deliver assistance in an efficient and accountable manner.
- Increase budget allocations for human resources so local organizations can hire and retain staff, and reduce instances of burnout, high turnover, and brain drain as local experts seek better career opportunities abroad.
- Reduce channeling funding for humanitarian aid, WASH, and health through the Lebanese government, and push for the implementation of necessary reforms for transparency and accountability.
- Provide support for programs benefiting vulnerable persons regardless of nationality to decrease tensions between host and refugee communities. The rates of unemployment and poverty have been rising steadily amongst the Lebanese population, while minority communities are more marginalized than ever and need increased support. Programs that benefit all populations and contribute to peacebuilding must be prioritized in international agendas.
- Include local organizations, as well as marginalized populations (women, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, children) in the planning of aid, protections and development programming. Local organizations and their beneficiaries know what kind of support is most appropriate and advantageous to their communities.

The Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Displacement Crisis in Lebanon is a voluntary, inter-organizational, non-binding and informal network facilitated by ALEF. The Working Group is open to all local CSOs working with persons affected by the Syrian crisis. It works to enhance the capacity and space for civil society organizations in Lebanon to influence their government and international actors to adopt policies that more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable displaced persons and host communities and implement them effectively.