

# MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS

With Community Based Organisations in Southern Jordan

JORDAN

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The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 1956 that works in more than 40 countries throughout the world. DRC fulfils its mandate by providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations – refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities in the conflict areas of the world.



With the protraction of the Syrian crisis, Jordanian civil society has grown significantly. The 3,800 civil society organizations in Jordan have a valuable insight that should be considered in responding to the Syria crisis in Jordan.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, without a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis in near sight, local duty-bearers and stakeholders will play a key role in the search for durable solutions. Local actors are often better placed to understand local contextual barriers and opportunities. However, many could benefit from further development to achieve their objectives more effectively and efficiently, which would require dedicated support and resources. This paper presents the Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) recommendations on partnership policy in southern regions of Jordan, based on evaluation findings of the EU-funded project, 'Tadmeen'.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tadmeen was implemented in Karak, Ma'an, and Tafileh governorates by DRC and the Arab World Center for Democratic Development (Uni-HRD), to support informed inclusion of women towards improved participation in local social, economic and civic life.

The project's overall objective over two years, from January 2015 to December 2016, was to develop a systematic, sustainable and coordinated mechanism to promote women's rights. DRC and Uni-HRD formalised partnerships with 6 local CSOs in Karak, Ma'an and Tafileh, three of which received sub-grants from DRC to develop their activities. Staff members at each CSO were provided with trainings; building their capacity and means to identify needs, design solutions, manage projects, network and advocate, so as to empower women's rights defenders. Trainings supported the implementation of EU guidelines on human rights at the local level, and combated discrimination against women by giving them access to information and services.

The project also supported specific civil society coordination at the local level to explore synergies and speak with one voice towards the authorities. Through this, the project aimed at benefiting women from various socio-economic origins, in rural and urban areas (outside of Amman).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ardd-jo.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/en\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_civil\\_society\\_in\\_jordan.pdf](http://ardd-jo.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/en_the_role_of_civil_society_in_jordan.pdf)

Nayla Ibrahim, is 48 years old and has been working as a volunteer in Karak for more than 20 years. She is currently working with the Tadmeen partner CSO, 'Active Citizen'. Nayla said "Tadmeen provided many useful trainings for women and youth such as women rights, project management and feasibility studies - the community liked it and they improved themselves." Subsequently, Nayla's daughter and six other women established a training centre in the region (providing courses in Mathematics, English and Science). "Women could do anything to lead her family and her community to success" Nayla said.

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"I want to thank TADMEEN for this opportunity, thanks because the program became as a life style, it will be an unforgettable print in life."

Nayla Ibrahim

## DRC IMPLEMENTING PARTNER POLICY

While DRC remains a largely self-implementing organisation, DRC operations in Jordan seek to engage in implementing partnerships with local actors, including local CBOs, with a view to foster local capacities to safeguard the rights of local populations and respond to humanitarian needs. In This serves to provide humanitarian assistance in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

An implementing partner is defined as 'an institution with which DRC has a formalised relation on its implementation of programmatic, advocacy, capacity development and material assistance under DRC's programme and budget.'<sup>2</sup> In the case of Tadmeen, DRC pursued 'Transformative Implementing Partnerships', which 'Serve as an instrument to reach a project goal as well as to improve the capacity of implementing partner, thereby transforming local response capacities.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Thus, an Implementing Partner carries out a portion of the activities covered by the programme based on a sub-grant. Implementing Partners include local NGOs, CBOs and public institutions, as well as INGOs operating in a given local context. [https://insite.drc.dk/media/3102752/ip-chapter-for-oh\\_20012017\\_final\\_mngmt-approved-version.pdf](https://insite.drc.dk/media/3102752/ip-chapter-for-oh_20012017_final_mngmt-approved-version.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

DRC conducted an evaluation to determine, first if the six CSOs that were involved in the Tadmeen project have an improved approach to management, outreach, knowledge and promotion of women's rights, and coordination as a result. Second, the evaluation also examined successful approaches and potential best practices for working with project partners.

The evaluation methodology involved a participatory approach, whereby CSO staff themselves discussed their experiences of successes and challenges with the Tadmeen project. DRC hosted a two-day Evaluation Workshop from 26th to 27th February 2017, which was attended by 40 staff from the partner CSOs. The two-day workshop was facilitated by DRC programme quality staff and included panel discussions, participatory focus groups, group-work, as well as a networking dinner. Participants were asked evaluate any development of a longer-term strategy for the promotion of women's rights and interests, assess implemented activities and use of the referral mechanism, discuss the role and attribution of DRC, and look at potential future recommendations for more sustainable outcomes.

Supplementary data was collected through 42 surveys, administered to available CSO staff who participated in Tadmeen trainings. The survey sought to quantify their understanding and perception of any organizational capacity changes following training received from DRC. The questions tested to what extent respondents agree or disagree with a given statement using a Likert scale, representing different facets of capability within the organization. Possible limitations of the findings include: due to high staff turnover, the survey and workshop was not able to include all of those who had directly received trainings and support from DRC.

Saada Abo Qdere is a house wife living in a small village in Karak. She is a mother of 3 boys and 2 girls. She told us how the income from her husband's job was not enough to support the family fully, so she started her own productive kitchen and selling handicrafts. However, these projects did not provide much more income until after Tadmeen trainings about Feasibility studies, Project management and Marketing. Since, she has noticed an increased profit from her productive kitchen and can recognize how to use that profit to both help her family and improve the business. After Saada received a Tadmeen awareness sessions about women rights she said, "I will raise my daughter to understand women's rights and my sons to respect women."

## RESULTS

Almost all (40) of the survey respondents agreed that their organization has a better capacity to promote women's rights and interests after the support from DRC. Indeed, all but one of those in management who had received direct trainings from Tadmeen reported that the support received from DRC was valuable and has already been applied in the daily management of their CSO. However, across the wider organization, 43% of the total CSO members surveyed noted that their financial and administration processes have largely stayed the same in the past six months. This indicates that the impact of the Tadmeen project was largely positive at the individual level, but limited in terms of reach within the wider capacity of the organization. That said, 22% also observed that they were not adequately briefed about their CSO's engagement with Tadmeen, which might help to explain why 38% of those surveyed agree with the statement that 'only a few key people in our organization have a strong understanding of the referral mechanism after training from DRC'.

The following section outlines the participatory discussion and recommendations, to further examine and qualify the survey findings.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

### Financial Support

All of the CSOs, in particular those in Tafleh and Karak, explained that larger grants than those distributed under the Tadmeen project are needed in order to have a bigger relative impact on their capacity to operate. Many receive larger grants from other international and national donors, and therefore the goals of the Tadmeen project were not fully prioritised. Indeed, reportedly grants under approximately 11,000 JODs are too small to afford the inputs and staff needed for sustainable organisational development and improved quality of implementation. That said, all of the CSO staff were extremely positive about the supporting role that DRC plays in the region, as the main INGO with a continuous presence.

Specifically, CSOs discussed that they struggled with servicing beneficiaries who were not located near their centre. They had a desire to expand their programming to reach more people outside of city centres but transportation was a limiting factor. Their proposed solution to this was for increased financial assistance from INGOs which could be used to cover transportation costs for beneficiaries.

To avoid funding delays that outrun the timeframe of the project itself it is important that INGOs factor in enough planning and time for the project authorisation process with municipalities, including guidance for partners on the required level of follow up. In the case of Tadmeen, three partners were unable to receive authorisations in time as they were unfamiliar with the process, and therefore never received their grant for which they were eligible.

### **Concentrated Partner Selection**

To dedicate larger financial and human resources to support partners over a sustained period of time, DRC suggests that fewer CSOs be selected for a targeted partnership. In addition, selection criteria should take into account the capacity of the CSO at the outset, including variance across departments in level of literacy, education and technical inputs. In this way, capacity building can be realistically designed to meet their specific needs. It is crucial that formalised partners and INGOs adhere to commonly agreed minimum standards.

Indeed, to strengthen adequate partnership selection and management, DRC's partnership policy recommends forming a Partnership Coordination Group, including members of staff from each core department (overseen by the Partnership Coordinator). Members of this forum could be committed part-time to regularly review and support operational and administrative areas within the CSO's individual departments, such as HR, finance and logistics.

Discussion demonstrated that the CSO staff recognized the importance of capacity building, and many were positive about the training component of the project as opposed to solely financial assistance. Overall, CSO staff who had directly benefitted from trainings emphasised that they used the new skills in their daily capacity to manage the CSO and promote women's rights. However, due to the high staff turn-over of volunteers who also received trainings on outreach and women's rights, the impact of the project on the overall capacity of the organisations was smaller than on the individual level. Notably, due to the small size of the project resources trainings were largely orientational in content, rather than mentorship or full courses. CSO participants recommended that sustained follow-up and regular mentoring are required to ensure that knowledge learned is applied habitually in daily activities in the mid- to longer term.

To achieve a longitudinal mentoring approach and effective management of relations with implementing partners, the DRC evaluation found that INGOs need to ensure that a clear focal point is dedicated to supporting and training the partners, on a full time basis. A Partnership Coordinator (or specific Project Manager) would lead the process, including coordinating requirements from supporting sectors and engaging directly with the partner.

## **Collaborative Platforms**

Several partners were confident in their perception that DRC was more transparent than many other INGOs and donors in terms of their partner selection criteria. Still, local coordination between CSOs is reportedly hampered by competition and distrust over grants received. This poses a significant challenge to promote platforms for civil society coordination, collaborative engagement with key stakeholders and establishment of a referral system. It is therefore imperative that any INGO planning to formalise partnerships in the region is transparent on the selection criteria not only with successful applicants, but with the broader civil society and community.

With a view to facilitating a local collaborative platform between CSOs and municipalities, INGOs should undertake a stakeholder and network mapping in the target area. This will identify specific influential individuals with whom INGOs can work together to promote women's rights during civil society's engagement with authorities.

In particular, facilitating a referral network in the region presented a challenge. Due to the limited capacity of partners from the outset, their absorption capacity for following new processes was not large enough to follow through on external referrals. DRC provided partners with a reference guide for possible referral partners in the region, but the evaluation found that those CSOs who used the referral forms did so only as an outreach tool for their own assistance. Indeed, the quality of the discussion during the workshop highlighted that CSO staff still lacked a deeper understanding for the purpose and value of a referral system.

## **Community Awareness**

Many of the participants spoke of the conservative culture in their communities as a key challenge to providing trainings for women in their area, as many women are unable to attend due to responsibilities and expectations in the household. Moreover, the partners emphasised that their greatest need is to support the economic empowerment of women in their communities. In order to work towards better community acceptance and support for businesses run by women, not only women but also men and youth need to be engaged with information on women's rights and interests in the region. INGOs should make sure to accrue a contextual understanding of community acceptance in an area before formalising a partnership with a CSO, so as to better identify and address external challenges to promoting women's rights.

## **Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment was emphasized as the main gateway for women to access their rights and interests, whereby they are not entirely dependent on male members of the household. During the workshop the CSOs explained that the Tadmeen project had a sizeable impact on women who received

trainings, by providing them with the knowledge and confidence to launch or grow their own businesses. Examples of successful economic empowerment include productive kitchens, apparel production, bakeries and farm equipment rental, all managed by female CSO members.

In order to grow their businesses further, CSOs suggested that INGOs could provide training and guidance on how to understand supply chains and access specific markets, in order to sell larger quantities of goods.

Discussion also demonstrated that trainings on more sustainable outcomes would be highly valuable, especially if coupled with larger grants that could contribute to larger economic inputs.

For example, facilitating the construction of a greenhouse coupled with trainings on economic and agricultural management could promote more sustainable food production businesses.

With a view to the future, women argued that the key demographic target group which CSOs should work with is the youth. If INGOs can facilitate the development of programming so that partners can not only attract youth but also teach them relevant skills, this would promote a generational step towards greater economic empowerment.

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The Tadmeen project was a relatively small programme with high ambitions. Subsequently, it had a high impact on the capacity of those individuals closely involved with the project. However, the tailored support and continuous guidance over time that is required to manage partner relations and foster sustainable growth across the wider organisation of a CSO was not possible within the limits of resources available. The evaluation found that a concentration of efforts with a smaller number of partners could have larger positive impact for the community as a whole.

To conclude, the process and management of partner relationships through the Tadmeen project has garnered critical evaluation and policy recommendations that INGOs should take into account when planning to formalize partnerships with CSOs and local stakeholders in the region.

Women engaged through Tadmeen predominantly believe that the project has supported the economic empowerment and self-confidence of women in the Jordanian governorates of Karak, Ma'an and Tafileh. However, it is evident that in order to achieve broader and more sustainable results INGOs need to commit concentrated resources to capacity building with dedicated, regular guidance over a sustained period of time.