Advancing Economic Empowerment for GBV Survivors:
Innovating and Localising Integrated Programming

The Local Anchor Group Model:
A New Approach to Localised and Integrated Programming

There is broad recognition that local actors are better placed to tackle local problems and since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the global humanitarian community has made localisation a key priority including donors and international organisations, especially from the global North . Despite this consensus, there is still a need for more efforts to rebalance power dynamics between international and local actors to enable equitable and horizontal partnerships. Further, short-term funding limits investment in local responses and sustainable capacity development models that are based on local needs and strengths. Many international actors and donors still struggle to identify effective approaches to localisation, and there is a lack of tangible evidence to assess the efficiency and impact of localisation efforts and approaches.

Jointly with local actors, the **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** and the **Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)** partnered to pilot a new, innovative and participatory approach to address the need for more evidence on localised and integrated models to GBV and Economic Recovery programming[2].

The LAG model – piloting a new approach to localised programming

The programme established Local Anchor Groups (LAGs) in the four contexts of implementation: Jordan, Lebanon, Niger and Uganda. LAGs are a coalition of local actors, international non-governmental organisations, United Nations agencies, and government ministries, who work together to enhance learning and capacities across both GBV and economic recovery sectors.

The LAG in each context applied a participatory approach to examine capacities and created capacity development action plans based on LAG members' self-identified needs. Using global guidance developed in the programme, the LAGs developed localised Theory of Change (ToC) models on how to reduce GBV and advance the economic empowerment of displaced GBV survivors in their communities. In the programme's final year, a few LAG members were selected in each country to receive flexible funding to pilot an integrated GBV-Economic Recovery programme, based on the LAG's common ToC. Throughout the programme, learning was measured and documented to contribute with evidence on the LAG model and integrated GBV-Economic Recovery programming.

What works? Best practices from piloting the LAG model

The LAG model was impactful in strengthening capacity, enhancing cross-sector learning (GBV and Economic Recovery), and facilitating collaboration at the local level.

"The…trainings improved our capacity and our level of response when it comes to resource mobilization. And for this reason, we are able to even now attract funding… As we went through this series of… trainings, we were able to build capacity not only of the organization, but also of staff on how they can apply these skills in their daily lives, and also on how they do programming at organizational level."

– LAG member in Uganda

LAG members found that the LAG model facilitated horizontal knowledge sharing, and the coalition of actors with different sector expertise enabled capacity-sharing and integration of sectors. While DRC led the process of bringing the LAG together, several trainings and workshops were facilitated by LAG members themselves. The individual learning of LAG members translated to greater organisational capacity, particularly for community-based, women-led and refugee-led organisations. Training on developing ToCs and MEAL frameworks and proposal writing were consistently evaluated as most beneficial by LAG members. Gaining a better understanding of the tools that are regularly used at the international level helped them in their process of designing programmes, writing more competitive grant applications, and in some cases, securing more funding for their organisation.

"The introduction to the Theory of Change was a game-changer for our work. It provided us with a fresh perspective and new tools. Now, for every project proposal, we start by developing our ToC before tailoring the intervention and selecting the appropriate activities."

– LAG member Lebanon

In this regard, the LAG is a promising model for capacity development, diffusing knowledge from international to local actors, as well as horizontally between local actors, and for creating effective, localised and integrated programming. LAG members valued this increased access to a network of local actors united under one goal as opposed to operating under traditional coordination structures and silos in the humanitarian system. Through the long-term participation in the LAG, members not only shared knowledge but also built relationships throughout the programme which led to further collaboration, consultations, and partnerships outside the context of the LAG.

[1]"New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants." UNHCR, 2016. https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants#compactonrefugees

[2]Integrated programming is defined as "*Joint analysis, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of activities that support mutually reinforcing Protection and Economic Recovery outcomes and overall objective. It combines complementary Protection and Economic Recovery programme activities which collectively contribute to achieving mutually reinforcing outcomes and a common programme objective.*" DRC Integrated Programme Guidance: Protection and Economic Recovery (2022).

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"I had the opportunity to interact with experts and specialists, ask questions and engage in inspiring discussions. My experience in the program has greatly expanded my vision and understanding of how to deal with gender issues and promote economic empowerment in humanitarian settings. I believe it will be an important base for my future contribution to positive change in my community."

— LAG member in Jordan

The LAG, as a model for localization, was successful in ensuring equal participation and engagement of local partners in the humanitarian response and diffused power between international, national and local actors in each context.

For members who were representatives of refugee-led, women-led, or community-based organisations, the LAG created a unique opportunity for increased visibility, access to expertise, collaboration and influence among their peers in international and national organisations and coordination fora. Participating in the LAG placed local actors on a more equal playing field with international actors. This was particularly notable when developing the contextualised Theory of Change, which LAG members viewed as participatory and collaborative, where experiences across all LAG members were valued, and consensus had to be reached to move forward.

The LAG model thus shows that network and collective approaches can be successful in ensuring localised responses as an alternative to traditional bilateral partnership models. The LAG bridged the gap between local, smaller organisations and larger national and international organisations, and enabled horizontal relationships and more equitable participation and voice of local actors - a major criticism of the humanitarian sector, including existing coordination mechanisms that are often dominated by larger international organisations.

"Sometimes you see there are meetings you go to and especially when you're put together with those international and national organizations, there are always those who feel like they've been in the game for quite a long time. They assume to be knowing everything. But this local anchor group team that is formed under the DRC program, I haven't seen that aspect there. So, we see ourselves in that anchor group as partners and we see we value each and every contribution that one has to put forward because like I said earlier on that we are looking at what can we do differently."

— LAG member in Uganda

The LAG model contributes to developing contextualized integrated programs for improved outcomes.

LAG members regarded the integrated GBV and economic recovery approach not only as beneficial to their individual understanding but also as an effective and highly contextualised approach to improving the lives of displaced GBV survivors in their communities by successfully bringing together all actors who could contribute to the desired outcome. LAG members valued the experience of examining GBV and economic exclusion in their communities, and the interplay between them in a more holistic way. The process of developing joint ToCs facilitated greater learning across sectors and allowed for the programme design to centre the voices of local actors, and in return amplify the voices of the community.

Preliminary findings from the pilots in the four countries show substantial promise of these localised ToC-adapted programmes to achieve the expected outcomes and according to survivors had significant impacts on their lives. However, some LAG members encountered greater difficulty including an integrated approach into their existing work due to lack of funding for integrated sector programming.

"By bringing together a group of humanitarian actors from different organizations under a single umbrella, [the] 'LAG,' we developed a sense of ownership for this group, even without any direct monetary gain for our organization."

– LAG member Lebanon

Read more about four country pilots and the learnings and recommendations for Integrated GBV-Economic Recovery Programming here.

Recommendations

→ **Prioritise funding for collective, locally-led models, such as the LAG model, to enable sustainability and promote two-way learning and capacity-strengthening**. These types of models can be more effective for long-term collaboration between local and international actors, engaging in horizontal cross-learning, because it allows local actors to participate as equal partners to international actors. However, these models require specific funding to ensure continuous local leadership, coordination and facilitation.

→ **Invest in collective partnership models as a way to develop highly contextualised programmes**. Leveraging international and local actors' expertise across sectors is effective in developing a shared understanding of a local problem and designing holistic and flexible interventions for better outcomes for GBV survivors.

→ **Collaborate with local organisations to understand and reduce barriers** that prevent donors and international organisations from partnering with local humanitarian actors, such as administrative and linguistic barriers.

→ **Support collective models, such as the LAG, to engage in joint advocacy**. The LAG brings together local, national and international actors providing an opportunity to speak with a joint voice and make a broader impact on local, regional and global levels. While this programme did not explore opportunities for the LAG to engage in collective advocacy to reduce GBV and promote gender equality, this was highlighted by LAG members as a recommendation for future collaboration and other collective models.

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