Locally Led, Globally Relevant

How NPA Partners Drive Change in Iraq and Syria

Norwegian People's Aid

Contents

Foreword

Dear Readers,

It is my profound pleasure to present this report, How NPA Partners Drive Change in Iraq and Northern Syria . It reflects the vision, resilience, and leadership of our local civil society organisations partners. The report reaffirms a deeply held truth that guides our work: sustainable development becomes truly meaningful when it is rooted in local leadership, when communities identify their priorities, act on them, and drive their own transformation. Across Iraq and Northern Syria, our partners have demonstrated that shifting civic power is not theoretical idealism; it is a daily practice of organising citizens, mobilising communities, and influencing institutions. Whether advancing gender equality in Basra, strengthening municipal responsiveness in Raqqa, expanding community peace initiatives, or shaping national policy directions, partners are redefining what is possible in fragile and evolving contexts. These are not isolated achievements, they represent a maturing civil society landscape where trust, legitimacy, and community accountability are becoming the foundation of governance and social resilience.

The examples captured in this report reaffirm the value of NPA's localization model. It reminds us of that NPA's greatest contribution lies not in directing change, but in enabling it by progressively shifting power, responsibility and decision making to the local actors. Through long-term accompaniment, flexible resources, and unwavering respect for partners' mandates and autonomy. We have seen grassroots initiatives evolve into professional organisations and in some cases, into national conveners influencing public policy, uniting networks, and shaping national debate. The above notwithstanding, this report highlights critical lessons for the path forward for both NPA and the wider humanitarian and development community. Shrinking civic space, declining aid flows, governance barriers, and demanding donor compliance requirements continue to constrain partners' ability to sustain and scale up their work. These realities call for deeper investment in local resource mobilisation, stronger organising and advocacy capacities, and greater opportunities for cross-border and peer learning. Moving from "localisation as rhetoric" to "local leadership as practice" requires commitment, patience, and courageous shifts in how we define support and success.

This report is more than a compilation of results; it is a testament to what becomes possible when local voices lead. It offers compelling lessons for the global sector and a roadmap for NPA as we deepen our commitment to equitable, long-term, locally led partnerships. I hope it will serve as an invitation to listen more deeply, trust more boldly, and stand firmly beside the civil society actors carrying their communities forward. In Iraq and Northern Syria, our strategies will continue to evolve in ways that reinforce partners' independence, elevate community voices, and ensure that localisation becomes more than a funding architecture, but a genuine transfer of power, responsibility, and leadership. That is the future NPA envisions, and the future we are committed to building alongside our partners.

To our partners, thank you for your courage, honesty, and steadfast service to your communities. Your leadership continues to shape the future of both countries. To our donors; thank you for your trust in our work and collaboration. Together, we can continue building locally anchored systems of peace, justice, and inclusion that endure long after external actors have stepped back.

Richard Odong
Country Director
NPA Iraq & Northern Syria

1. Executive Summary

After more than a decade of conflict and humanitarian crisis, communities in Iraq and Syria are entering a period of transition — from survival to recovery. In this evolving context, locally led development (LLD) has become central to how the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) and its partners deliver sustainable change. This review captures how NPA's partnerships across Iraq and Syria are redefining power, ownership, and resilience in fragile settings. Eleven partner organisations participated through interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, sharing concrete examples of how local leadership is strengthening accountability, advocacy, and community trust.

The findings show that NPA's operational model — implementation through strong, independent national partners — is working. Partners described the relationship as one built on respect, flexibility, and co-creation rather than control. NPA's technical support, core funding, and mentoring have helped local civil society organisations (CSOs) move from project implementers to recognised policy actors influencing local governance, justice, and protection systems.

Across both countries, partners reported tangible progress:

- In Iraq, CSOs are shaping policy dialogues on human rights, detention conditions, and juvenile justice.
- In Syria, partners are strengthening community resilience through livelihood recovery, protection, and peace building.
- Cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, inclusion, and protection are now embedded in programme design and advocacy.

At the same time, the review highlights persistent challenges — shrinking civic space, unpredictable funding, and coordination barriers that hinder local ownership. Yet, it also reveals powerful enablers: long-term partnership, trust-based management, and local legitimacy as key drivers of sustainability. The study concludes that locally led development is not a slogan but a practice one that demands time, flexibility, and equitable partnerships. It reinforces NPA's value as a catalyst, not a substitute, for local capacity and agency. As the region moves toward early recovery and stabilisation, NPA's approach offers a model for donors and peers: one that links humanitarian action to long-term resilience through genuine local leadership. The lessons drawn from this review provide a roadmap for scaling LLD across the organisation — proving that sustainable change starts when local voices lead.

2. Our Partners

11 partner organisations across Iraq and Syria
29 interviews and FGDs conducted with local CSOs, communities, and staff
2 countries, 1 shared vision: local ownership, accountability, and resilience

Partnership Quality — 1

Capacity Strengthening — 2

Organising & Mobilising — 3

Sustainability — 4

NPA Contribution — 5
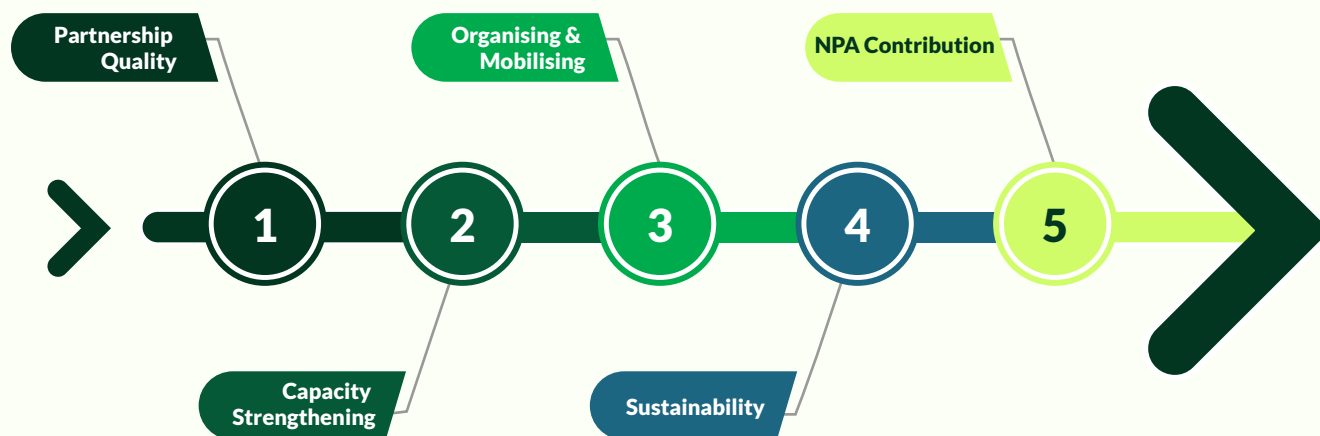
2.1 Partnership Quality and Dynamics

**Question:** *How equitable and effective are NPA's partnerships?*

NPA's partnerships in Iraq and Syria are trust-based, long-term, and strategic, creating mutual respect and shared decision-making. Partners value NPA's responsiveness, transparency, and consistent communication.

"NPA's vision matches ours — we grow together."

90%
Satisfaction rate from partner survey

2.2 Capacity Strengthening

Question: *How has NPA enhanced partners' capacity and performance?*
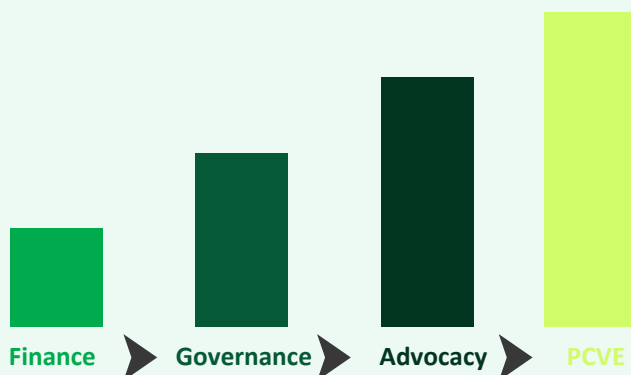
Finance ▶ Governance ▶ Advocacy ▶ PCVE

NPA's locally led development (LLD) model nurtures civic actors who engage citizens and influence policies — from youth and women's networks to community advocacy campaigns. However, the heavy emphasis on project-based grant management still limits full transformation into sustainable, movement-based organisations.

2.3 Organising and Mobilising for Change

**Question:** *How does NPA's approach help partners mobilise communities?*

NPA's locally led development (LLD) model nurtures civic actors who engage citizens and influence policies — from youth and women's networks to community advocacy campaigns. However, the heavy emphasis on project-based grant management still limits full transformation into sustainable, movement-based organisations.

Women

Youth

Community Advocacy
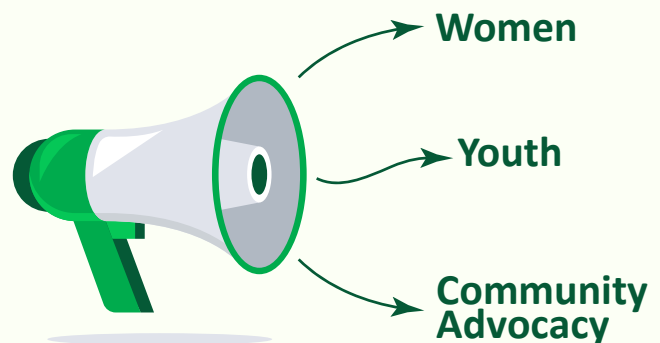
2.4 Sustainability and Scale

Question: *How sustainable are partners' outcomes?*

Several partners have achieved sustainability by diversifying funding, attracting new donors, and institutionalising good practices.

Examples include:
- *DBW's Houses of Peace* model securing new donor funding.
- *FDO's collaboration with Raqqa Municipality* to fund citizen priorities. Yet, domestic resource mobilisation (DRM) remains limited — signaling the need for community philanthropy and local fundraising strategies.

External → **Local** → **Community funding transition**
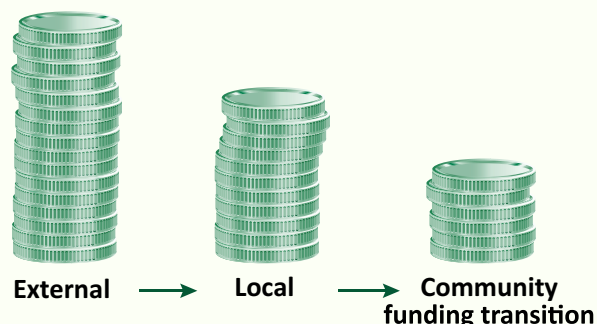
2.5 NPA's Contribution and Added Value

Question: *What difference does NPA's partnership approach make?*
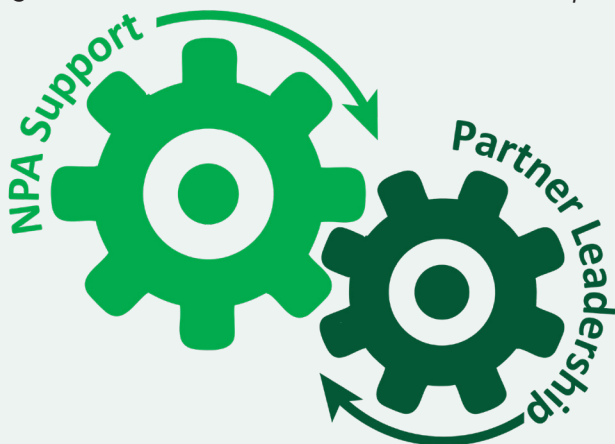
Key Insight:

NPA's accompaniment model — long-term mentorship, learning-by-doing, and joint strategy planning — distinguishes it from other INGOs. The Partners view NPA not as a donor but as a co-creator and ally in development, fostering trust and shared ownership.

"NPA doesn't strangle its partners — it gives them space to lead

Overall Takeaway

NPA's locally led development approach has:

- Strengthened institutions and networks of civil society
- Fostered inclusive advocacy and mobilisation
- Built trust and legitimacy at community level
- And positioned partners as influential actors in Iraq and Syria's social transformation.

From Partnership to Power:
Locally Led Development in Action

3. Methodology

29 Key Informant Interviews and 11 Partner FGDs
Participants: NPA staff, CSO partners, and community representatives
Coverage: Iraq and Syria Thematic focus: Protection, Livelihoods, Governance and Peacebuilding
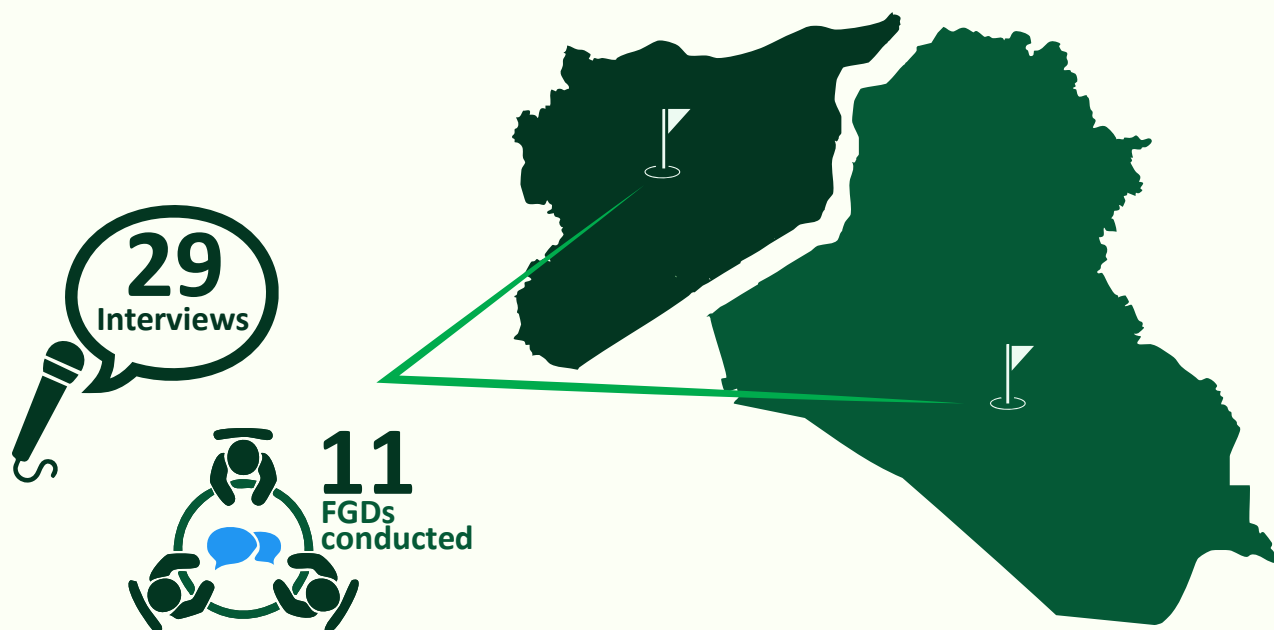
3.1. Turning Insights into Learning

- Triangulated partner input with programme reports, policy documents, and past evaluations
- Identified patterns of change, challenges, and enablers

Primary Data Collection overview

- Conducted joint reflection sessions with NPA teams
- Grounded findings in partners' lived experiences
- Ensured the review embodied locally led development principles

3.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Participants.

- NPA Iraq and Syria staff
- Partner organisation leaders and field staff
- Local authority representatives
- Donor and INGO stakeholders

29 Interviews

11 FGDs conducted

3.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Participants:

- Representatives from 11 partner CSOs
- Community members (youth, women, returnees)
- Beneficiaries of protection, livelihood, and peace building projects

3.3. Desk Review and Document Analysis Sources

- Programme reports and MEL data
- Partner project documentation
- Policy papers and previous evaluations

4. Locally-led Development Outcomes

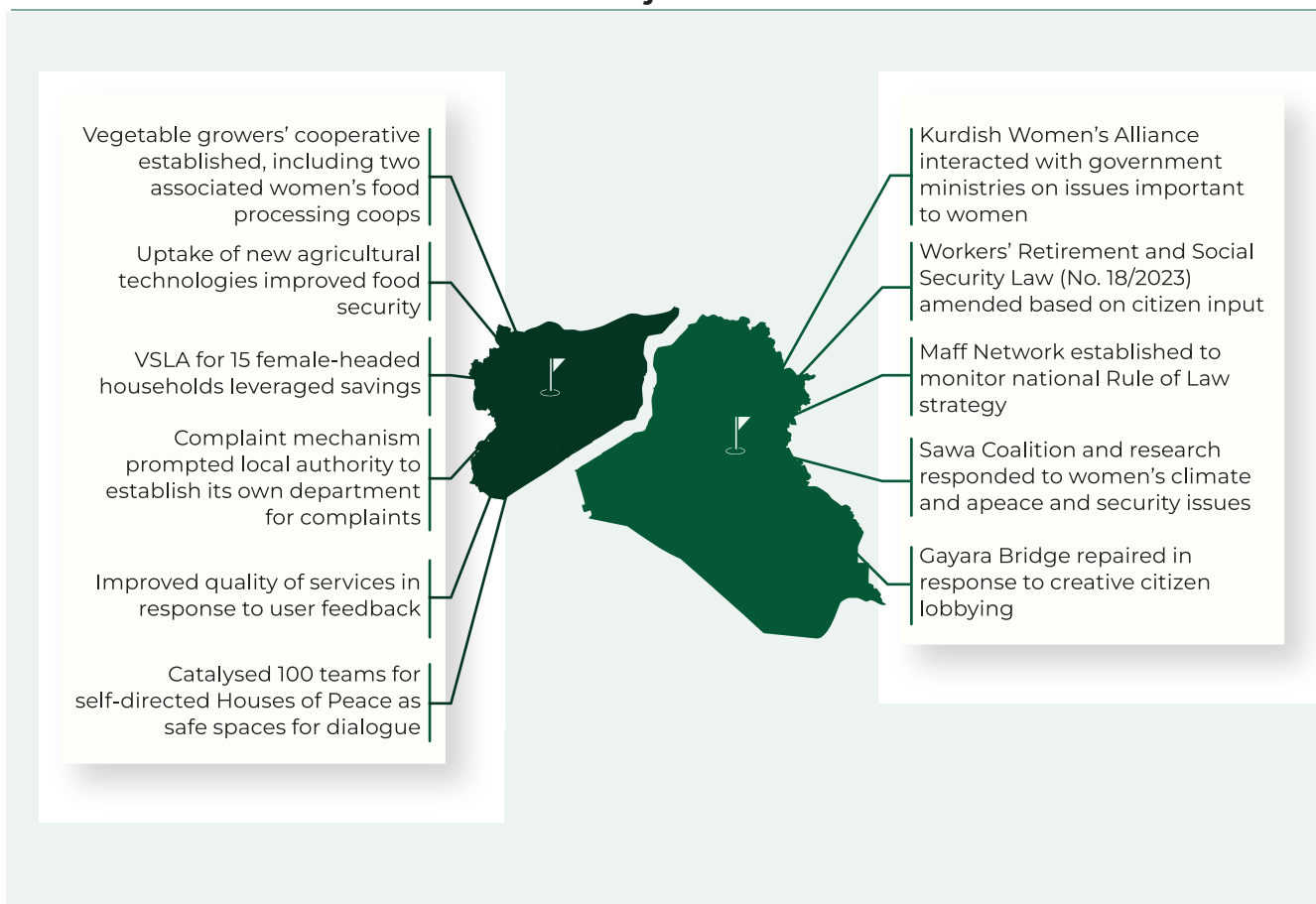## 4.1 Project Outcomes

What are the most significant outcomes that partners have achieved during their partnerships with NPA?

The outcomes were achieved by 1) partners' constituents, 2) partner-affiliated networks, or 3) local or national authorities. The table below summarises the specific examples of outcomes identified by partners.

Partner Project Outcomes

Vegetable growers' cooperative established, including two associated women's food processing coops

Uptake of new agricultural technologies improved food security

VSLA for 15 female-headed households leveraged savings

Complaint mechanism prompted local authority to establish its own department for complaints

Improved quality of services in response to user feedback

Catalysed 100 teams for self-directed Houses of Peace as safe spaces for dialogue

Kurdish Women's Alliance interacted with government ministries on issues important to women

Workers' Retirement and Social Security Law (No. 18/2023) amended based on citizen input

Maff Network established to monitor national Rule of Law strategy

Sawa Coalition and research responded to women's climate and apeace and security issues

Gayara Bridge repaired in response to creative citizen lobbying

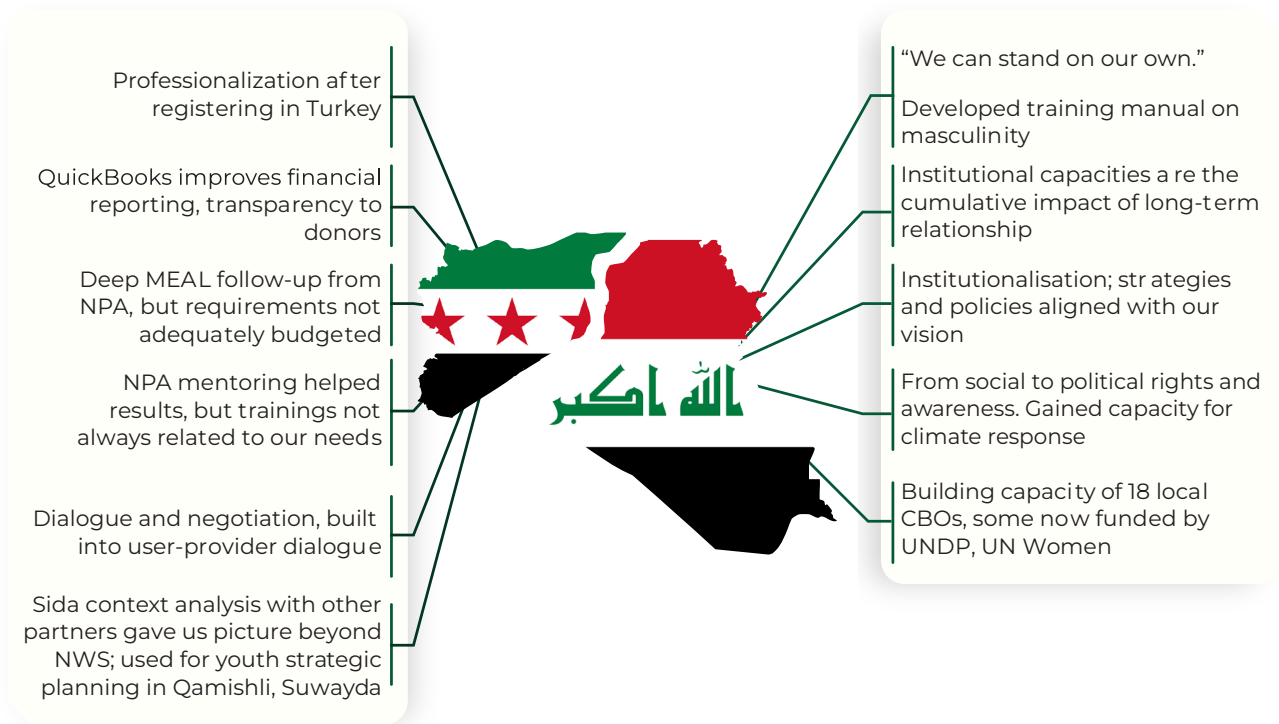**Influencing Change Through Local Leadership**

NPA's partners successfully engaged diverse power holders and institutions at community and national levels. Al Firdaws, a women-led organisation in Basra, mobilised women to advocate for issues affecting their daily lives, demonstrating the strength of grassroots civic participation. EMMA advanced gender equality by engaging the gender units of ministries and governorates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. PAO influenced legislative processes by working with the Iraqi National Assembly to establish citizen feedback mechanisms on new laws. Meanwhile, TAD empowered Mosul residents to lobby for — and secure — government funding to rebuild the Gayara Bridge over the Tigris River. These outcomes show how NPA-supported civil society organisations are not just service providers but active agents of democratic accountability and policy influence, bridging the gap between citizens and institutions to drive tangible change.

4.2 Capacity Outcomes

How have partners grown in their influence, reach, or credibility since working with NPA?

Most partners were able to identify specific outcomes that resulted from their enhanced thematic, administrative, and relational capacities. Several partners also spoke of their overall expanded scale, expertise, and profile that had evolved over the course of their long-term partnerships with NPA. Partner-identified capacities are listed in the table below.

Partner Capacity Outcomes

Professionalization after registering in Turkey

QuickBooks improves financial reporting, transparency to donors

Deep MEAL follow-up from NPA, but requirements not adequately budgeted

NPA mentoring helped results, but trainings not always related to our needs

Dialogue and negotiation, built into user-provider dialogue

Sida context analysis with other partners gave us picture beyond NWS; used for youth strategic planning in Qamishli, Suwayda

"We can stand on our own."

Developed training manual on masculinity

Institutional capacities are the cumulative impact of long-term relationship

Institutionalisation; strategies and policies aligned with our vision

From social to political rights and awareness. Gained capacity for climate response

Building capacity of 18 local CBOs, some now funded by UNDP, UN Women

4.3 Capacity Outcomes — From Local Actors to Leading Institutions

1. Technical Growth
Specialised Tools and Expertise in Iraq

- Developed a Masculinity Training Manual promoting gender equity.
- Enhanced financial reporting and built climate-response capacity.
- Strengthened community-based organisations (CBOs).
- Improved user–provider dialogue for citizen feedback.
- Built youth strategic planning skills informed by national context.

Collaborative Innovation under EU P/CVE Programme in Syria

- Jointly created NPA's *P/CVE Toolbox* of interventions.
- Led Integrative Complexity Thinking, training 39 local NGOs.
- Advanced non-formal education, digitalisation, and early warning systems; now training INGOs (IRC, Global Communities).
- Developed psycho-social model "Sounds of Change", engaging families influenced by extremist ideology in Al-Hol Camp.

2. Organisational Transformation
From Activists to Institutions

- Partners reported *institutionalisation* and *professionalisation* across operations.
- Built a *professional, independent organisation* protecting its vision.
- Evolved from a small group into a structured, policy-driven NGO.
- Expanded beyond Basra into southern governorates.

Stronger Systems and Networks

- New strategies, policies, and controls introduced for risk management.
- Partners now recognised by donors and INGOs for technical leadership.
- HQ staff note several partners that began as small activist groups are now major humanitarian actors — sometimes larger than NPA itself.

"Locally Led Development works best when capacity support is long-term, flexible, and co-created. NPA's partners have evolved from grassroots movements into professional, credible, and networked institutions shaping the future of humanitarian and development response in Iraq and Syria".

4.4 NPA Contributions to Partners' Capacities and Impact

What has been NPA's overall contribution to partners' institutional capacities and ability to influence and to sustain long-term impact?

> "Too often, civil society operates like an ambulance without a hospital. The Maff Network connects grassroots efforts to systemic advocacy."
> — *Dr. Ahmed Miran, CEO, IOL*

Case Study: IOL – Building the Maff Rule of Law Network (Iraq)

Strategic Outcomes

- After two years of negotiation, the Maff Network for Solidification of Justice and Development of Democracy was officially registered in August 2024 with Iraq's Department of NGOs.

- 12 member organisations united under one umbrella to strengthen rule of law, justice, and democratic governance in Iraq, making it a professional, independent network recognised nationally.

- Led to formal recognition by the Government of Iraq of civil society as a key partner in governance reform.

- Strengthened collaboration among CSOs and their engagement with government ministries and the Council of Ministers. Thus, a new coordination platform for CSOs, activists, and government.

- Contributed to Norad Impact 1: Informed, networked civil society influencing public policy -Enhanced civil society legitimacy and sustained advocacy power.

- Promoted women's and youth participation in the justice and governance space.

NPA's Contribution

Co-designed and funded 3 strategic workshops:

- *Feb 2024: Strategy and collaboration meeting (16 participants)*
- *Oct 2024: Public launch in Baghdad (48 participants)*
- *Dec 2024: Capacity strengthening in Erbil (16 participants)*
- *Facilitated dialogue between CSOs and government actors.*
- *Introduced partners to international rule of law standards and gender advocacy tools.*
- *Enhanced partners' skills in policy advocacy, legal reform, and women's rights protection.*

Stakeholder Voices

> We didn't even know each other before IOL connected us through this network." *Afaq Centre for Justice.*

> IOL now sits on the national task force coordinating Iraq's Rule of Law Strategy." *Ministry of Justice consultant.*

> *"NPA's long-term partnership and capacity investment helped transform a small local NGO into a national convener of justice actors — linking grassroots voices to governance reform in Iraq".*

Case Study: Al Firdaws – The Sawa Coalition for Women's Advocacy (Iraq)

Outcome

The Sawa Coalition ("Together") was created in Basra to increase women's participation in decision-making and security institutions. It became a coordinated advocacy platform uniting women leaders, activists, and youth around issues of peace and security. A joint campaign during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, featuring Brush of Change, Basra Women in Security Forces, and Climate Women — all amplifying women's voices in policy reform.

- Sawa coalition strengthened inclusive, gender-sensitive governance by linking women, youth, and security actors with policymakers. Women-led advocacy now embedded in Basra's peace and security dialogues.
- It advanced Sida Outcome 1 — improving representation and influence of marginalised groups in Iraq's decision-making processes. Civil society networks more cohesive and policy oriented.
- In a region marked by conservative norms, Sawa fostered collaboration and trust between civil society and local authorities to push the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda forward.
- Al Firdaws recognised as a credible actor influencing both community and government-level discussions.

> " Sawa gave women in Basra a space to be seen, to be heard, and to act together. — Al Firdaws representative "

NPA's Contribution

- *Long-term partnership since 2019 under the Sida Programme, providing mentoring, resources, and strategic guidance.*
- *Empowered Al Firdaws to transition from a small volunteer group to a recognised, networked advocacy organisation.*
- *Strengthened partners' ability to lead locally designed campaigns and coordinate coalitions around national gender priorities.*

> *"NPA's sustained mentoring and flexible support helped transform a small women-led CSO into a convening force for gender equality and peacebuilding in Iraq — proving that long-term partnerships drive inclusive, democratic change".*

Case Study: FDO – A Responsive Municipality in Raqqa (Syria)

Outcome

- Through its Youth Platform for Political Development, FDO organised 72 dialogue sessions engaging 1,800 citizens, including displaced persons and returnees from Al-Hol Camp.

- The dialogues led to 48 participatory workshops between community members, civil society, and local authorities — resulting in concrete municipal reforms including;

- Creation of women's committees in three wards.

- Education Committee decree allowing Al-Hol children to enroll without documents.

- Electronic complaint channels established by the Mayor.

- Entrepreneurship support fund integrated into Raqqa's 2024 municipal budget.

Significance

- 70% of participants reported increased confidence in civil society's ability to influence decisions.

- Demonstrated that citizen voices can shape municipal policies when dialogue channels exist. Contributed to *CSPPS Outcomes 1 and 3:*

→ Syrian CSOs influence decision-making.
→ Local governance responds to citizens' needs.

> "We learned that local authorities do listen — when citizens speak together, they can make change."
> — ***Youth participant, Raqqa dialogue session***

NPA's Contribution

- Selected FDO for its proven strength in *youth mobilisation* and *municipality engagement*.

- Empowered partners to design initiatives fully aligned with local priorities.

- Organised Nansen's digital training on Communication, Dialogue, and Conflict Transformation for all CSPPS partners.

- Created an enabling environment linking local ownership to Track III peacebuilding and civic engagement.

- Institutionalised dialogue between citizens and Raqqa Municipality.
- Strengthened youth leadership in governance and peacebuilding.
- Tangible municipal actions responding to community-identified needs.
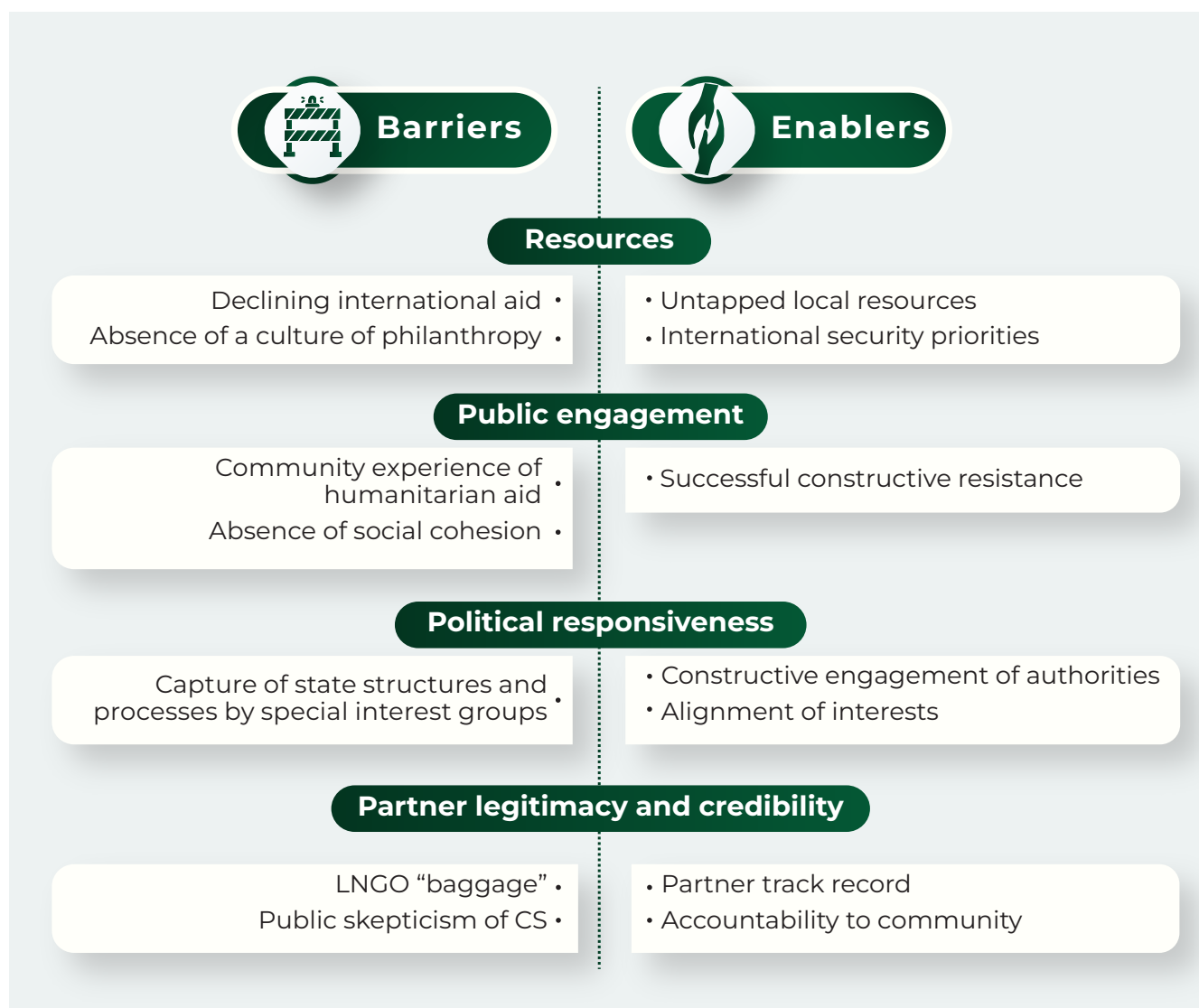- Laid groundwork for *national reconciliation through local participation.*

> **"***By trusting local partners to design their own initiatives, NPA helped transform dialogue into action — proving that inclusive governance and youth-led participation can rebuild trust between citizens and institutions in post-conflict Syria"*.

4.5 Contextual Factors

What are the main enablers and barriers experienced by partners when attempting to scale or sustain their initiatives beyond NPA's direct involvement?

The key contextual factors that impact partners' initiatives relate to: 1) availability of local or donor resources; 2) the history of public engagement; 3) the political responsiveness of power holders; and 4) partners' own legitimacy and credibility. Partners' abilities to recognise barriers and build on enablers shape the potential of their initiatives for scale and sustainability.

Contextual Factors Affecting Locally Led Development

Barriers | **Enablers**

Resources

Barriers	Enablers
Declining international aid • Absence of a culture of philanthropy •	• Untapped local resources • International security priorities

Public engagement

Barriers	Enablers
Community experience of humanitarian aid • Absence of social cohesion •	• Successful constructive resistance

Political responsiveness

Barriers	Enablers
Capture of state structures and processes by special interest groups •	• Constructive engagement of authorities • Alignment of interests

Partner legitimacy and credibility

| Barriers	Enablers
LNGO "baggage" • Public skepticism of CS •	• Partner track record • Accountability to community

Factors Shaping Scale and Sustainability

"Sustainability grows where resources, legitimacy, and trust intersect — when local organisations are both resourced and recognised as legitimate voices for their communities"

i) Resources and Financing

- Funding determines longevity. DBW's *Houses of Peace* model attracted new donor support and has now been integrated into NPA proposals.

- International attention on the threat of ISIS sustains donor interest in *P/CVE initiatives*.

- Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM) remains largely untapped but promising:

  i. *FDO* secured municipal funding in Raqqa for citizen priorities.

  ii. *Bahar* and *DBW* mobilised community savings groups.

1. Global examples (DRC, Aga Khan Foundation) show how diaspora remittances and *community philanthropy* can finance local development.
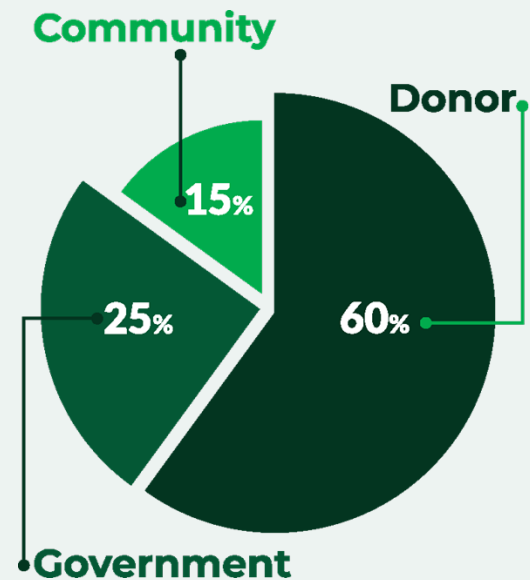
ii) Public Trust and Civic Engagement

- Public perception of civil society has been shaped by years of humanitarian dependency through a INGO"

- In Iraq, youth activists from the *Tishreen movement* are sceptical of formal politics, constrained by the *Muhasasa* patronage system.

- In Syria, however, mass civic demonstrations reveal a growing public hunger for participation and accountability.

"Syrians still crave a voice in building a peaceful, inclusive nation."

iii) Political Responsiveness

Civic Space
Government Collaboration
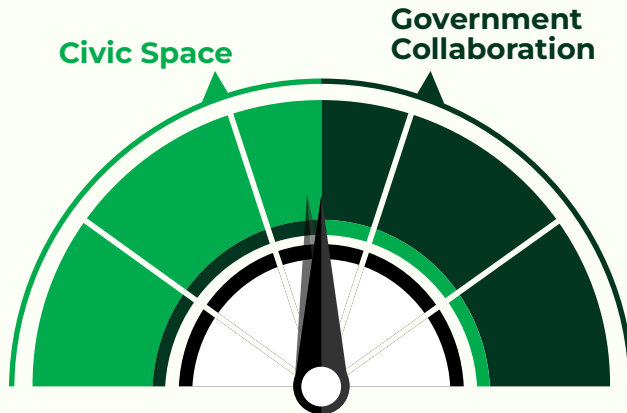
- Civic space is narrowing—e.g., Iraq's ban on the term "gender."

- Yet, the *IOL, Al Firdaws,* and *FDO* case studies show municipal and regional governments willing to collaborate when trust and relevance are built.

- Donor frameworks like *Norad* and *Sida* enable flexible, community-centered engagement, making local voices part of policy dialogue.

iv) Legitimacy and Local Roots

- Perceived legitimacy shapes partners' reach and influence.

  i. *Al Firdaws* gains legitimacy through its long-term ties with women activists.

  ii. *FDO* through its youth-led community engagement in Raqqa.

  iii. *KRD* through its service track record supporting returnees in Kobani.

- Longstanding engagement builds trust, continuity, and community credibility—the foundation for sustainable locally led development.

LEGITIMACY

CREDIBILITY

SERVICE

PRESENCE
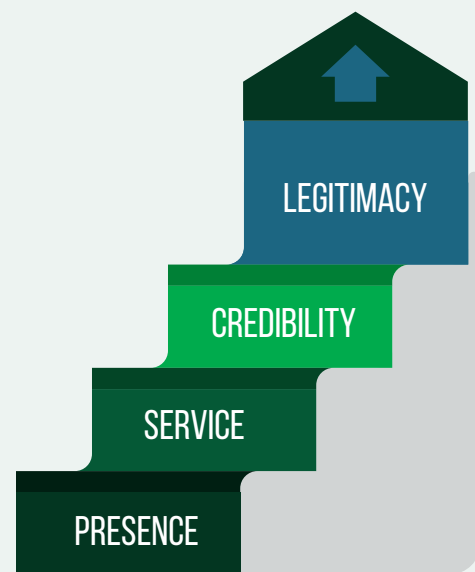
4.6 Conclusion: NPA's Contribution to Partnerships

What have been NPA's contribution, role and added value to partnerships delivering locally led development?

The outcomes identified by the partners, as well as reflections from partners, staff and some external stakeholders, reveal the following NPA contributions:

- Selecting legitimate, capable actors (mentioned by NPA staff)
- Influencing partners' project concepts or designs, e.g. through context analysis and programme framework (mentioned by NPA staff and some partners)
- Providing flexible resources (mentioned by all partners)
- Supporting institutional capacity development, including policies and organisational values (mentioned by all partners and NPA staff)
- Strengthening partners' organising and networking capacities and strategies, including context analysis and fostering innovation (most partners, NPA)

- Mentoring and learning, e.g. on strategy, problem solving, reporting (mentioned by all partners and by NPA staff)
- Enabling international relations and experience exchange (mentioned by one partner)

Regarding NPA's contribution to partners' institutionalisation, many partners have indeed matured into larger, more developed organisations, able to manage more grants with expanded coverage, which NPA staff and some partners associated with long-term NPA capacity support. But most of these partners also received support from other sources as well.

It can be said with more confidence, therefore, that NPA's role regarding partners' institutionalisation is one of contribution rather than attribution.

The table below summarises the contributions of NPA to partners' outcomes as identified by partners and NPA staff.

NPA Contribution (Partner)	NPA Contribution (NPA Staff)
• Continuous engagement on strategy • Regional experience and relations • Technical assistance on training manual	• Institutional capacity strengthening • Sharpened gender vision, approach • Helped navigate political crisis
• Systematic, cumulative capacity building • Long-term, strategic partnership	• Joint concept under Norad framework • Flexibility to adapt to changing context • Long-term capacity support
• Institutionalisation aligned with IOL's vision • Capacity building and budget for network	• Network concept aligns with Norad • Advice on political strategy
• Long-term support • Motivation to pursue vision • Training to turn idea into project	• Long-term capacity and mentoring • "Gravitas" of INGO support aided advocacy, gov't relations
• Attention to participation, cohesion • Flexibility on design, implementation	• Long-term capacity and mentoring • Joint concept under Sida frame • Progs supported intermediary role
• Financial, technical support • Engagement, mentoring throughout project	• Shift from relief to sustainable impact • Social mobilization capacities

• Funding and flexibility • Helped with local authority support	• FSL capacity strengthening
• Co-design of projects • Investment in cap sharing, learning	• Donor engagement caps (early on) • Joint dev't of PCVE interventions
• Concept emerged from Sida frame • Ongoing coordination, support	• Discipline to meet deliverables
• Concept emerged from Sida frame • Flexible design, 2-year time frame	• Social cohesion strategies • Formulation of advocacy messages
• Capacity strengthening on dialogue, conflict transformation	• Capacity strengthening and coordination support

5. Partnership Review

5.1 Quality of Relationships

How do partners and NPA each rate the quality and performance of their shared partnerships?

Overall Perception

Across Iraq and Syria, partners describe NPA partnerships as equitable, transparent, and trust-based. The 2024 Partner Satisfaction Survey shows that 90% of respondents were *highly satisfied or satisfied* with NPA's communication, collaboration, and contract management.

"NPA's vision matches ours. We share decision-making power and set priorities together." — *Iraqi partner representative*

90%
satisfied / very satisfied

Syria

- Partners praised collaboration, transparency, and context-based support.
- FSL partners valued joint context analyses; others welcomed independence in Sida projects but missed peer learning.
- Positive remarks on NPA's role in reducing partner isolation in NES/NWS.
- Critiques: inconsistent back-donor visibility and differing views on funding allocation rationale.

Iraq

- Partners emphasised mutual respect and strategic alignment: "NPA's vision matches ours."
- Valued joint planning, open communication, and annual reviews that identify growth areas.
- Appreciated NPA's long-term commitment and space for independence.
- Concerns: limited contact with donors and occasional unilateral language decisions (e.g., replacing the term *gender*).

deep trust / shared vision

Collaboration / less visibility

NPA Staff Perspectives

- Pride in shared ownership: "We and the partners now speak the same language."
- Staff view long-term collaboration as key to partners' independence and stronger programme quality.
- Challenges:
- High partner staff turnover slows progress.
- Leadership gaps within some partner organisations.
- Difficulty addressing governance weaknesses directly.

"NPA doesn't strangle its partners." — *AANES Representative*

HQ and External Stakeholder Reflections

- Head Office: sees NPA's approach as a model of solidarity and equality among INGOs.
  I. Cautions that equal partnerships are limited when access to back donors is restricted.
  II. Raises reflective questions:
     - Are partners chosen for *legitimacy* or *project delivery*?
     - Do NPA and partners share a *clear end goal*?
- Local authorities and INGOs: describe NPA as a leader in egalitarian partnerships.

"NPA's partnerships stand out for trust, transparency, and shared purpose. As the organisation deepens institutionalisation and scales locally led approaches, sustaining this equality — while addressing governance and donor-access gaps — will be key to the next phase of partnership excellence".

5.2 Quality of NPA Support

**How do stakeholders rate the quality and effectiveness of NPA's support to partners?**

Overall Perception

Most partners describe NPA's support as strategic, long-term, and transformative. Its greatest strength lies in *trust-based relationships* and *continuous engagement* that allow partners to grow from small activist groups into professional organisations. Partners value NPA's consistency and flexibility — confirming that long-term accompaniment matters more than short-term training**.**

What Partners Appreciate - Iraq /Syria Shared themes

- Joint capacity-building priorities agreed through annual assessments.
- Regular mentoring and communication with NPA staff.
- Hands-on learning in finance, proposal writing, reporting, and institutional development.
- Inclusion of capacity-strengthening budgets in projects.
- Tailored training and mentoring (e.g., Nansen's Dialogue and Negotiation training for FDO).

"Our partnership reviews changed how we manage projects. We now demand the same standards from other INGOs." — **PAO representative**

Finance

MEAL

Programme Design

Mentoring

Areas for Improvement

MEAL

Tailoring
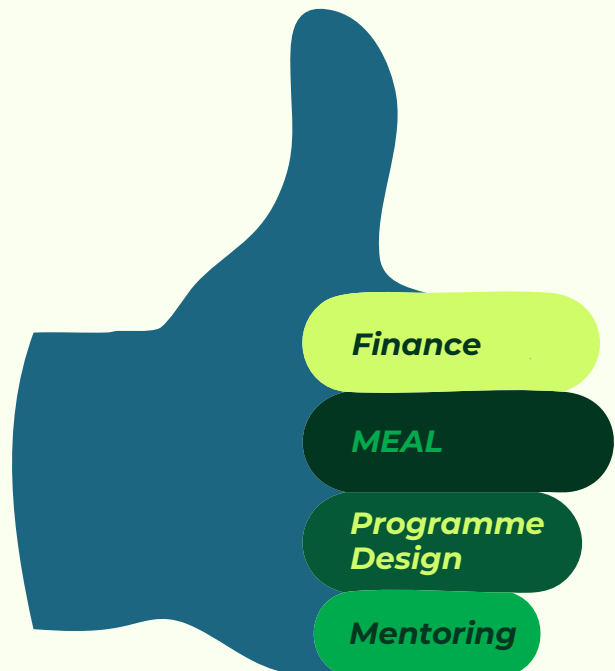
Exchange

- Limited partner-to-partner exchange and learning.
- MEAL tools sometimes designed at programme level, not project level.
- Need for stronger accountability and learning systems.
- Some external trainings viewed as generic or low-quality.
- Larger partners like Bahar desire more tailored, advanced support.

Staff Perspectives

- Iraq team: Highlights partner assessments, mentoring, and differentiated capacity support as best practices.
- Syria team: Notes mentoring helped *open doors to new donors* for partners but geographic separation (NES/NWS) limits peer exchange.
- HQ perspective: Iraq/Syria offices stand out for depth of support and focus on institutionalisation.

"We must ensure institutionalisation doesn't eclipse partners' missions." ***NPA HQ staff***

"NPA's long-term, trust-based support has built stronger, more professional partners across Iraq and Syria. The next step is deeper exchange, tailored learning, and stronger advocacy capacity — ensuring institutional growth translates into greater civic impact".

5.3 Relevance of Partnership Approach

How relevant and effective is NPA's partnership approach within the dynamic contexts of Iraq and Syria?

NPA's partnership model is viewed as a benchmark for locally led development (LLD) in Iraq and Syria — countries with emerging civil societies, persistent sectarian divides, and declining donor funding. Partners and peers regard NPA as a role model for equitable, long-term collaboration that strengthens civil society ownership and local legitimacy

Comparative Assessment — 7 Localisation Domains

Domain		ICVA Iraq Findings	NPA Better Practices	Areas for improvemnet
	Partnership	Some evidence of equitable collaboration	Long-term, egalitarian partnerships; budgets include capacity and indirect costs	Develop graduation pathways for mature partners
	Leadership	Limited local leadership in programming	Partners design projects (Norad, Sida); national staff in management	Include partners in programme committees; nationalise senior posts
	Cordination	Few joint approaches	Networks for CS coordination and advocacy	Facilitate regional and cross-border exchanges
	Participation	Weak community participation	Community feedback mechanisms in place	Review their effectiveness with partners
	Policy Influence	Local actors rarely shape donor/national policy	Documented examples of partner policy advocacy	Increase dialogue between partners and donors
	Capacity	Limited targeted support	Annual capacity reviews drive ownership	Focus more on organising and mobilising capacities
	Funding	Few actors financially independent	Investment in partner grant and finance skills	Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation

Key Insights

- Better practices in all seven domains especially in fostering ownership, network-building, and long-term trust.
- NPA's LLD approach goes beyond localisation by empowering civil society networks and community voice, not just transferring funding.
- However, like other INGOs, NPA must continue shifting from a supply-driven model to peer learning and exchange, while helping partners mobilise local resources

5.4 Conclusion: NPA's Approach to Locally Led Development

How has NPA's approach supported and influenced partners' ability to organise and to mobilise for change?

"NPA's strength lies in partnership, not patronage. To sustain this, future support must invest in partners' power to organise, mobilise, and finance their missions — ensuring Syrian and Iraqi civil societies remain authentic, rooted, and resilient".

Through equitable, long-term partnerships in Iraq and Syria, NPA has helped build a new generation of civil-society actors capable of mobilising communities and influencing local change. Partners credit NPA's flexible, holistic support spanning institutional growth, policy advocacy, and mentoring for enabling them to evolve from small activist groups to professional, trusted organisations leading locally led development (LLD) outcomes.

"NPA helped us grow roots in our own communities — not just manage grants." — **Partner interview.**

The Challenge

Despite this progress, much of NPA's engagement still revolves around grant management and donor compliance, reinforcing a subtle donor-recipient dynamic. Some partners now aspire to become "mini-INGOs," a trend that risks diluting local legitimacy, the very foundation of LLD.

Strategic Recommendations

i). Strengthen Evidence of Contribution

- Adopt simple Outcome–Significance–Contribution documentation to track how NPA's partnership inputs drive partner results.

- Publicise and share these stories to illustrate impact beyond outputs.

ii). Differentiate Localisation from Locally Led Development

- Focus on community-facing metrics (e.g., local cost-share, citizen-driven initiatives) rather than just donor-facing indicators.

iii). Build Sustainability and Resource Independence

- Support partners to craft sustainability and domestic-resource-mobilisation plans leveraging community philanthropy, diaspora remittances, and government collaboration.

Refining NPA's Partnership Model

- Shift focus from project management to organising, advocacy, and mobilisation skills, emphasising peer-to-peer exchange.
- Enable young Iraqi and Syrian CSOs to learn from Arabic-speaking peers (e.g., Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan).
- Empower mature partners through block grants, co-designed consortiums, and mentorship roles for smaller CSOs.

Country Context-Specific Directions

Iraq

- Re-orient the country strategy toward a civil society beyond aid, engaging media as allies for social cohesion.
- Deepen exploration of domestic giving and community philanthropy to reduce dependence on ODA.
- Consider grant-management consultants to ease reporting burdens and free partners to focus on civic work.

Syria

- Frame a post-Assad LLD objective focused on national dialogue and cross-regional collaboration.
- Support partners to register nationally and engage beyond NES/NWS.
- Assign a DHC representative in Damascus to integrate operations and bridge the humanitarian-development nexus.
- Facilitate civil-society mapping to build networks across Syria's regions.

Annex 1

Partners

Syria Partners
Masarrat
KRD
Bahar
Shams
FDO
DBW

Iraq Partners
Al Firdaws
Emma
PAO
IOL
TAD