



Adaptive Management at a Global Level: Adjusting a 5-year Localization Project based on Data

Identifying the Need

Women’s Voice and Leadership in Humanitarian Settings (WHS) is an innovative program focused on capacity-sharing, learning, advocacy, and grantmaking for women-led organizations (WLOs) in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Nepal. In each country, a regionally-networked lead WLO partner works with a cohort of 15 grassroots WLOs who receive sustained support throughout the project. This learning brief highlights a key development from the project’s second year of implementation.

In Year 2, lead partner organizations (LPOs) in each country continued Year 1 capacity-sharing activities with their cohorts while preparing for the distribution of subgrants to them in Year 3. The project was initially designed to provide subgrants to the four strongest WLOs in each national cohort during Year 3. These subgrants were intended to span two years, ranging from \$60,000 to \$90,000. The other organizations in the national cohorts would continue to receive capacity-strengthening support, but without funding. These subgrants would allow those organizations to solidify their learnings, extend their activities, build out their staff, and gain valuable grant management experience. At the

same time, this structure sought to generate concrete evidence that access to substantial subgrants combined with capacity-strengthening support is more effective than capacity-strengthening alone.

However, after working with the cohorts for a year, LPOs noted issues with the proposed subgranting structure. They predicted that giving subgrants to only four organizations in each country would disrupt cohort cohesiveness, create competition among WLOs, and potentially lead to attrition in the project as those not selected for funding might drop out of the process. Furthermore, they agreed that providing subgrants to only the four “strongest” WLOs did not align with their intentions to change the narrative of traditional definitions of “strong” capacity, which tend to sideline the most grassroots WLOs despite their track records as frontline responders. Additionally, in quarterly feedback surveys and other data collection processes, WLOs repeatedly expressed the need for support funding to be able to meet the project’s capacity-strengthening expectations. Thus, partners concluded that the benefits of having two subgroups of analysis (four WLO grantees versus eleven non-grantees) did not justify the possible negative consequences of demotivating unfunded cohort members.



"It is important to provide support in the territories and help us execute our annual action plan. We would like you to support us financially for these actions, which are fundamental for our organization" – Colombian cohort member, December 2023 feedback survey

Making the Case

After identifying the need to adapt the project based on data and insights from the first year of implementation, LPOs led an autonomous and collaborative effort to redesign the subgranting plan and propose a revised structure to the donor, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). Because the LPOs engage with the donor in this project through quarterly check-in calls, they were able to share their proposal directly with BHA. With the donor's support and assistance, partners worked together to find a way to provide some funding to each cohort member while still maintaining subgroups for comparative analysis.

The final decision was to provide three tiers of two-year subgrants to the cohort members, such that one subgroup of four WLOs per country will still receive a significant grant (\$40,000-\$45,000), another subgroup will receive a small grant (\$10,000-\$15,000) and the rest will receive small support funding (\$5,000-\$7,000). Despite the new "significant" grant size being much smaller than initially proposed, LPOs agreed that in each of their contexts, \$40,000-\$45,000 is still considered a significant amount of funding that can make an important difference to their organizational development and allows for the completion of activity implementation at the community level. They also agreed with this change because the process itself was a transformative practice to include grassroots organizations in funding opportunities despite traditional eligibility

requirements, getting resources to the most local and structurally marginalized groups.

Learning from the Process

"This was my first time coordinating across four countries, navigating diverse contexts/needs for building consensus by respecting the unique regional challenges of WLOs. This process has been incredibly empowering, allowing WLOs like us to influence project modalities based on our ground experiences and knowledge. As a WLO representative, I truly felt that our knowledge and experiences were counted, valued and respected throughout this journey." – LPO from Nepal, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)

This exercise was an important milestone for lead partners of this project as they exercised adaptive management based on direct feedback they had received from project participants and worked with each other and the donor to make the change a reality. It demonstrates the importance of a project being 100% flexible and allowing for these types of adjustments at any point in the project cycle. It also highlights the importance of donor openness to change during a five-year process. Now that the subgranting restructure has been approved, lead partner organizations completed a participatory, transparent selection process for cohort members to place them into the three levels of funding, and cohort members have expressed their gratitude and excitement that they will each receive some level of financial support. LPOs and BHA are looking forward to seeing the results at all three levels of these subgrants over the coming years.