

Questions from NMFA related to NPA proposals for response to the Syrian crisis.

Syria response – Northern Syria

MFA question: HTS (5.1 and 4.2): NPAs policy is that you will pull out if HTS takes over control of the territory where you work. The power-holding is very fluid in Idlib and we would like to know how you verify who has control at a given time? Military control mapping is according to the proposal one of NPAs strengths so more information on how you work is relevant and interesting. In addition, this fluidity has been the case for a long time so we expect that you have experienced that areas where your partners work have been taken over by HTS, directly or indirectly. Can you give some examples on how you have proceeded in such cases.

Based on information from [REDACTED] and report from one NPA staff who recently travelled to Idlib and came out 30th June, military factions included HTS is controlling Idlib both rural area and city, but civil and service work are still led by the local councils (LCs). This is based on a gentleman agreement between the LCs and armed groups. I/NGOs are coordinating with LCs, and the LCs will coordinate with military groups if there is any problem of interference. The military groups are mainly interested in the large public-service projects which impacts the wider community, like electricity projects and irrigation projects for agricultural lands, less in the support to individual beneficiaries.

[REDACTED] has written agreement with LCs in the locations they are working. The agreement states that LCs will help to solve any problem if any interference from armed/military groups occurs. [REDACTED] has twice experienced interference from militants group and individual members of military group (but never from HTS): In the first case the LC couldn't help to solve the issue. The first case took place under NPA wheat production project, where the initial targeted area was [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] villages. In the second case, the LC facilitated and addressed the issue, so [REDACTED] could continue working in the location. (Further details below)

Because of the fluid and extensive control of armed groups in Idlib, [REDACTED] is working in the locations Local Councils are experienced to be strongest, and not in the areas with problematic mixed-presence of military groups. In the location where armed groups are mixed, it is harder for LC to solve the issue and support the NGOs in case of interference. NPA and [REDACTED] are mapping which groups control the areas down to the targeted village level, before the project start, and observe the changes during implementation.

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[REDACTED] Security Officer is in contact with our NPA Security Focal Point [REDACTED], and is providing security reports and updates on challenges in regular basis. In addition, NPA Field Monitor who is based in [REDACTED] is on daily basis reporting directly to the Programme

Coordinator in [REDACTED] to verify [REDACTED] information both for program and to follow up on security and military changes.

The locations indicated in the proposal are identified based on planning at the point in time, but when funds are secured, we start the process of specifying and reverifying the feasibility of the locations. The partner will then be asked to re-do the technical assessment/households survey and submit the 'exact' target villages to NPA before start the projects, so that NPA can approve the locations before project starts. If situation has changed from when planning took place, locations will be changed.

With regard to control of locations mentioned in the proposal:

- [REDACTED] is control by Ahrar Al Sham and [REDACTED] is currently controlled by HTS (before it was control by Jund Al Aqsa). In this location, there is military council consisting from representative of many armed factions. This LC in this area will coordinate with military council if any one of faction wanted to interfere in the humanitarian work.
- [REDACTED] is control by Ahrar Al Sham, but many military factions have presence in the area, however the target location will not be in the forest, thus not expected to be impacted by the military presence.
- [REDACTED] is control by Failak Al Sham

The conflict map in this article also underpins the same picture:

<http://www.mei.edu/content/article/al-qaeda-affiliate-and-ahrar-al-sham-compete-control-idlib>

All these targeted towns have elected civilians councils (LCs) with broad civil and service powers, and they are the ones who take responsibility to coordinate with I/NGOS in the projects.

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NPA's analysis of the political context inside Syria is nuanced and informed by our experience and network from our democracy programming. NPA country team includes a Political Advisor who has direct access to a number of the implementing areas covered by the partners in this project. On October 2016, when NPA and [REDACTED] started to work in Idleb, NPA required [REDACTED] to submit agriculture and CFW target locations in advance to be checked by NPA Political Advisor. In this case, although not related with HTS presence, [REDACTED] was asked to change the location based on NPA's reconnaissance and advise. CFW activities changed from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]. This case was related to one military faction opening a main military base in the forest/hill and NPA feared that this could provoke airstrikes from the Syrian Regime. At that time, the partner aimed to have a tree planting project for women CFW. [REDACTED] then changed the approach to sewing and knitting to ensure the safety of beneficiaries and [REDACTED] staff.

Also, still under NPA project, a militant group (not HTS) tried to interfere [REDACTED] work in [REDACTED], and were asking wheat kits. In these two villages, there was mixed military control with a small presence of HTS, Ahrar [REDACTED] Sham, and FSA (mixed). As a result of this wheat production activity moved to 4 villages on [REDACTED] based on LC's advise.

***MFA question:** Idlib: You say that assistance to Idlib remains at critical levels and that the region receives too little attention from donors. This is not our impression when speaking to other humanitarian partners and donors. Could you clarify what you mean?*

Idlib in general is one of the areas in Syria with the highest needs related to livelihood, and this is also reflected in OCHA's overviews. There are however districts and areas other places in Syria which are more unserved and with more critical humanitarian needs. There are local and International NGOs working in Idlib, focusing on livelihoods, mostly agriculture: kitchen garden and wheat production, but the assistance far below needs, particularly with regard to support to farmers. As livelihood projects are expensive, (provide inputs to support agriculture project (full season)), not all vulnerable farmers can be covered. While host communities remain in dire needs, new IDPs are still coming to idlib from rural Damascus, Homs, north Hama, Deir Zor, Ar Raqqa, which increase number of people in needs. Our partner, [REDACTED] has not experienced any overlapping on beneficiaries in our target areas in Idlib, very different from Aleppo rural, and there are significant gaps with locations in Idlib that have not covered.

***MFA question:** Budget: Your budget is clear and honest. About 40% are support costs, aprox NOK 9 million of which 3,64 mill to Norway related costs. We acknowledge that humanitarian aid is expensive, but we ask our partners to comment on and justify their budget when we see that support costs are around 40 %. The same ratio and question goes for the CCCP budget.*

We hope the below details will provide sufficient explanation as to allocations for project follow up in the current projects. We admit that running humanitarian projects for Northern Syria are expensive, but will also underline that as these are livelihood programmes, which are more complex, and there is need to ensure sufficient follow up capacity to ensure quality, and the programmes also require training and capacity building both of beneficiaries, partners and staff. Norway costs are only 6,5% of the total budget, all other costs are related to presence and project and partner follow up in country.

2001 Investments: The equipment budgeted here is solely for project staff working at field offices and not for support staff.

4150 Expatriate Personnel Cost: This is the salary and benefit for the program manager for 10 months. Programme manager spends extensive time in the field, engaging directly with partner and project development and is considered project costs.

4200 Local Staff: NOK 970 000 are salaries for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning staff. NOK 637 000 is for national program staff. The rest, NOK 333 000 is used for Finance, Logistics at field locations or drivers for programme staff, cost we also consider project costs as these staff groups also work to build partner capacity at administrative level.

6815 Partner Related Costs: Hiring a data analysis consultant to support MEAL activities for partners and NPA

6925 Partner Capacity building: One of the corner stones in NPAs partnership policy is to capacity build local partners, so the cost included in this activity is directly program related.

6000 Running costs: These costs are relatively high because the project covers two cross border operation (NES and NWS and presence in 3 countries)and the need to maintain field offices in [REDACTED], presence in Turkey , and direct NPA monitoring capacity in [REDACTED]. The main operational base is now moved from Gaziantep to Erbil, thus programme staff costs also in Erbil. In total costs in Turkey has been considerably reduced, while costs have increased in [REDACTED] and Erbil.

7000 Evaluation and Appraisals: Project evaluation

7500 Audits: Here is budgeted both Audit for partners and for NPA. Included is also additional costs to ensure that the partners get direct feedbacks from Auditor

Would also like information on how much each partner will receive (activity 6810) each, and an estimate on how much is used on support costs within each organization and how much is used on beneficiaries?

For Syria distribution of partner support is as follows:

	NOK
A. [REDACTED] in Idleb (NWS)	4 628 000
A1 Agriculture support (potatoes seeds, pesticides, fertiliser, tools, irrigation/fuel support) and Agricultural extension session to assist farmers in all stages of agriculture management for 300 farmers	2 282 850
A2 Cash For Work, 100 unskilled and skilled labour wage, 22 days/month, 5-8 USD/day (5 hours) for 3 months, include cost for tools and materials for community projects	712 000
A3 Organisation Support Cost for [REDACTED]	1 633 150
B. [REDACTED] in Al Hasakeh & [REDACTED]	6 577 100
B1 Agriculture support (vegetable seeds, pesticides, fertiliser, tools, irrigation/fuel support, trainings)and Agricultural extension session to assist farmers in all stages of agriculture management of plastic tunnel system for 50 farmers in [REDACTED]	801 000
B2 Agriculture support (vegetable seeds, pesticides, fertiliser, tools, irrigation/fuel support, trainings)and Agricultural extension session to assist farmers in all stages of agriculture management of plastic tunnel system for 150 farmers in [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]	2 403 000
B3 Planting Trees project in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for 200 farmers engaged on B1 and B2	391 600
B4 Cash For Work, 140 unskilled and skilled labour wage, 22 days/month, 5-8 USD/day (5 hours) for 3 months, include cost for tools and materials for community projects	640 800

B5 Organisation Support [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]	2 340 700
C. [REDACTED] Al Hasakeh (NES)	2 002 500
C1 Cash For Work, 230 unskilled and skilled labour wage, 22 days/month, 5-8 USD/day (5 hours) for 3 months, include cost for tools and materials for community projects	1 246 000
C2 Organisation Support Cost for [REDACTED]	756 500
TOTAL	13 207 600

In general, minimum 65% will be used directly for beneficiaries. However partner organisational support costs include 100% project staff (for distribution and to train farmers) and MEAL cost (staff and vehicles to do monitoring). The cost of operation for partners also included their office and staff in Turkey or in Erbil, to be able to receive Bank transfer from NPA.