
SUMMARY REPORT

The Launch of NEAR

May 22, 2016

Istanbul, Turkey



This document serves as an overview of NEAR Network's launch event held on May 22, 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit.

ABOUT NEAR

NEAR (Network for Empowered Aid Response) is a movement of local organizations with a bold ambition – to reshape the top-down humanitarian and development system to one that is **locally driven** and **owned**, and is built around **equitable, dignified** and **accountable partnerships**.

NEAR's Vision: A world where local communities have the capacity, resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them.

NEAR'S Mission: To work towards restructuring the global response to human, economic and environmental challenges so that actions to address these are locally driven and owned, and promote equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships.

Discussions that led to the launch of this network were formalized in June 2015, at the Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action in New York where leaders of local and national organizations felt that there was a need for a platform that elevated the voice of local and national communities and organizations. Since then, the network has been engaged in membership consultations that have shaped the mission and the vision of this network.

THE LAUNCH EVENT

Objectives of the Launch Event

- i) To formally launch NEAR network and introduce its vision, mission and brand to stakeholders
- ii) Initiate discussions on localization, the state of the current humanitarian system and emphasize the need to support local responders.
- iii) Identify and establish contacts with new supporters, donors and strategic partners whose vision and mission align with that of NEAR.

Target Audience: Local and national organisations NGOs, affected communities, international NGOs, the UN, local and national governments, donors, taxpayers and the media.

Preparation for the Launch

In the months leading to the WHS, the network's secretariat worked in the following areas to ensure that the network was formerly launched as planned:

i) Network Branding and Launch Video Production

In December 2015, the network conducted a survey with committed members and network supporters to ensure that the branding process was inclusive and took into account suggestions from members. During a meeting in Nairobi in March 2016, members were also engaged in a naming exercise that informed the current name NEAR. What was clear in this exercise was that members wanted a name that emphasized togetherness, their proximity to communities and one that communicated the vision of empowered local communities.

Between January and March, consultants were engaged to provide branding services to the network, which included developing an appropriate name, a logo and a web portal. The first phase of the web portal was also finalized in the weeks leading to the launch, providing a platform to disseminate information about the network.

The network also worked with committed member organisations to engage videographers from Nepal, Liberia and Turkey to document the voices affected communities and local and national NGOs working with these communities. These videos were compiled into a short clip screened at the launch of the network.

ii) Launch Event Working Group

In February 2016, a working group was set up, comprised of the network's secretariat and a team from **Support to Life**, which is a member organization from Turkey. It was important that the network engages a local organization from the region whose knowledge of the area and existing relationship with vendors would help in coordinating the launch event.

iii) Format of the Event

After consultations with the Leadership Council, it was decided that the launch event was going to be a platform for conversation on localisation, with local organizations, affected communities and the network taking centre stage. An option to have a high profile MC was considered but later abandoned. The Leadership Council felt that it was more useful to bring local communities to the launch event in order to ensure that as many local voices as possible are part of the larger WHS conversation. It was decided that Sema Genel, a

member of the Leadership Council and the Executive Director of Support to Life, Turkey would MC the event.

iv) Choice of Date and Venue

Originally, the network was to be launched at a side event during the WHS. Launching the network at the WHS was a strategic decision, seen as an opportunity to ensure that local voices are included in shaping the future of the aid system.

In February, the network's communication team initiated an application process for a WHS side event. Unfortunately, communication from the WHS secretariat was not forthcoming on the status of the application. With only a few weeks to the launch, NEAR's secretariat and the Leadership Council felt that it was better to start making alternative plans for the launch.

Additionally, this option would allow the network to influence the design of its launch, and allow as many local stakeholders as possible to attend the event (even those without invitations to the WHS). A decision was therefore made to launch the network at a separate venue in Istanbul a day before the summit. Support to Life helped the network identify and book a venue close to the main WHS event.

v) Invitations and Participants

The network tapped into existing databases from members and supporters to ensure that the invitations were sent out to as many people as possible. Over 600 invitations were sent out and by the time of the launch, over 140 people had RSVP'd for the event. The event was attended by nearly 170 participants including local and national NGOs, international NGOs, the UN, government representatives, donors, representatives from other networks, supporters and the press.

vi) Funding

Leading up to the launch, a team from Adeso (which is the host organisation for the network) had been actively fundraising for the network launch and it's . By the time of the launch, OFDA, Oxfam America, The Rockefeller Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and ECHO had already committed funding to the network.

SUMMARIES FROM KEYNOTE STATEMENTS

1. Sema Genel, the Executive Director of Support to Life

Sema Genel welcomed guests to the launch of NEAR. She said the launch was a bold move and the most promising initiative emerging from the WHS process. Sema then welcomed the distinguished guest, **Dr. Fuat Oktay**, the president of AFAD, Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority.

2. Keynote Speech by Dr. Fuat Oktay, the president of AFAD

Dr. Fuat Oktay expressed his gratitude for the invitation and welcomed guests to Istanbul. He acknowledged the challenges of the current humanitarian system, saying that like all systems, it requires updates, fresh ideas, and new tools to stay capable of performing desirably.



Dr. Fuat Oktay, the president of AFAD giving his keynote speech.

He said that the challenges of the system had been deeply felt by AFAD in its response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. He insisted on the importance of working with local governments and local communities whose local knowledge is useful if response is to be effective and efficient.

“The “one-size-fits-all approach in the traditional aid system has failed to cope with the immense challenges of the day. The answer to the challenges of the system is not some radical move to abolish the international community, rather, to work together as a global community.”

The president concluded by saying that the launch of NEAR is a step towards the right direction and that AFAD was looking forward to sharing its experiences with local actors to address challenges around the world, and it remains committed to making the system better, effective and more transparent.

3. Degan Ali – Introductory Remarks on NEAR Network

Degan Ali, the Executive Director of Adeso, which is currently incubating the network, and who is also the chair of the network’s Leadership Council said that this was an immensely proud moment for all members of NEAR. She reflected on the journey of NEAR, which started over four years ago as an idea. In the consultations that took place leading to the launch, there were sentiments of marginalisation and lack of power among local NGOs.

“The consistent message from Nepal, Liberia, Somalia et al was that there is a pressing need to reshape the aid system, that the system has not been inclusive, transparent and truly accountable to the people it aims to serve.”

She said that the localisation agenda which came out as one of the prominent issues in the WHS consultations had - in the months leading to the WHS - faced a risk of suppression. While it survived, there was a need to preserve this momentum and to ensure that the vision stays alive.

Degan then introduced the vision of NEAR; a world where local communities have the capacity, resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them. She clarified that the network is not asking for a system that is devoid of national actors, but one that is an enabler and is respectful of the capacity of national governments and local organisations.

4. Panel I: Affected Communities as Responders

In this session, which was moderated by Scholastica Nasinyama, the Executive Director of InterAid Uganda and a member of NEAR's leadership council, panellists spoke about their experience being part of affected communities and becoming responders in their own community. The panel was comprised of Naomi Tulay-Solanki (Liberia), Azwar Hasan (Indonesia) and Rana Saffa Sayah (Syria).

There was consensus amongst panelists that local communities need to be engaged not as recipients of aid but as people with their own ideas and who can contribute to finding practical solutions to the problems that affect them.



Rana Saffa Sayah during the panel on "Affected Communities as Responders"

5. Panel II: A Conversation with Network Members

NEAR's Interim Executive Director, Smruti Patel engaged network members in a conversation in which they shared their views about the network, global issues and what they hope the network will achieve. This panelists included Manu Gupta of SEEDS, India and a Leadership Council member, Sema Genel of Support for Life, Turkey and chair of SITAP network, Turkey and Ahmed Abdi Ibrahim of Arid Lands Development Focus (ALDF), Kenya.

Panelists reflected on the need for such a network, and its potential in ensuring that local communities and organisations were given a seat on the table and involved in decision making.

6. Closing Remarks - Rezaul Karim Chowdhury - Closing remarks

In his closing remarks, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury—the Executive Director of COAST Bangladesh and the Treasure of NEAR—shared NEAR's commitments to the WHS. He said that the network will monitor localization, how much is the aid transaction cost, how much is going to local NGOs. He also added that NEAR will emphasize on the demand side of localization, and will publish annual state of affairs report in this regard.



Rezaul Karim Chowdhury giving his closing remarks

NEAR AT THE WHS

a) Localization as a Central Theme at the Summit

During the summit, localization took center stage as participants reiterated the need to ensure that “people affected by crises are not only informed and consulted, but put at the centre of the decision-making processes.” The launch of NEAR was referenced severally in side events and in the Chair’s Summary as a significant step towards achieving this.

b) Leaders High-level panel

Ms Degan Ali of Adeso and Chair of NEAR network delivered a statement on behalf of NEAR. To truly transform the aid system, she said that a key reform around UN Security Council needs to be addressed. Further, she shared NEAR’s commitments to enhance the voice and participation of local actors in decision making forums and to advocate for a global transparent mechanism in order to track progress on how much funding is flowing to local actors, and to undertake research on the transaction cost in the aid industry. She said that in an effort to implement the Grand Bargain 25% target of all humanitarian funding going to local and national organizations by 2020, NEAR would establish national pooled funds managed by local actors exclusively for local actors. Lastly, she said that NEAR will work with strategic regional, national and local partners to strengthen the capacity of local organizations so that we are more accountable to donors.

c) Special Sessions

Manu Gupta an LC member and the chair of ADRRN delivered a statement at the special session on “People at the Centre” in which he called for the support of local leadership. He emphasized the role of local communities who contribute to response even in the most difficult situations. Manu Gupta defined the idea of localization for ADRRN as one centred around local leadership, regional partnership and international support. This approach, he said, helps get to the root of the problem rather than just treating the symptoms.

d) The Grand Bargain

A significant win for the network at the WHS was the Grand Bargain. Since the first meeting in New York consultations in June 2015 where members first endorsed the network, NEAR has been advocating for reform in aid financing.

More specifically, and among other recommendations, the network has been asking that national donor countries bring their respective humanitarian funding of local and national NGOs to 20 per cent of their total humanitarian funding by 2020. During the WHS, several donors and humanitarian partners committed to channel 25 per cent of financing to national and local responders as directly as possible by 2020. While NEAR feels that local and national organizations were not adequately consulted in the run up to the signing of the Grand Bargain, the network welcomes this move as a significant step towards a future that is supportive of and empowers local organizations. NEAR intends to keep an eye on these commitments to see how much of the aid dollar actually goes to local NGOs.

e) Side event with CAFOD/Charter for Change

The event analyzed the efforts of both national and international actors to address some of the challenges they face in their efforts to respond to communities in need. Over 60 participants attended this meeting. The panel was comprised of Degan Ali (Adeso and NEAR), Sema Genel (Support to Life and NEAR), Naomi Tulay-Solanke (Community Healthcare Initiative and NEAR), Mathew Carter (CAFOD), Joshua Tabah (Canadian Mission to the UN in Geneva) and Danny Sriskandarajah (CIVICUS). It was moderated by Nigel Timmins of Oxfam International. Panellists discussed some of the challenges for local and national organisation and an attempt to have practical targets to implementing commitments to localisation. The Charter4Change was discussed from the perspective of INGOs signed up to the commitment and national NGOs' experiences and endorsement of the Charter, what donors can do to push forward the localization agenda and the role of the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. There was consensus that moving forward, accountable, practical measures are needed to enable localization.

f) NEAR Members Debrief Session

12 NEAR members present during WHS Summit attended a debrief meeting at the end of the Summit to give feedback and on (i) the NEAR launch event and (ii) the WHS summit.

Members present acknowledged that the launch event got a lot of attention during the 2 – days WHS Summit. There was a high interest about the new network from various stakeholders to engage with NEAR.

g) NEAR Leadership Council and Secretariat Debrief Meeting

A de-brief meeting with Leadership Council and the secretariat on 24th May concluded the summit for the network. It was agreed that there was a need to engage cautiously and manage expectations in order to give the network time to set proper foundations.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

a) Tracking the Commitments

NEAR believes that the success of the WHS will be measured by how much the system improves equity in decision-making and financing and resource allocations to local and national actors and affected communities. The WHS resulted to over 1300 commitments and over 2400 alignments with core commitments. While this is a significant step, it is important that organisations are held accountable to these commitments in order to change the status quo. In this regard, the network sees itself playing a significant role in tracking these commitments. NEAR will therefore advocate for a global and national transparent mechanism to track progress on how much funding is flowing to local actors. Similarly, NEAR commits to undertake research on the transaction cost in the aid industry in order to understand how much of the aid dollar is actually getting to affected populations.

Additionally, in an effort to implement the Grand Bargain 25% target of all humanitarian funding going to local and national organizations by 2020, the network will establish national pooled funds managed by local actors exclusively for local actors. In the next 5 years, the network will pilot 3 such pooled funds.

b) Membership Criteria

The launch of the network has created a lot of interest to join from local organisations who share the same frustrations with the system, and who believe in the mission and vision of the network. In the next few weeks, a working group will finalise the membership criterion for the network to allow as many local and national organisations as possible to be part of this movement with the bold ambition to reshape the aid system.

c) Regional Launches

The launch of the network in Istanbul was the first step in introducing the network's mission and vision to stakeholders. Discussions are ongoing on the possibility of launching the network in the regions from which its members come from, in order to build on the conversation and ensure that there is local ownership of the network.