

# Report from MENA sclr peer learning event in Istanbul

- Dates: November 1<sup>st</sup> – November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022
- Location: Istanbul, Turkey
- Organiser & sponsors: sclr Hub MENA/L2GP, with great help from ‘host organisation’ STL and all participating organisations
- Participants: A total of 23 participants, representing East Jerusalem YMCA (3), MA’AN Development Centre Gaza (3), CFTA Gaza (5), Support to Life Turkey (7), Najdeh Lebanon (3), JORD Erbil (2).



## Feedback from participants

Participants were asked to reflect, orally and via an anonymous written survey, on their experience with the workshop. Positive as well as negative comments were encouraged. It's impossible to do justice to all the responses - but below are some major trends:

Among the dominating positive experience was the opportunity to meet as peers and colleagues (community mobilisers) from across many different local realities and context, yet all using the sclr approach in their daily practice. This comparing and exchange of experience happened during the structured part of the workshop but also continued long into the evening over dinner/coffee/tea in the evenings. *“The spirit of love and cooperation between the participating teams, although we did not know each other previously, the familiarity that prevailed between the participants during the workshop and during the cruise”*, as one participant expressed it in the survey.

The scarce presence of management representatives of the involved national NGOs and INGOs/donors as well as the rather informal structure of the workshop seemed to contribute to the sense of equality and an expressed spirit of openness, and honesty among participants – a safe space where both successes and failures could be shared. This in turn contributed to the quite extraordinary sense of shared commitment and collaboration, which informed the entire event.

The fact that participants all had hands-on experience with sclr also allowed discussion to go deep into the details and mechanics of the various issues and component parts which the participants discussed (having identified these issues themselves before the workshop). This “getting deep into the craft” aspect was evaluated as positive and crucial for learning from one another.

Survey responses and much of the deliberations throughout the workshop, confirmed that sclr, while being contextually modified in each location, appear to have a very strong attraction with both staff (community mobilisers/project officers) and with the community groups, they work in across the aforementioned countries/areas.

The surroundings (the hotel, food, Kadikoy/Istanbul etc.) only received positive comments from those who addressed these issues in their feedback. There was however a repeated request, both orally and written, to hold future events in locations which allowed for a combination of discussion-based workshops with visits to communities implementing sclr together with one/some of the participating organisations.

Most critical and/or negative feedback focused on two issues in particular: The quality of translation and the duration of the workshop. A large group of responders would have preferred simultaneous translation between Arabic, Turkish and English via headsets, as subsequent translation took up too much time and affected the natural flow of conversations. Almost all wished that the workshop had been at least a week – rather than the 3-days, which was the reality. Many also felt that the respective agenda modules should have been longer – and on the other hand, the individual days less intensive/long (and indeed the 3 days were very “full”). Linked to this concern, was a repeated wish for more time to discuss further on issues such as advocacy, sustainability of Protection Groups/CRECs, PALC, community grants and development of a “sclr training curriculum”.



## Concrete results

- 23 community mobilisers/project officers working with sclr got the opportunity to reflect on and learn from highly qualified colleagues through semi-structured sharing of experience with most elements of “sclr in practice”. Respondents rated this as the most important outcome of the event.
- Similarly, the gathering made it possible to shape a strong institutional and individual “connect” between 5 organisations and 23 individuals using sclr across Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. This, if properly maintained and resources in the future, can be a strong asset for further uptake of the sclr approach across the region.
- The event equipped all participants with (via What App, FB, e-mail etc.) easy, real time, informal (low threshold) access to collegial/peer advice and support from each other as well as linking them to the wider sclr Hub in MENA and the global sclr/L2GP Community of Practice
- 23 community mobilisers, who rarely have opportunities to travel beyond their own locality or attend regional/international peer/collegial conferences and workshop, experienced just that and with that an articulated increase in motivation and sense of opportunities and potential beyond their usual experience.
- 3 outside observers had the opportunity to take a step back, listen and learn from the people ‘doing the actual work’ and understand how people in these crucial positions in our collaboration (around sclr) can be better supported/encouraged in the future - also by external/international entities.

## Reflections for future events

There is no doubt that the workshop was well-received and long sought for by all participants. For many, this was the first time they were able to meet colleagues who works within the same field as themselves. It was also the first time many of them were able to travel abroad. This combination made for a unique experience on both professional and personal levels – none of which should be underestimated in terms of incentivisation and motivation to continue and keep strengthening their sclr work. It should be mentioned here, that the role of our Turkish host, Support to Life, was indispensable - among other it ensured visas for colleagues who otherwise find it difficult to travel.

Sclr is still a small field without a lot of the professional incentives (regular trainings, reports, research, funding) that comes with the more traditional humanitarian/development ways of working. It is evident that it is the trained community mobilisers that ‘carry’ the sclr initiatives across the region, and without their hard work, dedication, and the trust they build with the communities, it is simply not possible to continue this type of work. Partner INGOs and other supporters of sclr should therefore ensure that this capacity and potential is continuously being built upon and strengthened. With some adjustments (see above), the Istanbul workshop proved to be a successful format for this purpose, and with this first experience, it should be possible to make this into a regular/semi-regular happening.

## Key lessons for future events

- The event must be *by and for* the community mobilisers/project officers themselves. All ideas for content/agenda should come from them, to ensure that the workshop is as relevant and useful as possible.
- Keeping the workshop semi-structured and ‘informal’ played a key role in creating a safe space for participants to share both positives and negatives. Keeping the participation list on a staff level, potentially with managers coming in for one or two sessions, seemed to be appreciated.
- While keeping in mind that ‘no number of days’ will be enough to satisfy everyone’s need/desires, three days is probably on the low-end of what one should arrange for. If combining discussion-based workshops with community visits, 5-6 days should be considered.
- It was incredible useful to host the event in a country where we had a participating organisation that could assist with official invitation letters for visa procedures (this was essential to ensure visas came through), travel agencies and local procurement teams for hotel bookings and similar. There should, however, be planned for and clarified how much work is requested for this so that the host organisation can arrange accordingly.
- The organisation of future events should be co-led between “sclr hub” and a grouping of national actors to ensure ownership and relevance. Still, partner INGOs should be involved earlier and more heavily in terms of contributing financially and logistically to ensure events can take place. A joint application to for instance back donors with a regional scope should be explored as could additional support/resources from the likes of ODI HPN and ALNAP, likeminded universities etc. could be considered.

- The main language should correspond with the majority of the participants, and it should be considered if it's worth to limit to only two languages both to save time and costs for translation services.
- Simultaneous translation – expensive as it is – should be considered very seriously.
- Fundraising, preparations, and invitations for a next peer learning event need to start very early as travel and access issues require a lot of time.

Please annexes for list of participants, agenda and key words/topics discussed.

