



ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH, UKRAINE: SCLR LEARNING BRIEF

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The authors are very grateful to colleagues who made a significant contribution not only to the writing of this publication, but also to the process of implementing the approach "Supporting community initiatives" (SCLR - survivor and community led crisis response) as part of the project "Program of integrated humanitarian response in conditions of war and post-war reconstruction" (donor of the Disasters Emergency Committee

(DEC) project, coordinating partner Christian Aid Charitable Organization, Great Britain):

- *Emma Pritchard, Justin Corbett, and Nils Carstensen of Local to Global Protection;*
- *Hanna Williams, Simone di Vicenz, and Vanessa Maynard of Christian Aid;*
- *and finally, all of the NGOs – partners of "Alliance for Public Health".*

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“I am proud that our group managed to do it. The applicants asked us to help solve a problem. Sometimes small amounts of money can help overcome serious problems for many people”.

(Staff member of local Charitable Organisation (CO) Rehabilitation Center for Drug Depots "Zakhid Shans", Ivano-Frankivska)

Key statistics from sclr implementation in the period of July 2022 – February 2023:



20
Oblasts reached



156
community groups supported



156
microgrant initiatives implemented



£415,820
funds used for sclr microgrants



£2,665
average costs per microgrant



87,318
people reached

INTRODUCTION



In the first twelve months of war, 15 million Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes as internally displaced people (IDPs) or refugees, the largest population movement in Europe since World War II. Over 1,000 medical facilities have been destroyed or damaged and approximately 20% of Ukraine has been occupied by the Russian military, cutting access to essential services and treatment. There have been extensive reports of war crimes by the Russian military against civilians, including torture and killing.

Alliance for Public Health (APH) has been working with other civil society and community organisations, medical facilities, governmental organisations, and the Ministry of Health to maintain the HIV response since the very first days of the war. This work was quickly complemented by APH working with 27 NGOs in their network, to expand activities across 19 oblasts in Ukraine, providing humanitarian aid, medical, psychological and legal counselling, and social assistance. In this project they were supported by Christian Aid, the British Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC), and the Irish Emergency Alliance.

From the outset of the war, a significant number of volunteer-led and local faith-based initiatives have responded to the humanitarian crisis caused by Russian military aggression. In July 2022, APH, with support from Christian Aid and flexible funding from other donors, began to pilot survivor and community led crisis response (sclr) in Ukraine. Through this approach they have been able to support the work of these local organisations and initiatives, while also meeting calls from international and national organisations for localised response to the crisis.

Sclr focuses on the natural creativity and capacities of communities affected by crisis, to encourage and empower them to identify and

implement initiatives in ways that improve their immediate wellbeing, (in time) address root causes of the crisis, strengthen longer-term resilience, accelerating social cohesion. These community initiatives are supported by microgrants that aim to strengthen autonomous collective groups in ways that complement otherwise externally-led humanitarian response. Instead of imposing an outside intervention, APH leveraged their pre-existing country-wide network of civil society organisations (CSOs) to strengthen sustainability and community ownership of the response.

Between July 2022 and February 2023, APH has supported 156 community groups in 20 oblasts across the country, with 156 microgrants totalling over £415,000, reaching over 87,000 people. A recent real-time evaluation by the ACT Alliance, found that this approach was the best practice for supporting and strengthening the localisation agenda in Ukraine.

³The International Charitable Foundation “Alliance for Public Health” (formerly known as “International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine”) is a leading NGO making a significant impact on the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, and other socially dangerous diseases in Ukraine. They provide financial and technical support to programmes, reaching over 250,000 of most vulnerable people in Ukraine. The Alliance continues to have a significant impact on combating the HIV/Aids epidemic, most notably in Ukraine (as well as working with other organisations in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region). For more information, visit their website www.aph.org.ua.

The diversity of initiatives from communities so far has emphasised the wide range of needs communities face in times of crisis, beyond the traditional areas of focus typically observed in international humanitarian response. Community initiatives funded with microgrants decided by locally-represented selection committees so far have included: water tower reconstruction; construction of communal bomb shelters; evacuation car repairs; repair of older people’s homes for winter; installation of wood fired stoves in older people’s homes and schools; children’s playgrounds; creation of child safe spaces; investment in greenhouses to grow food; a space and equipment for IDPs to do laundry; speech therapy; art therapy; and kitchen supplies for an IDP shelter to allow residents to cook their own food.

This learning brief highlights some of the observations and early lessons emerging from APH’s empowerment of community-led response during the first year of the war.

“People tried to work together towards a common goal, joining their efforts as they believe everything was for them”.

(A colleague from Public Health, Poltava Regional Charitable Fund (CF))

1. The spirit of collective action and mutual aid among Ukrainian people during the war.

Speak to anyone from Ukraine and they will no doubt be able to share stories of how they or someone they know helped, and were helped by, fellow Ukrainians in the immediate onset of the war. Whether through offering shelter to those fleeing active shelling and bombing, collecting food and supplies and taking them to families, villages, and neighbourhoods cut off from vital sources of support, or preparing hibernation kits for makeshift shelters, or elevators, in the event of a loss of power.

These waves of collective action and spontaneous support and aid to one another has continued since the war began, ebbing and flowing around the unpredictability of attacks, access to supplies and power, and the movement of people. In the face of war, people in Ukraine, and the neighbouring countries, have seen a growth of volunteerism and the development of local initiatives beyond traditional faith-based practices of support, to help each other protect themselves, get through the war, and try and live as normal a life as possible.

Creation of a sewing workshop in shelter for displaced people. v. Pogrebysche Vinnytsia region (NGO Nezalezhnist’)



This impressive response country-wide has seen people in Ukraine coming together to help those displaced and seeking refuge, elderly people, families, children, the military, and abandoned animals. Many people with no background in volunteering came to community centres to give their time, skills, and resources to help their community. Responding to ‘calls to action’ from celebrities, entertainers, politicians and the military, and relatives of captured or killed Ukrainians, volunteers and local communities organised to clear rubble and repair houses in cities and villages after bombing, and even to transport animals from zoos to safe places. They have been supported by international efforts to raise funds for Ukraine and provide assistance to each other. Despite continued air raids and shelling, this widespread spontaneous and quick response has reached many of those who needed it most.

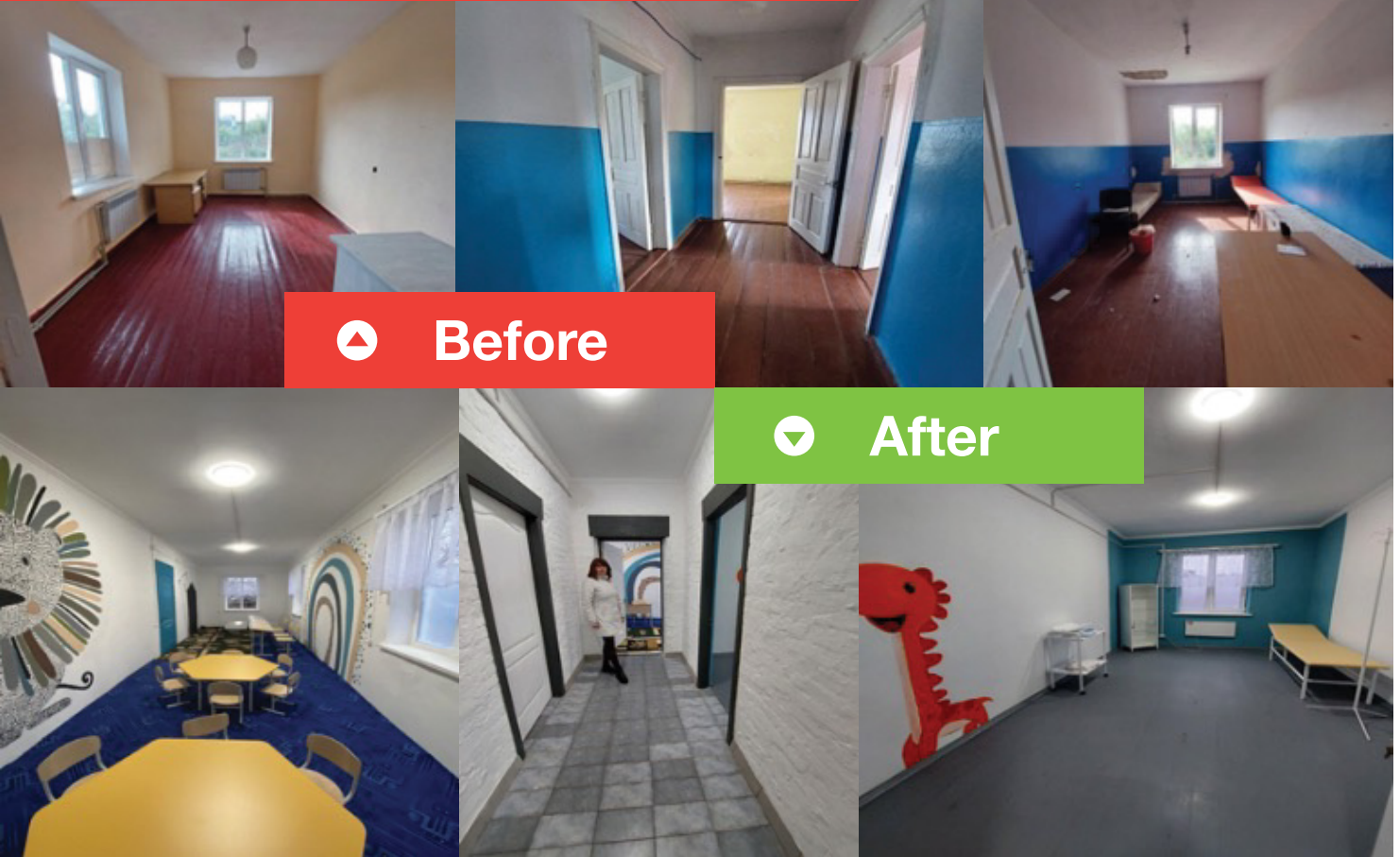
As has been seen in crises around the world, the action of coming together, finding connection, commonality, and a collective purpose, helps people look beyond their own immediate circumstances, and maintain dignity despite their circumstances. APH has seen countless examples of spontaneous local efforts to respond to the impact of war in Ukraine. In July they began to work with Christian Aid, to implement sclr to support these initiatives, and grow them in scope and scale. Since then, sclr microgrants have helped groups across the country. A village in Chernihivski supported by the Public Organisations (PO) Vidrodzhennya natsiyi repaired the roof of the local school which had been damaged by shelling. With a small grant for equipment and supplies, this initiative brought together many people across the community in coordination (including with and through the village council) and collective action, benefiting not only the children who go to the school, but their families and the wider community. Furthermore, this example highlighted the central role of encouragement, leadership, and coordination that a village council

can play when involved, as their motivation encouraged village-wide collective action. A residents’ group in a village in Odessa repaired the water station damaged by shelling and bombing supplemented the microgrant they received from APH partner PO Youth Public Movement “Partner” with their own money, restoring access to water for the whole village of over 900 people. This contribution of people’s own resources, whether time, money, or materials alongside microgrants, has been seen time and again in different crises around the world⁴.

Reflecting on how civil society has been strengthened over the past year, APH reported ‘there was a good jump, but we have a lot of work to do.’ A significant part of this work is creating the space, opportunities, structures, and availability of resources to allow local actors, including community groups and local organisations, to act on their ideas. Yozef Yanyshyn, Senior Programme Officer with APH, said that they provide support to community groups with writing applications and reports, alongside wider skills and specialisation. Yanyshyn notes that most communities responding to the crisis ‘have no time, skills, space, they just focus on humanitarian assistance and that’s all, but they should have skills.’ Currently, communities and local organisations are focusing on meeting the immediate needs brought on by the war, but APH is working with them so that future rounds of microgrants can expand beyond these to look to long term resilience to crisis.

Though in many areas, especially parts of Eastern Ukraine, social tolerance and cohesion still have some way to go, sclr helps to support and empower different sections of society from the grassroots level. The approach encourages people from different social groups to work together to improve their own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of those around them, finding local solutions and opportunities together. In Zaporizka oblast, ‘IG module Town’, a group of

Arrangement of a medical office and children's space in the village of Zastugna in the Kyiv region (NGO "Youth of Vasytkivshchyna")



◀ Before

▶ After

recent IDPs from Donetsk and IDPs who have settled there since 2015, supported by local partner CF Spodivannia, used their microgrant for a communal laundry initiative.

‘The activity united all men and women who were able to contribute their work: welding, mounting, painting the assembled constructions ... Many working people contributed to the project on weekends. We observed how the community was able to unite their efforts and make a significant contribution to the implementation of the project.’

(Community Group Leader, IG module Town.)

The use of sclr has allowed APH to build on their existing programmes of humanitarian assistance, to support the widespread spontaneous mutual self-help that emerged in Ukraine after the outbreak of war. Despite the considerable stress on NGO staff, who are themselves also living through the war, sclr has enabled community groups across the country to build on their initiatives of mutual aid, aiding social cohesion, and looking to skills development for future initiatives.

“We are talking about funding ideas, not an activity from scratch to completion”.

(Maryna Varban, Alliance for Public Health)

⁴See: L2GP, ‘Survivor- and community-led crisis response: Practical experience and learning’, HPN Network Paper 84, 2021 (<https://odihpn.org/publication/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning/>); L2GP, “Let communities do their work’: the role of mutual aid and self-help groups in the Covid-19 pandemic response”, Disasters, 2021 (<https://www.local2global.info/research/covid-19/>)

2. THE DIVERSITY OF LOCALLY GENERATED COLLECTIVE INITIATIVES.

The sclr process of providing microgrants to community groups begins with the announcement on the availability of these small grants by the local or national NGOs. This invites existing, newly formed, and emergent groups that are, or want to be, carrying out initiatives that provide mutual aid to those affected by the crisis situation. These ideas are shared via short proposals, all of which are reviewed and decided upon by a locally representative selection committee, which includes but isn't limited to members of the local or national NGO. Approved proposals see groups receive microgrants to the maximum value of USD 5,000 to be spent over a typical period of implementation of 2-3 months. A simple report is submitted by the group at the end of implementation, accompanied with proof of expenses, upon which the NGO supports the community groups reflect and document their learning from action.

The term “project” is not used often within sclr; a project, much like an activity, is fixed, easily defined, and executed within a particular timeframe. Initiatives that emerge during a crisis, as L2GP has found from experience across multiple crises, are far more organic, holistic, and often, longer lasting. Given the immediate and severe nature of the crisis, many of the initiatives for this first round of microgrants focused on providing time-sensitive and specific relief such as equipping shelters, orphanages, and schools for children with special education needs, purchasing generators, restoring water and electricity supply, providing medical and psychological support, repairing vehicles, and providing students with education materials.

However, there were also a wide range of initiatives from community groups that address-

sed a variety of needs and opportunities, including reaching historically marginalised groups in society:

- Equipment and space for laundry, which became a meeting place, connecting more than 1,400 IDPs (internally displaced people) and local people, and a chance to talk and connect (supported by CF "Our Future" in Zaporizka);
- Established a chatbot and software to check needs and create shopping lists for IDPs, saving time, and connecting IDPs (CO "CF "Spodivannia", Zaporizka);
- Opened a space for art therapy for children and distribution of food and hygiene kits, promoting social rehabilitation (Center Public Health Independence, Vinnytsia);
- Equipment and speech therapy for IDP children with autism, providing psychosocial recovery and adaptation following trauma / stress from the war (Alliance for Public Health, Lviv);
- Setting up a playground next to a shelter where more than 840 IDP and local children can play, socialise, and parents and families can connect (supported by Center Public Health Independence, Vinnytsia);
- Cleaned drinking water wells in the event that the central water supply is damaged in future attacks (All-Ukrainian CO "Convictus Ukraine", Kyiv);
- Conducted 4 two-day trainings on providing pre-medical care (CF "New Family", Chernivtsi).

The principles guiding sclr recognise the need to protect the organic nature and spirit with which groups form and create ideas. Over-projecting the approach damages energy; so, language, processes, and tools should be kept simple. Organisations facilitating sclr, together with their partners, have a responsibility to find

Arrangement of a school playroom in the village of Mykytichi, Rivne region (NGO "Our Future")



locally appropriate ways of doing less harm through external actors' interactions with people affected by crises; it is inevitable that the interaction of external actors with local response actions may cause harm through power imbalances, resource allocation, and ways of working. Through careful consideration and the application of locally defined mechanisms and solutions, these risks can be mitigated. All the while, sclr facilitators and enablers should be encouraging these same people's potential, planned, and actual collective action with both immediate and longer-term impacts.

One way that APH has put this locally appropriate ways of doing less harm into practice is during the selection process. Selection committees, the locally-led decision making structure within sclr, as encouraged by APH network partners, reviewed proposals not only for initiatives that provided 'humanitarian aid', but those also contributed to longer term impact. For example, approving a proposal that sought to make repairs to a kindergarten used as a shelter, that would impact all children, whether from IDP or local community families, once schools reopened.

However, APH recognises the difficulty many Ukrainians currently face in the context of the war, to look beyond immediate needs for survival, as was expressed by Yozef

Yanyshyn, "we have now a lot of groups leading initiatives that need food assistance, but what about other needs? More important now is food assistance, winterisation, warm clothing. We should look wider beyond immediate needs. But people cannot look wider and find different ways".

There are opportunities for longer term projects, as evident from the examples above: one approach for organisations facilitating sclr and supporting different community groups may be to share the vision and ideas from across different groups, communities, and oblasts as inspiration. This will be more effective, however, as immediate needs are increasingly met.

- Local ownership: IDPs carrying out their initiatives in Kirovohradska funded with a microgrant from local CF Return to Life were very actively involved and appeared more united as a result. Some groups also approached other donors with the same proposals, both to boost funding for current plans, as well for new initiatives.
- Adapting for survival: A group from a neighbourhood in Mykolaiv used their microgrant awarded by local CF Vykhid to relocate their gardening centre that serves 400 households ensuring the continued production of fresh produce for local use, despite the shelling.

- Protection for historically marginalised groups: A group in Ivano-Frankivska supported by local CO Rehabilitation Center for Drug Depots "Zakhid Shans" used their microgrant to establish a safe, protective, and
- Local relevance and continuity: Several groups across the country applied for subsequent funding and additional microgrants, demonstrating how important their initiatives are to the people reached by the activities. These include "Voluntary help Rivne" distributing school materials to displaced children, "Vidrodzhennya natsiyi" rehabilitating a school and a shelter station in Chernihiv, and "Country of goodwill" in Kyiv, who following providing psychosocial support to children with their first microgrant, used their second microgrant for distributing winterisation items to IDPs.

Supporting over 100 initiatives carried out by community groups affected by the war across the whole country has illustrated the diversity of their capabilities, needs, and local solutions. Many of their actions included the provision of 'traditional' humanitarian assistance, in the form of food and emergency items. Equally, many initiatives considered issues, addressed activities, and reached sections of society that perhaps

would not have been considered or included in externally led humanitarian interventions, some of which are now discussed in the next section. This diversity of ideas, action, and local implementers is so important to empower, and equally important to protect.

Microgrants "created opportunities and conditions to live a normal life".

(Member of CF A Way Home, Odessa)

3. THE RELEVANCE AND VALUE OF COMMUNITY GROUP LED CRISIS RESPONSE TO PSYCHOSOCIAL RECOVERY.

Experience has shown that strengthening psychosocial wellbeing is crucial to recovery . When people affected by crises are empowered to lead their responses to the crises, not only do they often seek out opportunities that meet a variety of needs and opportunities (as explored in the previous section), taking action and doing something helps to counter the feelings of helplessness that some may experience.

Installation of a hybrid solar power plant with a capacity of 5 kW at the Center for Support of Immigrants in the Konotop Lyceum No. 2 of the Sumy Region (NGO "Interregional Community Development Institute")



⁵See: L2GP, 'Survivor- and community-led crisis response: Practical experience and learning', HPN Network Paper 84, 2021 (<https://odihpn.org/publication/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning/>)

Many community groups across the country saw the need for initiatives that allowed people to come together, connect with others, share emotions and experiences, and some, the provision of vital psychosocial support.

- In Kherson oblast, a group supported by local Youth PO Youth Public Movement "Partner", created a sports and playground for the village community. They didn't have a playground even before the war, and everyone celebrated with an opening ceremony, including children who made and wore costumes.

Supported by local CF Vykhid, in Mykolaiv,

- families with members living with disabilities and mental health issues formed a group, facilitating their children to socialise with others (not having done so since the war), purchased equipment that will help connect and socialise the children, and held celebrations on Independence Day.

In Poltava, IDPs who have since found

- residence elsewhere still meet at the bomb shelter in which they previously stayed, to which renovations were made with the mini-grant provided by CF Public Health. This space continues to be used for social activities, and a weekly movie night, bringing people together again, maintaining a vital connection to a local support system.

As the rolling out of sclr went on, and more community initiatives were supported, APH partners were able to work with groups more quickly. From sclr experience globally, this is often found by many (if not all) organisations facilitating the approach, that the more sclr is adopted, and the more groups are supported with implementing their own initiatives, the quicker the process, and efficiency and timeliness continues to increase⁶.

Further to this, APH partners observed that as groups were seen to be designing and implementing their own initiatives around a particular need or opportunity, interest was generated

among other individuals or groups in the neighbouring area, who too began developing their own ideas. These groups then approached both APH organisations and other local actors with their ideas. Such inspiration was based mostly on what people were observing of the initiative and action being taken around them, and thus, was autonomous. APH have received many requests from communities for support in establishing art therapy programmes for those who remain in occupied territories, including for exhibitions on the war. Such initiatives are deeply relevant at this time, crucial in helping to deal with stress and processing the traumas of war.

Through this observation of a growing interest from communities to develop their own ideas and initiatives, and the feelings of unity and friendship expressed by a colleague with CO Convictus Ukraine, one must be reminded that many of the sclr implementing organisations are themselves a part of the local community. This feeling of unity and growing energy around local collective leadership, is important to not only the aims of sclr, but more widely, important to enhancing cohesion and a sense of togetherness in a crisis that seeks to divide, isolate, disempower, and conquer. A group of residents who have been living in rented accommodation in Donetsk since occupation efforts began in 2014, used their microgrant from local CO Spodivannia to make improvements around the building, not only for their own benefit, but for the local community too, as *"part of our moral duty, we need to do something for your community."*

As the APH network has now had a chance to engage more with communities, including with new sections of society, this network of local NGOs, as well as communities and groups, can see ideas and opportunities that will enable us to support as much of a sense of normalcy as is possible during a war. What is needed especially right now is the facilitation of this, as well as the structure within which these can be designed and delivered, a point which was also made by an NGO colleague in Hungary.

As the war continues, and the uncertainty around its longevity remains, many Ukrainians feel stuck. Not wanting or able to move beyond their temporary locations of residence. Unable to return home. At the same time, trying to maintain some element of normalcy, no matter how small. This state of limbo is difficult to occupy for a sustained length of time and can have a deeper negative future impact. Being able to take action and leadership, carrying out a diverse range of initiatives, as well as the provision of psychosocial support all contribute to holistic protection and recovery from a context such as the war in Ukraine.

“This way of working allowed us to move away from HIV work and do humanitarian work where needed”.
(Colleague from CF Unitus in Mykolaiv)

4. THE ADAPTABILITY AND AGILITY NECESSARY IN BOTH UKRAINE AND THE WAR.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, many adaptations had to be made, on a personal level, by families and communities, economically, for service and business continuity, and to infrastructure. Businesses have relocated within occupied territories, taking their staff with them, in order to survive and keep operating. Among civil society, organisations such as the APH network have demonstrated significant adaptability to new realities and new interest, as addressed in the next section.

At a more local level, people, communities, and local businesses and service providers were making perhaps the biggest changes to adapt to varying context of security, legislation, and access to resources, alongside other challenges. However, local solutions were found:

- Normal purchasing practice in Ukraine has been to pay 30% upfront and the remaining 70% upon delivery, but a colleague of CO Blago in Kharkiv reported that this no longer works. Instead, suppliers are now working on a voluntary basis, people and groups have their own connections with suppliers, and “*all are working for the result*”, and payments take place after transactions, including where cash and/or transfers are possible.
- Also in Kharkiv, in a small town where the choice of supply was limited, community groups established an agreement with one supplier to purchase all the equipment needed (from various sources) and deliver it for free.
- In another example provided by CO Blago, where roads and bridges had been destroyed in an area of Kharkiv, and therefore agreements with out-of-town suppliers could not be fulfilled, local businesses rallied around, offering their goods as a contingency, and organised delivery. These are all examples that speak to the relevance, efficiency and cost effectiveness of local connections, and how people and groups can self-mobilise and self-organise, even where supply is limited.

With the high level of transition in Mykolaiv, an agreement was established between CF Unitus and the local community agreeing that assets purchased for the initiative serving IDPs would be transferred for the community to oversee and manage. Perhaps the greatest example of relevance, responsiveness, and adaptability (all valuable benefits of sclr) comes again from Kharkiv. A community group were working on it agreed plan to establish a bomb shelter and had identified a location. This potential shelter was bombed overnight and destroyed. On a telephone call the next morning, the local CO Blago and APH colleagues in Kyiv decided to reallocate the microgrant to an initiative that repaired vehicles damaged due to shelling, which were used to evacuate approximately 3,000 people, including those with disabilities.

Installation of equipment for uninterrupted power supply of the dispensary in the village of Malyutyanka, Kyiv region (NGO Found Boyarka community)



As APH colleagues reflected, *“we adapted very fast in a very short time, but we have no time to think, we just need to do, get support for communities, for our partners.”*

This highlights the importance of space for reflection, exploring early learning, and rethinking. As attitudes and behaviours continue to evolve with the movement towards more equal, unbiased, and power-balanced partnerships, perhaps the greatest value international partners can bring to true partnership with Ukrainian civil society is as mentors, creating space for reflection and foresight, and exploring local solutions, as well as space for leadership and action.

As Maryna Varban, APH’s Senior Project Manager said, *“in general we as individuals should find a person to help me with one need and then I can look to the future, with help.”* The same applies to providing support and accompaniment to national NGOs.

“I was personally surprised when we received applications as I thought we would have to write them ourselves”.

(Colleague with local CF Vykhid in Mykolaiv)

5. THE STEEP, NECESSARY, AND VALUABLE ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING CURVES.

APH bought into sclr the first time it was introduced as a possible approach to integrate into their crisis response surrounding the war; *“the mission of Alliance is very close to the mission of sclr”* (Maryna Varban, Senior Project Manager). As such, a quick overview of the approach and practice guidance was given, after which APH quickly developed their plan and budget for roll-out across their network partners. This took nearly no convincing, at any level of the network structure, as the flexible open and locally relevant nature of the approach fit closely with their desire to assist local groups and communities. This alignment not only a profound impact on rolling out sclr as efficiently as possible, but also on later stages of reflection on practice, when looking back critically, with an open mind, and with humility.

However, given the newness of the approach to the network, and the need to adapt the approach, its tools, and templates to the Ukrainian context, including to its legislation, a quick process of contextualising was required. Several working meetings were held, including with

partner NGOs, and guidance and procedures were rewritten several times. The Alliance also needed to change their internal granting procedures to facilitate microgrants and payments as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Another challenge and significant learning point for APH and their partners was learning about a new approach, both in its objective and practice; none of the regional NGOs had issued grants before. As such, a significant amount of ongoing support and mentoring was provided to the partners throughout all stages of implementation: from compiling announcements to potential community groups, to establishing the selection committee, through to final reporting on each of the initiatives.

Overall, there were many challenges that APH and their partners faced throughout implementing sclr, all of which required quick decisions and action. However, all of these experiences have provided important lessons that have informed other projects. Despite some of these difficulties, including of an initial short period of roll-out and scale-up, the experience of such a rapid introduction of a new approach has made APH even more creative, resourceful and resilient to various challenges.

For many of the NGOs within the APH network, not only did their understanding of sclr increase, but so too did their understanding (and experience) of humanitarian projects, with organisational capacity growing through the development of new procedures and learning.

As the colleague from local CF Unitus in Mykolaiv said above, *“this way of working allowed us to move away from HIV work and do humanitarian work where needed... it seems that anything will work as a micro-grant initiative and that this motivated us.”*

By engaging with local people in a different way, i.e., by receiving proposals for how they are or plan to address specific needs and gaps, these

organisations have gained a better understanding of what people need, developing their understanding of how to provide response to a humanitarian crisis. Alongside this, some APH partners reflected that their experience of engaging with marginalised groups through other projects helped their connection with new groups, for example, IDPs. For CO Rehabilitation Center for Drug Depots "Zakhid Shans" in Ivano-Frankivka, using funds to give microgrants to community groups enabled access to all communities within the oblast, increasing opportunities to work with new groups of people, including new IDPs, with future rounds of funding.

When asked how implementing microgrants had shifted their mindset, a colleague of Rivne Regional CF Our Future said, *“I dreamt of providing grants to groups of people several years ago wanting to increase their capacity – it has now increased, tenfold”.*

For APH, the experience of facilitating sclr has also changed their attitude and practice around partnership, specifically in terms of:

- Trusting the partners more as well as their initiatives;
- Freely changing internal procedures (and encouraging partners to do so), adapting them to new realities and needs;
- Building new partnerships, including with new and diverse groups in society.

“The attitude of the public administration changed and they looked at us with wide open eyes”.

(Colleague with 100% of Life, Cherkasy)

6. WORKING WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

As a whole, the reputation and profile of the partner organisations increased within their areas and among their local peers. As the colle-

Equipping a bakery with equipment to provide bread to vulnerable people in Chernivtsi (NGO "Bright future for you")



ague from CO 100% of Life Cherkasy mentioned above, being seen as a “grant giver” increased their perceived authority among local stakeholders. This is significant, not only as first responders in the context of the war, but also to the future role in connecting, rebuilding, and repairing the social fabric in years to come.

Numerous examples from the APH network’s recent experience of supporting group initiatives have demonstrated the establishment of a closer working relationship with the authorities at a local level.

A colleague with Kharkiv fund Blago reported, “we didn’t stop cooperating with local authorities, they knew about our work and asked for access to groups and communities and about their needs.”

In many cases, where APH partners were restricted by not being able to support state-run facilities or services, local authorities have supplemented support to community groups through others means of assistance and collaboration. For example, local authorities in Kharkiv used their municipal budget to refurbish a shelter being

used by victims of domestic violence, whilst the APH partner helped the group to register as an official CSO, enabling them to apply for funding themselves in the future. In this example, local residents also helped the group by coordinating deliveries and unloading supplies and equipment.

Existing government structures and relationships in Poltava were utilised to support and mentor groups with their initiatives, and to act as an intermediary between the groups and the APH partner.

As a Poltava CF Public Health staff member from this region commented, “it was very good that the local authorities took these responsibilities.”

Further examples of local relationships and structures being strengthened include:

- In Cherkasy, the local authorities heard of plans community groups had put forward for support by CO 100% Life Cherkasy and supported one of the groups by providing funds to supplement the grant used for the purchase of equipment for home repairs.
- In Chernivtsi, the needs and challenges faced by the community being supported by CF New Family were brought to the attention of the local council, after which the Department of Social Services began providing support.
- Local CF Vykhid in Mykolaiv is drafting a memorandum of cooperation with the local authorities on their role in preparation for further conflict, as well as a memorandum of cooperation with the military on supporting communities affected by shelling.
- Youth PO Youth Public Movement "Partner" supported a community group in Odessa who were purchasing surgical equipment that could be used for emergency procedures. The local authorities connected with the group and supported by making renovations to the medical room.

Installation of a generator and purchase of gasoline coupons for the Buchatsky College of the Ternopil region (NGO ProLife Ukraine)



APH has a longstanding history of working alongside government agencies. The recent war and the humanitarian crisis emerging as a result have become the biggest challenge for both the State and civil society. Close interaction, flexibility in approaches, quick response, and the absence of unnecessary bureaucracy are all important to an effective and efficient working relationship and operational environment. Given the limited capacity of the State and their focus on rebuilding and re-establishing itself, civil society, including APH and their partners are leading partnerships with the State, often taking up action and responsibilities which cannot be upheld by State departments. For example, APH and other organisations procured emergency medicines (antiretroviral treatment, or ART, and opioid substitution therapy, or OST) when the

Ministry of Health was unable to do so. The synergy of State stability and the flexibility and mobility of NGOs and Ukrainian civil society is all the more important during this time.

For more than 20 years, APH has built a reputation among Ukrainian government agencies and civil society organisations as a reliable partner that guards the interests of target groups, boldly introduces innovations, and is always ready to provide assistance. Before the war, this was predominantly around public health. Now APH’s profile and reputation is increasing within the national humanitarian sphere; they are attracting new donors, expanding their services and beneficiaries, working with new partners, which include government agencies and NGOs, and boldly trying new approaches such as sclr.

CONCLUSION

Approximately one quarter of the budget held by APH for Phase 1 activities (March – August 2022) was allocated to microgrants and the sclr process, making sclr an important approach that has raised the profile of this project for APH. Sclr will continue to be an approach that APH supports, not least through the allocation of funding for Phase 2 (September 2022 –

August 2023), but also upon its reflection upon and learning from sclr practice.

Following the rollout of sclr using Christian Aid, DEC, and subsequent Irish Emergency Alliance funding from June to the beginning of September, APH has committed with two further donors (Elton John AIDS Foundation and

Aidsfonds - Soa Aids Nederland) to continue facilitating sclr, this time with a more targeted focus on people living with HIV/Aids.

APH and their partners have recognised the adjustments and changes they have already and still need to make to internal ways of working, much of which is based on years of managing funding from international donors, as well as their own need to balance trust and control. Despite this, APH as a whole has demonstrated the willingness to try (and fail), the flexibility to change, and humility to learn.

The extensive examples of initiatives identified and led by community groups that has emerged from this first phase of sclr implementation demonstrates several important factors.

i)The diversity of needs and opportunities that can/should be supported during such crises.

ii)Despite current challenges and historic tension between individuals and groups in society, Ukrainians can and have self-mobilised for the provision of collective assistance and mutual aid.

iii)The vital role that Ukrainian civil society play in enabling and empowering local efforts to survive, protect, and recover during the war, when state actors do not have capacity or reach.

Reflection on the experience of APH and their partners through response efforts has demonstrated that despite the challenges of the kinetic conflict, and the legal restrictions in Ukraine as a result of the war, it is possible to shift power and resources to groups of individuals affected by the conflict. Every Ukrainian has been affected by the conflict, whether living in occupied territories, or supporting loved ones (and strangers) from the other side of the country. It is the moral duty of all actors (including international) to trust in the power and decisions of community groups, whilst creating an environment and mindset of safe-to-fail and learning by doing (or learning through action). The Alliance for Public Health is

one network of Ukrainian organisations that have adapted to a new role in humanitarian response, taken on a new approach through survivor and community led crisis response, and worked with groups in society different to their norm. There is much that the external humanitarian community can learn from the Alliance’s humility and willingness to learn, adapt, and evolve.

Civil society actors such as APH and its network can be strengthened, especially through its partnerships, which also will have an immediate and important positive impact on how communities and actors respond to the crisis resulting from the war:

- APH and its country-wide network of NGOs have the capacity to scale up their support to groups and communities, including being able to reach those others cannot;
- Links between civil society actors should be strengthened, and opportunities for sharing plans, practice, and learning should be proactively sought out and enabled;
- International organisations and donors partnering with Ukrainian civil society can help such local and national actors with documenting and talking about their work;
- All actors in Ukraine, including international partners, have the power and responsibility to advocate for space for civil society leadership and action , which should also include community groups and individual citizens.

Readers of this paper may consider the following quote as a parting reflection: *“this project has demonstrated the need for making people more active, to involve people who were victims, or having faced losses, such people find the inner force to help others – this direction shows the world a light at the end of the tunnel. It is a roadmap showing where to go and where others can go”* (Maryna Varban, senior manager, APH).

⁷As was also found and recommended in the following study report Harrison, L. with Kondratenko, D. & Korenkova, K. (2022) Options for supporting and strengthening local humanitarian action in Ukraine: a scoping exercise report. Commissioned by Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). November 2022, available <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/options-supporting-and-strengthening-local-humanitarian-action-ukraine-scoping-exercise-report-enuk>.