

ESTABLISHED AND PROVEN CAPABILITY: ARK and The Global Strategy Network (TGSN) are the current implementers for CSSF's strategic communications work in Syria (Support to Grassroots Activists and Support to the Moderate Armed Opposition (MAO) respectively) and their teams have been implementing these projects since their inception in 2012 and 2013 respectively. As a result, both teams have been intimately involved in the development and evolution of strategic communications programming in Syria, and the creation of the independent media sector, ensuring the sector keeps pace with the changing media environment. Information now moves between audiences at increasing speed and the ability to influence target audiences has shifted from a handful of traditional television news channels and newspapers to a diffuse collection of online outlets. The incumbents have a detailed understanding of the different platforms, actors, key stakeholders and target audiences, and close ties to numerous media entities inside Syria, as well as regionally and internationally.

Over years of implementation, both companies have been able to develop an extremely detailed understanding of target audience attitudes and behaviours inside Syria, and have been able to continuously evolve the projects, learning through close monitoring and evaluation to achieve shifts in attitudes and behaviours despite the extremely challenging operating context. Amalgamating the two projects provides a significant opportunity to build on successes to date, and the strategy below demonstrates how ARK and TGSN will bring together and develop their existing capacities and approaches to train and support moderate opposition entities to shape the narratives around them, supported by unified, compelling campaigns. These campaigns will be amplified by ARK and TGSN's well-established platforms and close links to national, regional and international media. This work will be underpinned and informed by an Audience Insight and Evaluation (AI&E) strand, provided by Conflict Management Consulting (CMC), a third consortium partner. CMC brings deep expertise in technical assistance and research services in fragile, conflict and post-conflict areas. The AI&E strand will serve as a coordinated yet autonomous function to assess the impact of MOR programme activities on target Syrian and international audiences and drive continuous improvement.

UNDERSTANDING AND INSIGHT – TARGET AUDIENCE / MEDIA LANDSCAPE: Over the past six years, the consortium companies have developed extensive networks covering stakeholders across Syria, from key members of civil governance structures, brigade commanders and members of ninety MAO groups to civil society organisations, service providers and activists. ARK and TGSN have been providing ongoing reporting on this to HMG and, through the MAO project's dedicated liaison, to the International Coalition and both have well-established, extensive research networks across opposition-held areas. In addition to this, ARK's sister company, The Stabilisation Network (TSN), focuses on countering violent extremism research and communications and is currently implementing counter-Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and counter-Daesh communications projects for HMG in Syria, providing detailed insight into extremist messaging and responses, which has also fed into the design of this project. In 2016, ARK produced a Syria Systems Conflict Analysis, presenting a detailed understanding of the evolution, key drivers and potential trajectory of the conflict and in early 2017, it carried out a nationwide Tier One Target Audience Analysis (TAA) in Syria for CSSF, providing a detailed understanding of target audiences and the Syrian media landscape.

The results of this TAA have strongly informed the consortium's project design and its focus on four of the key target audience segments identified: the 'Northern Opposition', (about 17% of the population, which favours the FSA but accommodates HTS, particularly if it is receiving services from it), the 'Southern Core' (around 5% of the population, which strongly supports the FSA and rejects all extremist groups but shows less support for democracy and the participation of women and minorities), the "Revolution is Dead" segment (around 17.8% of the population, comprised of persons in middle Syria who might once have actively opposed the regime but who currently see no alternative to it) and the small but influential 'Civic Opposition' (around 1.7% of the population) composed of engaged activists. The identification of these audience segments, their motivations and media consumption has enabled the design of a highly-tailored project which builds on the work done by ARK and TGSN to date, moving from distinct awareness-raising outputs to developing and promoting coordinated positive narratives across the moderate opposition, shifting from decline to resilience with the primary objective of increasing public trust and support for these entities. CMC will use the target audience data as a baseline to test and demonstrate that the project is managing to achieve this aim.

Both ARK and TGSN have been instrumental in developing independent Syrian media. Since ARK first began training citizen journalists in 2012, as part of HMG's efforts to develop professional,

independent and self-sufficient local Syrian media organisations, it has trained more than 200 journalists and has been a key implementer of a multi-donor effort to develop media platforms inside Syria, maintaining close links with these organisations. As a result of this ongoing programming, ARK has an extensive network of partnerships with Syrian opposition media and has delivered high-quality, impactful campaigns through TV, FM radio, social media and print material (posters, magazines and comics). TGSN staff, who have trained almost 400 stringers, were instrumental in developing two key media brands to shape perceptions of the MAO. Working together, ARK and TGSN are able to leverage their long-running relationships with key Syrian media stakeholders, as well as their own communications platforms, built over many years with UK and other donor funding and which now form an intrinsic part of the wider Syrian opposition media landscape. The consortium's proposed strategy maximises these joint capabilities to provide coordinated direction and development across these media brands and opposition entities, enabling the project to move beyond a focus on specific products and platforms, to affecting the wider narratives evolving within the Syrian opposition media environment and through to the international community.

STRATEGY AND PLANNING: Building on the consortium's experiences to date, the proposed project would see a step change in the approach to delivering strategic communications in Syria. During the period that ARK and TGSN have established and run Syrian opposition media platforms, they have increasingly had to defend against sophisticated perception-manipulation techniques by both the regime and its proxies and by violent extremist organisations. As such, the project methodology is tailored to shift the existing narratives around the moderate opposition from decline to resilience and challenge the media dominance of extremists and other groups that seek to undermine the moderate opposition. The consortium will provide capacity building and mentoring to moderate governance and armed actors to enable them to carry out strategic communications for their own activities, under the aegis of a coordinated, overarching nationwide campaign supported by ARK and TGSN, covered and amplified through their stringer networks, their extensive media relationships and through successful UK-funded platforms set up under the existing projects. Together these platforms have more than 1.3 million social media followers¹ providing a powerful base from which to promote cross-cutting outreach efforts, covering and amplifying local-level activities. Additionally, the consortium will use the capacity building sessions to identify credible, moderate civilian governance spokespeople who will be promoted as go-to interlocutors for regional and international media. They will echo key messages linked to the coordinated local campaigns across all media, with consortium platforms able to cover this messaging as well and encourage other outlets to pick it up. This multi-media approach, which will provide, promote and coordinate positive messaging around the moderate opposition, linking the hyper-local level to the international aims, will increase target audience exposure to examples of moderate opposition successes and ongoing, positive narratives about their efforts, growing their credibility and enabling an increase in public trust and engagement.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND COORDINATED CAMPAIGNS: The consortium will provide this training, capacity building and ongoing mentoring to moderate opposition entities agreed on in coordination with HMG. ARK has already piloted this approach very effectively with the Idlib City Council, doubling its Facebook followers and increasing video views on its page from 3,000 to an average of 60,000 in one month. The consortium will work with these moderate entities to develop coordinated campaigns using shared branding and hashtags, to create coherent, unified and impactful messaging, and ARK and TGSN will build on their existing cooperation with the communications teams of CSSF and other donor-funded projects to include them in these campaigns, bringing critical mass to messaging outputs.

¹ RFS: 608k Facebook followers / 26k Twitter followers
SMO: 365k Facebook followers / 37k Twitter followers
Moubader: 165k Facebook followers
SyrianWaves (to be re-branded as Moubader radio): 20k Facebook followers
SyriaGraph: 89k Facebook likes

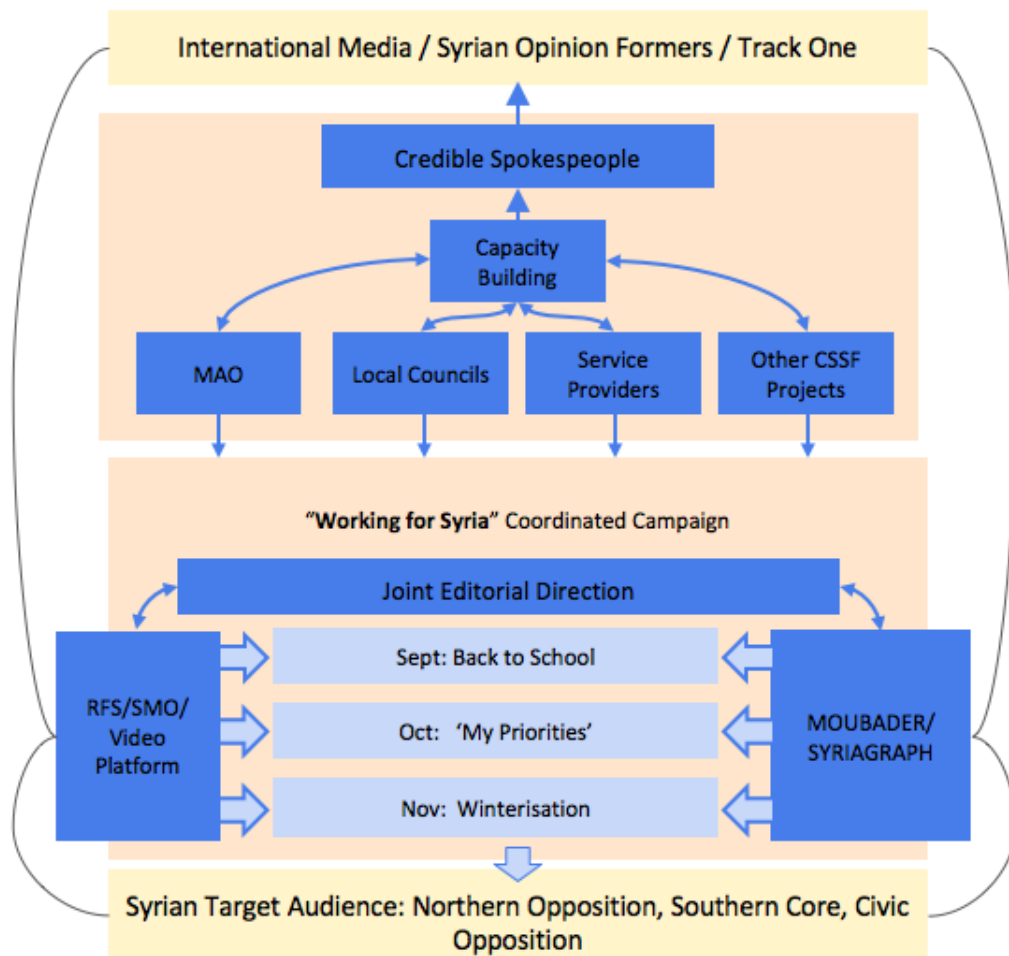


Figure 1: Project Schematic

The project will develop a single, overarching campaign theme, such as *“Working for Syria”* (three indicative messaging streams within this campaign are shown above), and work with the FSA, moderate governance actors, CSOs and other CSSF-funded projects to develop and implement campaign activities at the local level, then amplify these at the governorate, national and international levels, developing the perception of an increasingly unified moderate opposition locally, nationally and internationally. The consortium will build upon previous campaigns such as the TGSN team’s *“FSA_OurChoice”* and ARK’s *“Working for You”* (which jointly promoted the work of the Free Syrian Police, Civil Defence and Local Councils), developing coordinated activities that demonstrate and amplify consonance between moderate opposition groups. ARK and TGSN will also work with their stringers and media contacts to identify stories that steer the narrative around the moderate opposition, and these activities will collectively aim to **shift the narrative from one of decline, to one of resilience**. This approach has been developed through ongoing discussions with key Syrian stakeholders and the consortium’s Syrian staff and beneficiaries, based on TAA findings. In northern Syria, the TAA demonstrated a requirement to raise awareness of moderate opposition service provision, promote the FSA and counter HTS propaganda and the regime narrative that there is no moderate opposition. In the South, although the threat from violent extremist groups is more limited, there is a requirement to promote democratic values and the participation of women and minorities to counter prevailing attitudes that have become extremist in all but name. The selected approach will also hit another key target audience, the *“Revolution is Dead”*, providing them with compelling narrative and demonstrations of a credible alternative to the regime.

Given that the consortium’s delivery teams, networks and relationships are already in place, it will be able to launch a coordinated *Back to School* campaign in September, if awarded the contract. ARK and TGSN have already informally consulted with various relevant entities, including the Idlib City Council, brigade commanders, projects supporting the Education Directorate, other CSSF implementers, etc., all of whom are willing to participate in a campaign using the *Back to School*

theme, with shared slogans, hashtags and branding providing a unified approach while ensuring that each entity has the freedom to creatively respond to the theme in line with their on-the-ground contribution. All campaigns and activities will ensure that gender is fully considered in planning and implementation. As an example, *Back to School* would enable coverage of female teachers, demonstrating their key role in educating children, as well as emphasising the importance for all children (regardless of gender) to be able to safely attend and complete their schooling. This theme will also enable a rapid response to any regime abuses that impact children's return to school and can provide coverage of schools that have moved underground to escape barrel bombings. TGSN will engage with MAO brigades providing services such as security and manpower to clear roads that enable children and teachers to get to schools, with these activities filmed by TGSN's stringer network and disseminated online and on broadcast channels. All proposed campaigns will bring together the messaging capability of both civilian and military moderate entities across Syria, with consortium project staff using their existing relationships to coordinate these messages.

The follow-on "*My Priorities*" theme will push moderate opposition entities to engage directly with their constituents to understand their priorities and explain their own through a combination of media outputs and physical activities. Again, this will employ shared slogans, hashtags and branding and will ensure women are effectively represented. This unified branding approach builds on TGSN's success in moving almost all MAO brigades to adopt a shared visual identity, with all social media banners and joint statements delivered through a common design and branding. As well as presenting a more unified approach, this shared visual identity also differentiates the MAO from other armed actors.

In addition to different monthly or bi-monthly campaign themes, the consortium will also run an ongoing campaign based on the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) training TGSN has delivered to MAO brigades in northern Syria. This initiative has been the fruit of extensive and continual outreach and conversations with the top echelons of the MAO leadership to convince them of the benefits of IHL and their legal accountability to it. So far, around 200 fighters and 60 officers have been recipients of in-country IHL training. One of the architects of TGSN's IHL delivery, Hanadi Abu Arab, a senior female Syrian judge, personally ensured that four brigades signed deeds of commitment in Geneva relating to the prevention of both violence against women and the recruitment of children, an action that received significant recognition in the international media. Under the proposed MOR project, the consortium will develop a two-strand IHL training component: one strand for the MAO and one for moderate governance and civil society groups to ensure that they are better able to hold armed actors accountable. By continuing to improve the MAO's compliance with IHL, and using ARK- and TGSN-run platforms to amplify and communicate these efforts, the MAO will differentiate itself from extremist groups and the regime and increase levels of trust among Syrian citizens and the international community. This campaign also better positions the MAO for any future Security Sector Reform (SSR) and/or Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) processes - with which there is currently no appetite to engage. TGSN seeks to encourage specific, senior 'Legal Officer' designations within each brigade's chain of command (mirroring the structural changes it achieved in the positioning and authority of MAO media officers after extensive training and outreach). Not only will this insulate IHL compliance gains from changes in personnel (a shortcoming of previous IHL efforts done elsewhere) but IHL compliance is a prerequisite for DDR and SSR processes, ensuring that achievements now will pay dividends in any peace agreement. For governance and civil society actors, increasing IHL sensitivity has the added benefit of leveraging the influence of public expectation of key actors, who have become increasingly sensitive to popular perception. Furthermore, given the subject matter, the project can run joint civilian and military IHL courses, providing a useful method to bring people together building a mechanism for future engagement.

The consortium will also build on TGSN's collaboration with the CSSF-funded Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), to ensure that Track 1 obligations are fully understood by the FSA hierarchy, local governance actors and CSOs. PILPG is working with the FSA Astana delegation (whose spokesman is currently fully supported and funded by TGSN through the MAO Project, and also a member of the Geneva delegation) to examine all legal documentation agreed in Astana. These agreements are largely prepared in advance by Russia and Turkey and, as such, the MAO has agreed to commitments it does not fully understand, phrased in unfamiliar legal terminology, hindering or handicapping implementation. Key points will be drawn from PILPG's legal analysis and communicated to the relevant brigades to improve compliance, while tailored training on ceasefire terms will also be provided for local governance and civil society organisations. As with the IHL campaign detailed above, this will provide another means to link the civilian and military spheres and

to enable moderate entities to transparently provide critical information to target audiences, thereby increasing their credibility. The consortium’s combined networks, themselves trained on IHL and Track 1 agreement obligations, will then be better able to report violations committed by the regime or its affiliates which will then be highlighted and amplified on existing platforms, with egregious examples provided to international media.

CREDIBLE SPOKESPEOPLE: The capacity building component of the consortium’s strategy will leverage the success TGSN has had in developing credible spokespeople for the MAO project, by identifying a small number of civilian spokespeople who will be provided with training and mentoring to act as credible interlocutors for regional and international media. ARK and TGSN have well-established contacts with numerous key media organisations including Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Orient, Sky News Arabic, CNN, BBC, BBC Arabic, The Times, The Guardian, FT, NYT, Reuters and others. Through these contacts, the spokespeople will be able to respond to regime abuses while also promoting the successes of the moderate opposition and credibly re-framing the narrative that all opposition areas are dominated by extremists. The availability of both credible spokespeople and well-trained and connected local governance media offices will be the foundation of this new approach, moving from reactive news output to a proactive, narrative-formation strategy.

AMPLIFICATION THROUGH EXISTING BRANDS: Having implemented these projects for a number of years, ARK and TGSN benefit from having well-developed media brands which they can use to cover and amplify all of the campaign activities detailed above. Their platforms and links to other media outlets provides a unique capacity for message dissemination and amplification. ARK’s **Moubader** brand currently encompasses a high-quality hard copy monthly magazine with widespread distribution (15,000 copies per month) across opposition-held areas of Syria, and an online presence that includes a [website](#) and a popular [Facebook](#) page (165k fans). Soft copy distribution of the monthly magazine was introduced recently both to expand distribution and to mitigate the risk of physical distribution being interrupted. Moubader, which translates as “a person who takes initiative”, was set up by ARK in 2015 in response to an HMG request to develop a platform that would be capable of amplifying CSSF project successes and taking the project through transition. Moubader identifies, promotes and amplifies the work of individuals and moderate civilian institutions (including CSSF funded projects) that are making a positive difference in their communities. As such, it is a unique repository of positive stories from Syria that amplifies the resilience and successes of moderate opposition civilian groups. M&E results have demonstrated the impact of the Moubader approach: in a survey carried out in March 2017, 89% of respondents to a survey of institutions featured in Moubader reported that they had seen an increase in community engagement as a direct result of coverage. Face-to-face surveys conducted in March 2017 revealed a positive correlation between reading Moubader magazine and feeling confident in the ability of local entities to serve citizens. 84% of survey respondents who

“[Moubader] magazine makes me feel positive about the initiatives covered. It breaks down the barriers between citizens and our institutions.” 25 year-old female Moubader reader in Kafranbel, Idlib, April 2017

“[Moubader] illuminates the brightest side in the Syrian reality and highlights the strength of the community and its members. The site gives me optimism about the people of the country and its future....The media ignore the role of civil society and follow the news of destruction and factions and the regime and others and ignores the positive action of civil society.” Respondent to a Moubader website feedback survey in July 2017

had read Moubader agreed that “civil actors are capable of delivering needed services in certain areas of liberated Syria”. The figure for respondents who had NOT read Moubader was 64%. An open-ended question also elicited ten clear examples of behavioural change, in which reading about the initiatives of others had inspired individuals to contribute to their own community. Under the MOR project, the ARK team will build upon the existing trust, reputation and effectiveness of the Moubader brand to provide detailed coverage of the coordinated campaigns that newly trained moderate governance media offices will be running (as well as providing details on IHL and ceasefires). The ARK team will also use its links to the international media to increase its coverage of positive moderate opposition magazine-style stories, recognising that news stories on the Syrian conflict are now rarely covered. Given the importance of broadcast television as a trusted source of

“Moubader made me change my own life. I am now registered in many volunteer organisations that are working to develop our community.” 24 year-old male Moubader reader in Batabo, Rural Aleppo, April 2017

media (as evidenced in the TAA), ARK will also seek to develop a Moubader television programme to leverage Moubader stories and values to maximum effect and to reach an even wider audience. This will require additional funding which ARK will seek to secure from other donors or media partners.

ARK’s **SyriaGraph** photography platform - which comprises a [website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [Instagram account](#) - depicts daily life in opposition areas, and holds monthly competitions to find and develop new talent, and generate engagement around specific themes. In order to fulfil the MOR project objectives, ARK will re-develop SyriaGraph into an internationally-facing platform. This will include translating the website into English and adding new functionality, allowing SyriaGraph - and its vast, searchable archive of photos depicting the daily reality of life in Syria - to be developed into the first professional Syrian photo agency, providing attributed content to other users, and becoming an easily-accessible resource for international media, news agencies, international NGOs and CSSF partners. It will also provide dedicated photographic coverage of instances of the regime’s military excesses or abuses - and thereby perform the function of highlighting these abuses to international audiences, with SyriaGraph photographs becoming a powerful testimony to counter regime and extremist narratives.

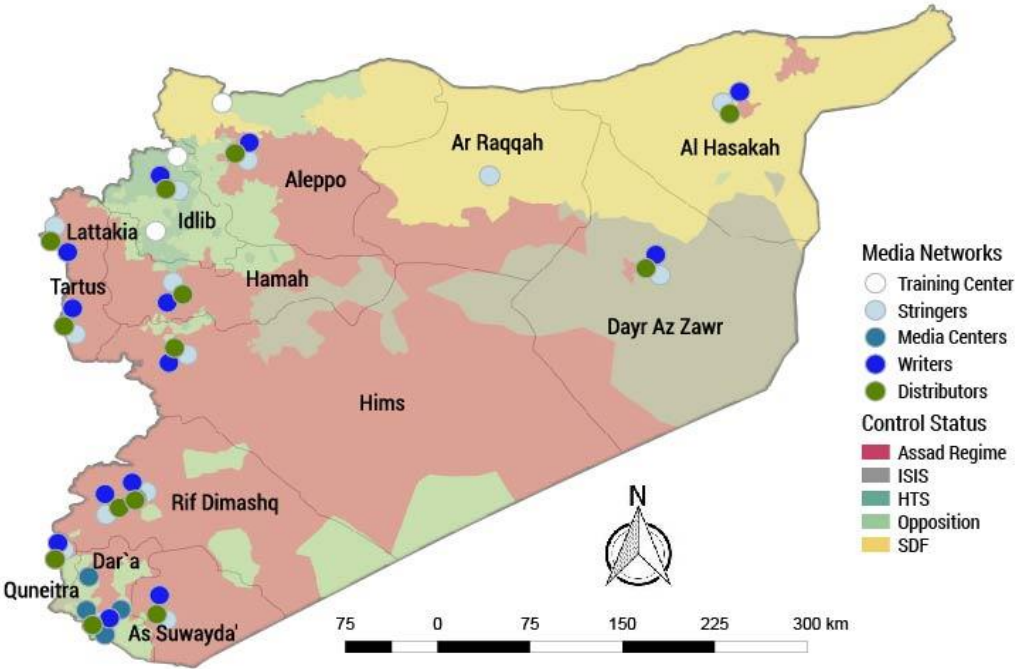
The TGSN-run **Revolutionary Forces of Syria (RFS)** is a primary source of news about the Free Syrian Army (FSA), particularly in northern Syria. The RFS production team, working with TGSN under the existing MAO project, have built the site into a trusted news source that provides information and footage about the activities of FSA brigades to Syrian, regional and international broadcasters. The platform’s Facebook page has 608,000 followers, and produces videos that have attracted over a million views (in addition to pick-up elsewhere). RFS is popular in part because individuals and other opposition platforms rely on it for fast and reliable information and news about events inside Syria. This capability is based on the TGSN team’s efforts to train and equip its stringer networks and develop the editorial skills of core staff. Similarly, **SMO** is a platform supported by TGSN that focuses on the MAO in the south, and is another key information outlet. Both platforms enable TGSN to amplify particular messages at key points in the conflict, such as calls for armed groups to unify and engage seriously in peace talks. The MAO project to date has also advised key MAO spokespeople on messaging, with their comments subsequently being picked up by international media outlets. All four platforms will take gender and conflict sensitivity into account in all content production, with women considered as a key audience, even on MAO platforms where they are less likely to be directly featured. Moubader and SyriaGraph will increase their existing focus on reframing the narrative of women in the Syrian media from victim to active participant in public life.

As required by the SoR, the project will provide an Arabic-speaking, DV-cleared and DoD CAC (Common Access Card) holding liaison officer to the military Global Coalition against Daesh. TGSN’s liaison officer has played this role since mid-2015 when the UK began providing strategic communication support and he will continue to do so under the new project, if awarded. TGSN’s work has included joint planning and strategy sessions at US military SOF HQs in the USA prior to their deployment to forward locations to direct Syria-based counter-Daesh work. Both TGSN and ARK’s sister company TSN have briefed the Global Coalition extensively in their regional HQs, providing a Syrian prism for their planning and messaging, and strategic advice in positioning the counter-Daesh effort within the existing context of Syria. The collaboration with ARK in this consortium means that this liaison function can align civil society and Raqqa-based CSSF StratCom programming (including the Global Coalition’s Arabic social media presence, which TSN runs) with ongoing military efforts.

CONSORTIUM IN-COUNTRY RESOURCES	
Video stringers	97
Writers	23
Distributors	49
Photographers	23
In-country trainers	19
Training centres	8
Media offices	3
In-country M&E / Research officers	32

CONTENT CREATION AND COORDINATION: ARK and TGSN already share a common approach to content creation and this will be continued and enhanced under the new project. Over the years of implementing the existing projects, both companies have identified and nurtured fully-Syrian stringer and production teams which are now highly skilled in creating resonant and engaging outputs against high level creative briefs, under the guidance of senior international mentors and managers. Through the consortium’s networks on the ground (see networks map below) it can gather original material from all areas of opposition-held Syria, including video and audio content, photographs and written articles. This network of writers and stringers has established relationships of trust with local institutions, providing the network with access to resonant local stories and ensuring they are covered in manner that is sensitive and retains a strong, authentic local voice.

Content creation for this project will be based on best practice in communications theory to achieve the desired shifts in the target audiences' attitudes and behaviours. Rather than present purely factual arguments to explain moderate opposition governance, service and security provision, content will be developed that contains powerful and persuasive personal narratives, appealing to key motivating factors identified in the TAA and through years of research on and experience with the target audiences in Syria. The tone of content produced through this project will be predominantly positive, an approach the Moubader brand has been implementing for the past two years with significant success (see above). Research in social media and advertising has empirically demonstrated that positively arousing emotions results in the greatest amount of content sharing; significantly more than negative messaging, even shock content. The TAA data also identifies that family and friends are the most trusted source of information among Syrians, and social media shares represent a viable (and measurable) conduit for accessing the opinions of friends and family. This reinforces the importance of developing engaging, shareable content that is optimised for mobile/low-bandwidth consumption. ARK has already effectively used this approach on the Moubader Facebook page in recent months to significantly boost engagement rates. This approach will be mainstreamed in all capacity building and content creation in support of the coordinated campaigns (e.g., *Back to School*). As noted in the gender section, the project will also specifically focus on reframing the narrative around women in the conflict to focus on their positive participation rather than the current overwhelming portrayal of them as passive victims.



ARK and TGSN will combine their proven content gathering and technical capabilities to coordinate outputs for maximum overall effect. Messaging themes (such as those suggested above) will be confirmed using key stakeholder input and the consortium's research capacity, and the production team will then coordinate with the platforms, media offices and spokespeople to discuss and decide on specific products to be made and disseminated. Each platform will also seek to cross-promote messages and products to other, credible platforms and broadcasters to shape the wider narrative. The team will ensure that gender considerations are taken into account when making production decisions, with the opinions and needs of women and girls covered as a matter of routine. ARK has considerable expertise in this area having delivered gender-focused programming in Syria for the UK, Dutch and Canadian governments since 2015.

Through the existing projects, ARK and the TGSN team have invested significantly in their stringer networks and production capabilities in recent years, upgrading their skills and equipment. The consortium will develop this further by focusing on the ability of key individuals inside Syria to better understand the utility of news media. The consortium will train stringers to more proactively spot stories: this will be of increased importance if ceasefires, de-escalation zones and increased diplomatic and political activity reduce active conflict, while training provided to key civilian and military leaders through the capacity building component will improve their ability to discern what their key Syrian and international audiences expect from those who claim to be fighting for respect, dignity and justice. Following the reduction of hostilities in Syria, TGSN has already worked with its stringers to change from events-based content to values-based content. This ability to create compelling, resonant content across multiple platforms and entities represents a gear change in the Syrian opposition media landscape. The regime and Russia have been coordinating output and messaging to great effect, but up until this point, the opposition has lacked a corresponding capability.

PRE-PRODUCTION, PRODUCTION, TESTING, DELIVERY, DISSEMINATION, AMPLIFICATION:

Under the proposed new project, the consortium will continue to build on its existing multi-media approach to content production and dissemination, using the results of the TAA to further focus on the

SMO’s “Question Time”
 TGSN has recently trialled a local engagement approach through a BBC Question Time-style programme produced by SMO in southern Syria. An influential local military commander appeared on an episode to answer questions from a live audience. The programme, which generated extensive interaction from the audience, was hosted by a female presenter and included female representatives of local civil society organisations.

regional satellite broadcasters regarded as most trusted by the four key target audience segments. Using footage from their dedicated stringer networks, ARK and TGSN have produced and placed more than 2,000 news reports, voxpops, documentaries and other products on the TAA-identified most trusted channels: Orient, Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera and Sky Arabic, and regular (at least weekly) placement will continue under the new project. The addition of capacity building for moderate local entities and the introduction of coordinated campaigns across multiple moderate entities will ensure that there is a strong element of on-the-ground outreach activities included in the project, a key means of reinforcing other media messaging and accessing the family and friends networks that all target audiences regard as the most reliable. Such physical campaign activities will include town hall meetings and information sessions (for example on ceasefires), sporting

events, children’s activities, etc., which ARK and TGSN will support directly, as well as wider media coverage through their dedicated platforms and access to broadcast networks. ARK has extensive physical distribution networks in opposition held areas, having distributed over two million print products inside Syria, and carried out hundreds of localised events and campaigns with partner groups which it will further leverage under this project. The consortium’s existing Syrian production teams are highly experienced in creating content for different media formats, including print, digital, television and radio, documentaries, interviews, voxpops and animation. The project will continue to focus group test products for resonance and feedback on audience reactions to messaging and will constantly track the progress of messaging and reactions to it.

Securing Moubader delivery in the South
 In August 2017, a Moubader distribution team in the Deraa countryside were stopped at a checkpoint at the entrance to the town of Sheikh Saad and threatened with arrest by a man they believe may have been linked to Daesh. However the team was able to resolve the situation by calling on the head of the Sheikh Saad Local Council. He was fully aware of the purpose and value of Moubader magazine. He not only resolved the situation at the checkpoint, but also provided them with a signed letter to facilitate their passage should they encounter any problems in the future. This incident demonstrates the advantage of existing brand recognition and relationships of trust in securing the delivery of consortium products.

Building Idlib City Council's media capacity, June-July 2017

The ICC's online following more than doubled during ARK's four-week training programme, hitting an engagement rate of more than three times the Syrian average, with views of online videos reaching an average of 60k (up from less than 3k prior to the training). The ICC project also serves as an indication of consortium synergies, as ARK delivered some of the in-country training with an instructor who was trained and equipped by TGSN staff through the MAO project.

CAPACITY BUILDING: As detailed in the strategy section above, capacity building will be a key part of the proposed project to develop sustainable skills across moderate opposition entities to raise awareness about and support for their activities, and to enable them to work to change the narrative from one of decline to one of resilience. This approach builds on the capacity building ARK and the TGSN teams have been carrying out for Syrian opposition entities and activists under the existing projects they are implementing, but moves beyond basic communications training to focus on narrative formation, building in particular upon ARK's recent experience developing a communications strategy for the Idlib City Council (ICC). Both companies have a range of expert, male and female Arabic-speaking trainers able to provide core technical skills, such as filming and editing and the consortium also

In-country training resources

Given the difficulties of providing cross-border training, TGSN staff ran a train-the-trainer programme and established three training centres across northern Syria. Part of ARK's recent training of the Idlib City Council was done by an MAO-trained trainer, in an MAO centre. TGSN staff have now delivered 60 courses inside Syria. Between them, ARK and TGSN have trained over 600 stringers and media officers (for institutions including the Free Syrian Police and the Idlib City Council) and issued more than 250 professional stringer kits.

draws on the professional media experience of senior international team members. The TGSN SME and ARK's Civilian Voices Component Lead and Communications Director have a combined 50 years of journalism and production experience for organisations such as Al Jazeera, Reuters and the BBC. Our proposed training programmes therefore draw on this depth of expertise to mentor key opposition institutions (agreed with HMG) on a more strategic approach to their communications outputs, working with them to shape the narrative within their own communities, drawing together digital engagement and optimisation, with public outreach and service delivery activities on the ground. Both ARK and TGSN take a "learning by doing" approach, providing continuous mentoring to beneficiaries to put new skills into action. For example in 2015, as part of advanced capacity building, ARK stringers worked with the company's lead video editor to produce a 27 minute documentary, "Champion", covering sports fanatics training against the odds in opposition-held Aleppo. The film was broadcast on Al Jazeera and there have been several international screenings, including in Washington DC.

SCALABILITY, FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY: Over the past four years, both ARK and TGSN have demonstrated considerable flexibility and adaptability to project changes, scaling different parts of their respective projects up and down as necessary, in response to conflict dynamics and to donor requirements. In response to a UK requirement to provide credible messaging throughout a transition period, while also building an audience as the conflict continues, ARK evolved its pro-opposition Basma production capability into the multimedia Moubader platform to attract a wider audience and enable credible transition messaging when appropriate. ARK's stringers, journalists and photographers (who include female media professionals) all continue to support this Syrian-run platform, and the grassroots project currently has 168 Syrians engaged on it, with one international project manager.

Through the very nature of its project, TGSN has had to demonstrate scalability as the MAO's areas of operations have shrunk. In conjunction with the geographic pressures on the MAO, its activities have also gone through major changes: heated battles have been replaced with de-escalation zones, ceasefires and truces, while the MAO has gone from having no political representation to a delegation negotiating in Astana. TGSN has had to be flexible to these substantially different scenarios, adapting to each one by changing media output (e.g. events-based to values-based as fighting died down) and capacity building (shifting emphasis to spokesman skills and IHL as the Astana process developed). TGSN's outreach coordinator has been approached directly by the media head of the Stabilisation Committee for Aleppo province, which brings order and services to liberated areas, both to provide

training to civilian bodies across the Euphrates Shield area and also to create for them a unified media strategy to mirror the success of the MAO's Unified Visual Image (UVI, see above).

The consortium has designed the new project to be inherently flexible, adaptable and scalable: capacity building can be targeted to those locations preferred by HMG (to provide a layered approach to programming in key areas of Idlib for example) and can equally be moved to new geographic locations at short notice in the event that changes in the conflict render certain areas or groups out of bounds/unfeasible for the project. The coordinated communications campaigns that will run as part of the project also provide extensive flexibility for different civil society or governance entities to participate to a greater or lesser extent, according to resources or localised security challenges. The multi-media, multi-entity approach will unite smaller, localised campaigns through national and regional amplification, providing increased overall impact, while allowing for the inevitable delays and setbacks that occur during remote and in-conflict programming.

Through its CSSF-funded research project in Idlib, ARK is in a unique place to contextualise Idlib-based work, particularly with the recent shrinking of the FSA's overt presence in the province. Likewise, necessary restrictions on the Grassroots project's ability to operate in northern rural Aleppo due to the tight Turkish control of the 'Euphrates Shield' area, are balanced by TGSN's extensive activities and contact with the moderate factions in that area. As such, a combination of TGSN and ARK allows for an ability to coordinate campaigns across northern Syria, while both have existing operations in the south. The consortium's ongoing research capabilities and project monitoring will provide the independent, objective and appropriately safeguarded assessment required to make well-informed decisions on how and when to adapt and flex programming, in coordination with HMG direction. The consortium's platforms and relationships ensure it is well placed to promote popular support for a peace deal, if one were to emerge from ceasefires and ongoing talks. Such an effort would require knowledge and contact with key civil, governance and military figures as well as a sound understanding of Syrian narratives and access to the Syrian media sphere. The consortium would be ideally placed to scale up at short notice to provide such support. As mentioned above, TGSN's IHL programme also seeks structural and behavioural changes from the MAO that would as a corollary facilitate any SSR or DDR process.