

A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System

How to Truly Localize Aid

Rationale

Year-on-year, the world is experiencing disasters with increasing frequency, as well as a growing number of conflicts due to climate change, rapid urbanization, poverty, and environmental degradation, to name a few. More often than not, the international humanitarian system is asked to respond to these disasters and conflicts through the provision of life-saving aid, whenever and wherever it is needed. At the center of this system are the millions of people affected by crises that the system seeks to serve.

However, a growing disconnect between the needs of disaster-affected communities and the actions of those who define the terms of the humanitarian system is compromising the effectiveness of that system. Currently, global humanitarian policies take little account of the dependency of disaster affected populations on local actors, including local government, civil society, and Southern Non-Government Organizations (SNGOs),¹ who are usually the first on the ground in the wake of humanitarian crises.² These entities as well as local businesses and the national private sector play a vital role in responding to emergencies and post-crisis rehabilitation.

The current humanitarian architecture invests very little in the sustainable capacity building of local actors, a factor which is driving an escalating culture of dependency on international NGOs (INGOs) and other international agencies. These actors in turn often sideline local actors, treating SNGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) as sub-contractors rather than partners. This capacity shortfall limits the effectiveness of first-responders in the immediate wake of disasters, reconstruction or recovery efforts and isolates them from policy and planning dialogue in which critical decisions that affect them as well as affected communities are taken. In some countries, tensions also arise between the national government and the international humanitarian system, especially when the international humanitarian system works in isolation of the government.

There is now a growing consensus that the humanitarian response needs to be more locally rooted. “One that leverages the responsibilities and capacities of states, civil society and affected communities, supported by international actors, is one which will be more effective in responding to and mitigating the risks of crises.”³ In addition, the focus on resilience requires greater engagement with local and national institutions because of its core emphasis on strengthening local systems in advance of future shocks.

¹ In the context of this paper, the term ‘Southern NGO’ includes all local, national and regional non-government organizations that are founded and headquartered in the global south. The term does not include International NGOs founded and headquartered in the global north with chapters, offices and branches in the global south. While we believe that localization of aid should include all local actors (including SNGOs, civil society organizations, governments, the private sector, etc.) and although the terms SNGOs and local actors are sometimes used interchangeably, this paper focuses specifically on SNGOs. However, some recommendations provided support all local actors and others are specific to SNGOs.

² Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, Synthesis Report: Expanded Summary, Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami. Available from: <<http://www.alnap.org/resource/5536>>. {2 July 2015}

³ ODI (2015). Localising humanitarianism: improving effectiveness through inclusive actino. Humanitarian Policy Group, July 2015

This position paper proposes four principal reforms that will promote a more effective partnership between local actors and the international humanitarian system led by the UN and INGOs. These reforms will encourage greater equity in decision making, as well as more open and transparent communication, in addition to supporting more ethical and transparent expenditure and the capacity building of local actors. The proposed reforms are:

1. Reform the global humanitarian architecture to ensure increased participation of local actors and involvement of all stakeholders, concerning the policies and terms of humanitarian response, recovery and resilience efforts to be undertaken in partnership with local authorities, national governments and local civil society.
2. Reform aid financing to enable local actors (SNGOs, local governments, and civil society organizations) to access the funding they require to better anticipate and respond effectively to crises. Improved ownership in the medium to longer-term, which grows out of that increased effectiveness, will also be assured. Such a reform will also bring greater transparency to the management and disbursement of donor funds – an issue of mounting concern to taxpayers. It will also foster a smoother transition from disaster relief in emergencies to recovery and resilience building.
3. INGOs should consider the following recommendations as part of operationalizing a *People-centered humanitarian response*⁴ and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. INGOs should be working in solidarity with SNGOs to support the establishment of a new aid architecture that truly practices the ethos espoused in various international commitments. This role should include advocacy by INGOs to their respective donor countries and the UN system to truly change the humanitarian architecture in a meaningful way.
4. These recommendations, along with existing commitments in support of a *People-centered humanitarian response* should be incorporated in organizational accountability frameworks and should be a mandatory part of reporting requirements.

This paper has been developed through consultation with a group of Southern based local, national and regional NGOs that are in the process of establishing a global network (referred to as a SNGO network)⁵ that would prioritize the transformation of the humanitarian and development system to become truly people-centered. The SNGO network will actively seek the membership of southern based local, national, and regional NGOs across the world, and facilitate resource mobilization and capacity building to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian response, adherence to humanitarian principles, and promote dialogue with local and national governments, as well as a present a collective voice on humanitarian issues for local actors.

The network will establish a pooled fund mechanism to allow small, medium, and large (local and national) SNGOs to access funding more directly from a diverse funding base. The network's mandate will be to build the capacity of SNGOs over time to manage large grants and the complexities of

⁴ <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/core-standard-1-people-centred-humanitarian-response/>

⁵ Ramalingam Ben (April 2015), The Demand for, Feasibility and Scope of A Global Network of Southern NGOs in Disaster, Resilience, Response and Recovery. http://adesoafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GlobalNetworkReport_April-2015.pdf

humanitarian financing mechanisms. The network will also strongly engage in global advocacy and target policy reforms to support the implementation of these recommendations.

Reforming Humanitarian Architecture

While natural and man-made disasters strike all corners of the world, those in the global south tend to be the most frequently and severely affected by these disasters. Local actors, based in and among affected communities year round, are best placed to understand the real needs of those communities before and immediately after disasters strike. Unless these actors, including SNGOs, local governments, the private sector and CSOs are capacitated, empowered, and enabled to play equitable leading role in dictating the terms of humanitarian response, our humanitarian system cannot achieve a *People-centered response*.

Recommendations:

Inclusion and Capacity Building

1. All humanitarian actors should endorse the Principles of Partnership (Equality, Transparency, Results-Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity) introduced by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, and set targets for its implementation and monitoring.
2. UN agencies, INGOs and donors should ensure robust organizational support and capacity strengthening of local actors to enhance their capacity to respond to crises and resilience efforts and in turn increase their share in the overall global humanitarian response.
3. To reduce subcontracting, ensure that SNGOs are involved in the design of programs at the outset and participate in decision-making as equals in order to influence program design and partnership policies.
4. Expand space for civil society in crisis-affected countries, so that empowerment of humanitarian actors and local communities enables improved community resilience and capacity to respond effectively to their communities.
5. Ensure global events in the coming months – such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change Agreement – take proactive account of the challenges faced by local actors in the delivery of aid to affected communities.
6. Where possible, allow national governments to lead humanitarian response, with the support of SNGOs and civil society. This should include diversifying membership of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) to include both governments and SNGOs. In situations where neutrality and impartiality may be compromised – such as in situations where Government may be party to a conflict affecting the target populations – the role of the local actors and their interface with the international humanitarian system may be different, and determined by national context.
7. Hold coordination and cluster meetings in the global south in the local language.
8. Reform the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to ensure fair and equitable representation of SNGOs and national governments. According to the IASC Steering Group's 2014 review, IASC decisions have little bearing on a large number of humanitarian actors, including local communities,

affected country governments, CSOs, and the private sector.⁶ Humanitarian fora in which decisions and commitments are made that impact the global south should be held predominantly in the south where southern actors can have ready access to them and can also have a say in these decisions.

9. Humanitarian agencies (UN, Local and International Organizations) should form working partnerships with diaspora communities, who, through their financial contributions and work on the ground, contribute significantly to humanitarian relief and longer-term development.

Accessibility

10. Accept and encourage funding proposals in local languages, with proposal deadlines allowing reasonable time for local actors to complete often complex submission proposals. This also includes encouraging national governments to create legislative and regulatory environment that enables national and local groups to receive international funding.

De-politicization

11. Ensure adherence to international humanitarian law and the ICRC international code of conduct to facilitate the ability of aid organizations to be truly neutral. The ability of an aid organization to negotiate access with all parties to a conflict and provide assistance in a neutral manner to people affected by conflict is severely constrained, if not made impossible, with the restrictions imposed by counter terrorism legislation. Counter-terrorism laws and policies must no longer impede humanitarian access and response, as it is widely accepted they did during Somalia's 2011-2012 drought and famine, in which over 260,000 people died. Donor countries should consider introducing a waiver to exempt humanitarian action from counter-terrorism policies and legislation.

Dignity and Flexibility

12. Resource transfers in times of crisis should be both dignified and transition from providing basic survival packages to "thriving" packages. Communities affected by crisis will never graduate from dependency on external assistance if the humanitarian system continually provides the bare minimum for survival. Therefore, new metrics and needs assessments that look at the "thriving" threshold should be established.
13. People affected by crisis should not be burdened with navigating a complex aid delivery system in order to get assistance. This currently results in delays that are costly both financially and in terms of lives lost. The system needs to adopt a more holistic approach to assessing and responding to needs. This could be done by assigning one case worker/agency to every household to assess their needs and providing them with an e-wallet through which all their assistance can be provided on a monthly basis. The assistance should be flexible and provide choice to the recipient. Private sector partnerships and donor investment is needed to support national governments to establish national registries and electronic payment mechanisms that can also be used for social protection but also scaled up to serve people during crises.

⁶ IASC Principals Steering Group, Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Available

Amplify the Voices of Local Communities

14. Promote the role of local partners in the media by acknowledging their work and including them as spokespersons as much as possible, where security circumstances permit.
15. Devote the first half-day of the World Humanitarian Summit and other humanitarian events such as the ECOSOC humanitarian affairs segment, UN General Assembly and other member state processes like the UN Human Rights Council to listening to the voices of affected communities and local actors.

Reforming Aid Financing

Between 2010 and 2014, local and national NGOs received only 1.6% of the total assistance given directly to NGOs, and only 0.3% of the total assistance reported to the UN OCHA FTS. In 2014, that figured dropped to 0.2% (a total of US\$46.6 million out of US\$24.5 billion) and their share of total funds given to NGOs dropped to 1.2%.⁷ Yet these organizations play a critical role in helping civil society and local and national governments meet the most urgent needs of millions of people every year who are affected by humanitarian crises.

When disaster strikes, it is more often than not local actors that are first on the scene, first to respond, and best placed to understand the needs of affected communities. But with limited access to funds and isolated from decision making fora, local actors and SNGOs in particular, are over-burdened, under-funded, and often inadequately prepared to respond as effectively as possible.

If the international humanitarian community is serious about *people-centered aid* then it must capacitate the closest existing denominator to disaster affected populations, by enabling SNGOs and local governments to access an equitable share of funding, and be engaged in decision-making and policy processes in a fair and transparent manner. This is especially so where local actors, including governments, are in a better position to access and provide humanitarian aid to affected populations in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Recommendations:

It is the position of this paper that the below recommendations be supported and endorsed by NGOs, UN agencies, and donors.

1. All International and national organizations to commit to the Charter for Change and hold themselves accountable to their partners.
2. Increase direct funding to SNGOs for humanitarian and resilience building actions. All national donor countries should bring their respective humanitarian funding of SNGOs to 20 per cent of their total humanitarian funding by 2020 allowing for the global target to reach 20 percent. In countries where Common Humanitarian Funds/Emergency Response Funds exist, SNGOs should be adequately represented in decision-making on use and disbursement of funds.
3. Increase transparency around resource transfers to SNGOs. A significant change in approaches towards transparency is needed in order to build trust, accountability and efficiency of investments channeled to national actors via international intermediaries. All actors should document the types

⁷ Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015. Available from: < http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/GHA-Report-2015_-Interactive_Online.pdf > {3 July 2015}

of organizations they cooperate with in humanitarian response and publish these figures (or percentages) in their public accounts using a recognized categorization such as the Global Humanitarian Assistance in real-time, and the International Aid Transparency Initiative standard.

4. Review and revise existing donor rules and regulations to take into account the challenges faced by SNGOs and support these actors to understand, and comply with, existing rules and regulations. This could include: reviewing payment modalities to not impose unrealistic cash flow requirements on the organization; providing sufficient unrestricted funds to improve administrative and operational capacities; and remove financial barriers that were designed with larger more capacitated INGOs in mind such as bank guarantees.
5. Establish alternative pooled funding mechanisms at national and regional levels that are available only to local actors and that are not managed by the UN or INGOs. In addition, provide multi-year predictable funding to national and local actors.

Prepared by Adeso on behalf of Network members – for more information please email network@adesoafrica.org. This position paper is endorsed by the following organizations:

Access Development Services	India
Adamawa Peace Initiative	Nigeria
ADES Agences de Développement Economique et Social ONG	Chad
Adeso	Kenya
Adult Literacy Centre	Malawi
Africa Humanitarian Action	Ethiopia
Akkar Network for Development	Lebanon
American University of Nigeria	Nigeria
Association Tunisienne De Défense des droits de l'enfant	Tunisia
Center for Disaster Preparedness Foundation	Philippines
Centre for Legal Empowerment	Kenya
Center of Resilient Development	Nepal
Church's Auxiliary for Social Action	India
Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust	Bangladesh
Community World Service Asia	Pakistan
Coordination, Rehabilitation and Development Service	Afghanistan
Emergency Pastoralist Assistance Group - Kenya	Kenya
Forum Bangun Aceh	Indonesia
Foundation for Rural Development	Pakistan
Health Link South Sudan	South Sudan
Humanitarian Development Consortium	South Sudan
Iranian Lifequality Improvement Association	Iran
InterAid	Uganda
Jindal School of International Affairs	India
Jordan Hashemite Charitable Organisation	Jordan
Lawyers for Human Rights	South Africa
Legal Resources Centre	South Africa
Libyan Humanitarian Relief Agency	Libya
Mavi Kalem Social Assistance and Charity Association	Turkey
Mercy Malaysia	Malaysia
Nuba Relief Rehabilitation and Development Organization	Kenya
OFADEC	Senegal

People's disaster risk reduction network, inc.	Philippines
Seeds India	India
Settlement Council of Australia	Australia
Shaik Tahir Azzawi Chaity Organization	Libya
SHARP – Pakistan Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid	Pakistan
Strengthening Participatory Organisation-	Pakistan
The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia	Australia
The Indonesian Society for Disaster Management	Indonesia
Youth Leadership Forum and Giving Back Movement-	Indonesia
Zanjireh Omid International Charity Institute	Iran