

Turning Aspirations into Reality: CARE Philippines' Humanitarian Partnership Platform

Investing into Partnership Approaches to Emergency Preparedness and Response

Progress, Learning and the Way Forward

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Executive Summary

In 2014, an influential (internal CARE) report – Jude Rand's *Aspirations and Realities* – challenged the assumption that partner-led responses could be delivered through a limited CARE country presence. Using the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines as a case study, the author argued that partnership models were key to delivering CARE's humanitarian mandate (and would only grow in the future) but questioned the assumption that this can be achieved without strategic investment and sustained presence.

The present study, commissioned three years later, seeks to document CARE's journey in establishing a partner-based emergency preparedness and response model in the Philippines. Far from a light presence, CARE strongly re-engaged in response to Typhoon Haiyan, using a hybrid model of direct and joint implementation. Building upon existing partnerships, CARE formally established a Humanitarian Partner Platform (HPP) in 2016, now boosting over 20 members and covering the entire country.

This study concludes that **the Platform has become an asset to CARE, a vital element of CARE's ability to deliver humanitarian impact throughout the Philippines**, one of the world's highest disaster-prone countries. The Platform is proof that partnerships can deliver fast and effective response to a range of disasters in deeply-rooted and connected ways, with local actors and communities playing a central role before, during and after disasters. And critically, the Platform has made encouraging strides in advancing local leadership of humanitarian action, with partners showing greater readiness and capacity to respond. This in turn translates into greater coverage, speed and effectiveness in response. *'We would not be here if not for the partnership with CARE, [a partnership based on] trust, shared voice and mutual benefit.'* Minet Jerusalem, LCDE

The research documents **the Platform's evolution**, marked by strategic expansion and increasing decentralization. If CARE continues to play a central role, there are encouraging signs of partner-to-partner support and movement towards local surge. During non-crisis time, the Platform invests in strengthening capacity and planning for, and testing, preparedness. It switches to emergency mode during crises where it provides funding, support and accompaniment to frontline responders. A key characteristic of the Platform is its adaptability: generally supporting partner-led response but also surging when needed with a larger leadership role for CARE based on the severity and scale of the emergency.

CARE offers a range of services to partners under the Platform. Partners unanimously report that quick and reliable access to funding, in the form of a local emergency response fund, is the most beneficial aspect of the partnership. This significantly increases reaction time for needs assessment and response. Also highly rated were provisions of targeted surge support, the activation of (light and pre-agreed) emergency response protocols, high levels of preparedness for response, and access to new humanitarian knowledge and capacity.

With the establishment of the Platform, **CARE's role in the Philippines has evolved significantly** from direct/joint aid delivery to positioning partners to prepare for and respond to emergencies. CARE is moving away from traditional roles to higher-value functions such as Platform convenor, donor, relationship and knowledge broker, capacity builder and surge provider. The move towards a networked Platform, with multi-stakeholder collaboration at the center, has also affected the roles of Country Office staff. They are increasingly **moving away from project implementation into accompaniment and support roles, which require strong training, communication, and mentoring skills**. This is also reflected in the Country Office culture where humility, valuing partners, and mutual learning are valued over control and risk aversion. Beyond the Humanitarian Partnership Platform, CARE Philippines is extending the use of collaborative models to the areas of Integrated Risk Management (IRM) and Preparedness with the establishment of Learning and Innovation Labs. This is a welcome development and should unleash additional gains for CARE and its partners; however the interface between the IRM Lab and the Platform needs to be carefully defined to ensure mutual benefit. Increased specialization, with CARE moving into an exclusive humanitarian presence in the Philippines (including DRR and IRM), seems increasingly relevant in what is a crowded space in the Philippines, with capable civil society and government delivering on longer-term development.

The Platform is starting to show **positive impact** in the form of faster response, increased coverage and access especially in remote and high risk areas (eg, Mindanao), and locally-rooted and appropriate responses. Other by-products of the Platform include enhanced preparedness and more robust local organizations. By pooling resources from a diversity of actors, by engaging partners and aligning towards a common goal, **the Platform delivers much more than the sum of its parts**. If CARE provides long-term accompaniment and support to partners, it also benefits from their presence on the ground, deep roots with communities and local government, technical expertise, and extensive networks. This unleashes new value for all involved – CARE, partners and at-risk or affected communities. The Platform is proof that diversity, when strategically leveraged into a cohesive whole, allows CARE to be more impactful and relevant both locally and nationally, to multiply impact. This construct, however, is best realized when power, ownership and decision-making are shared between CARE and partners, moving away from a CARE-led model of exercising control and engaging partners as implementers. As the Philippines example shows, CARE needs to be open to embracing and learning from external organizations, to be shaped and influenced by them, to co-construct a model that works for all.

If the Platform is seen as an emerging success, it is in large part due to **CARE's sustained investment in building and nurturing this model**. The Platform benefited from long-term and flexible financial resources, a clear and compelling vision, in-country presence (essential to build and nurture relationships), the energy and drive of CARE Philippines leadership, and the adoption of light, nimble emergency preparedness and response protocols. What also made a difference was the courage to pilot a new approach and take measured risk. A strong partnership culture, exhibited by both CARE staff and partners, led to respect and trust among all stakeholders and proved to be an essential ingredient of the 'partnership contract' that underpins the Platform.

Is this worth the investment? It is difficult to quantify, in monetary terms, the costs and (ever more so) the benefits of the Platform. The benefits, the added value – from faster to more relevant and appropriate response, from enhanced preparedness to more robust first responders – do not neatly translate into quantifiable measures. **It is evident that the return on investment is considerable** and allows CARE to fulfil its humanitarian mandate in ways that are increasingly localized (with affected populations and first responders at the center), in ways that multiply scale and impact and advance

CARE's global aspirations for social justice and change. If collaborative models such as the Humanitarian Partnership Platform is increasingly lauded as the 'model of the future', it remains to be seen how it can be adapted to other environments especially in contexts marked by high risk, fragility, or where the space and capacity of civil society are restricted.

Despite significant achievement, the Platform faces a number of challenges today.

Recommendations point towards **increasing the decentralization of the Platform** (with more contextualization and independence of regional hubs), shifting the **focus towards increased preparedness and resilience** (as capacity to respond grows), reaffirming the **centrality and voice of partners** in the Platform (both strategically and operationally), and exploring opportunities for **stronger engagement of partners in national and global fora for high level policy and influence**.

Finally, **CARE will urgently need to clarify its vision for the future of the Platform** (It is an end in itself and if so, in what ways can it become financially and operationally self-sustaining? What support will be needed on CARE's part and what form of presence and investment does this require? Or is the Platform seen as a means to an end, a vehicle for increased local humanitarian leadership and what are the implications for CARE under this approach)? **These questions are critical and have implications for the evolution of CARE's presence in the Philippines and for the sustainability of the Platform.**