Panellists

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As local as possible, as international as necessary: Practical steps

Webinar summary
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The value of local actors to humanitarian response efforts is increasingly recognised. Local actors are often the first responders when disasters strike, they can have the best access to local populations and they have critical knowledge of the local context and people. Yet, local actors often struggle to move beyond implementing projects to being treated as strategic and equal partners with international actors. Recent developments including the Grand Bargain have seen the largest humanitarian donors and aid organisations commit to strengthening local ownership and capacity. This includes directing 25 per cent of their funds to local and national actors by 2020.

The STAIT webinar outlines a number of good practices in terms of making localisation a reality. It encompasses the experiences of senior leaders from three different perspectives, heading a large national society, a Humanitarian Coordinator and a donor. Panellists use examples from their experience in the Philippines, Pakistan and the Pacific to discuss the added value of, and practical steps, for concretely supporting local actors within humanitarian response.

The value of local actors at the centre of humanitarian response

- **Sustainability:** Working with local actors' can generate sustainability and predictability before, during, and after a disaster. Local and national actors are often part of the affected communities and continue to work with the communities once international actors have ended their response.
- **Preparedness**: As local actors on the ground already, it means that some level of preparedness has been achieved. With the Haiyan typhoon response in the Philippines, local actors could start responding quickly. They needed little time to align their response mechanism to the national and local structures as they were already part of the response system.
- **Knowledge of context:** Local actors generally understand the needs and priorities of affected communities faster and can share this knowledge with the wider response community. Local actors also understand the different communities, their norms and cultures, and can identify the key actors within them.
- **Accountability:** Local actors are – even more – held accountable by the local population, as the communities know them.

Practical steps in support of localisation

- **Support activities that can be done locally by local actors**. Advocate for international support to local efforts, and ensure that international response complements rather than overwhelms local structures. Develop frameworks and establish agreements with local actors before disaster strikes, and provide long-term investment with 'quality money' to build sustainability.
- **Invest in local capacity.** Train volunteers who are normally present in all contexts. Build a culture of volunteerism among communities and people at risk. Second staff from international organisations to national organisations as it can help with the transfer of expertise and building experience in complying with detailed 'international' reporting requirements.
- **Invest in preparedness, and link to the risk reduction and response efforts of national and local actors.** Actively support development of coordinated contingency and disaster management plans among actors, including agreeing pre-disaster Memorandum of Understanding between national, local and international actors. Engage with established community disaster management committees for assessments and accountability, and put in place a strong monitoring system, so that levels of trust in national and local actors can increase. Governments can agree frameworks with other governments in advance of crisis by setting out a menu of support that can be provided when disaster strikes.
- **Include local actors as leaders in international humanitarian structures.** Ensure national and local organisations are represented in Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and Inter-Cluster mechanisms, for example guaranteeing a number of seats. Support prioritisation of local actors by humanitarian country-based pooled funds (CBPFs).
- **Ensure special consideration for women and other vulnerable groups**: Pursue a deeper level of inclusivity with women and other vulnerable groups to ensure that their voice and priorities are appropriately represented.
- **Engage the private sector.** Work with private sector partners to identify what and how they can contribute to disaster preparedness and response, including how response actors and leaders can mobilise private sector resources and expertise. Consider developing a database of local businesses, their specialisation, stock, and ability to deploy quickly to remote places.

Dr. Gwendolyn Pang
IFRC Head, East Asia Country Support Team, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Beijing
"The key to humanitarian effectiveness is to focus on local actors. By making them the centre of humanitarian action we can achieve more and we can do better".

It is necessary to not only recognise national and local actors' roles and their importance but also to empower them to play a stronger role during humanitarian response. In the Haiyan response (Philippines), local volunteers from the national society were in the driving seat across the response.

A National Society Perspective - Practical steps for promoting localisation in the Philippines

Invest in the training and capacity building of volunteers, including with 'quality' money: National/local volunteers are present in all contexts and can make a real difference within a response if they are properly trained. There also needs to be a constant effort to build a culture of volunteerism in the communities. Investment needs to be with a long-term focus and with 'quality money.' For example, the new RC/RC National Society Investment Fund and I Billion Coalition.

Support governments: The government often needs support in implementing the disaster risk reduction law. This law serves as a foundation for building community resilience.

Invest in preparedness: The Red Cross always works with governments and private sector companies within clusters to agree on coordination and establish contingency and disaster management plans. This exercise is useful for identifying roles and responsibilities for when a crisis/disaster strikes, and helps avoid duplication and overlapping efforts.

Put in place Memorandum of Understandings: MoUs with national and local authorities can be established before a crisis/disaster. They help to identify relevant actors on the ground and define roles, responsibilities and commitments of everyone involved in the response.

Engage with established community disaster management committees for assessments and accountability: Put in place a strong monitoring system, so that levels of trust in national and local actors can increase.

Mr. Jamie Isbister

Humanitarian Coordinator and First Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian Division of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

"Implementing localisation during disaster response can take place as long as local s and national actors can be mobilised."

Localisation means that affected communities are not just passive receivers of assistance. Instead affected people are actively involved in defining and prioritising needs and allocating assistance. Local ownership of disaster response supports a demand driven more than a supply driven response.

A donor perspective - Practical Steps for promoting localisation in the Pacific

Develop long-term partnerships with local actors: Be inclusive when collaborating with local governments, civil society organisations, affected communities, and private sector companies. Inclusivity is required at a deeper level, when engaging with women and other vulnerable groups, to ensure that they are truly taking an active role in defining the response.

Invest in risk reduction, preparedness and response efforts: Localisation in practice means that funding is not siloed, but instead is used in a collective way that includes local actors. A key part is investment in preparedness. The Australian Government is finalising a framework with governments in the Pacific which sets out a menu of items that can be offered when a disaster occurs. The idea is to move from a supply driven approach to a demand driven approach.

Engage with the private sector: More effort is required to define exactly what the private sector can contribute to a response, and how a response can mobilise this expertise. For example, during protracted crises, local transport companies can reach hard to access communities. A useful exercise would be to develop a database of all local businesses, their specialisation, stock and ability to deploy merchandise quickly to remote places.

Link local, regional, and international efforts: Local actors often have established, working structures in place that are useful during the sudden onset of a disaster. Activities that can be done locally through local expertise should remain the responsibility of local actors. What cannot be done locally can then be complemented by regional and international efforts. International surges should not overwhelm and de-capacitate local structures.

Mr. Neil Buhne

Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Resident Representative for UNDP, Pakistan

"Localisation means better results, reaching more people sooner, for lasting effects."

For localisation to work in practice, international and local actors must work together. Relationships need to be built at different levels and between international actors, the government and civil society actors.

A perspective from a Humanitarian Coordinator - Practical steps taken in Pakistan:

The HCT in Pakistan has endeavoured to include local actors in the driving seat and decision-making processes. There are 3 national NGOs that are members of the HCT. In the last four years between 87 – 100 % of the Pakistan Humanitarian Pooled Fund has been granted to national civil society. The fund has trained national NGOs in project application and design.

Support local partners deal with donor and other reporting requirements as internal procedures can be a disincentive for receiving international donor funds. A good example from the **2005 earthquake response,** was **Ox**fam deploying INGO staff within national NGOs building on its long-term partnerships. It helped mitigate risks with reporting and build capacity according to international good practice.

Invest in supporting and training the National Disaster Management Authority and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities in the areas of emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction, secondments and long-term commitment/institutional analysis. This was done in Pakistan following the 2010 floods by the HCT/UNCT.

International actors play an important role to provide support to and advocating for space for local and national NGOs. The role of local partners may be contested in some contexts by national governments. This is especially the case in conflict situations, although normally less so in natural disasters.

During the webinar, participants submit questions to the speakers. Some of the main questions included:

1. A common stereotype is that 'local' organisations present a high risk of corruption. Is this perception accurate?
2. Some argue that local actors in a conflict situation cannot or do not want to operate with neutrality and should therefore not be supported as frontline workers. This as local organisations affiliation to political elites or parties to a conflict may compromise their ability to operate independently. How can neutral and impartial humanitarian aid be ensured?
3. Situations arise where local actors can be too closely affiliated to political elites or the parties to the conflict. This compromises their ability to act independently and provide impartial assistance. How can principled humanitarian action be assured by local actors?
4. What does capacity-building mean in practice, and is it sustainable?

For answers to the above questions, to listen to the full webinar, and to access recordings of past webinars, visit the STAIT website http://www.deliveraidbetter.org/