

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
1-3 July 2015 - International Conference Center Geneva

Thematic Session
Background Paper

Delivering Together in Emergencies

Friday 3 July, 09.00-10.45 – Room 2

The international humanitarian system has been, and continues to be, seriously tested by the number, dimensions and complexity of today's emergencies, as new crises appear and existing situations deteriorate, with devastating consequences.

The succession of recent humanitarian crises has underscored once again the key role played by local and national NGOs, civil society actors and other local and national entities in responding to emergencies. Recent experiences in Mali, Syria, Nigeria, the Philippines and Ukraine have reinforced key findings emanating from earlier crises including the Haiti earthquake response and the succession of displacement emergencies in Pakistan: that it is invariably local and national actors who are in the forefront of the immediate response to crisis, and who remain as critical players throughout, drawing on their contextual knowledge, community links, networks, and presence.

Despite this, the international humanitarian response to emergencies still fails to adequately engage with and reinforce pre-existing local and national capacities, and more frequently than not, in major emergencies, these are sidelined and/or undermined, with potentially negative consequences. While there are many solid examples of investment in capacity building and fostering of national/local partnerships, the evidence suggest that in practice, in major new emergencies, the role of national/local actors is either overlooked, or the relationship with international agencies more closely resembles one of contractor/service provider.

The potential benefits of deeper and more systematic collaboration between international, national and local organisations are evident. In the early phases of natural disasters, such as in Haiti, Pakistan, the Philippines and most recently Nepal, the strong contextual knowledge of local organizations played a vital role in mobilising the initial response, in facilitating the engagement of incoming actors, and in directing the response to the most compelling needs.¹ In conflict situations, such as in the Nigeria and Mali situations, local development actors with a presence in conflict-affected areas have been able to draw on their networks and local expertise to deliver protection and assistance in remote and

¹ See, for example, *Whose emergency is it anyway? The role of local actors*. VOICE out loud: Issue 18, October 2013

insecure areas. In the case of Syria, the onset of the conflict has generated the establishment of many hundreds of local NGOs, many working together with diaspora organisations and playing a key role in providing support to conflict affected communities, albeit largely outside the formal UN-led co-ordination systems in place.² In Libya and in Yemen, partnership with national NGOs has enabled the delivery of assistance despite a dramatic scaling down of the international presence, and in Ukraine, local and national partners have played a key role in registering and providing support to IDPs.

The engagement of local and national actors can also help to build responses defined by the needs and aspirations of local communities rather than externally imposed priorities, and which better reflect the coping mechanisms of local communities and how to support them. As such, they frequently play a key role in ensuring accountability to affected populations.

Despite the evident value of strong collaboration between international humanitarian actors and national/local NGOs and civil society organisations, realizing this in practice remains challenging. Local and national NGOs, civil society and faith based organisations are disadvantaged by unfamiliarity with formal humanitarian approaches, language barriers, the use of humanitarian jargon, and the complex, time consuming and centralized nature of humanitarian coordination structures.

The financial, administrative and reporting requirements attached to international donor funding and implementing partnership arrangements also frequently exceed the capacity of local/national organisations. Humanitarian projects, particularly in emergencies, are often characterized by ‘stop-start’ funding approaches which lead to cycles of intensive implementation, followed by new funding applications, with few opportunities to invest in institutional capacity development.

Overview of the session

The purpose of the session is to enable an analysis of recent experiences with regard to collaboration between international humanitarian actors and national/local partners (including NGOs, civil society organisations and faith-based organisations) in recent emergencies, with a view to identifying ways in which this might be strengthened.

Panelists from an international NGO, a national civil society network in Nigeria, and UNHCR will share their experience and views, followed by a moderated discussion. Participants in the session are invited to share practical experiences from recent emergencies.

² *International and local/diaspora actors in the Syria response*, March 2015, Svoboda and Pantuliano. Humanitarian Policy Group, London. <http://www.odi.org/publications/8714-international-localdiaspora-actors-syria-response>

Key questions to be explored:

- What are the key strengths/contributions of international and national/local actors in emergencies and are there positive experiences of effective collaboration in recent crises?
- What are the factors inhibiting effective partnership between international and local/national actors in emergencies, and how can these be addressed?
- How can international and national/local actors collaborate better in emergency preparedness? Who should play which role?

Moderator: George OKOTH-OBBO, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR

Speakers: Dr. Margee ENSIGN, President, American University in Nigeria, Adamawa Peace Initiative

Bishop Steven RANSOM, Adamawa Peace Initiative, Nigeria

Imam Dauda BELLO, Adamawa Peace Initiative, Nigeria

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