Reinforce, Do Not Replace, National and Local Systems

Analytical Paper on WHS Self-Reporting on Agenda for Humanity Transformation 4A

Executive Summary:

This paper was prepared by:[1]

CHS Alliance

CAFOD
Just one world

START NETWORK

At the time this report was written, 697 commitments had been made towards the Agenda for Humanity transformation 4A "Reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems."[2]

The scope of this transformation is quite broad, including: putting people at the centre; building community resilience; participation by all, particularly by women; using local capacities in preparedness, response and recovery; cash based programming; using financial incentives to promote community engagement; national social protection systems and safety nets; national and local leadership; complementarity between international, national and local actors and; adherence to the Core Humanitarian Standard and other relevant standards to improve accountability.[3]

Many of the stakeholders who reported on transformation 4A are still at the planning stage, and only a minority of self-reports highlight significant actions that are part of a coherent, holistic plan of action. The lack of a commonly-agreed, overarching vision and recommended key actions has an impact on actions but also the ability to measure progress. Some actors have nonetheless made serious efforts by reviewing procedures, making access to funding for national non-governmental organization (NGOs) easier, decreasing unnecessary administrative workloads, and increasing the ability of local actors to work independently.

It is also positive to see a number of national actors report on how they are taking matters into their own hands, for example by adapting national legislation, or working together with donors and UN agencies to develop the capacity of relevant ministries and local authorities. For a majority of national actors however, involvement in global discussions such as this one is a resource intensive process they cannot afford, an issue that undermines the "representivity" of the process. [4]

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[1] This paper was jointly authored by CHS Alliance (David Loquercio), CAFOD (Anne Street) and the Start Network (Deepti Sastry), with the support from Charlotte Dixie. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of CHS Alliance, the START Network or the United Nations Secretariat.

[2] The 697 commitments were made by 224 different stakeholders. This implies that this transformation received 75% more commitments than the second most popular one (Empower and protect women and girls with 388 commitments): http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/visualization. As of May 2017, a little over 38 per cent of those who signed up had submitted a self-report on their commitments, a total of 87 stakeholders. Of these 37 were regional and 50 global. Additional figures can be found here: http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Transformation%204A-analysis%20of%20self-report%20submissions.pdf

[3] The information covered in this report complements analytical papers prepared on transformation 5A (Invest in Local Capacities), the Charter for Change initiative, and the cross-cutting issues of cash-based responses and of accountability to affected people. It is also directly linked to work stream 2 of the Grand Bargain. It is therefore worth reading reports on these themes in combination with this paper.

[4] For example, few national actors have unrestricted funds to dedicate to following up or participating in such discussions. Even if they are sponsored to attend, it can be very challenging for nationals of some countries to secure visas to enter the United States of America or European countries. Furthermore, such meetings are often not translated from English to other languages.

AGENDA FOR HUMANITY
5 CORE RESPONSIBILITIES
24 TRANSFORMATIONS

Most significant progress made across reporting on transformation 4A – Reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems

Most actions described in the self-reports can be linked to capacity development efforts, a reflection on how the system could or should be adapted to reflect the commitment, or efforts to channel funds more directly to national actors. In some cases, actions are isolated or anecdotal, while in other cases, they reflect a coordinated, coherent approach.

Investing in capacity development

Self-reports convey a variety of efforts undertaken to develop local capacity, from individuals to organizations, to government entities. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) has reached over 2,000 individuals with its online Humanitarian Learning Stream, focused on humanitarian financing. This learning stream primarily targets NGOs, with the objective to allow local actors to better understand the financial system and develop their ability to access it. The Humanitarian Leadership Academy, on the other hand, started work to make contextualized learning opportunities available in person and online for national staff of any NGO.

A significant number of international organizations and international NGOs have reported on their efforts to develop the capacity of local partners and civil society. Many of these efforts are however limited to existing partners who implement programmes on behalf of their international partner and self-reports contain limited information regarding the nature of capacity development or its results. It is worth mentioning that some of these efforts include research. As an example, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) includes local researchers in projects, as a way to not only develop capacity but also better ground findings in the context.

Member States also contributed to capacity-building of local response. For example, the United Kingdom supports the Start Network through the Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme. This programme funds national capacity-development through projects (led by international NGOs) such as the Financial Enablers for National Organisations, Shifting the Power, Talent Development, or Transforming Surge Capacity. The Shifting the Power project, for example, works with local organizations in countries such as Bangladesh, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to support capacity and create space for engagement in international debates on humanitarian policy. Outcomes include training ten local organizations in Bangladesh to be able to join the district-level, joint needs assessment resource pool and bringing local NGOs to draft the Kenyan disaster management policy at the county level.

Finally, some stakeholders worked with governments located in disaster prone contexts to develop disaster risk reduction or disaster preparedness. As an example, Estonia reported working towards increasing the readiness of countries and regions for preventing natural disasters and dealing with their consequences. Norway reported working in Africa on the capacity of the national meteorological and hydrological services to provide timely severe weather forecasts warning to users. The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) reported its increasingly systematic support to disaster risk reduction programs as part of humanitarian financing, and New Zealand cited its approach to supporting disaster risk management in the Pacific.

Reflecting on local response and building a coherent approach

A number of self-reports describe initiatives taken to reflect on past approaches and define new ways of working. For example, the Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD), one of the organizations which played a leadership role in bringing together the 29 Charter for Change signatories, worked with 3 other Charter for Change signatories to research the impact of international NGO recruitment on national NGO staff during emergencies. CARE on the other

hand initiated an internal review process of what barriers (to working with national actors) currently exist within the organization (and the larger humanitarian system) and how to remove them. Importantly, some organizations have also reviewed their internal processes in order to align them to this transformation. For example, CAFOD has developed an ethical recruitment policy and internal guidance for human resource managers and program managers to ensure that national NGOs are not undermined by CAFOD's recruitment practices. ACT Alliance and its members have taken concrete steps which go beyond its Charter for Change commitments, such as

> *"NGO capacity for humanitarian response, as well as the capacity to engage with and be a leader in the humanitarian system cannot be fully manifested unless they have access to, or themselves manage resources that will ensure timely decision-making and response. In fact, it can be argued that NGOs in the Philippines do have the capacity, but not the resources to respond."*
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> **Christian Aid**

committing resources to pilot ways to better support locally led crisis responses. ACT Alliance revised the rules of its rapid response fund so that only national members are eligible. It also adapted its humanitarian response mechanism to reduce the workload on reporting for local and national members, in line with the principles of the 'Less Paper More Aid' initiative championed by ICVA, the German government and members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Financing Task Team.

Finally, acknowledging the fact that committing to change is not sufficient to make it a reality, Oxfam hired a change manager to support implementation of the Charter for Change commitments, and setting up internal mechanisms at the senior management level across the confederation to oversee Oxfam's work aimed at enabling local leadership in humanitarian response.

Enabling greater access to funding for national actors

Self-reports reviewed highlight three main channels for increasing the amount of funding going to national actors.[5] The first one relates to support provided directly to national and local authorities (including ministries) and there are substantial efforts to do this. The second relates to funding provided directly to civil society. Here, several reports highlight that for this to happen, it is important that barriers to accessing funds be removed. In this regard, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports putting in place simplified agreements to partnering with community based and local actors, as well as actively engaging with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to simplify and harmonise business processes to partner with UN agencies.[6] Smaller actors have also highlighted actions, with Peace Direct supporting partners in eight countries to determine their needs, development strategies and helping them to access international funding. The third channel is that of country-based pooled funds (CBPF), and is one of the key objectives of transformation 5A.

The main barriers/ challenges to progress

Several stakeholders point to the lack of accessible resources as a barrier to progress on this transformation, mentioning both time constraints, the competing priorities of staff and lack of financial resources. Christian Aid states, for example, that "in spite of the Grand Bargain commitments, donors have concerns around capacity, due diligence, risk, terrorism and trust which restrict available funding for national NGO response or capacity building." Peace Direct

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[5] While funding relates more to transformation 5A than 4A, it is difficult to ignore the relationship as both intent and funding are needed to deliver meaningful change. Key dimensions are mentioned here, and we invite readers to refer to the paper on transformation 5A for additional details.

[6] UNHCR reports that in 2016, it had 3.5 times more national than international NGO partners (526 vs 147). However, national NGOs only received 31 per cent of the funds (a total of USD 1.43 billion) going to NGOs, making the average grant to international INGOs 8 times larger than the average grant to national NGOs.

adds that sometimes, the type of and conditions attached to funding do not match the needs and approach that local actors and local communities need.

The lack of resources to support progress on localization is not only valid for international NGOs and donors, it is also a problem for national NGOs. The European Union notes that local and national actors are still underrepresented in relevant meetings and discussions. CHS Alliance notes that if well-resourced international actors struggle to meaningfully engage, it can only be more difficult for national NGOs to do so, asking whether we can afford to have a discussion on localization without proper representation of local actors.

The Netherlands note that strengthening capacities of local actors requires a long-term, holistic and sustained approach which should not only focus on staff training, if only just because of staff turnover. In fact, while training individuals is important, when it is not combined with an organisational strengthening approach, it often results in the perverse situation of national NGO staff being poached by international actors who can offer more attractive conditions and professional perspectives, as highlighted in the CAFOD-led research report entitled *Time to move on: National Perspectives on Transforming Surge Capacity.*

Several Member States mention their own legislation as an obstacle to directly providing funds to national NGOs, and a reason for increasing contributions to country-based pooled funds. For example, the Belgian law on development cooperation does not allow the government to finance local actors directly. However, pooled fund application requirements can still be too high for national organisations to meet.

Finally, it is interesting to note that there can be very different opinions on the relationship between humanitarian principles and increased reliance on local and national systems. Indeed, while France points to the challenge of finding the right balance between promoting localization and safeguarding humanitarian principles in some political contexts, Christian Aid argues on the contrary that the lack of direct funding for local and national actors undertaking protection work undermines the ability to document violations of international humanitarian law, or to strengthen resilience to risks related to those violations.

Measuring progress

Though most stakeholders seem to lack indicators or detailed workplans with progress benchmarks to support this transformation, some interesting examples have emerged from the reports that demonstrate how agencies are measuring progress against localization activities.

CARE has for example begun to establish an agency wide baseline against its commitments, cross-referencing not just World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) commitments but also those in relation to the Grand Bargain and the Core Humanitarian Standard. CARE also started documenting gaps in current practice that are barriers to transformative partnerships.

As far as member states are concerned, Australia is working with Pacific states, NGOs, regional organisations and research partners to define priorities and opportunities for localization, with monitoring included in the Australia-New Zealand Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Sudden Onset Disasters in the Pacific.

To provide its members with the ability to benchmark their progress on this issue, the CHS Alliance has integrated into its CHS self-assessment a localization index, based on relevant indicators of the CHS. This index will allow its +200 members and others to assess their performance against key actions that are supportive of local response, identify gaps and compare how they are doing vis-à-vis their peers.

Gaps between the actions of stakeholders and advancing the transformation

ACT Alliance singles out the biggest challenge to progress as the reluctance harbored by donors and many international NGOs/UN agencies to "truly relinquish decision-making power and real control over financial resources to locally led crisis responses." Despite the rhetorical commitments it says, "most donors and international humanitarian actors appear reluctant to accept that a more effective, holistic and locally led crisis response presupposes that international actors reduce their role, size and share in decision-making over the actual programming and project activities if locally led responses are ever to flourish." Others such as CBM International and Action Aid point towards deeply ingrained practices that undermine the ability of local organisations to engage. For example, local organisations are still excluded in some coordination mechanisms, sometimes formally but more often by the use of English and/or jargon in meetings. The fact that important meetings take place in capitals where some local organisations are not represented, and the lack of access of local actors to Humanitarian Country Teams are also pointed as issues. It is emblematic that some stakeholders mention the lack of capacity of national NGOs to engage as a barrier to progress rather than the issue to be addressed.[7]

> *"A bigger effort to change practices in emergency is needed. Reinforcement of national and local mechanisms and capacities means that the role of other actors or countries should be to train or share knowledge instead of direct response."*
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> **Spain**

So, for this transformation to become a reality, what is needed is not just a change in individual practices, it is a change of the system itself. Self-reporting by design relates to individual or organisational actions. However, a more coordinated set of measures is needed to contribute to remove the institutional and contextual factors that limit and undermine national and local systems and their access to international funds and fora. For change to take place, national actors need more than statements of intent such as those found in the Principles of Partnership or the commitments related to transformation 4A. They need verifiable actions and targets, reinforced by a set of incentives for international actors to act on their commitments. In this sense, the Charter for Change and work stream 2 of the Grand Bargain are more specific when it comes to recommended actions and can help to ensure momentum in moving this work forward.

> *"The lack of comprehensive data on the effectiveness, efficiencies and interdependencies of these, and the absence of a unified and structured approach to reinforcing systems doesn't allow for proper tracking of how such scattered investments are contributing to the overall strengthening of the structure."*
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> **Humanitarian Leadership Academy**

The absence of commonly agreed, global key actions or targets means stakeholders are not in a position to define a clear baseline from which they can measure progress, a problem that is not new. Capacity-building efforts have existed for decades but for lack of agreed frameworks to measure progress, they are still unable to demonstrate impact. CARE insists "there is a need to agree on definitions, for data to be comparable across signatory agencies," adding that "data is challenging to extract as no agency-wide system currently tracks this type of data, forcing us to rely on proxy indicators for now." The recently agreed definitions, elaborated by the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, of direct and indirect funding, and of what constitutes a national or local actor, together with follow-up work underway to carry out a baseline survey amongst Grand Bargain signatories, based on these definitions, should provide an important starting point for tracking progress into the future on providing increased funding, directly to national and local organisations.[8]

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[7] The Shifting the Power project of the United Kingdom funded- Disasters' Emergency Preparedness Programme of the Start Network is developed largely to address this barrier, i.e. to bring local organizations into international humanitarian policy-making. This project includes developing skills to influence policy, access to international debates and funding to attend events.
[8] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc

For progress to take place, international actors need a clearer vision of the type of relationship they want to have with national actors in 10 or 15 years, what it implies in terms of capacity development, but also in terms of reviewing procedures, roles or legislation. This must be accompanied by a solid, verifiable framework to define a baseline and measure progress, defining indicators from the outset. Application should be contextualised because while the overall objective is similar, countries which face humanitarian crises do not all start from the same place. Therefore, the role and capacity of national and local authorities and civil society must account for context.

Highlights of good practice

The self-reports provided a number of examples of good practice. Here are a few examples complementing those mentioned in earlier sections of this paper:

- In July 2016, **ActionAid** Bangladesh's response to floods was implemented entirely through a women-led emergency response, ActionAid Bangladesh and its local partner only provided technical and facilitation support as needed. In the event of another disaster in the same area, the women leaders will be able to roll-out a response without direction from ActionAid Bangladesh.
- With a view to grounding actions in evidence, **CARE** has developed several learning papers on localizing aid, including a meta-analysis of lessons learned on partnership from CARE's disaster response evaluations over the past seven years.
- **Mongolia** made an amendment to the disaster protection law, reflecting local and international humanitarian aid coordination during a disaster. In the revised disaster protection law, adopted in February 2017, part-time national and local councils were established with rights and obligations to provide policy guidance, support government along with private sector and inter-sector collaboration, and provide citizens' participation in disaster preventative operations.

Recommendations

1. Stakeholders should work against a common set of concrete, coherent actions in order to reinforce, not replace, national and local systems, linking in particular transformations 4A and 5A, the Charter for Change and work stream 2 of the Grand Bargain, using these frameworks as a baseline to assess progress.
2. International organisations should concentrate on measures that allow them to transform their relationship with local organisations from 'implementing partners' to partners, for example by strengthening the negotiating skills of local actors, by harmonising and simplifying compliance requirements, and by addressing staff poaching practices.
3. Reinforced national and local systems being the purpose of this transformation, the next and subsequent rounds of analysis of Agenda for Humanity (and Grand Bargain) self-reporting should take action to ensure self-reporting of Members States and international actors is balanced with the perspective of national and local actors on the relevance and effectiveness of measures taken in relation with this objective.