



ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON LOCALISATION OF AID
27-28 AUGUST 2019

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, major donors and humanitarian organisations signed the “Grand Bargain” with ten top-level commitments to reduce the costs of humanitarian aid and make it more effective. Among these were the commitment to increase international funding and support for national and local responders (known as the “localisation of aid”). Since the adoption of the “Grand Bargain”, signatories have continued to work together to support the achievement of their localisation commitments through a network called the “Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream.”

The conference, hosted by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) in Jakarta, Indonesia, gathered more than 100 individuals, representing more than 70 organisations – local non-government and civil society organisations, government

agencies, international non-governmental organisations, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UN agencies, and donor agencies. This was the third in a series of regional conferences organised this year with the following objectives:

1. Share recent developments in global processes, research findings, and progress on localisation;
2. Facilitate a dialogue between different stakeholder groups in the region on the opportunities and challenges of localisation;
3. Ensure perspectives from the region help guide planned global guidance products and other initiatives to promote localisation, and;
4. Initiate and/or support ongoing discussions and planning for individual and collective action in the region on localisation.

PRIORITY ISSUES

The Conference participants suggested a number of priority issues that should be addressed to accelerate the realisation of the localisation agenda.

1 A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CAPACITY AND ADDRESSING THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING NEEDS

- Different definitions and understanding of what capacity and capacity development/strengthening that are oftentimes from an international perspective.
- A contextualised understanding of capacity and capacity strengthening is needed; recognising the importance of two-way learning and complementary approach. Capacity strengthening of local actors should build on their existing capacities and with them taking the leadership role, with a view to sustainability.
- Many capacity strengthening or capacity building initiatives are short-term and one-off; longterm approaches are needed and these require multi-year, predictable funding.

2 THE NEED FOR MORE COLLABORATIVE AND STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO FUNDING AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

- Conversation needed among all actors on strategic approaches to financing and resourcing for local actors including funding priorities and modalities, the role of intermediaries, and the wider issues of capacity, risks, and trust.
- How to increase access to humanitarian funding by women's/women-led organisations.
- Diversification of funding sources, including the identification of new funding streams (especially local resourcing) and non-traditional donors remains an imperative. There is also a need to strengthen coordinated approaches to advocacy with donors on flexibility and predictability of humanitarian funding.

- There are a number of notable initiatives in the region on mechanisms and modalities of humanitarian funding. The lessons emerging from these initiatives need to be amplified for the benefit of the humanitarian community in the region.

3 REPRESENTATION LOCAL ACTORS, INCLUDING WOMEN'S/WOMENLED ORGANISATIONS IN COORDINATION

- Some local actors specially women's women-led organisations still do not have access to cluster/coordination meetings while some are not encouraged or constrained to attend due to language barriers and the number of meetings.
- Lack of effective coordinative networks and mechanisms among the local actors themselves, often expressed in problems of legitimacy and credibility of local representatives in coordination mechanisms.
- Competition among local actors on who should represent them in formal coordination mechanisms. There is a need to transform competitive relationships to one with shared responsibilities.

4 ROLE OF HOST GOVERNMENTS

- Need to better understand how (host) governments see themselves reflected in the localisation agenda and what are the legal and institutional frameworks in place including on the management of international relief
- Scope for national government policy frameworks for INGOs to learn from the Indonesian model's requirements on INGOs demonstrating commitment to building sustainable local capacity and exit/transition strategies
- Government agencies can and do often support and partner with local civil society actors; need further political support and commitment of government to gender equality and women's organisations
- Need to seize good opportunities for stronger engagement and cooperation at regional level between governments and civil society. AHA has a civil society framework that can support documentation of good practices by governments in civil society engagement including enabling policy and regulatory frameworks to facilitate the work of local civil society actors

5 THE NEED TO PROMOTE/MAINSTREAM WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE ACTION

- Resourcing women's/women-led organisations remains a problem as they are often left out of formal coordination and funding discussion and decision-making platforms.
- Right's based feminist and intersectional framework to gender issues need to be promoted and mainstreamed; gender equality is not just about women but addressing power relations between women and men
- Limited or lack of disaggregated data and absence of social inclusion in data gathering

6 BUILDING QUALITY PARTNERSHIP

- Need for a clearer definition of partnership, especially addressing aspirations for shared accountability, complementarity, and leadership.
- There is still a significant amount of competition and distrust among various humanitarian actors; INGOs need to recognise capacities of local organisations and give them space to work and grow
- The “nationalisation” of INGOs is a trend in the region.
- Need to promote and amplify some good practices/experiences of INGOs working effectively with local actors (consortium approach to action planning, peer reviews, two-way capacity assessment, etc)
- Need to advocate ‘upwards’ to shift ways of working and improve communication i.e. for donors to better understand the constraints that local actors are faced with and vice versa

6 UNDERSTANDING LOCALISATION

- The concept of localisation is not always easily translated into local languages and can have different meanings in different cultures and contexts. There is a need, therefore, to push for efforts to develop a shared language about localisation and leadership by local actors.
- There is no one-size fits all approach to localisation. Approaches to localisation needs to be contextualised, even if there can be a common set of foundational principles. Local understanding, concept and experiences of localisation is an important foundation of developing contextualised approaches.
- There is a need to cultivate buy in and push implementation by all actors through e.g. ‘National Localisation Frameworks and Charters’ (Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar) and adapt/replicate in other contexts

TAKING ACTION – 2020-2021

The conference participants, in sub-regional and country discussions groups, proposed a number of priority initiatives that have the potential of accelerating and making localisation a reality at the country level. Included in these discussions were specific asks of regional and global level dynamics to support country-level change.

These proposed priority initiatives were also framed by normative, strategic, `and practical progress happening at the global level, as illustrated by the Grand Bargain independent annual report, the learning from demonstrator country visit¹, and the work of the localisation workstream (that includes the development of practical thematic guidance notes).

¹ Learning visits to Iraq, Bangladesh and Mozambique to understand developments around the localisation of aid in particular.

ON BUILDING GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Build on existing mechanisms and policy frameworks (e.g. Pacific Resilience Partnership) and where strong multi-stakeholder relationships and high-level political support is available. As an example, ASEAN is the key lever for existing partnerships and best practices in the Southeast Asia region, including the development of National Localisation Framework.
- Build relationships and close links between NDMA/Os and conduct regular dialogues across stakeholders to deepen and strengthen partnerships. Long-term relationships also build mutual capacity.
- Develop a stronger, more effective accountability framework and mechanism that take into account different accountability dimensions (vis-à-vis community, donors, government, etc.). This will include holding Grand Bargain signatories to account as well as national level accountability of donors and partners.
- Develop a “partnership health” check/monitoring framework.

ON BROADENING THE UNDERSTANDING OF LOCALISATION AND THE BROADER GRAND BARGAIN AGENDA

- Conduct research on different understandings of localisation across different contexts, focusing especially on understanding what constitutes quality localisation – principles, values, partnership modalities – and taking into consideration local culture and indigenous knowledge.
- Encourage all countries to develop their respective “localisation roadmaps” building on initiatives such as the National Localisation Framework and charters. These can catalyse multi-stakeholder and contextualised multi-stakeholder localisation approaches.
- Localisation approaches and dimensions should be embedded in appropriate policies and action plans, with tracking mechanisms. The role of regional platforms and institutional mechanisms, such as the SAARC, should be explored. At the global level, international actors should focus on embedding localisation elements in proposal development as part of due diligence.

ON STRATEGIC FINANCING/FUNDRAISING APPROACH

- Joint/collective approaches to resource access and mobilisation – including pooled fund processes, increased local resource mobilisation, and resources for women’s/women-led organisation – should be scaled up and supported. This will include providing local NGOs and civil society organisation information on available funding sources.
- Promote a more holistic perspective on resource provision – including support to both preparedness and response, flexibility between humanitarian and peace and conflict funds, and replenishment of funds and other resources that have already been expended.
- Review risk management practices and simplify financial systems.
- Provide funding support to promote local NGO coordination mechanisms.

ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION

- Conduct regional studies to understand more deeply significant barriers to women’s more meaningful participation in humanitarian response. This can include case studies addressing gender in legislative and policy frameworks at country level.
- Establish forum/network at regional and national levels among local NGOs and CSOs to share experiences and good practices to promote equality in humanitarian action between women and men,

safety for women responders and organisations, and allocation of more funding resources to women's and women-led organisations. Donors at country, regional and central levels should be engaged to support/advocate on the same messages.

- Support efforts to enhance the participation and role of women's and women-led organisations in humanitarian decision making and funding bodies at different levels.
- Conduct research and pilots on gender and inclusive humanitarian programming.

ON COLLECTIVE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND SHARING

- Continue to support the development of local humanitarian leadership building on existing capacities and competencies at the local levels, taking into account different dimensions and contextual differences of capacity.
- Advocate for understanding localisation in government structures and enhance better cooperation between local and national government, as well as between civil society and government.
- Enhance private sector involvement in capacity strengthening.
- Develop a measurement and health check framework and system on capacity strengthening.

HIGHLIGHT SESSION – LESSONS FROM THE SULAWESI RESPONSE

A special session on the more recent Sulawesi earthquake response experience was organised in the conference to provide a granular view on the challenges, dilemmas, and positive contribution of localisation to effective humanitarian action. The discussants represented the Pelang Mera Indonesia (PMI), Indonesia National Agency for Disaster Countermeasure or BNPB, an Indonesian NGO, and the country office of an international NGO. Among the insights shared in the session are: (a) localisation efforts have been ongoing in Indonesia for a long time, preceding the World Humanitarian Summit, nevertheless, there is still a lot of challenges to be addressed; (b) the government has the mandate to coordinate and lead disaster response, based on existing legal frameworks and principles; (c) there was confidence on the part of government and other local humanitarian actors that systems, resources and competencies are in place for an effective response, albeit selective external assistance was needed; (d) international mechanisms, such as those on coordination, can exclude local actors; (e) localisation needs to take into account local culture and unique ways of doing things in local communities and among local organisations that may not be easily understood by international actors/organisations; (f) mainstreaming gender is still a big challenge.

At the end of the day, the important thing is that dialogue is happening, driven by a common interest to ensure effective principled humanitarian response. There is still a lot of suspicion and mistrust among many humanitarian actors but these need to be tackled head on. Here is where genuine partnerships become very important – and it is about people, not just institutions.