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MOVING FORWARD LOCALISATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Empowerment leads to better humanitarian outcomes

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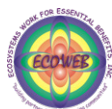
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This is a summary of a localisation report that has been prepared as part of the Philippines Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) workplan to strengthen its localization agenda. The recommendations in the report were endorsed by the HCT. Acknowledgment goes to all who have contributed to the successful conduct of the Philippines Country Localisation Dialogue process and to Kathlyn Kissy Sumaylo-Pearlman and Smruti Patel for preparing this report.



“We are learning a lot and changing because we have been impacted by many crises. Now, we are moving from donor-recipient to more horizontal partnerships. We are transitioning from a silo to more participatory action which is part of resilience-building. We are moving from vertical and centralized aid to localisation. We are moving from stand-alone interventions... to platforms, to coalitions. Localisation agenda is also an agenda of complementarities between those from the grassroots to the rest! We complement each other.”

Gustavo Gonzalez
UN Resident Coordinator and
Humanitarian Coordinator

Introduction

The humanitarian sector has been discussing localisation for over 25 years. The World Humanitarian Summit, the Agenda for Humanity, and the launch of the Grand Bargain in 2016 were major initiatives to reform the humanitarian system to make it fit for the future. In the last five years there has been a push for more concrete implementation of localisation commitments at

country level. This report presents key findings of the country level dialogue carried out in the Philippines between February and July 2021 and aims to serve as a localisation blueprint, a plan of action, with concrete recommendations to be taken forward by various stakeholders.

The multi-stakeholder dialogue process

The initiative to map the state of localisation through multi-stakeholder dialogue was seen to be the first step in raising awareness of the commitments, understanding country level progress, documenting the good practices already existing and mapping the way forward. The Philippines country level dialogue is part of a global effort to promote better understanding and implementation of the Grand Bargain localisation commitments. As part of its commitment as the 63rd signatory of the Grand Bargain, the Alliance for Empowering Partnership (A4EP) committed to support such dialogues in country through a collaborative process. In the Philippines, the Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits (ECOWEB) took the lead in the process in collaboration with the UN OCHA Philippines, Oxfam Philippines and A4EP and with leadership support from the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The dialogue process was organised in collaboration with various CSO networks in the country, including the Center for Disaster Preparedness, Philippines Preparedness Partnership and Asian Preparedness Partnership.

The objectives for the country dialogue process were to promote and institutionalise the implementation of Grand Bargain commitments on localisation and the participation revolution at the country level as well as to devise a localisation roadmap for the Philippines Humanitarian Country Team. The dialogue also assisted in creating a greater sense of momentum and providing the space to explore synergies and linkages with existing humanitarian coordination mechanism, donors and Philippine INGO networks, private sector, local and national CSOs and national authorities. Lastly, it sought to identify opportunities and challenges to localisation and to develop a country level plan of action and a tracking mechanism, which are crucial to the success of localisation in-country.

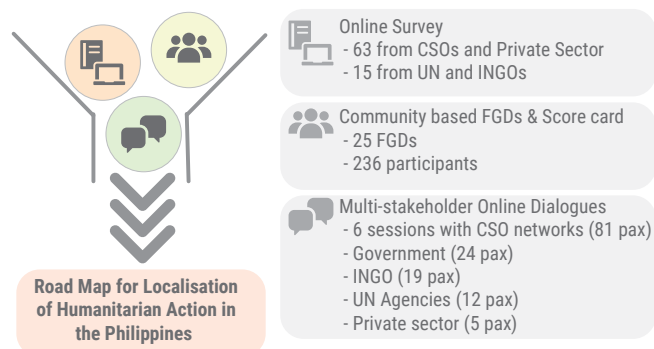
The dialogue process took place between February and June 2021 and consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives of communities affected by crisis in six regions in the Philippines and with humanitarian responders. In total these consultations reached 504 participants – 268 from humanitarian agencies and 236 from the affected communities. The online survey for humanitarian responders that mapped the state of localisation of humanitarian actions in their respective agencies was completed by 63 respondents from the CSOs and 15 from the UN agencies and INGOs. The series of online intra-network dialogues had a total of 155 participants from national and local CSO networks, government agencies, INGOs and UN agencies, and private sector humanitarian groups operating in the Philippines. The process culminated in a multi-stakeholder dialogue on June 10, 2021, with close to 100 participants identifying key actions to move forward the localisation in the country. It also brought to the fore the insights and findings from the community FGDs, online survey and the series of online dialogues among humanitarian stakeholders.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the major stakeholder groups involved in the process committed to take forward key action points identified in the dialogue. The Seven Dimensions Framework for localisation – (i.) Relationship Quality, (ii.) Participation of Affected Populations, (iii.) Quality of Relationship and Partnerships, (iv.) Quality of Funding and Financing, (v.) Capacity, (vi.) Visibility and Credit Sharing, and (vii.) Humanitarian Standards and Policy - was used as a framework for systematic analysis of localisation commitments.

Kimberly Go Tian from the Philippine government's Disaster Response Management Bureau of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) noted during the

multi-stakeholders dialogue that “the actions toward localisation are aligned with the upcoming implementation of the Mandanas-Garcia Ruling by 2022, which aims to enhance the service delivery of local government units through enhanced decentralization of basic services of the government.” She then emphasised the importance of developing the road map and the importance of coordination among various actors, in order to better provide effective and efficient programs in crisis-affected communities.

Below are key findings and recommended actions to move forward the localisation of humanitarian action in the Philippines.



Summary of process and participation to the Philippine Localisation Dialogue

Key findings and recommended action:



Quality of Relationships and Partnerships

The main issue raised on quality of relationship was the urgency to address power inequalities and call for equitable and long-term complementary partnerships between local/national and international actors, as opposed to sub-contractual arrangements. Affected populations in crisis also wish to be treated as partners in humanitarian actions rather than being treated only as “beneficiaries/recipients” of aid. Politicisation of aid and “red-tagging” of humanitarian workers

putting at risk their safety and security were also among major concerns raised by local humanitarian actors.

Suggested changes to improving relationships include depoliticising aid, promoting complementarity instead of competition among humanitarian actors to enable effective services to affected communities of crisis.

KEY ACTIONS for Improving Relationship and Ensuring Quality Partnership between and among humanitarian actors:

1. Enable equitable partnership among humanitarian actors on the basis of shared values and accountability between partners, upholding the principles of partnership (based on equality, mutual understanding, transparency, participation, shared responsibilities) that can best benefit the community.
2. Local and international partners to conduct joint decision-making and co-creation process of programming and implementation of projects.
3. Strengthen learning through cross-learning, capacity sharing, complementation and systematically documenting good experiences and practices that highlight the contribution of all partners.
4. Depoliticise humanitarian aid, address occasional practice

of political patronage in government humanitarian actions and provide protection for civil humanitarian actors.

5. Provide support to local CSO accreditation in LGUs and national government for stronger partnership and accountability in humanitarian and development governance and for building partnership with private sector.



The Participation of Affected Populations

Traditionally, affected communities have been seen as victims and recipients of aid. However, affected communities wish to be treated as partners in humanitarian action. They expressed the need for contextualizing humanitarian action to make it culturally-sensitive and ensure participation and empowerment of the affected population with bottom-up/community-led approaches which are more dignifying and ensure inclusion of the most vulnerable in all humanitarian action processes.

Advocating for, and strengthening, real-time feedback mechanisms will allow affected populations to better communicate with humanitarian actors, including donors and government, and ensure they receive immediate feedback on actions from duty-bearers.

KEY ACTIONS for Improving Participation of Affected Population in humanitarian actions

1. Institutionalize co-creation and co-implementation in projects, where affected communities are involved in conceptualizing and delivering humanitarian interventions based on their needs and capacities such as through the conduct of community FGDs, survivor- and community-led crisis response approach, participatory action planning, and upholding the principles of inclusivity - "Nothing About Us, Without Us!".
2. Promote community organizing as a long-term strategy. This does not only ensure that communities are able to mobilize themselves to respond at the onset of disasters, but this also builds the capacity of the community to influence their LGUs (e.g., in local development planning and DRRM planning). These should be among the indicators of success of community participation.
3. Strengthen community-based monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms, especially those that enable access of community to mechanisms for community feedback- whether face-to-face or through digital means (e.g. Loop digital feedback platform).
4. Advocate for the creation and implementation of policies and guidelines supporting bottom-up processes, creation of CSO desks in international NGOs, donors or national government, and enable CSO accreditation in LGUs and national government, for stronger partnership and accountability in humanitarian and development governance.

In 2017, AMDF organized Family Conversations, or listening sessions involving fathers, mothers, youth, and children who were displaced during the Marawi crisis. At least 240 families were engaged in these Family Conversations, which helped shape the development of a "People's Agenda" for the recovery and rehabilitation of Marawi. Here, a community facilitator conducts a debriefing session with women in an evacuation center.





Focus group discussions with women, mothers and elderly in Barangay Baseco, Manila as part of the pre-crisis information mapping on aid preferences of at-risk community in an event of a 7.2 magnitude earthquake.

Photo: Gil arevalo/OCHA



Funding and Financing

Based on the survey conducted with humanitarian actors, the overall trend for the last five years has seen decreasing funding to varying degree for a number of CSOs. About 35% of the CSO respondents said they have no international funding, and about 25% said their access to international funding had significantly decreased compared to about 13% among UN/INGOs. Meanwhile, over 35% of INGO/UN respondents said their access to international funding has slightly increased, compared to 11% of CSOs in the last five years. Major challenges identified by national and local actors include limited, or lack of, access to multi-year funding and flexible grants, lack of coverage for overhead costs, and barriers to financing requirements, which are difficult to comply with by small and local organisations (examples cited are requirement for coun-

terpart and highly technical programming). The increased use of cash assistance and programming was positively received by communities, and this is projected to be used more widely for anticipatory humanitarian actions.

Local humanitarian actors are looking to diversify sources of funding and partnerships, such as building local and shared pooled funds such as SAFER and exploring corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs provided by the private sector. However, to engage with the private sector, CSOs need to strengthen their capacity for good stewardship of allocated funds and resources, accreditation and registration requirements of government and improve transparency and accountability within their own ranks.

KEY ACTIONS for Ensuring Quality funding and Financing for effective, efficient, and accountable humanitarian actions

1. Support small and local CSOs to gain more access to humanitarian funding by simplifying requirements, bureaucratic systems, and removing administrative policies that exclude smaller local actors in funding mechanisms such as the requirement for financial counterpart which is perceived to favour the bigger and financially stable organizations.
2. Provide enough support for overhead, staff retention and other operational costs for local actors (including those related to institutional capacity strengthening) other than direct project costs.
3. Promote consortium-building efforts in accessing humanitarian funding for CSOs that actively involve smaller local actors/area-based local actors, especially in planning and implementation of projects on the ground.
4. Expand country-based pooled funds that are accessible to local humanitarian actors including community-based organisations.
5. Expand cash-based flexible and participatory programming to effectively address the needs of the crisis-affected people.



Existing capacity of local CSOs/NGOs in facilitating humanitarian actions on the ground is generally appreciated by the communities. Many CSOs have been building technical capacity for managing and implementing humanitarian response. However, they also recognize that there is still a need for effective and complementary technical support from international partners. The nexus approach as practised by many CSOs is considered important to ensure effective transition from humanitarian response to recovery and development. This requires integrated programming to facilitate resources, and capacity for complementarity to address the complex needs of crisis-affected communities.

Challenges experienced by local humanitarian actors include limited staff capacity and staff turn-over, which constrain them from immediately deploying humanitarian response. They are also hampered in their ability to fully engage in partnerships due to difficulty of complying with due diligence standards and necessary accreditation requirements. Exploring collaborations with the private sector for corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, working more closely with the academic institutes

and cross-learning were some of the proposed actions.

It was recognized that localisation requires a change in mind-set among all actors, including donors, UN and INGOs; and a commitment to new ways of working to genuinely work towards localisation, and to build lasting capacity for local humanitarian actors at all levels, including on financial stewardship and project execution whilst also recognising the complementarity of actors and added value each of them brings. This way, the burden of raising capacities does not just lie on communities, and local actors, but among all humanitarian and development actors.

KEY ACTIONS for Improving Capacity of humanitarian actors to ensure effective, efficient, complementary and accountable humanitarian actions

1. Undertake scoping of capacities of local actors and conduct organizational assessment to determine their strengths and weaknesses and build on their strengths as basis for programming and investing in their capacity enhancement.
2. Enable local actors to retain and maintain their staff capacity through appropriate budget allocation for staff. Provide just support for overheads and advocate for dialogue in support of individuals or NGOs in the humanitarian sector who have been affected by threats of violence and personal safety.
3. Provide support that will enable local actors to comply with due diligence processes and requirements, to enable them to fulfil their partnership obligations, and meet standards related to safeguarding, accountability.
4. Invest in education and training for transformative partnership, i.e., enabling local actors to claim their rights to engage in transparent, accountable, and equitable partnership.
5. Promote effective complementarity and sharing of capacity between local and international partners and among local and national humanitarian actors to facilitate better humanitarian and nexus services to the affected communities.



Coordination Mechanisms

Coordination mechanisms are generally valued for information sharing between international, national and local actors and facilitating complementary capacities and resources, as well as for providing space to elevate concerns of local actors and communities to authorities. It is a positive development that local humanitarian actors are increasingly being represented in various coordination platforms. What needs to happen next is for them to be actively engaged and to take on leadership

positions in these platforms. Some of the challenges faced by local humanitarian actors relate to staff capacity to attend various coordination meetings and the lack of space for them to honestly (or openly) share their opinions. Other reasons cited for CSOs' low participation in existing coordination mechanisms include lack of funding and distance or geographical location of meetings if they were to happen face-to-face.

KEY ACTIONS to make Coordination valuable to affected populations and inclusive of local actors

1. Strengthen local humanitarian leadership and effective local coordination among CSOs.
2. Develop mechanisms through which crisis-affected communities are adequately represented in coordination meetings.
3. Enable stronger coordination between local government and

CSOs to address issues of duplication and politicization of aid and strengthen complementation.

4. Increase the capacity of local actors for their more meaningful participation in the cluster coordination system ensuring that these meetings are inclusive and offer added value to local actors.

Community members form a human chain to bring supplies to higher ground in Barangay Lipatan, Santo Niño, Cagayan, an area affected by Typhoon Mangkhut (local name Ompong) in 2018.





Humanitarian Standards and Policy

The rights and dignity of the affected population should be made the centre of the humanitarian action. Communities affected by disasters argue that humanitarian standards used for assistance should be made transparent and well-coordinated to avoid creating conflict in affected communities. They also expressed wanting to be engaged in the process. Among humanitarian workers, threats to their safety and security, particularly “red-tagging by the government” in their work for their potential association with suspected insurgents, has been strongly identified as a concern. Providing protection for safety and security of the humanitarian actors is also among the humanitarian policies sought by CSOs. With the COVID-19

pandemic, international and national humanitarian actors need to support communities to have internet access and effective communications. While steps have been taken to orient on humanitarian standards, CSOs need support and resources to be able to follow policies and standards, which also need to be contextualised.

Communities want to be informed about humanitarian standards and policy and INGOs and CSOs should invest in retraining communities on understanding and application of humanitarian standards.

KEY ACTIONS to harmonise and contextualise Humanitarian Standards Policy ensuring effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of humanitarian actions

1. Ensure accountability of all humanitarian actors to humanitarian standards where rights and dignity of people are placed at the centre. Include relevant clause in partnership agreements that addresses non-adherence to humanitarian standards.
2. Conduct an inclusive review for the harmonisation and contextualization of current humanitarian standards and policies to ensure quality humanitarian services are delivered to communities.
3. Establish effective monitoring systems ensuring participation from vulnerable sectors such as persons with disabilities, and older persons, among others.
4. Create a feedback mechanism accessible to affected population of crisis with registry of emergency and key humanitarian actors' number.
5. Advocate to include in the humanitarian policy the protection for safety and security of humanitarian actors.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Goni (local name Rolly), the strongest storm on planet in 2020 that made its initial landfall in Catanduanes, the UN agencies and local partners distributed cash assistance through the Central Emergency Response Fund. This gave most vulnerable families in Catanduanes flexibility in addressing their needs, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.





ECOWEB's community development facilitator, facilitating the participatory action learning in crisis (palc) with the Marawi IDPs.

Photo: Rakila Mamosaca/ECOWEB



Visibility and Credit Sharing

Perspectives from the FGDs and stakeholder dialogues expressed that visibility and credit sharing with local humanitarian actors be given more attention. Visibility should not only be expressed using branding materials; communities emphasised that what is more valuable is that the presence of humanitarian actors and services provided are felt by the communities. Clear visibility of humanitarian actors is also

considered important for the safety of affected population in areas at risk to conflict. Policies on visibility and credit-sharing should form part of partnership frameworks between and among international and local/national actors.

KEY ACTIONS for shared Visibility and Credit Sharing that is more relevant to the affected population of crisis and local CSOs

1. Ensure the participation of communities in the whole project cycle - from project design, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation - so that they can already provide inputs during programming, partnership and design as well as in during reporting and in visibility for humanitarian action.
2. Include in the global humanitarian standards equitable credit sharing and accountability between local and international humanitarian partners. Include provisions on equitable credit sharing and accountability in partnership agreements.
3. Design visibility materials in such a way that is inclusive, culture-sensitive, integrates accountability/feedback mechanisms, peace-promoting and upholds the rights and dignity of people.
4. Ensure clear visibility of humanitarian actors for safety and security of both humanitarian actors and conflict-affected communities.



Cross-Cutting Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Localisation

COVID-19 has affected and delayed programmes and services and has severely limited the movement of communities and humanitarian actors. However, many actors are finding ways to localise their operations by working with local organizations. Cash assistance given during the pandemic was appreciated by the affected populations, but this is not enough and has at times excluded many vulnerable groups. Politicisation of government cash assistance at local level often lacked trans-

parency and corruption was reported to be a significant issue. Proposed actions include the mainstreaming of COVID-19 response across programmes and strategies and providing support to local partners, including the allocation of funds to enable their access to digital technology (which has been shown to be a key need during humanitarian responses that have occurred in this pandemic).

KEY ACTIONS to make Humanitarian Aid more responsive to needs of the most vulnerable and affected by COVID-19 in the face of limited resources and growing needs

1. Build on existing coordination mechanisms/working groups for localisation that will study and facilitate the conduct of transparent, multi-stakeholder consultations to include sectors related to education, economy, health, peace and order, among others, to help determine tangible solutions to the impact of the pandemic.

2. Identify potential local solutions to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in humanitarian response, in collaboration with actors engaged in sectors such as health, social welfare, economic empowerment, enterprise development, gender equality, and skills training and education.

3. Advocate and establish support mechanisms that strengthen partnerships between CSOs and government and

that will enable CSOs' direct access to communities amid travel restrictions imposed by the government during the pandemic.

4. Enable effective complementarity and partnership between local and international actors to effectively respond to the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable communities. Harness access of local actors to affected communities amid hardship in mobility as a result of lockdowns and restrictions as imposed by the government this pandemic.

5. Support nexus approach, flexible and locally led actions and more cash-programming to effectively address various humanitarian needs of communities during this pandemic.



ECOWEB Marawi Response Project Manager, co-facilitating the community scorecard roll out to youths in Bantogawato, Balindong, Lanao del Sur. The main facilitators were the community leaders who graduated the community scorecard training of trainers.



Post-Dialogue, Moving Forward the Localisation Commitment

Following the dialogue process, major stakeholders committed to moving forward the localisation of humanitarian actions in the Philippines and strengthen complementarities and added value of each stakeholder.

With the strong leadership from the UN RC/HC, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) created an ad hoc group on localisation composed of donors, the UN agencies, INGOs and CSOs. The ad hoc group is tasked to operationalize key actions which the HCT can move forward. From the thematic lists of key actions identified through the dialogue process, and listed above, the HCT ad hoc group conducted a survey and will prioritize at least one key action per theme to turn it into a plan for action.

A core team of CSOs also continued a dialogue process by consolidating the views of all of the networks of CSOs advocating for localisation in humanitarian action. The CSOs have decided to conduct a wider CSO summit where the dialogue results will be presented and turned into specific plan of action, which can be used to determine short-term, medium-term and

longer-term action points. Apart from the engagement with the INGOs, UN and donors, CSOs are giving attention to the identified key actions in engaging the government.

The creation of a National Reference Group as recommended by the global Grand Bargain 2.0 process is an important action point, which CSO localisation leaders in the Philippines agreed to move forward in coordination with the government, UN, INGOs and donors in the country. Representation of affected population, local and national CSO networks, private sector, INGOs, UN, Filipino diaspora, donors and government in the national reference group is considered crucial to ensure complementarity, inclusivity and stronger coordination among humanitarian actors in the country. Safeguarding the rights and dignity of people is at the centre of humanitarian action and at the core of the localisation framework that stakeholders in the Philippines all committed to.

While needs in sectors like shelter and WASH are tangible and easier to identify, the international partners complement capacities of local responders in augmenting relief efforts to address intangible needs around protection concerns, particularly in gender-based violence and child protection. Tiwi, Albay emergency response to Typhoon Goni (Rolly) in 2020.



Collaborating agencies forging ahead on localisation

From among the dialogue partners, Smruti Patel of the A4EP noted that the immediate next step is not only to come up with the report, but for the different stakeholders to concretely take forward the actions in their own work in a holistic way so actions are taken at all levels. A4EP can share the process with other countries and share some of the findings with the Grand Bargain signatories.

From Oxfam Pilipinas, Ma. Rosario Felizco recognised the importance of the processes over the last few months, leading up to the roadmap planning, in revisiting what localisation meant across stakeholders and be able to input them into the global discussions that are happening relative to the future of the Grand Bargain.

While the global discussions are very important, they will only be meaningful if they can be adopted and practiced at the country level, thus requiring more concrete and more actionable resolutions. Oxfam expressed its commitment to carrying on the conversation with all the stakeholders to make the localisation roadmap meaningful and be something that can be implemented.

From UNOCHA, Manja Vidic, reiterated that localisation is about complementarity not competition - about partnership and relationship building, and not replacing one another. In order for the Philippines to take on the localisation agenda, there is a need to continue creating safe spaces for open dialogue. Ms. Vidic expressed UNOCHA's commitment to walk the talk, especially in coordinating the HCT, in which some of the activities on the action plan will be discussed and put into action.

Regina Salvador - Antequisa, Executive Director of ECOWEB, acknowledged all the partners who contributed to the localisation dialogues, including the trust given to ECOWEB in leading the dialogue process – this is localisation in action. She encouraged continuing vibrant collaboration among stakeholders “to show to the global community how localisation is done in the Philippines.” She, together with other CSO leaders, are leading the continuing process among CSOs to move forward the identified key actions for moving forward the localisation agenda in the Philippines.

In cooperation with:

Government and basic sector participation



UN agencies, INGOs and member NGO participation

Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)

Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT)

Philippine International Non-Government Organization Network (PINGON)

National and local CSO actors participation



CLEARNet
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