Humanitaire Top NL 2015

Local versus international capacity

Preamble

The humanitarian system is bursting at the seams. The number of severe, large-scale humanitarian emergencies is rising; at the moment the international community is responding to the ebola outbreak in West Africa in addition to four L3 emergencies: Iraq, Syria, CAR and South Sudan. The humanitarian community is increasingly struggling to respond all these large-scale crises especially conflict related, happening at the same time. There is a lack of capacity to respond to today's crises situations. But do we optimally use the potential? And how can we build capacity to be able to respond to today's crises situations?

The problem: *The Humanitarian community is not able to deliver timely and effective humanitarian response to today's crises*

Among INGOs we roughly see two opinions on how to address the challenges in delivery based on different philosophies and contexts: the first one strives to strengthen international capacity to safe-guard principled aid; especially neutrality, impartiality and independency .The second "school" sees investing in (sustainable) national/ local capacity as the way forward.

To maximize collective capacity in meeting needs of affected people in different context, we need to have an open debate that goes beyond these positions and seeks to find ways to combine the two approaches.

Considerations / deliberations

We urge humanitarian sector to engage in a debate on 4 issues that are central to the discussion around the topic of 'local versus international capacity and to take these one step further by bringing in both perspectives.

1. *Managing accountability and transparency.*
Increased upward accountability and transparency demands complicate the entry of national/ local[i] actors into the humanitarian field which is currently heavily dominated by selected agencies (UN and a few INGO networks). These demands also encourage the existence of chains of aid organizations – creating "middle men"- which tend to slow down timely delivery of humanitarian aid.
Under which conditions will humanitarian actors be trusted and respected by the wider humanitarian aid community? Can we work towards an accountability framework that is better accessible for different humanitarian actors, especially local actors, and developed through dialogue? Is there space (in the current bureaucratic set-up) for creativity and adaptability to context?

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3. *Humanitarian principles*

Humanitarian aid is historically guided by principles of Humanity and impartiality facilitated through independence and neutrality. However, organizations who position themselves as humanitarian actors are not always clear about the principles and values driving them. This creates confusion and is not supportive for the search for solutions to increase collective capacity for response*, especially in conflict context where the humanitarian principles are key for effective delivery of aid.*

How and in how far are local organizations, especially in conflict settings, able to provide aid in an impartial manner? Are international organizations always better able to guarantee impartial delivery of aid? Can solidarity be an effective, albeit non-impartial, strategy? Not all actors are familiar with the principles - what do we do to share them, discuss them and promote them? Are we open to discuss them and how much do we allow to adapt them to support access in a given context?.

4. *Efficiency*

There are two entrance points for this discussion. Firstly, the cost-efficiency of local and international humanitarian organizations and the role of the international organizations as 'middle man' (see point 1 above).

What is the best way to ensure value-for money from the perspective of people in need? Can international organizations and donors support the search for new ways of creating added value between actors? Secondly, how can we best promote the development of sustainable future capacity to ensure a timely response?

By investing in national and local preparedness and capacity? By investing in international capacity? Does the system allow for engagement of citizens and international solidarity?

5. *Speed of scale-up*

The first days and weeks of an emergency are crucial, scale up must be fast. It is an essential part of humanitarian action – whether local, national or international – to be clear about what capacity the actor has (funds, experience, HR, specialization, etc), what the actor cannot do and how long it takes to scale up or develop an effective response.

Are local organizations better positioned because they are familiar with the context and the local situation and already there? And what are pre-requisites for them to be able to scale up? How can international actors support effective channeling of local initiatives to allow scale-up? When local response capacity does not exist or *being local* becomes an obstacle how to ensure fast international response, especially in complex, instable settings?

These four aspects should be central to the debate around local versus international capacity and how we can increase the collective capacity to respond. A distinction should be made between disasters induced by natural hazards and those induced by conflict - two different contexts in which humanitarian assistance is provided (recognizing they can also exist simultaneous). The balance between local and international capacity and the possibilities for being complementary to serve people in need is very context specific.

The humanitarian capacity agenda for the coming years

If we seriously want to address the growing challenges related to the provision of humanitarian aid the different actors in the humanitarian system have to reflect on their own role and capacity, be transparent and honest about what their capacity is and how this contributes to delivery of timely, scaled response and subsequently make clear choices what contribution they can bring to the collective capacity and invest accordingly in their organization's response capacity.
Therefore we call for:

> - *We call for a debate between donors and actors on how to ensure that the accountability demands in different context facilitate creative cooperation between different actors instead of becoming a hampering factor resulting in delay of the response*
>
> - *We call for different actors to reflect on, and be clear about, the impact of the choices (explicit or implicit) they make on the principled delivery of aid.*
>
> - *We call for an honest reflection on the current efficiency of the humanitarian system, with its layers of actors, multiple strings driven by a risk-averse and accountability-to-donor agenda. And to be open to make different choices if these are more efficient*
>
> - *We call actors to be clear and transparent about their capacity and resources to scale-up fast (or not) in the first crucial days of a response in specific context. .*

Recommendations to the World Humanitarian Summit

During the World Humanitarian Summit, humanitarian actors should rethink the roles that local humanitarian actors as well as international humanitarian actors currently have in the system. Central in these discussions should be how the different actors can cooperate or work complementary depending on the type of disaster and local context

The issue of local versus international response capacity should be integrated in the themes of the World Humanitarian Summit, and should particularly be addressed during the discussions around the themes 'humanitarian effectiveness' and 'serving the needs of people in conflict'.

Recommendations to other stakeholders

To allow for a more open humanitarian system, an **accountability framework** that is accessible and acceptable for both local and international humanitarian actors should be established.

To enable a more systematic approach to context related disaster preparedness that recognizes and includes both international as well as local capacity (strengthening) .

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[i] National NGOs (working nation-wide) and Local NGOs (working in a specifc geographical area in a country)
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