

BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LOCAL ACTORS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF DONORS

THE ISSUE

LOCALISATION: EXPLORING A MULTIFACETED AGENDA



Faizi Welongo II, CEPAC (Communauté des Eglises de Pentecote en Afrique Centrale) Country Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance, at a Child Friendly Space in Tanganyika, DRC. ©Photo: Hannu Happonen/Fida

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In the 2016 Grand Bargain, signatories pledged to provide at least 25% of their humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020; in 2023 this goal is still unmet.

But donors' role in building an enabling environment for local actors is not limited to the funding offer. Localisation requires an ideological change which includes shifting decision-making, resources, and control to local and national actors.

This approach is crucial in redesigning a humanitarian system fit to meet new humanitarian challenges.

Without an ideological rethink, the barriers faced by local actors will continue to hinder the transformation of the humanitarian system. One major barrier is access to direct funding. The overreliance on international intermediaries will also persist, which risks diminishing the 'as local as possible, as global as needed' rhetoric.

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A MORE INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

Ideological rethinks are tough, but we can find examples elsewhere. The disability movement uses the concept of accessible design to describe the creation of products, environments, and services that can be used by a wide diversity of people, including and beyond those with disabilities: good design is better for everyone.

The concepts underpinning accessible design can provide a lens through which to examine and address systemic barriers that hinder local actors' participation in humanitarian action, for example, simplifying heavy administrative burdens: an environment which is enabling for local actors is in fact better more effective environment for all actors, including INGOs and donors. The momentum for localisation is growing, so what roles can donors play to strengthen the humanitarian community in general, and local actors in particular?

> A legitimising role

Donors have a role in recognising NGO certification schemes for humanitarian actors. These voluntary initiatives, which can be national or international, help NGOs establish and maintain standards for their humanitarian work and provide a mechanism for demonstrating their commitment to ethical and accountable practices.

By recognising these schemes, donors can help to build trust between NGOs, communities, and other stakeholders, leading to stronger partnerships and more effective outcomes.

> A financing role

Funding, and the directness of funding, is one indication of donor confidence in their implementing partner. Direct funding to local actors is not just about the money. It is a marker that legitimises the humanitarian organisation's work towards other stakeholders.

Local actors must be able to access financing without excessive administrative or reporting requirements. Actors should be able to demonstrate a right of initiative regarding how money is spent to fulfil humanitarian objectives. Donors need to give a reasonable allocation of unrestricted funds to support both project implementation and development of the local actor. As do intermediaries.

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> Donor role in recognition and visibility

Donors can help raise the profile of local humanitarian actors by recognising their work and highlighting their actions through traditional and social media channels. This would re-educate the public to realise the diversity of humanitarian actors and show how partnership approaches between different actors contribute to more impactful delivery of humanitarian aid.

> Driving organisational development

Donors push NGOs to develop and meet the grant and programme standards. Donors play a critical role in helping local actors to meet these requirements, providing support and guidance where needed.

> Facilitating networking and partnerships

Coordination and partnership building is essential for effective humanitarian response. Donors can facilitate networking and partnerships between local humanitarian actors and other organisations in the sector, including international NGOs, UN agencies, coordination mechanisms, and other donors.

In closing: donors must play a crucial role in enabling local actors in humanitarian response through funding, recognition, and organisational development. Such shifts will benefit the entire humanitarian system and ultimately and most importantly, those in need of assistance.

Ruth Faber, CEO
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