



Wilton Park

Summary report

One year on - the Grand Bargain and localisation
Monday 5 June – Wednesday 7 June 2017 | WP1543

In partnership with:



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This Wilton Park conference brought together 70 representatives of local organisations in countries affected by emergencies, national governments, regional and international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the diaspora and the private sector for two days of intensive discussions. The conference, co-hosted by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) of the European Commission, aimed to contribute to the discussions about localisation of humanitarian action by providing an opportunity for senior representatives of a broad cross-section of organisations to share successes and challenges encountered by those seeking to promote local ownership and leadership in preparedness, resilience and response.

Key messages

The overall aim must be to move from a short term, project focus towards a longer-term approach that enables local organisations to build up capacity and meet core costs sustainably, leaving them in a better position to prepare for, and respond more effectively to, future crises.

The conference heard presentations on local leadership of humanitarian action from local NGOs in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Turkey. Further case studies of support for local leadership in humanitarian action were offered by international NGOs, UN agencies and donor governments. In four workshops, participants developed initiatives which might contribute to the successful promotion of locally-led humanitarian action. The initiatives proposed are:

1. Investment in systems

Current barriers to the localisation of aid include: legislation and regulation, perception and trust, the range of different interests and capacities of local actors, and often, a significant information gap. Strategies to address these issues could include: mapping of donor capabilities; investment in capacity building of fewer organisations rather than a piecemeal approach to many; adoption by organisations of technologies that are appropriate to their functions; encouragement of intensive group conversations between national actors and donors; strengthening of social enterprises and domestic funding streams to support local actors.

2. A Global facility for local action

It is proposed that there are four pillars to this facility: the development of financing tools; the building of institutional capacity; putting in place systems to address issues of risk-sharing; and expertise and knowledge brokering. The facility should link to existing organisations and networks to ensure that it is not siloed, and should be nationally-led and managed. To support the Grand Bargain commitment, national institutions or banks could act as brokers between donors and local organisations.

3. Investing in and supporting local coalitions

Steps to achieve this might include: mapping (relevant local organisations come together and identify capacities, agree objectives and values); planning (elements could

include creating a tool-kit, identifying timeframes, organisational leadership, long-term vision and membership criteria); and developing a communications strategy (identifying the most suitable technologies, using all relevant languages, documentation of successes, failures and lessons, the development of an advocacy strategy). Accountability can be promoted by adopting clear roles and responsibilities, as well as establishing baselines and monitoring. Investment in local coalitions should be clarified from the outset, and may not necessarily require finance. In-kind contributions from members of the group, the private sector, and international NGOs may be key to a sustainable model.

4. Working across the humanitarian/development nexus to achieve collective outcomes

There is such a diversity of contexts that a set of principles could be developed around how collective outcomes should be formulated. Conversations are required with all those involved to build one cohesive ambition, and then work to identify what type of funding is best for each element of the plan – including how national pooled funding mechanisms can be utilised. Collective responsibility is required to make this work: donors need to commit to working in a different way, and local and international NGOs to be more collaborative and coherent.

In addition to these workshops, participants also took part in plenary sessions focussed on three key aspects of the localisation agenda – capacities, financing and collaboration/coordination. Among the points emphasised in these discussions were:

Capacities

Pre-investment is required to enable local organisations to move away from project funding to long-term sustainability, by building up ‘back-room’ capacity such as finance, logistics, administration and fundraising. Long-term institutional change is required, rather than short term training workshops.

Relationships between local organisations and international partners are too often unequal, even exploitative, with minimal, if any, funding of overheads that would allow them to survive between projects, or even public recognition of their work. Concern was expressed that some INGOs have been ‘localising’ to access local funds, rather than supporting the growth of genuinely local initiatives.

Funding

A wide range of financing and funding models were presented, and participants recognised the value of this opportunity to hear what is working in other parts of the world and to establish networks to share experiences. International funds remain difficult for local organisations to access. Barriers include language, onerous forms, length of due diligence processes and cultural differences. National pooled funds can play a larger role – they spread the risk among donors, UN agencies and INGOs. International agencies need to be able to pass on overheads to their local partners. Most donors do not currently allow for adequate cost recovery. A more strategic, rather than opportunistic, approach to partnerships is required. New mechanisms and metrics need to be considered. The issue of capacity of donors and other international partners is also critical, if new relationships are to be developed.

Collaboration/Coordination

The value of dialogue, working together and joint analysis to achieve collective outcomes was repeatedly emphasised. It was noted that organisations operating at the national level need to build their programmes on coordinated analysis and assessment carried out by local actors, and throughout the conference there was an emphasis on the value of collaboration between local government and civil society organisations in developing area based plans. It was acknowledged that local actors already have valuable assets that can be built upon, but these are unfortunately not always recognised. In some countries, rival organisations have come together successfully to address urgent needs, and it was stressed that local NGOs and partners can, and should come together in a critical mass: increased collaboration leads to greater influence.