



**THE HUMANITARIAN
PLATFORM** FOR LOCAL
AND NATIONAL
ORGANISATIONS IN UGANDA

BUILDING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE CAPACITY THROUGH LOCAL ACTION

ISSUES PAPER #1

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1. Introduction

This issues paper highlights programmatic and organizational aspects impeding the growth of local actors and acquisition of capacity to plan, respond and consistently engage in humanitarian emergencies. It also provides recommendations and conclusions necessary for building humanitarian response, planning capacity among local actors.

This paper builds on the experiences of local and national humanitarian organizations that have led or managed humanitarian response and preparedness in Uganda. The issues paper has been developed by the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations in Uganda comprising of 55 members being hosted and coordinated by Uganda National NGO Forum since 2017.

2. Background

There is a growing need for humanitarian assistance globally with an increased requirement for resources to manage this need. Since 2011, the United Nation's (UN) annual total humanitarian funding requirements have more than doubled from \$7.4 to 16.4 Billion¹. The number of people requiring aid has doubled over the last decade, to approximately 936 million people globally², with an overstretched and underfunded humanitarian assistance mechanism; unable to meet rising needs of crisis affected communities and providing assistance that is often insufficient, inappropriate and delayed. Global humanitarian assistance situations have ranged from earth quakes, floods, famine, wars, disease breakouts to hurricanes.

The main challenge facing actors engaged in humanitarian response programming is the ability to maintain the capacity to anticipate, plan and respond to multiple and complex crises across the world, at the right scale. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit which recommended prioritizing "The Vision for Skills and Capacities" of local and national humanitarian actors to enable better response was a first step in discussions to address these concerns.

Furthermore, global frameworks that will guide implementation of these reforms such as Transformative Agenda and Sphere standards, Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change commitment and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework have been initiated.

Humanitarian Situation in Uganda

Uganda's humanitarian situation is diverse ranging from both internal and external disasters including landslides in the eastern region of the country, floods in different regions of the country, hunger, disease outbreaks³ and refugee influx. Uganda is currently hosting the largest refugee population from its neighboring countries, predicted to be at 1.8million refugees by the end of December 2018⁴.

Efforts to manage and mitigate the humanitarian situations have encompassed interventions from Government of Uganda (GoU), the development partners and local actors including the communities where these occurrences take place. In FY 2016/17 alone, GoU spent UGX 36.9bn on disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention⁵.

Some of the interventions promoting local actors are the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Refugee and Host Empowerment (REHOPE) strategy which seeks to explore opportunities that benefit both refugees and the communities that host them, by bridging the gap between humanitarian and development interventions. ReHoPE represents a key building block of a comprehensive response to displacement in Uganda and a critical component in the application of the CRRF, as stipulated in the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (19 September 2016).

¹ <https://www.one.org/us/2015/02/24/save-lives-save-money-fix-food-aid/>

² See <https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/GHA-Report-2018.pdf>

³ See <https://www.gfdr.org/index.php/en/uganda>

⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/southern-and-eastern-africa-rosea/uganda>

⁵ CSBAG, Oxfam, 2018, Financing Mechanisms for Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation and Prevention in Uganda

3. Factors affecting development of humanitarian response capacity among local actors

Global initiatives and frameworks discussed in the preceding sections, argue that action in humanitarian emergencies should be implemented by local actors within the recipient country including the local community where the disaster strikes. These local actors may include community-based organizations, civil society and the respective recipient country government agencies – OPM in case of Uganda. The local community actors are the first responders whenever a disaster strikes.

They have a deep understanding of the context and the needs of the communities with insights, information, knowledge, and know-how that is likely to contribute to a more appropriate, efficient, and effective emergency response. However, during the emergency response their efforts are overlooked by bigger institutions and organizations that offer humanitarian response, affecting sustainability management as indicated below:

3.1 Coordination

Local and national organizations operate independently in humanitarian response with little or no collaborations with other actors in their interventions partly due to lack of awareness and/or familiarity with the humanitarian operations, limited resources and lack of sector experience and technical capacity. Good coordination is integral to humanitarian responses as it decreases risks of role conflict among agencies; minimizes duplication and waste while promoting leverage of scarce resources.

Whilst the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations in Uganda has been established and has kickstarted on several interventions of coordination among non-state humanitarian organizations, coordination challenges still exist among local actors. For example, lack of consistence in attending meetings deprives actors the opportunity to deeply engage on humanitarian issues and to tap into resourceful networks and connections. This leads to fragmented delivery and efforts for resource mobilization.

3.2 Platforms that facilitate regular engagements and interactions between local actors and the INGOs are limited

There are few platforms outside the regular UN Cluster Coordination system, where local actors can also become active in humanitarian discourse. A local actor would have to be either a UNHCR implementing or operational partner

to be invited to participate in these platforms. Yet this is where key operational and strategy decisions are made. In Uganda for example only 4 out of approximately 60 humanitarian agencies are local Ugandan NGOs. A new local actor considering an active role in the humanitarian work would have to tag along an existing UN partner or wait for the next public solicitation for partners which may not always be forthcoming.

The international donor community involved in humanitarian assistance in Uganda on several occasions has operated independent of other organizations; GoU engagements have only brought a small portion of actors in this area to take part in dialogues on humanitarian assistance, leaving out many actors especially the local organizations. The spaces are still closed with little or no transparency in operations. The local and national organisations are not effectively and efficiently utilizing the limited spaces.

3.3 Funding

Humanitarian action is a costly venture that calls for concerted efforts that draw on national and global resources. For example, the CRRF alone is required to spend up to USD 2bn annually yet only about 16% of this has been funded⁶. Uganda received up to USD 158.8m in the 2016 in form of humanitarian assistance according to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018, and GoU spent up to UGX 36bn on managing and reducing disasters in the country in FY 2016/17. This notwithstanding; local and national organizations face difficulties in finding appropriate and sustainable funding for humanitarian interventions.

Most local NGOs rely on donor grants for their operations. This limits their ability to meet their core costs making them unsustainable. The lack of core funding further limits the continued ability of these NGOs to remain actively engaged in delivery of humanitarian work. Even when funding is provided indirectly, it often remains tied to specific projects without space for indirect cost recovery or institutional development and organizational strengthening costs.

Local actors' access to international funding remains a challenge because they are competing with large international organizations that are better equipped to provide co-funding. Local organizations lack longer-term sustainable funding to respond to humanitarian crises.

⁶ http://solidaritysummit.gou.go.ug/sites/default/files/UgandaSolidaritySummitonRefugees_KAM-PALA%20DECLARATION.pdf

This not only limits scale up of operations but also affects flexibility in response and sustainability.

3.4 Capacity to deliver

Local and national organizations recognize that they have limited technical and organizational capacity to effectively and efficiently provide humanitarian response. They have limited skills in understanding and applying the required humanitarian standards, as well as the poor supportive systems such as the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and the required financial system. This is coupled with the limited absorptive capacity that restricts the scale at which funds can be channeled to them.

There are limited investments in skills development and infrastructure systems by local and national organisations which greatly affects the way they prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises. This is escalated by the high staff turnover especially after their capacity has been built. In most cases, the best local staff from the local and national organisations often move to international organizations, drawn by higher salaries and better working conditions, debilitating national organisations at the very moment when they most need effective leadership. This has greatly weakened the human resource of local and national organisations thus affecting their effective and efficient delivery of humanitarian response.

3.5 Systems of governance

The lack of exposure to robust systems of governance coupled with the lack of commitment and resources

by local NGOs to invest in durable, robust and globally acceptable governance, systems has resulted into local NGOs with weak governance and policy environments.

This precludes many local NGOs from accessing donor funds and/or forging partnerships for resource mobilization. On the other hand, if this weakness is to be overcome international NGOs and donors must commit to supporting local NGOs acquire this much needed governance capacity. This is partly because of the disconnect between passion and professionalism especially for the local communities that offer first response.

Many have the passion to aid with their rudimentary ways without clear structures and strategies which constrains international agencies from partnering with them in offering humanitarian assistance as this would birth elements of conflict of interests. Many local community actors for example the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) lack a robust financial system which is very key in showing potential of managing finances appropriately.

3.6 Documentation

Local and national organizations provide a lot of humanitarian assistance however; there are limited mechanisms to document their efforts. Some efforts have been initiated such as the creation of the Uganda Humanitarian Learning Platform (UHLP) but this still needs to be strengthened. Most of their interventions therefore go unnoticed and this in the long run affects their generation of evidence which they could use for lobbying and influencing other humanitarian actors especially the international agencies to build trust and partner with them.

4. Changes in global humanitarian context that local NGOs can benefit from

The above issues notwithstanding, there is need to also understand the diversity in the changes or opportunities in the operating environment in which these humanitarian situations are happening as detailed below:

4.1 Changes in attitude

There is greater global recognition that top-down, single delivery approaches to aid can no longer meet the growing needs of those affected by humanitarian crisis. The global humanitarian system is further overstretched by the increased vulnerability and growing humanitarian needs because of political persecution and civil unrest, landslides, floods and drought. Given the limited availability of additional funds from donors in the developed world,

there is recognition that more must be done to draw on the latent skills of local and national organizations.

4.2 Change in nature of emergencies

As restrictions in humanitarian access increase, the prevailing model by which international organizations implement aid projects using local actors and civil society organizations as contractors rather than partners, is becoming less possible. As such agencies explore innovative ways of delivery through partnerships or profiling local actors.

4.3 Increased humanitarian coordination is leading to greater accountability

Many International Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are starting to critically reflect on whether they are doing enough to promote localization. Groups like the Start Network and International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) have created platforms for agencies to challenge each other and hold one another to account; whilst movements like the Charter for Change (C4C) challenge agencies to live up to their commitments. These groups have been joined and supported by 'southern' groups, such as the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) that are demanding to be heard and allowed to take part in and lead humanitarian responses.

4.4 The Charter for Change (C4C)⁷

has 8 commitments which were to be implemented by May 2018 i.e. INGOs should allocate at least 20 per cent of their humanitarian funding to national NGOs; publish the amount/percentage of funding passed to National NGOs; reaffirm principles of partnership; address and prevent negative impact of recruiting national NGO staff during emergencies; address subcontracting and ensure equality in decision-making; emphasize the importance of national actors to donors; and provide a robust organisational support and capacity building; and promote the role of local actors to media and the public. This provides the local actors with a more bargaining power.

4.5 Grand Bargain an agreement between the biggest donors and humanitarian aid organizations aims to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action⁸. Under Commitment 2 of the Grand Bargain, governments, international humanitarian agencies and donors have committed to providing more support and funding tools for local and national responders. They committed to making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary recognizing that international humanitarian actors play a vital role particularly in situations of armed conflict and that they will engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities.

4.6 The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)

There is a growing consensus that humanitarian action needs to be more locally rooted. The CRRF process in Uganda offers a unique opportunity to foster new ways of working in line with Grand Bargain commitments as it clearly outlines the principles of implementation, which

include among others; the increased role of national responders to the extent possible, leveraging comparative advantages of a diverse range of actors to work across the humanitarian/development nexus towards collective outcomes, and engaging and empowering the affected populations (refugees and local host community) to ensure a response capacity-based development approach from the start.

In the CRRF, partnership is one of the key principles fronted and this entails working with all key humanitarian stakeholders including Government, Development Partners, Civil Society and the local community. Its Development Partners Working Group and the Steering Committee co-opted Civil Society representation from the Humanitarian Platform for local and national organizations, currently represented by the Uganda National NGO Forum.

4.7 Clear policies and strategies for humanitarian action by the Ugandan Government

The Government of Uganda and the Office of the Prime Minister, Departments for Refugees and Disasters have been constantly engaging several agencies on the need to strengthen the capacities of local and national organisations in Uganda's humanitarian response. The Uganda refugee policy clearly stipulates the need for international agencies to develop and strengthen the capacities of local and national organisations through trainings.

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in recognition of Uganda's firm commitment to peace and security in the region and the protracted nature of displacement, the Government of Uganda took a bold decision to include refugee management and protection within its own domestic mid-term planning framework, namely the second National Development Plan (2015-20).

4.8 Responsiveness of the UN agencies and International NGOs

The UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF are promoting the principle of partnership by involving some of the local actors at the early stages of emergency preparedness in mapping emergency capacities, identifying potential gaps and ensuring support to build and strengthen local capacities for emergency response. The International NGOs in Uganda have been and are still investing in joint implementation or monitoring and coordination of response work supporting refugee settlements and host communities through working in consortia and or partnership with local and national NGOs. Such consortium approaches include the EU Trust Fund being implemented in consortium with at least one local organization and the Country Directors Working Group for

⁷ The C4C is signed by 29 INGOs and endorsed by over 130 national NGOs. See www.charter-4change.org

⁸ <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861>

Refugees has been continuously discussing potentials of how to effectively engage local and national actors into the Refugee response in Uganda.

5. Recommendations

For local and national organisations to address issues that hinder them from building the humanitarian response capacity, there is not only need for concerted efforts from different stakeholders such as the Government and International Agencies but also for local and national organizations to commit to addressing their binding constraints.

5.1 What We as Local and National Humanitarian Organisations in Uganda Commit to do

- I. To work on our leadership and governance structures to ensure that we have clear systems and policies that guide our operations and programming. This might entail reflecting on the national and international requirements and standards within our institutions, so that we become more legitimate and credible.
- II. To self-regulate ourselves through the established Quality Assurance Mechanism that members of the platform are trying to adhere to by applying to be QuAM certified. The process we undergo will enable us to have acceptable systems and structures in place.
- III. To strengthen the capacity of our human resource and to adhere to the agreed upon humanitarian standards while delivering humanitarian work.
- IV. To be transparent and accountable to humanitarian stakeholders at community, district, national level; our strategic and development partners in the humanitarian sector. We shall also develop financial management systems that adhere to national and international standards.
- V. To strengthen our coordination mechanisms at all levels. While the Humanitarian platform for local and national organisations in Uganda has been established, there is need for it to be more robust, generate a collective voice for influencing the humanitarian agenda, link it to interventions with other humanitarian fora as well as support the strengthening of district or sub regional humanitarian related platforms.
- VI. To strengthen the learning agenda through the thematic working group on knowledge management under the platform. So far, the Platform has designed learning events as a starting intervention. This will be supported

by a robust communication and documentation strategy to support the learnings and information sharing.

- VII. To build and nurture partnerships with humanitarian stakeholders including Government, United Nations agencies, International NGOs and Private Sector to ensure that the humanitarian system is responsive to those in need.

5.2 Recommendations for International Agencies

As the local and national humanitarian actors, we recommend that International Agencies i.e. INGOs and UN agencies;

- I. Implement the Charter for Change and Grand Bargain Commitments
International agencies and the International NGOs need to ensure implementation of the commitments that they signed to such as the Charter for Change and Grand Bargain are realized. Such commitments include the use of their global influence in support of strengthening the role and leadership of local and national organisations.
- II. Address Funding Constraints
There is need to promote the right kind of funding, under the right kind of conditions and partnership models, pushing for reforms of existing funding requirements and mechanisms to enable local and national organisations better access direct and indirect funding. There is need to move away from sub-contracting to partnership led approach where aspects of multi-year, unearmarked and sufficient overheads to support sustainable capacity might be considered. International agencies should explore funding of consortiums as one way of reducing risks and enabling smaller organisations to have an opportunity for funding given that they might possess unique skills which are critical in the humanitarian system.
- III. Address Capacity Gaps
Strengthen the capacity of local and national organisations and this could be through establishment of a capacity building fund, secondments, trainings, mentoring and coaching.

5.3 Recommendations for the Government of Uganda/Office of the Prime Minister

- i. The Government of Uganda needs to strengthen and or provide space for participation of the local and national organisations in its coordination and decision-making platforms at both national and district level such as the Inter-Agency Coordination Committees, CRRF Steering Committee, and Inter district meetings among others.
- ii. The Government to provide a favorable and conducive environment that supports local and national organisations to actively participate in humanitarian response in Uganda. This could be through policies and regulations that can bind international agencies to deliberately partner with local organizations while delivering humanitarian response in Uganda.
- iii. Develop a monitoring framework to track progress of humanitarian stakeholders in supporting local and national organizations to play a more active role in the humanitarian system. It will also act as a check for the local and national organizations on how they are strengthening their internal systems to suit the new or adapted changes in the humanitarian architecture.
- iv. The government of Uganda particularly the Office of the Prime Minister to influence international agencies to implement the various commitments they signed to such as the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change and discussions from the World Humanitarian Summit.

5.4 What the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations intends to do

As the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations in Uganda, we intend to build humanitarian response capacity for local and national organisations through;

- i. Promoting and strengthening information sharing, learning and knowledge management among the local organisations and with other humanitarian stake holders for better humanitarian preparedness and response.
- ii. Strengthening the institutional and technical capacities of local and national organizations to effectively deliver and influence the humanitarian agenda.
- iii. Strengthening coordination within local and national organizations and enhance engagement and dialogue with other humanitarian actors.
- iv. Providing space and ensuring that local and national organizations act as a collective voice to influence the humanitarian agenda at national, regional and global levels.
- v. Promoting of partnerships and collaborations between the Platform members and other humanitarian stakeholders

Conclusion

The question is not about which approach is affecting us in humanitarian response. Complementarity amongst actors and operational approaches is a necessity if we as local and national organisations are to address the issues affecting us in the humanitarian response and utilize the opportunities available. We must internally reflect on how to be more proactive, address some of the challenges that are within our full control such as the issue of leadership. Government needs to act as a catalyst and a middleman between the local and the national organisations and other humanitarian actors. International agencies need to deliberately reflect on how to deliver the humanitarian system in an effective way through local actions.

This might require a strong commitment and a transformational change process where key stakeholders within the country (UNHCR, INGO's, UN agencies) must buy-in, sign off and participate in the full process and ensure that they support local and national organisations to define and implement their path for change towards promotion of humanitarian response capacity.

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