

# HPG

Humanitarian  
Policy Group

## Localising humanitarianism: improving effectiveness through inclusive action

Steven A. Zyck with Hanna B. Krebs

### Background and acknowledgments

This paper was written by Steven A. Zyck of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), with inputs from Hanna B. Krebs. It is one of three papers commissioned by the British Red Cross on behalf of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Task Force on the World Humanitarian Summit. These papers draw upon Movement policies, practices and perspectives to provide reflections on key thematic issues of relevance to the World Humanitarian Summit. While informed by the work of the Movement, the papers

\* The development of this paper was informed by consultations with a Reference Group of Task Force members. The Reference Group was chaired by Samuel Carpenter, British Red Cross, and comprised Paulo Cavaleri, IFRC; Charles-Antoine Hofmann, IFRC, seconded to the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat; Dr. James Kisia, Kenya Red Cross; and Lai-Ling Lee, Canadian Red Cross. Additional inputs and comments were gratefully received from Simon Eccleshall, David Fisher, Marwan Jilani and Anne Christensen of the IFRC; Alexander Matheou and Sorcha O'Callaghan of the British Red Cross; and Eva Svoboda of HPG. This project was also supported by Bethan Mathias from the British Red Cross.

have been written by HPG and thus do not constitute official policy of the Movement.\*

### Key messages

- While contributing to humanitarian action in immense ways, national/state institutions and local organisations have often been kept at arm's length by the international humanitarian community.
- Discussions of 'nationalisation' and 'localisation' have often revolved around institutional politics and interests, though it is clear that crisis-affected people will be better served if the humanitarian community draws upon all available actors depending on their comparative advantages and complementarities in different contexts.
- The unique status and modus operandi of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including how it brings together the best of local, national and international humanitarian action in a single network, may offer some relevant good practice for the consideration of the humanitarian community.

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- This paper outlines a number of key recommendations for overcoming the institutional and practical challenges involved, from setting targets for international funding of national and local actors to institutional development within state structures and national NGOs. Responsibility for moving this issue from rhetoric to reality ultimately falls on all involved – the international community, states and local actors.

## Introduction

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 provides a crucial opportunity to assess the position of national and local actors, including states and their national disaster management agencies, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (hereafter ‘National Societies’) and national non-governmental organisations, within the humanitarian community.<sup>1</sup> While ‘localisation’ is not one of the four themes of the Summit, it is important to each of them: humanitarian effectiveness, reducing vulnerability and managing risk, serving the needs of people in conflict and transformation through innovation. A more locally-rooted humanitarian community, one that leverages the responsibilities and capacities of states, civil society and affected communities, supported by international actors, is one which will be more effective in responding to and mitigating the risks of crises.

This paper discusses the role of national and local actors – specifically government institutions, National Societies and national NGOs – in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people. It begins by outlining the legal and institutional basis for national and local humanitarian action, before highlighting the potential comparative advantages of local, national and international stakeholders in the humanitarian community, and asking whether their complementarities are being harnessed effectively at present. The paper concludes by outlining some of the obstacles to the greater and more effective participation of national and local actors in humanitarian preparedness and response, before presenting a series of recommendations for overcoming them.

<sup>1</sup> By national and local actors we also refer to community-based organisations, businesses, industry associations, academic and research entities, religious institutions and others. However, the focus of this paper is on government institutions, National Societies and national NGOs.

The propositions and recommendations below are based on a review of the relevant literature, previous field research<sup>2</sup> and consultations with members of the Reference Group and others. The paper also draws on a January 2015 event in London on promoting national and local humanitarian action organised by the British Red Cross and the Humanitarian Policy Group.<sup>3</sup>

## National and local actors: comparative advantages and complementarities

State and national institutions and local organisations have significant and increasing capacities to manage the risk and impact of humanitarian crises in their countries.

In addition, the responsibility of state and national institutions has long been recognised under international law. UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 affirmed the right and responsibility of each state ‘to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory’. It also outlined the affected state’s ‘primary role’ in ‘the initiation, organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory’ – a role which may require calling for international assistance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This refers to separate research projects undertaken by the authors on the role of ‘new’ and local actors in humanitarian action, including regional organisations’ humanitarian work in Southeast Asia and Somalia, the role of the private sector in humanitarian action in Jordan, Kenya, Indonesia and Haiti, an evaluation of the UK response to Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines and several projects related to humanitarian response in Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> Summary Note: Promoting National and Local Humanitarian Action, World Humanitarian Summit – Conversations that Matter Series’, 27 January 2015, British Red Cross and HPG.

<sup>4</sup> That is, in many cases the magnitude and duration of an emergency may be beyond the capacity of many affected states, and in this context the affected state has the duty to seek international assistance. 30th International Conference 2007: Resolution 4 set out: (1) Affected States have the primary responsibility to ensure disaster risk reduction, relief and recovery assistance in their territory. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, and domestic civil society actors play a key supporting role at the domestic level; (2) If an affected State determines that a disaster situation exceeds national coping capacities, it should seek international and/or regional assistance to address the needs of affected persons; (3) Affected States have the sovereign right to coordinate, regulate and monitor disaster relief and recovery assistance provided by assisting actors on their territory, consistent with international law. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/resolution/30-international-conference-resolution-4-2007.htm>

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The 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent also reaffirmed ‘the primary responsibility of States and their respective public authorities to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable persons on their respective territories and that the primary purpose of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field is to supplement them in the fulfilment of this responsibility’.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, more than two decades ago *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* stated that adherents ‘will work through local [non-governmental humanitarian agencies] as partners in planning and implementation’ (Code of Conduct, 1994: 4).

In 2003 the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative emphasised the need to ‘[s]trengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners’ (GHD, 2003). Successive evaluations have likewise emphasised the need for the humanitarian community to support – and not undermine – the work of local actors (see e.g. Scheper, Parakrama and Patel, 2006; Grunewald and Binder, 2010). UN officials, NGOs and others have acknowledged the importance of local actors, such as national NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and others, in lessons learnt papers (see Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti, 2013).

#### *Comparative advantages*

Local, national and international actors each offer comparative advantages and have specific responsibilities that apply to varying extents under different conditions and in different contexts. The question is not ‘who do we need more’ or ‘what type of actor is best’; rather, humanitarian actors – including national authorities, donors, intergovernmental entities and implementing agencies – must consider what arrangement of complementary actors is best suited

to the context in question.<sup>6</sup> This fact has given rise to discussions of complementarity and the need to develop responses in which different stakeholders can take on separate but inter-linked roles without extensive need for renegotiating arrangements each time a crisis strikes.

Local actors such as National Societies and national NGOs are crucial to humanitarian action and are commonly among the first responders to sudden-onset disasters (ICVA, 2014). Their ability to respond in a timely manner results, in no small part, from the fact that local actors are often part of the affected population, providing built-in opportunities for local participation and contextually-relevant assistance. Given that the majority of disasters are relatively small scale and do not require international assistance, local actors often lead the humanitarian response alongside subnational and national government entities and others (Voss and Wagner, 2010). Being ‘local’, they also often have a deeper understanding of histories, cultures and languages than outsiders. This contextual knowledge increases the likelihood that assistance will be attuned to local priorities (Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti, 2013), although ethnic proximity, socio-political affiliation or local pressure on some local actors may sometimes affect the impartial delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Local actors may sidestep at least some of the acceptance and consent-related challenges attached to international aid agencies, which may find themselves associated (or perceived as such) with political or security agendas by virtue of where their funding originates. That is, local actors may be perceived as more neutral and impartial in *certain cases*, which may give them access to locations and affected communities governmental or international actors cannot reach. For instance, local NGOs were able to provide locally-procured assistance to Kachin IDPs in Myanmar in 2011–12 while the UN was still attempting to negotiate access to this population with the government (Jaquet and O’Loughlin, 2012).

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5 30th International Conference 2007: Resolution 2, ‘Specific nature of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in action and partnerships and the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, available at <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/resolution/30-international-conference-resolution-2-2007.htm>.

6 These variations include factors such as: (i) the type of crisis; (ii) the extent of a crisis and its resultant damage; (iii) the frequency of humanitarian crises in an area; (iv) the type of humanitarian response needed (including the balance between protection and aid provision); (v) the level of capability and resources within a given state and society; and (vi) the level of cohesion between the state and the citizenry and between different groups of citizens. The following discussion, while not necessarily able to account for all of these contextual variants, identifies some of the key comparative advantages of local, national and international actors.

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## BOX 1: COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

National Societies have distinct comparative advantages that straddle the local-national-international spectrum. As parts of an international Movement, one of the Fundamental Principles of which is universality, they are internationally engaged and have access to global resources, cooperation and support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and their sister National Societies. National Societies have a special relationship with national institutions: National Societies are established by recognition of the State on the basis of the Geneva Conventions and national legislation – and serve as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field. Yet, their extensive networks of volunteers are crucial in embedding National Societies within communities and rendering them highly local. This unique position means that a National Society has a range of different relationships which may in some contexts be useful in facilitating access and providing assistance and protection in conflict-affected areas or, under other circumstances, in providing assistance in close cooperation with the government.

National actors, primarily state institutions, have an acknowledged responsibility to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises in their own countries (IFRC, 2011; ALNAP, 2010), and increasingly have professional disaster management institutions and frameworks in place which allow them to provide assistance through specialised agencies, line ministries, military and civil defence units and other public organs (Harkey, 2014). This range of tools and the sheer size and geographical coverage of government institutions in many countries mean that they are potentially able to deliver timely, large-scale disaster response informed by an understanding of local cultures and languages. Even where states are not directly delivering humanitarian action, governments increasingly have the ability to coordinate the activities of international NGOs and UN agencies – as is their legal prerogative<sup>7</sup> – whether independently

or in partnership with others.<sup>8</sup> In the Philippines the government co-leads the clusters, and in Lebanon the state co-chairs each of the sectorial coordination structures established to oversee the response to the Syrian refugee crisis. States may also help to ensure a smooth and timely transition from emergency relief to recovery and development. It is important to recognise, however, that depending on the context, their capacities and interests, states play different but complementary roles in humanitarian action. In certain situations states are parties to the conflict and their actions may contribute to humanitarian needs and/or may create barriers to the provision of principled humanitarian protection and assistance.

For their part, international humanitarian actors, including UN agencies, international NGOs, donor agencies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, have the ability to respond to crises on a very large scale, and can have the financial stability required to provide long-term support. This gives them advantages when it comes to dealing with donors, national governments and others. Large international agencies also have access to economies of scale and an ability to negotiate rates for materials and services that would not be available to smaller customers (DFID, 2012). Some international actors, particularly those within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, may also have advantages in *certain* conflict settings, where they may be perceived (depending on the nature of the conflict) as being separate from any domestic political, ethnic, religious or military faction, facilitating access and proximity to the affected population.<sup>9</sup> Such apolitical humanitarian action can be further strengthened by the deployment of a range of nationalities as staff of international agencies, reflecting an international approach and helping to mitigate accusations of Western bias. International aid agencies may also be better able than local actors to engage with sensitive protection issues. The ICRC, for example, thanks to its neutral and impartial approach to humanitarian action and unique mandate under IHL, has been able

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7 For a discussion of the tensions between states' concerns over sovereignty and humanitarian actors, see Kahn and Cunningham (2013).

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8 Coordination of the Movement's response is undertaken internally. In terms of national governmental coordination of humanitarian action, this does not necessarily apply to states which have limited resources or capabilities – or which are facing severe limits as a result of conflicts or other crises.

9 Such an observation is noted in the literature and was referred to by several interviewees. However, this highly qualified statement of course does not indicate that international actors are in all cases perceived as being neutral and impartial.

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to demonstrate a comparative advantage working in very polarized situations and monitoring conditions of detention and protecting civilians in armed conflict.

### *Capitalising on complementarities?*

Despite recognition of the respective strengths and comparative advantages of local, national and international actors, there is a widespread perception that the appropriate balance between them has yet to be struck. National NGOs, for instance, receive only a tiny portion – estimated at 1.6% according to Financial Tracking Service (FTS) data – of international humanitarian funding (GHA, 2014). Local NGO representatives describe being excluded from coordination meetings and funding opportunities, sometimes as a result of formal policies or through informal factors such as the location and language of meetings and documents. Where local aid agencies are drawn upon, it is often as sub-contractors for international NGOs (Baker et al., 2013). The middleman role played by international NGOs in such instances, while offering some advantages, often comes at significant cost to the leadership, sustainability and capacities of local actors, and can draw resources from an already under-resourced humanitarian community.

Despite this imbalance in the international humanitarian architecture, local organisations are delivering a significant level of assistance in many of today's most challenging and violent crises. This trend has been driven by a range of factors, including national governments' and armed groups' concerns about international actors, and aid agencies' own strict security management policies and anti-terrorism regulations, which impede international NGOs from getting directly involved in implementation (Collinson and Duffield, 2013; Metcalfe-Hough, Keatinge and Pantuliano, 2015). There are also concerns that local actors are being encouraged to provide assistance in highly insecure areas, but without a corresponding investment by the international community in their capacity to mitigate the threats and risks involved. Similar concerns have been raised as local aid workers and volunteers –working with local organisations with scarce funding and opportunities for infectious disease

training, logistics and institutional support – formed a crucial component of the response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

National state structures are likewise being under-utilised and ignored. In the Philippines, which has a strong national disaster management architecture, officials spoke of being marginalised by the size of the humanitarian response after Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013. Repeated crises show that national government structures are often bypassed in favour of UN-based approaches to coordination such as the Cluster System. One recent review of 29 UN-led Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) found that roughly two-thirds included donor personnel, but only one included national government representatives.<sup>10</sup> Many models of coordination involve governments joining temporary international structures such as clusters, rather than international aid agencies joining government-led coordination mechanisms, which are at times poorly defined and under-resourced.

The limited role played by some states in humanitarian action owes in part to their modest investment in institutions and capacities to coordinate international natural disaster response. Over a dozen years of research and consultations by the IFRC found that few countries had comprehensive procedures and institutional mechanisms in place for handling international assistance.<sup>11</sup> To assist states to develop these rules the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent adopted the 'Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance' (known as the IDRL Guidelines) in 2007.<sup>12</sup> While 18 countries have adopted new laws or rules based on the IDRL Guidelines, further efforts could be made to improve preparedness among more states. Without clear rules, it is unlikely that certain governments will be ready to lead in future disasters.

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10 This statistic was cited at the London consultation on promoting national and local humanitarian action organised by the British Red Cross and HPG in London and was reiterated by speakers at the 2015 ALNAP Annual Meeting in Berlin.

11 For further information on the IFRC Disaster Law programme and its research and consultation activities, since its formation in 2001, on legal preparedness for international assistance, see <http://www.ifrc.org/what-we-do/disaster-law/>.

12 In 2008 the UN General Assembly adopted three resolutions (Res. 63/139, 63/141 and 63/137) encouraging states to make use of the IDRL Guidelines.

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5 For example in Pakistan, as part of a conference on humanitarian action in the light of Sharia and international humanitarian law: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/pakistan-conference-humanitarian-action-light-sharia-and-international-humanitarian-law>.



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## Obstacles to greater national and local humanitarian action

Despite the improvement in effectiveness more inclusive humanitarian action can bring, national and local humanitarian action faces obstacles and dilemmas. These obstacles help to explain why several decades' worth of discussions around enhancing national and local humanitarian action has yielded less-than-expected results. In many cases these obstacles and dilemmas derive from a combination of factors, many originating in the international aid architecture, which has at times been reluctant to engage national and local actors, distribute resources more widely or genuinely build national and local capacity.<sup>13</sup> However, all of the issues noted below will require international, national and local initiative to resolve or mitigate.

*Financing a more inclusive humanitarian community.* The scale of international humanitarian assistance has risen dramatically in recent years. In 2000, the FTS recorded \$1.77 billion in international humanitarian assistance; this amount increased to nearly \$8bn in 2007 and, in 2014, was just shy of \$21bn.<sup>14</sup> In other words, international humanitarian assistance (excluding all other forms of local aid) has increased by 1,100% in 14 years. This skews the support towards international actors as the growth has led many donors to agree a smaller number of large-value contracts with trusted agencies, and as such they are unlikely to be in a position to provide assistance to an ever-increasing number of smaller organisations.<sup>15</sup> Nor is it clear that donor agencies are willing to take the risk of providing greater amounts of humanitarian assistance directly to states in crisis-affected countries, many of which face challenges related to accountability and capacity.

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13 As several speakers at the January 2015 British Red Cross and HPG event on national and local humanitarian action noted, international aid agencies are under pressure to maintain or grow funding levels – a fact which may make them hesitant to shift a large portion of humanitarian work and resources to national and local actors.

14 See the OCHA-operated FTS at <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-globalOverview&Year=2014> (accessed 29 January 2015).

15 As discussed later in this paper, these larger contracts have resulted in increasingly multi-layered subcontracting processes that unnecessarily remove resources from the aid community before funding reaches the ultimate implementing agency (often a national NGO) and affected communities.

## BOX 2: MANAGING RISKS TO THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES: COMPLEMENTARITY IN SOMALIA

Operating in highly insecure areas, the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) faced the risk that its aid could be captured by armed groups and that, as a result, the Society's impartiality and neutrality could be called into question by certain stakeholders (O'Callaghan and Backhurst, 2013). To mitigate this risk, the SRCS limited its involvement in the distribution of relief items in southern and central Somalia and in conflict-affected parts of northern Somalia. These areas were, instead, assisted by the ICRC, which was considered less vulnerable to accusations of partiality. This general strategy was further refined so that, in some instances, the ICRC decided on contentious issues such as the placement of water points, with the SRCS then stepping in to provide ongoing support (*ibid.*). This combination of local and international actors suggests the varied approaches that can be adopted to leverage the comparative advantages of different types of actors depending on the on-the-ground realities.

*Ensuring localisation safeguards protection and humanitarian principles.* As previously noted, several international humanitarian agencies play a specific role in protection, particularly in the context of armed conflicts, in a manner that some local organisations may not be in a position to undertake legally or politically. The ICRC has a mandate under international law to act in the event of international armed conflict, and a right of initiative under Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions to act in the event of non-international armed conflict. Notwithstanding the protection roles some local actors play in many contexts, concerns have been raised that the localisation agenda could result in reduced attention to protection and humanitarian principles.<sup>16</sup> While this is not necessarily the case for National Societies, which cooperate closely with the ICRC and IFRC in the delivery of their humanitarian mission, this concern is pertinent to government institutions, which are themselves often parties to conflicts which generate humanitarian emergencies (Harvey, 2013;

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16 This paper recognises the difference between the four most commonly accepted humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) and the additional three principles (voluntary service, unity and universality) included in the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013). Likewise, national NGOs may have affiliations with particular factions which could complicate their ability to contribute to principled humanitarian action.

*Managing risks to the safety and security of local staff and volunteers in insecure environments.* Attacks on aid workers are increasing, affecting national NGO staff and National Societies, as well as international staff. The increasing shift to national and local actors in challenging security environments can, at times, put them in untenable positions and expose them to extreme risk. While recognising that these actors are often present before, during and after conflict, this shift can present genuine ethical issues. A stronger push for localisation – before safeguards are put in place – could have the result of providing incentives for unprepared local aid groups to become involved in some of the most dangerous settings where the risks are perceived as too high for many international actors and in locations where they are vulnerable to other risks (e.g. infectious diseases such as Ebola). Hence, this issue will require greater attention, and structures and systems should be put in place among all those involved in humanitarian action. The ICRC's (2013) 'Safer Access' materials<sup>17</sup> – which can assist national actors to have an appropriate legal base, systems and approaches to respond in situations of conflict – are one crucial step in this direction.

## Recommendations

The issues noted above should be approached not as challenges but instead as opportunities to build a more inclusive humanitarian architecture that is better able to support affected communities. The following are a number of suggested recommendations for achieving this goal. They build on the discussion above and a January 2015 workshop organised by

the British Red Cross and the Humanitarian Policy Group – with inputs from a wide variety of aid agencies and local organisations – in London. It will be useful for all humanitarian actors to consider these and other suggestions as they prepare to engage with the localisation agenda in the run-up to the WHS in 2016.

Before turning to the individual recommendations, one issue merits action by all humanitarian stakeholders: the development of an evidence base on the role of national, local and international actors in humanitarian action. In order to better leverage national and local capacities, all stakeholders need to better understand the varied contributions of local, national and international actors. This will require the transparent reporting of information by national governments, donors, intergovernmental organisations and others on what they are doing and what levels of resources<sup>18</sup> and capabilities they can bring to bear when responding to crises. Evidence is required to identify complementarities to inform broader developments within the humanitarian community. The voices and perspectives of affected communities must be brought more fully into this discussion.

### *For local actors*

- Engage without discrimination all communities affected in managing the risk and impact of humanitarian crises, appropriately leveraging the unique position that proximity with communities affords.
- Capitalise on National Societies' distinct roles and comparative advantages, ensuring complementarity with those of international actors. As previously noted, National Societies combine the best of local humanitarian action with international support and a principled approach.
- Strengthen operational security management systems and introduce approaches rooted in international good practice for operating in insecure environments; these efforts could build on the aforementioned ICRC 'Safer Access' materials.
- As local organisations are there before, during and after crises, they should receive increased support

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<sup>17</sup> Safer Access is an initiative in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to build upon members', particularly National Societies', experience in operating in challenging environments in order 'to increase acceptance and security in order to increase access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions'. Safer Access resulted in a series of practical resources for humanitarian actors in and outside of the Movement to draw upon. These revolve around eight core elements: (i) context and risk assessment, (ii) legal and policy base, (iii) acceptance of the organization, (iv) acceptance of the individual, (v) identification, (vi) internal communication and coordination, (vii) external communication and coordination and (viii) operational security risk management.

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<sup>18</sup> At even the most basic level, it is difficult to identify – whether from UN databases or elsewhere – how much international assistance ultimately goes to government institutions, national NGOs and other local actors, whether directly or through subcontracting arrangements (CAFOD, 2013).

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to develop the clear and robust policies and systems necessary to deliver principles-based humanitarian action with strong financial accountability.

*For national actors*

- Redouble preparedness efforts – in terms of both capabilities and regulatory frameworks (e.g. the IDRL Guidelines) – to ensure a smooth assumption of humanitarian coordination responsibilities. State institutions have the mandate to coordinate and regulate humanitarian activities within their borders and must put in place basic rules, procedures and mechanisms for effective disaster response in line with the IDRL Guidelines.
- Dedicate locally-mobilised revenues for national disaster management institutions and programmes. By adequately resourcing domestic disaster management institutions and avoiding excessive financial reliance on international donors, national governments will be poised to more fully steer humanitarian action within their territories.
- Recognise when national actors have limited capacities and resources and where further support could be provided by national or international actors.

*For international actors*

- Recognise where, as in certain conflict situations, international actors may have a particular comparative advantage or complementary role.
- Set targets for financing national and local actors, and establish a focal point to monitor and publish results. Separate targets for funding national and local actors should be set, and an independent secretariat should be appointed to monitor and publicly report donor performance against these targets on an annual basis.
- Discourage wasteful subcontracting arrangements by developing mechanisms for channelling support directly to national and local actors. The exact mechanisms and safeguards needed to do this have not specifically been reviewed in this process, but there appear to be some benefits when donors or UN agencies pre-approve local partners by assessing their capabilities and accountabilities before rather than after a crisis strikes.
- Introduce institutional support and technical assistance programmes that reward results. At present so-called ‘capacity-building’ activities targeting national and local actors have been under-financed and of questionable effectiveness.

Further research on what works is needed, and new programmes to build institutional and individual capabilities should be well funded, with financing tied to specific, impact-oriented targets rather than outputs and activities.

- Building upon initiatives such as ‘Future Humanitarian Financing’,<sup>19</sup> more fully involve the private sector in developing new and inclusive approaches to humanitarian funding. Models which allow greater attention to risk forecasting, preparedness and rapid response appear particularly worthy of exploration.
- Begin a transparent dialogue on complementarities and solidarity as well as risks and concerns. International NGOs, UN agencies and others are concerned about losing access to funding as a result of increasing emphasis on national and local actors (and regional organisations and the private sector). This is a real risk given that humanitarian financing is stabilising after a period of rapid growth – while needs continue to rise. But the solution is not to undermine support to national and local actors. The solution is to acknowledge – among senior leaders, country directors, boards of directors and others – that any resultant decline in individual organisations’ funding is not necessarily to be taken as a sign of under-performance.

In addition to these pragmatic recommendations, more fully transformative approaches rooted in new technologies should continue to be pursued. Distributed networks and the sharing economy allow small-scale actors to pool their capabilities via online platforms and provide services on a massive scale and in accordance with a set of pre-determined rules. There is reason to believe that such approaches could be applied to national NGOs, CBOs, local government offices, small and medium-sized businesses and other stakeholders – enabling them to provide humanitarian assistance across distributed, complementary networks. Such blue-sky thinking is needed alongside the more practical recommendations noted above. The localisation agenda is potentially revolutionary for the humanitarian community and those affected by crises, and their promise should not be lost. The goal must remain transformation, not homogenisation.

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<sup>19</sup> See FHF (2014), <http://futurehumanitarianfinancing.org/visioning-the-future/cross-sectoral-dialogues/dialogue-reports/london-summary/>.



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