

Localization of Protection Roundtable Summary Report

The IRC and InterAction hosted a roundtable on 24 September 2018 in Washington to discuss localization in protection coordination mechanisms as well as at the community level. The roundtable intended to stimulate rich and textured discussions across the protection sector, gathering local actors from Africa, Asia, America and the Middle-East and international actors to share their experience, views and recommendations. The roundtable was attended by 40 participants (17 people attended this event in person and 23 joined online) representing national and international NGOs, UN agencies and donors.

Localization of Protection

The Humanitarian Advisory Group, the Humanitarian Policy Group and the Australian Red Cross opened the roundtable with a presentation about their research project exploring the relationship between localization and protection in natural disaster responses in the Pacific context¹. The lead author of the initial report provided an analysis of existing knowledge and literature on this issue, in particular the challenges and opportunities for effective protection in locally-led response. The presentation helped unpack the conceptual confusion existing around localization and protection and, in particular, questions such as which actors are best placed to provide protection and how international protection mechanisms can complement, rather than undermine, existing local initiatives. While exploring the different dimensions of local protection, the importance of understanding the context, the role of traditional practices and structures, and the legal framework were emphasized. Key issues in relation to increased localized response revolve around the potential positive and negative protection outcomes that could arise, the differing concepts of protection between international and national actors, the different prioritization and perspectives, as well as the impact of multiple mandates and gender, cultural norms and biases might have on protection outcomes. The question of upholding humanitarian principles and ensuring proper representation and accountability structures for local actors were also discussed.

Localization in Coordination

During the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, aid organizations and donors committed to “support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles”. The first part of the roundtable was framed around this specific commitment, looking at how coordination groups such as global and in-country clusters and sub-clusters can impulse a system-wide shift through their collaboration with local actors. It was highlighted that coordination groups closely work with hundreds of local government and civil society actors and can draw on these networks to improve protection analysis and coordination, document and disseminate lessons learned and encourage good practices on localization to be taken to scale. Coordination groups also lead the development of national humanitarian strategies and can support government and donors decide when and where to invest advocacy, funding, capacity strengthening and other resources.

¹ The report is available online: <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Localisation-and-protection-HPG-HAG-ARC.pdf>. Further research about the relationship between localization and protection is available here: <https://www.odi.org/publications/11171-crossing-boundaries-protecting-civilians-mapping-actors-insights-and-conceptual-spaces>

Encouraging practices

Panelists and participants shared encouraging practices showing that the humanitarian community is gradually moving towards the commitments made on localization through coordination.

The membership of protection coordination groups is composed of a large number of national actors (government counterparts, national and local NGOs) who regularly participate in cluster meetings. Local actors recognize the benefits that the cluster system can bring to their organizations such as being informed about practices and standards, enhancing partnerships, joining a forum for joint advocacy, coordinating and planning a more effective humanitarian response, networking and sharing information and good practices. They also play a pivotal role in conducting protection assessments, collecting data and providing information about protection needs, and delivering protection programming.

The governance structure of humanitarian coordination groups is more and more reflecting the presence of national actors; some of them holding a leadership position in the Humanitarian Country Team, Strategic Advisory Group, or Cluster. The Myanmar HCT has extended its membership to 4 NNGOs and the DRC HCT has also assigned one seat for NNGOs, while discussions are ongoing for a second seat. Similarly, local partners are represented in the SAG of the Protection Cluster and several national partners are co-leading Protection Cluster and Sub-Clusters at the sub-national level (South Sudan, DRC). Finally, the CP AoR has established the first and only global cluster SAG that has national representation and that is chaired by a national actor. This has changed the way the CP AoR works in practice, with more explicit focus on field support and country-level action.

The country-based pooled fund mechanisms are made more accessible allowing for direct funding to be allocated to national NGOs to empower them to operate as an integral part of the humanitarian response and not as sub-contractors of international organizations. In Myanmar, the Humanitarian Response Fund has increased direct funding to local NGOs by 50% in 2017, which results in 23% of its total funding going directly to national NGOs. Similarly, in the DRC, the proportion of funding from the Common Humanitarian Fund going to NNGOs had steadily increased since 2006 reaching a rate of 21.4% in 2016. One seat is also assigned to a NNGO in the evaluation committee of the DRC CHF. Finally, in South Sudan, there has been an increase of national partners featured in the HRP and allocation of funding to NNGOs through the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund has considerably expanded over the past years from 7% in 2013 to 23% in 2017.

Global guidance and support to coordination groups to advance the localization agenda has been provided by the Child Protection AoR and the IRC on behalf of the Global Protection Cluster and the AoRs. The CP AoR produced guidance for coordination groups on how to work with national authorities in conflict settings as well as a guidance document for coordination groups to transition to local co-leadership. Additional tools such as a Cluster Self-Assessment and Tip Sheet for integrating localization in the HNO/HRP processes have been developed and piloted to help Cluster Coordinators think through the involvement of local partners in the cluster system. Lastly, the CP AoR has decentralized its French, Arabic, Spanish and English helpdesks in order to address the language barriers. The helpdesks are housed by local NGOs to ensure contextualized guidance is provided and foster discussions and exchanges of good practices between local actors.

Remaining Challenges

Panelists and participants also pointed out a number of significant barriers preventing local actors to meaningfully participate and influence the cluster system.

The humanitarian eco-system still heavily relies on international surge capacity and remains largely internationally-led. It is generally geared at replacing rather than reinforcing existing coordination mechanisms and local actors feel that international actors are dominating the system. There is no evidence of any coordination group led by a national actor other than a government. Funding is generally stated as a major obstacle, as well as adherence to humanitarian principles. In that context, when looking at advancing the localization commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, there seems to be a misconception of the concept of the localization approach, which is understood as going 100% local. The commitment of “as local as possible and as international as necessary” often needs to be clarified and further explained. Coordination groups are thus best placed to continually assess the right balance between what is as local as possible, as international as necessary.

While the participation of local actors (primarily national NGOs and government) in humanitarian coordination networks has grown over the past years, there is still no presence of smaller local NGOs, community-based organizations, diaspora, or the private sector due to the fact that coordination groups are still predominantly used for sharing information about funding and partnership opportunities. Similarly the engagement of local actors in decision-making processes such as the development of humanitarian strategies or in governance structures remains limited. If local actors significantly contribute to collecting protection data, they feel that they are not involved in the analysis and validation of those data nor in strategic planning processes such as the HNO and HRP. However, decentralized coordination hubs seem to lead to a more open environment for local actors to engage with (e.g. local leadership transition). In addition, the international coordination system is not an enabling environment for local partners (e.g. language barriers, humanitarian jargon/acronyms, complex humanitarian planning processes, high number of meetings to attend). Concrete steps need to be taken and coordination needs to be led by people who will foster a culture of inclusivity within the cluster system.

Capacities of NNGOs to meaningfully engage with the cluster system remains challenging. Most of them don't have unrestricted funding to cover their core costs and lack the resources and longer-term funding that participation in the humanitarian system requires. Local actors accessing pooled-fund mechanisms remain the ‘lucky few’, usually the largest national NGOs already engaged with the cluster system rather than smaller national NGOs and CBOs and competition between international and national actors for accessing funding remains evident. In addition, capacity strengthening efforts have generally focused on technical areas of protection while institutional capacity strengthening remains limited. Supporting the sustainability of the organizations (e.g. financial and administration processes) to ensure the effective participation of local actors in coordination is therefore crucial. Finally in terms of partnership, it was noted that sub-granting remains the main way to deliver protection response. There has been very little evidence of the use of other type of partnership model such as coaching and mentoring, joint-implementation, accompaniment. While most partnership agreements include a risk assessment or partner capacity assessment, there is little evidence of how the international partner is using this help the national partner address some of the recommendations and no examples of where budgets are allocated to support this. It is therefore difficult for local partners to hold their international partner to account.

Recommendations

Panelists and participants recognized the potential system-wide shift that coordination groups represent to advance the localization agenda and highlighted the following points to taken into consideration.

- Train local NGOs for meaningful engagement with coordination groups, fostering a better understanding of the benefits and the processes of coordination. Take practical steps to address the barriers to meaningful participation (such as translation or usage of local language).
- Support national actors to be more engaged in governance structures by providing guidance, orientation, training and funding; supporting local leadership transitioning strategies.
- Give space for local actors to be part of decision-making processes including them in planning of humanitarian strategies; moving away from a system dominated by international actors to a system where local actors can take the lead and mutually share decisions and power.
- Engage diasporas in the humanitarian system and build on their capacities in terms of project design, data analyzes and institutional capacity strengthening.
- Ensure evaluation of any localization approach or research conducted in the sector. Share and replicate best practices and methodologies on localization that have worked and ensure those practices are taken to scale through coordination groups and are anchored in the cluster system.
- Invest in sustained institutional strengthening for local and national organizations to strengthen their coordination capacities, including in the partnership agreement a section to identify priority recommendations that the national partner wants to work on over the course of the partnership.

Localization through Community-Based Approaches

This section of the round table aimed at exploring how community-based protection approaches can be used to achieve the commitments of the Localization Agenda. To do so, three speakers, of which two representing local actors from Haiti and Myanmar, were invited to present their practical experience around community-based protection approaches.

During the first part of the roundtable participants several time referred to affected community as local actors. This shows to which extend humanitarians actors acknowledge the role that affected community play in responding to crisis. However, so far the localization discourse has focused on local actors intended as: national governments, national and sub-national institutions and organizations, local civil societies, regional institutions. Individuals and communities are generally considered as affected population who need to receive aid/assistance, despite studies and evidence from the field prompting an increased recognition of the role of “first responders” that affected communities play.

Especially as far as protection is concerned, women, girls, men and boys directly affected by crisis are more and more considered as key agents of their own protection, ideally together with local authorities, who remain the main actor responsible for protection, but who are sometime unwilling or unable, to guarantee the protection of its population. As a result, affected community need to find their space in the localization discourse and be recognized as part of what is generally called “local actors”.

In that sense, Community-Based Protection (CBP) approaches can be seen as a transformative model to delivering locally-led protection responses with a real shift of power to crisis affected populations. A CBP approach builds on the way an affected community identifies the protection risks to which they are exposed as well as community based protection measures to mitigate those risks. In doing so, the affected community strengthens their capacity to analyze their own environment, to identify causes as well as

relationship between causes and effects and to make decision on the best way to improve their own protection. In a CBP approach, the role of international or national/local organizations is to accompany the affected community to develop the skills needed to ensure their own protection. Therefore, the CBP approach helps shifting the power from international to local resources, without excluding international and/or national actors, who have an important role to play.

However, CBP approaches still present different challenges and opened questions that need to be addressed, such as: How to define a community? What makes a group of people become a community? How can CBP be inclusive, especially where different social norms exists? Are affected communities aware of the role they play or could play in their own protection? Do they want to play this role? Are local authorities and community leaders ready to accept community members as “protection actors”? Are international, national and local actors as well as donors ready and prepared to support this approach, including changes involved in terms of objectives, way of working and timing?

At this stage, the IRC is developing and testing its CBP approach in eight different contexts through eight pilot projects with several local partners, aiming at bring some evidence of how CBP can help affected communities be recognized as key actors in the localization agenda.

Voices from local perspective and experiences

Panelists agreed and reinforced the idea that local actors need to be taken into consideration in order to ensure sustainability and ownership of the approach.

Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly (AFUP), a women led organization operating in Haiti and supported by ActionAid, by sharing their experience clearly showed how a humanitarian response can more easily met communities needs and expectations when it is conceived and led by local actors and local communities. The AFUP also showed how a humanitarian response led by local actors together with affected communities can strongly contribute to mutually empower them; ensuring local actors are prepared and skilled to respond to humanitarian needs and crisis and strengthening affected communities resilience capacity by raising their awareness and voices, strengthening their leadership and ownership, creating incomes opportunities and building networks. AFUP intervention also highlighted women role in the localization agenda, which needs to be more visible and supported. Evidence shows to which extend women can greatly contribute to raise and to strengthen communities’ participation, ownership and accountability. AFUP experience demonstrates how a CBP approach succeed in making affected communities protagonist of their own protection and resilience, taking initiatives and accepting responsibilities such as accountability, resulting in a more sustainable response.

Yaung Chi Thit (YCT), a women led organization operating in the Rakhine State in Myanmar, also brought in their experience with CBP approaches. Although this is a quite new approach for them, their experience concurred with others panelists, especially in terms of changes and benefits that CBP brings to their work as local actors and to affected communities. In this regard, YCT highlighted how CBP approach promotes community engagement setting time and resources for this; strengthens the human right based approach, putting the identification of protection risk and mitigation measures at the center of the action; provides a better analysis of the environment, promoting communities perception and prospective; empowers communities in terms of skills and capacities to analyze and respond to protection risks they are exposed to; encourages the participation of different stakeholders at different levels, enhancing each role and responsibilities; and finally strongly contributes to create a more sustainable response.

Recommendations

There is a general interest to see how CBP contributes to making a concrete power shift from international to local actors. Although panelists and participants acknowledged the challenges protection actors still face in applying this approach, they recommended taking into consideration the following points.

- Ensure the existing legal framework in affected communities, including customary law, is known and taken into consideration; enhancing overlapping and similitudes.
- Acknowledge that long time exposure to violence can compromise and destroy social fabrics, resulting in a minimal level of trust between people, which requires time to be rebuilt.
- Adapt the approach to the community existing in a specific space and time, without being rigid in defining what a community should be.
- Ensure there is a shared knowledge and awareness about potential risk the CBP approach could expose communities to in order to find mitigation measures.
- Promote networking between local actors and communities members in order to strengthen their capacity to learn from each other.
- Create the space for the community to take the lead, even if this means for international and national organizations to step down.
- Constantly and professionally build capacity of local actors and communities to take the leadership of the response, including by strengthening their organizational capacity.

Additional information

International agencies, local organizations and donors who participated in this roundtable included ActionAid, Asamblea de Cooperacion por la Paz (ACPP), Catholic International Development Charity (CAFOD), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Center for Civilians in Conflict, Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CP AoR), Danish Red Cross, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, HelpAge, HIAS, InterAction, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Refugee International, Save the Children, Trocaire, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly (Haiti), Centre de Recherche Jurisconsulte (DRC), Convention pour le Bien-Être Social (DRC), Hold the Child (South Sudan), Metta/ Joint Strategic Team (Myanmar), Syrian Society for Social Development (Syria), Voice of the Somali Community (Somalia), Yaung Chi Thit (Myanmar), Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) and Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

For more information about this event, you can consult the [recording](#) and the [panelists' presentations](#).

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