GLOBAL MENTORING INITIATIVE

FROM ECO-SYSTEM TO SELF
Support rather than replace: systems change in the international relief industry

Part II: Operationalising Localisation

Abstract: This is the second in a series of three GMI briefs that, together, provide a comprehensive perspective on the changes required in the interaction between international relief actors and national and local ones. They are an invitation for joint reflection and offer various questions to that effect. This brief explores key factors that shape the degree and nature of internationalisation and localisation in a given context; several core dimensions and cross-cutting issues in the operational interaction between international relief agencies and local/national actors; the questions of risk, trust and value-for-money; and that of power, its responsible use and abuse.

I. CONTEXTUAL DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND LOCALISATION

The historical processes of national/local crisis management followed by an internationalisation and, eventually a relocatisation, vary per context. Among the important influencing factors are: the type of crisis, the prior experience of national actors in dealing with that type of crisis, the strength of prior international presence and its nature, the degree of global media and political attention, the security situation.[i]

The primary actor-groups are the national government, national and local non-governmental actors, and the international actors as visualised in diagram 5. The key shaper of the dynamics between them is the national government. The national government decides what role it plays itself in crisis-management: Does it mainly set a policy and administrative framework, or is it itself a main operational responder? It also decides whether to call for international support and what space to give the international actors. It also sets the space for its own civil society, which can keep it weak or allow it to be vibrant. Whether government-civil society relationships are antagonistic or complementary and collaborative, will be an important factor. A civil society kept weak domestically, is at greater risk of being instrumentalised by international actors.

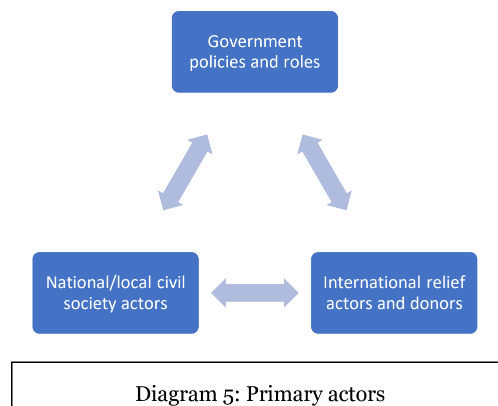


Diagram 5: Primary actors

National government being the key shaper of the situation can look like 'national leadership' hence effective 'localisation'. Not necessarily: A distinction must be made between *political, administrative and substantive leadership*. National governments can invite a comprehensive response from international actors, because politically they want a problem to be an 'international' rather than 'national' one, and because they need the financial support. Many also know that the volume of financial support is often dependent not only on need but also on the number of internationals on the ground. Administrative leadership, which can be guided by a political policy, occurs when government officials insist on vetting and approving (or not) all specific programme and project proposals. Substantive governmental leadership means that government institutions have significant expertise, financial resources and procedures to be a major player themselves in a crisis response, with national non-governmental actors and possibly international assistance actors in complementary and supporting roles. Only this would count as effective 'localisation'.

As internationalisation and localisation take place in specific contexts, with their own history and political economy, they will follow different trajectories and go at different speeds. This is not an excuse

for international assistance actors to delay and continue with business-as-usual. It only means that a collective localisation strategy, with the deliberate goal to see national and local actors managing protracted and future crises (largely) with their own collective capacities, and international actors in selected supporting and reinforcing roles, needs to be *fit-for-context*.

The issue of 'nexus' approaches (double nexus of development-relief-development, or triple nexus (relief-peace and development) sits at this strategic-contextual level. Grand Bargain commitment 10 speaks to this – and should now be integrated across all commitments. A nexus approach however cannot be a call for 'development finance' to be used for (ever expanding boundaries of) 'humanitarian' action. Rather it should be a call for 'relief actors' to be more self-conscious of where their expertise lies and their role is justified, and where development and peace actors are better qualified and their approaches more appropriate. In many countries, as diverse as Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar, national and local actors, certainly civil society ones, strongly object to the radical disconnect between 'humanitarian' and 'development' and 'peace' work. They see 'humanitarian action' for what it is: a band aid to alleviate symptoms. They know from painful experience that the underlying causes need to be addressed. This makes them multi-mandate organisations, like governments, many UN agencies and most INGOs.[ii]

II. DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF INTERACTION

The seven key dimensions in the operational and contextual encounter and interaction between international and national/local actors responding to a crisis with humanitarian consequences are shown below in diagram 6.

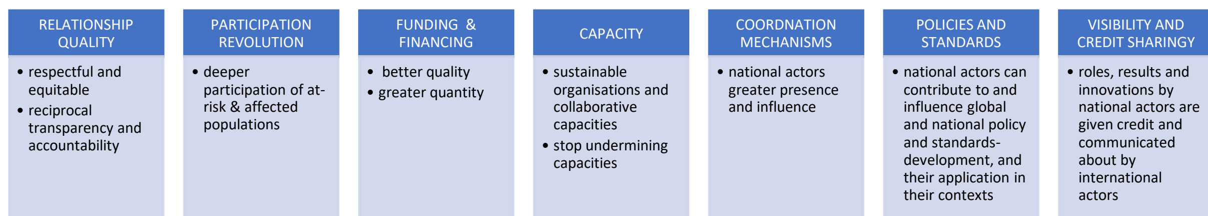


Diagram 6: Seven Dimension Framework

Reading it from left to right, Western style (an Arabic translation would reverse the sequencing), it puts the quality of relation first. Relationship management is as important as project management. Part III of this series examines this in more detail. Many national actors no longer want to be just sub-contractors or even mere 'implementing partners' of someone else's designs and decisions. They want equitable partnerships in which they can be 'decision-making' partners. Others rightfully do not want to be decision-makers (yet) as they realise they have much to learn. But as they learn, roles should change – which too often does not happen. As local actors in the Pacific put it: "*You have strengthened our capacities for years, but there is never a graduation ceremony!*" Not all say they want change: they may stay in prolonged subordination because they have no other options, have lost their own drive, mission and self-confidence and become contract implementers, or when a subordinate role is seen as a better tactic to continue getting contracts. This is not in line with the Grand Bargain commitments of international actors: *"The Grand Bargain is a level playing field where we all meet as equals."*

Equally central is a participation revolution. This 6th commitment of the Grand Bargain recognises that crisis-affected people want to regain a measure of control and decision-making power over their own lives. They also want a say in what is being done on their behalf and for their intended benefit, whether by international or by local actors. "*Nothing for us without us*", as IDPs from Marawi, Mindanao, put it. The commitment encourages openness to community-led crisis-response.[iii] Some international agencies argue that they do just that with direct implementation: they do not need national or local organisations; they directly support the resilience of affected people. Possibly valid in the short-term, this reasoning no longer holds in the medium-term; household 'resilience' and even 'community-support' in many situations are necessary but not enough to deal with serious and prolonged crisis: larger, organised, capacities are also required – as they exist in the aid-providing countries. From our collective learning on 'state building' and 'governance reform' we know that to function well a country

needs strong and capable institutions, governmental and non-governmental. And as we have seen during the COVID-19 response also in Western countries, civil society organisations were vitally important complements to state action and state cash transfers.

Access to finance is critical and comes prior to 'capacity-development'. An organisation regularly on the brink of financial starvation cannot attract and retain resources, financial, human or partners. Research has shown that quality of funding can be more important than quantity: national organisations lose money if only their direct project costs are covered but not core costs; they have to let go of trained staff when they have cash flow problems; they can't invest in accounting and financial management software because very few donors help them buy computers and software; they cannot diversify income sources because they do not have the money for a person to be dedicated to this etc. Grand Bargain commitment 7 invites more multi-year predictable funding. That is another form of quality finance which helps to run more effective programs and encourages investment to strengthen the financial viability of the organisation.

Question: Is criticising local CSOs for 'living from project to project' and not being 'strategic', while we contribute to that condition, like criticising our daily labourers for not having career plan?

The 25% target of the localisation commitment in the Grand Bargain is misconceived in its current formulation. It considers the quantity but is blind to the quality of the finance.[iv] It does not even distinguish between what goes 'through' an national actor and what goes 'to' a national actor.[v] It is perfectly possible to report having passed on 25% of a country response budget to national and local responders, while using (or abusing?) them as cheap labour sub-contractors.

Question: The Grand Bargain calls for a reduction in transaction costs: the intent was to reduce the cost of too many intermediary agencies. In practice, are we reducing the costs of the intermediaries or of the weakest player in the chain: the national / local actor?[vi] If there is truth in the latter, how does this fit with the advocacy, by multi-mandate international organisations, for social justice, fair wages and decent work, and proper labour conditions?

International aid actors have been doing 'capacity-building' of national ones for at least 30 years. Yet globally we continue to hear everywhere that national actors have 'no capacity'. Whose failure is that? For some international agencies, localisation means 'more capacity building'. Why would doing more of the same yield different outcomes?

> *"We cannot solve our problems with the same kind of thinking that created them."* A. Einstein

Key learnings are available yet ignored. Among them:

- Purpose – effectiveness in context: The primary purpose of capacity-development support is not that national actors can meet the (ever changing) requirements of international relief actors. The purpose must be that they can be highly effective, collaboratively, in responding to different types of crises in their contexts, addressing the symptoms but where possible also the underlying drivers.[vii]
- Collective capacities: Collective national capacity consists of a mix of governmental and non-governmental organisations that are institutionally sustainable, able to attract and retain resources, and willing and able to work collaboratively and complementary when a crisis happens. Sectoral connectedness is well understood in development cooperation but not in the relief sector where competition far outweighs collaboration.
- Fragmented supply: Ad hoc, fragmented and uncoordinated, largely bilateral, 'trainings' and 'workshops' supplied by international relief actors, often as stand-alone events, do not add up and do not contribute to that goal. Nor is this cost-effective.
- No sustained impact: Capacity-support disconnected from the financial viability objective will at best have only short-term impact: capacities acquired will get lost. Even after years of presence in a country or a region, the international presence and capacity-building often has not led to national, institutionalised, organisations of reference, with particular areas of expertise (e.g. refugee affairs, international humanitarian law, financial

> *"Many quick impact projects do not add up to more structural, sustained impact."* GMI

management for not-for-profits, innovative ways of fundraising, research and analysis; gender-age-inclusion). Considered over the medium-term then, there is little return on investment in capacity-building. Why do we continue practices of low value-for-money i.e. little sustained impact - in a context of a growing humanitarian financing gap?[viii]

- No OD expertise: Most 'capacity-support' in the relief sector happens without frameworks of and expertise in organisational development (OD).[ix] Doing so in a particular historical, cultural, social and political context, requires additional competencies. Rather than imposing copies[x] of international organisations (whose hierarchical and centralised structures do not fit well with a 'participation revolution', with 'diversity and inclusion' or 'empowerment'), a more open framework is better used. An example is this 5 Capabilities framework in Diagram 7.[xi] It focus on functions and does not prescribe a particular form for these core capabilities.

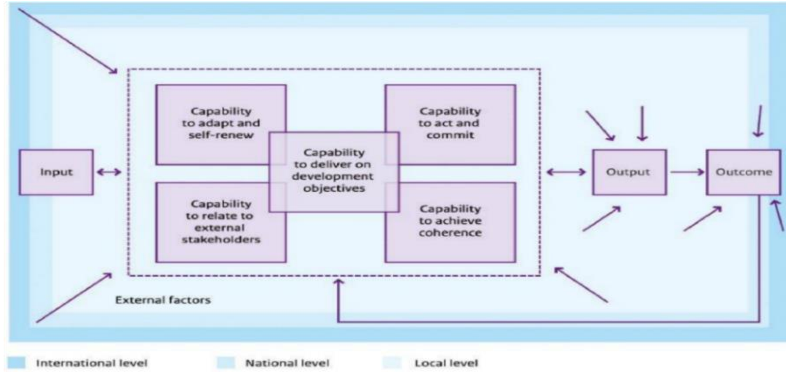


Diagram 7: 5 Capabilities framework

- Positive energy: Also often overlooked is the 'élan vital' or life force of an organisation. This is an important factor in its survival and thriving, as other research has shown.[xii] The 'life force' refers to the inspirational quality of leadership but also the depth of commitment of staff and volunteers. Private sector management consultants agonise over the lack of staff 'engagement'. How effective is our capacity-support if de facto our 'partners' are constantly preoccupied with finding income, commitment falters as organisations cannot keep even core staff and if volunteerism weakens in the face of the high salaries offered by international agencies? How many activists and change makers have been turned into grant administrators through our 'capacity-support'?
- Peer-learning: Local actors are signalling that OD is more valuable than individual competencies development and that organisational mentoring and accompaniment is more effective than one-off training courses. They are also asking for more opportunities for peer-learning. This can have the added value of encouraging collaborative action.

Question: Why do we believe that national and local actors, that have been operating in their contexts for years and decades, have 'no capacities'? What changes if we start using 'capacity-convergence' instead of 'capacity building'? What have you learned from the national and local actors you collaborate with?

In the 'Seven Dimensions' framework, the quality of relationship, finance and organisational capacities are closely interlinked. In our operational practices, they cannot be disconnected from each other.

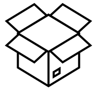
The presence and meaningful participation and leadership by national actors in coordination spaces, and their ability to co-create global and national policies and standards, or how these are applied in their contexts, are also closely interlinked.

Many people will not strive to uphold a certain standard if they do not 'own' it. They also will not do it, if they feel it is unrealistic, in current contextual circumstances, for a broad majority of people residing there. A more impactful process is for national actors to collectively develop and evolve their standards of quality, integrity, good stewardship and accountability, and drive this from within. External standards can be a source of inspiration – but without access to similar resources as international actors, may be too much too fast. The result is setting national actors up to fail, and overall frustration.

Providing supporting and reinforcing assistance also means giving credit and visibility where it is due and highlighting, to institutional donors and in communications to wider audiences, the roles, contributions, courage and commitment, achievements and innovations of national and local actors, Taking credit for someone else's achievements does not fit with professions of 'solidarity' and 'assistance'. It is an expression of an ego-system rather than an eco-system consciousness. It contributes to distrust and cynicism.

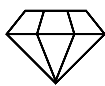
Cross-cutting themes

To the seven dimensions, GMI adds cross-cutting issues



Accountability (and transparency)

As a cross-cutting issue, this is present in different dimensions: reciprocal accountability is a hallmark of an equitable partnership; accountability also appears in the dimensions of 'participation revolution', finance and visibility. It can also be looked at in the context of collaboration and coordination.



Humanitarian Principles

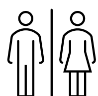
In crisis-contexts, international and national actors alike are expected to abide by core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Part of the common narrative against localisation is that national and local actors, apparently 'per definition', are unable to do so, while international ones 'per definition' always do. Such 'black' and 'white' portrayal is not supported by evidence. Impartiality and neutrality are sometimes practiced by international relief actors as 'political blindness'.[xiii] The result may be a failure to work with conflict-sensitivity, ignoring how humanitarian responses are also influenced by geo-political considerations, and an underestimation of how they are discreetly manipulated by various parties to a conflict. Being disconnected from 'political' actors and being politically blind makes it hard to competently navigate the shifting political dynamics to maintain an 'equi-distance' of all interest groups.

Humanitarian principles originally developed very much as an operational tactic to maximise the possibility to maintain acceptance and access, globally. They were not intended to apply to every responder to a crisis all the time, and to be used in a dogmatic, normative manner.[xiv]

> *"The truth is that nothing in life is absolute. The doctrine of the Red Cross, formulated at a particular moment in history, applies to a living world in never-ending movement, to a society composed of men who have not attained perfection. Sometimes it represents an ideal model to which we may aspire, rather than an unbending and rigorous law."* Jean Pictet

Local humanitarian actors can be impartial in the relief they provide, but do not have to be politically neutral. Most have a vision of an inclusive society that is well governed for the benefit of all. Most international agencies providing relief also are multi-mandate or -mission: they too introduce their agendas of societal change once the acute crisis subsides, gender transformation being one of them.

Finally, assessing whether a crisis-responder adheres to core principles or not, is a matter of contextual analysis. We need to listen carefully to understand what motivates the positioning and behaviours in that context. Stereotyping assumptions have no place here.



Gender, women and localisation

The Grand Bargain (and several other statements of international commitments) have been criticised as weak on gender. An informal '*Friends of Gender for the Grand Bargain'* group was formed a few months after the World Humanitarian Summit. Gender equality, the ability of each human being, irrespective of gender, to make choices to fulfil their greatest potential (in Sen's understanding of 'capabilities')[xv] is a justified goal, and merits intentional support globally. In practice, gender and localisation is translated into 'women's rights' and 'women-led' organisations and localisation.[xvi] Yet several women in aid-recipient countries stress that they also need many men as

supporters, and that gender transformation also requires reflection on and change in images of masculinity.

Tensions can arise over how this is translated into practice and who has the legitimacy to speak on this and to lead, in different societies? International actors (who, by seeking durable transformation in gender roles, go beyond the provision of relief) rightly support legislative reforms, the full participation of women in public and political life, economic opportunities for women and an end to gender-based violence (also against men and boys). Yet in practice, women's organisations point out that they find it much harder to get a seat at the table, be taken seriously and get quality funding. They also object to being pushed to be instruments for the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation agendas of international political actors. They have repeatedly asked for better funding to work on the broader prevention of gender-based violence, not only on case management of survivors, where most resources are concentrated. And they object to being project-ised, used as sources of case studies, and forced into artificial consortia.[xvii]

Gender-specialists in aid-recipient societies on the other hand have demanded attention for how the singling out of women ignores their belonging to families and communities with whom they share economic and political concerns. There is discomfort with the individualistic approach of Western actors, which is also the corner stone of capitalist market-economics. Too impatient a drive for gender-transformation, also now in eagerness to meet the 2030 SDG, can divide women's movements. It can also provoke a backlash in a society, that national and local gender activists are more vulnerable to than international ones. Outsiders rightly promote gender equality – but cannot engage in social engineering of another society. Gender transformation needs to be driven and led from within. Finding the right pace and tactics is a delicate balancing act that national and local actors are better equipped for.[xviii]

III. RISK, DISTRUST AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The immediate objective of international relief action is saving lives. We may now accept that effective international humanitarian assistance also comes with the strategic objective to leave behind a legacy of stronger, collective, capacities of national and local actors (including at risk populations) to deal with ongoing and future challenges. But still be concerned about risk. The money they can provide is not that of relief agencies: it is given to them in trust, by taxpayers and individuals, to be managed good stewardship. That includes managing risk. There are real risks, international agencies claim, in providing large sums of money to national and local actors.

The argument is not without reason of course. But it is unbalanced, for four reasons:

1. Fraud and corruption happen regularly in international agencies as well. It is kept out of the spotlight so as not to undermine public confidence in donor countries, but the risk is equally real. Local and national actors see a lot of 'wastage' in international relief agencies: unnecessary spending. Such wastage may not show up in the accounts because it is underpinned by receipts, but it is still resources not used to alleviate suffering. The accumulated transaction costs from multiple intermediaries are only one illustrative example; expensive international conferences with talk that does not translate into action, a possible other?
2. Fear does not bring out our best potential. Constant concern about risk creates fear. We don't achieve our best potential when we operate in a climate of fear.
3. An exclusive focus on risk fuels pervasive distrust: Dysfunctional collaborations are characterised by and absence of trust. 'Distrust' in the relationship between international and national actors is reported from all over the world. Distrust too often is the starting point and remains the dominant atmosphere, even after years of presence and interaction.[xix] Profound distrust (fed and internalised by constantly repeated negative narratives about national and local actors) is a bad starting point for every relationship. Caution is healthier. Caution means testing and verification, but also an openness to evolve a relationship to more stable trust, based on lived experience.

Patrick Lescioni's five dysfunctions of a team in Diagram 8 is applicable also to the interaction between international and national actors. The collaboration should be for a shared purpose and attentive to results. There is high emphasis on accountability, but only one way, not reciprocal. Certainly for the weaker national actor, there is often fear of 'conflict': the risk of being de-funded if they are critical towards the international agency, even if the critical perspective could be justified. Fear of conflict leads to 'talking nice' (see above), and superficial conversations.

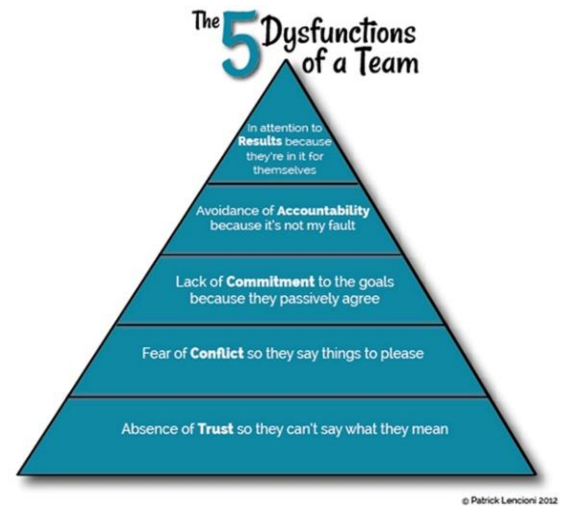


Diagram 8: The 5 Dysfunctions of a team

4. Distrust is expensive: Soon we may reach the absurd situation where of every Euro 100 allocated to alleviate acute needs somewhere in the world, Euro 68 will be spent on controlling, checking, monitoring, and auditing that the remaining Euro 32 is correctly spent. Distrust carries a high cost, and reduces our value-for-money. Trust reduces the cost of controlling. Equally importantly, it invites and enables co-ownership and shared responsibility.

A high distrust cost reduces value-for-money. GMI

Risk matrices, like the one in Diagram 9, are a popular tool in aid agencies to manage risks. They are also deceptive. They give the impression that all risks are identified and well managed. But what about the 'risks' that do not make it onto the radar screen? The aid industry makes the same mistake as economists have done for decades, namely ignoring 'unintended' consequences as 'externalities'. For a hundred years we have treated environmental impacts as an externality- someone else's problem that therefore does not show up in my risk matrix and in my accounts. The results is such overexploitation of our planet that we now are concerned about our species survival. Here are some real risks that seldom make it into risk matrices:

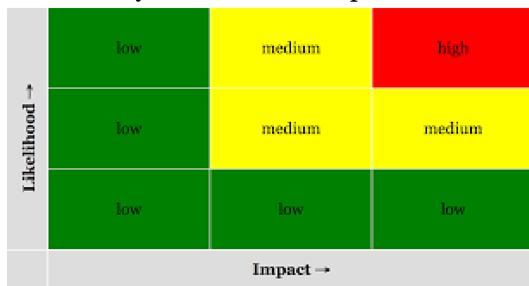


Diagram 9: Risk matrix

- The risk that the capacity-investment will have no sustainable impact because the recipient organisation cannot access enough funding to retain the strengthened capacities.
- The risk that an expensive 'comprehensive' approach does *not* leave a legacy of significantly strengthened national and local capacities to deal better with the next crisis. Billions have been spent on repeat comprehensive responses to political crises and natural disasters in Haiti. Individuals and families have benefitted, but there is little strengthened Haitian organised capacity.[xx] So next time, another very expensive, comprehensive, international response will be required. Did our apparent value-for-money in the short term remain value-for-money in the medium- to longer-term?

What we assess as value-for-money in the short term, may no longer appear value-for-money in the medium to longer term. More profound and costly negative consequences may only become apparent in the medium-term. GMI

- The risk that the relief sector undermines the development of a strong civil society, that the development sector invests in. In various countries, international donors invest with multi-year programmes in 'civil society strengthening'. Simultaneously, a large contingent of international relief actors may be mostly instrumentalising national and local CSOs, hiring away their best people and undermining their self-confidence, by constantly pointing out how they do not live up to international requirements and standards. With one hand we seek to strengthen, but with the other we undermine. Are we doing harm here? How does this relate to international aid agencies' expressed concerns about 'shrinking space' for civil society in many countries?

- The risk that our implicit messages invalidate our explicit ones: In our international support for governance reform, we promote more open and participatory governance. We may do this through standards of participation and co-creation such as under the Open Govermment Partnership, and the promotion of practices like 'open budget' and 'participatory budgeting'. Yet simultaneously we bring to a country a top-down, authoritarian and non-transparent relief system, which is an implicit message that local actors definitely observe. Are our international left and right hands working at cross-purposes?[xxi]

Genuine partnership means sharing benefits and sharing risks. In reality, much risk is transferred, ultimately to those whom we give the last resources. This is not an expression of solidarity. It is not an attitude of someone who comes to assist, to aid. And there is no partnership in it: First, there is no recognition of the risks of a local organisation collaborating too closely with an international one.[xxii] Secondly, instead of sitting together with local actors to jointy assess all the risks and jointly develop risk management strategies, international actors see the local actors as 'the risk'.

Questions:

Does our risk matrix consider the consequences of not investing in trustbuilding and shared ownership?

Does it include the possible future costs of failing to leave behind significantly strengthen national capacities?

Do we, as internationals, consider the reputational risk of not living up to the international commitments we spent money developing and freely committed to?

What would happen if we developed risk/opportunities matrices?

What would change if, together with local 'partners', we examine all possible risks and see how, together, we mitigate them?

IV. POWER, ITS RESPONSIBLE USE, AND ABUSE

Conversations about internationalisation and localisation that do not frankly discuss power miss the point. The Grand Bargain is also about the political economy of aid. National actors are acutely aware of the power asymmetries. International relief actors have been given financial resources in trust, to use it for the benefit of the people for whom it was mobilised – not for their own institutional growth and market share. The good stewardship of these resources is a responsibility that justifies control and oversight, which requires authority and hence power. But there is a difference between responsible use of power and abuse of power. International solidarity cannot be used to maintain a system of structural domination and subordination.

Diagram 10, the 'power cube' (developed at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex, UK) helps to analyse various dimensions of power.[xxiii]

The left side of the cube is straightforward and invites reflection on where the fundamental decisions are made: locally, nationally, or internationally? For the international relief sector, that remains overwhelmingly internationally, with little or no input of those stakeholders who will be directly impacted by them.

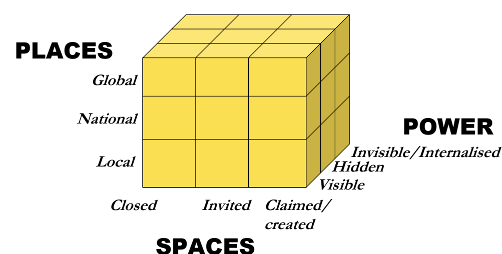


Diagram 10: The Power Cube Framework

The front side looks at spaces where power is exercised and key decisions-made, who is in those spaces and who is out? Are there national and local actors in the Humanitarian Country Team, in the clusters, in local coordination meetings, in Grand Bargain workstreams, in the Interagency Standing Committee, in the working groups that develop new and evolve existing standards and guidelines on a multitude of themes? Or are these 'closed' spaces? Can they gain entrance only 'by invitation' rather than by right ('by invitation' is a manifestation of

power)? When they are allowed a seat at the table, can they participate meaningfully? Do they know the rules of the game, can they contribute through other rules? When they voice a view or a proposal, are they taken as seriously as an international? Or are they obliged to lobby, advocate, even demonstrate in the street (as refugees sometimes have had to do) to obtain the opportunity to give their views and express their priorities and preferences? Do national and local actors have to create their own spaces, because they cannot meaningfully participate in those controlled by powerful international ones?

The right-hand side draws attention to hidden and invisible/internalised power, behind and underneath the power that is used very visibly. Power is visible when international actors 'assess (and judge) the capacities' of a national actor but do not allow reciprocal assessment. It is visible when they decide, unilaterally, what is 'as local as possible and as international as necessary'. Power is visible when international actors alone decide agendas, for meetings, conferences, processes etc., also those that directly concern and will affect national and local actors. It is visible when international actors decide which national actor among several candidates can be part of a panel. It is also visible when power holders signal that they will only accept 'criticism' if it is expressed politely and disinvite and de-fund those who are too assertive. Power is hidden, for example, when international actors control the narrative both ways: what donors hear about the local and national actors, and what the latter hear about the donors.

If we act out of solidarity, we seek 'power with'. If we are there to assist, we support and reinforce the national actors to have more 'power to'. If we act with a self-image of superiority, and largely driven by our personal and institutional interests, then we will exercise 'power over'. If national and local actors internalise our constant narrative that they have 'no capacities', they will lose self-confidence and with it their 'power within'. They have now internalised the power relationship as a negative self-image: invisible power![xxiv]

Question: What power dynamics do you recognise in your interaction with national and local actors? What prevailing power dynamics do you observe in the collective interaction of international relief actors, with national and local ones?

Question: Does your organisation believe in 'speaking truth to power'? Did it do so in the past? Can your organisation, can you, accept that someone speaks 'truth' to your 'power'?

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[i] GMI May 2020: *Contextual Factors that Influence the Degree of Localisation or Internationalisation*. https://www.gmentor.org/equitable-partnership

[ii] Non-governmental organisations do not have legal 'mandates' in the sense that multilateral ones do. The correct term would be 'multi-mission' organisations.

[iii] For more on this see e.g. IARAN 2018: *From Voices to Choices*. With Action against Hunger, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Paris, IRIS. The ReflAction network is active on this, as well as Local2Global. Additional insights can be found from other listening exercises e.g. Anderson, Brown & Jean 2012: *Time to Listen. Hearing people on the receiving end of international aid* (CDA, Cambridge MA) and C. Fabre & L. Ruiqi 2019: *Lives in Crisis. What do people tell us about the humanitarian aid they receive*. Paris, OECD. For a painful critique of the ineffectiveness of international protection efforts in the eastern DRC based on listening to women and girls there see C. Seymour 2019: *The Myth of International Protection. War and survival in Congo*. Univ. of California Press

[iv] On the importance of the quality of finance, see FAO, DI and NRC. 2020. *Catalogue of quality funding practices to the humanitarian response: A reference tool for policymakers and practitioners to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of programming* (Report, July 2020). Rome.

[v] GMI June 2019: *The Finance and Economics of Localisation. Is the 25% target a key performance truth?* https://www.gmentor.org/equitable-partnership

[vi] That would make the 'Grand Bargain' a 'good bargain', in the sense of a cheap purchase of a good product, for the international actors – but not for the national and local ones.

[vii] Capacity-assessments are sometimes a key criterion for an international organisation in its partner selection. For a more meaningful way of exploring what value each brings to the joint pursuit of a common purpose or objective, see GMI March 2020: *Value Contributions in Partnerships. Are you having the conversation?* https://www.gmentor.org/facilitation-and-partnership-brokering

[viii] For a refreshing alternative to value-for-money assessments from the perspective of aid administrators, that invites the intended beneficiaries' perspective, see D'Emidio, F., T. Wallace, S. Henon & D. Buckles 2017: *Value-for-Money in ActionAid. Creating an alternative*. ActionAid

[ix] See e.g. Ubels, J., N-A. Acquaye-Baddoo & A. Fowler 2010: *Capacity Development in Practice*. Earthscan. For an earlier resource, focusing also on people's capacities, see Eade, D. 1997: *Capacity-Building. An approach to people-centered development*. Oxfam Publications

[x] 'Isomorphic mimicry' here means creating external copies of organisational structures that international aid actors want to see, but not owning them and not really functioning accordingly. As Andrews et al put it: "*isomorphic mimicry is a key "technique of successful failure" that perpetuates capability traps in development. In the context of this study, isomorphic mimicry is the tendency of governments to mimic other governments' successes, replicating processes, systems, and even products of the "best practice" examples. This mimicry often conflates form and function: leading to a situation where "looks like" substitutes for "does"; i.e., governments look capable after the mimicry but are not actually more capable. We argue that this is endemic in development and has become a primary reason why countries do not build real capability even after years of policy and reform engagement and billions of dollars of capacity building work. We suggest that the tendency to so mimic is amplified by the current development ecosystem, especially where public sectors have become closed to novelty but open (and supportive of) agenda conformity. Such characteristics make it very hard for states to build the new capabilities needed, for their contexts, given their realities."*

[xi] The 5 C framework was developed by the ECPDM in Maastricht, after a global comparative study of what makes organisations and networks (public and not-for-profit) sustainable and able to adapt to evolving contexts For the original study results see Baser, H. & P. Morgan 2008: *Capacity, Change and Performance. Study report*. Maastricht, ECPDM discussion paper no 59. For a summary introduction see GMI June 2020: *The 5 Capabilities Framework*. https://www.gmentor.org/competencies-development-centre

[xii] Renoir, M. & M. Guttentag 2018: *Facilitating Financial Sustainability. Understanding the drivers of CSO financial sustainability*. LINC, Peace Direct & Foundation Centre

[xiii] See the 'Thinking and Working Politically' community of practice. Mostly focused on development cooperation, but the principles are applicable to relief aid too. https://twpcommunity.org/

[xiv] Pictet. J. 1979: *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross. Commentary*. ICRC p. 14 For a recent critique see H. Slim 2020: *You Don't Have to be Neutral to Be a Good Humanitarian*. The New Humanitarian https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/08/27/humanitarian-principles-neutrality and H. Slim

2020: *Look Back and Learn. Notable humanitarians who took sides*. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/09/22/humanitarians-who-took-sides?

[xv] Sen, A. 2001: *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press

[xvi] See e.g. UN Women 2020: *Guidance on Gender Responsive Localisation*.

[xvii] For a strong critique see Gender and Development Network 2019: *Solution – or Part of the Problem? Reflections on the role of INGOs in women's rights work*. https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/solution-or-part-of-the-problem

[xviii] For some thought-provoking reviews, see e.g. Nassif, G. 2020: *Women's Political Participation in Lebanon and the Limits of Aid-Driven Empowerment*. Lebanon Support, WE4L, HIVOS or Ababneh, S. 2020: *The Time to Question, Rethink and Popularise the Notion of 'Women's Issues'. Lessons from Jordan's popular and labour movements from 2006 to now*. Journal of International Women's Studies 21(7) 271-288.

[xix] GMI February 2019: *Prepared for Partnership? Trust and distrust in international cooperation*. https://www.gmentor.org/equitable-partnership

[xx] For an alternative observation on the aid response in Haiti, see Katz, J. 2016*: The Big Truck that Went By. How the world came to save Haiti and left behind a disaster*. St Martin's Publishing: see also Karroum, N. 2017: *La 'Localisation de l'Aide' dans la Réponse à l'Ourgan Matthieu en Haïti*. Group URD

[xxi] 'Coherence' is one of the DAC evaluation criteria. How does it look like if we apply it across the range of international cooperation practices in the same country? Twenty-five years ago, CDA Inc introduced 'Do no Harm' thinking into the aid sector. They pointed out how 'implicit messages' can have negative consequences. What are the implicit messages in how the relief industry behaves?

[xxii] See Humanitarian Outcomes & Interaction 2019: *NGOs and Risk. Managing uncertainty in local-international partnerships*, for an assessment from the prevailing paradigm. See GMI Insight 7. 2020: *No Shared Risk, no Partnership*, for risks for local organisations when partnering too closely. https://www.gmentor.org/equitable-partnership

[xxiii] See https://www.powercube.net/ For a practical framework to assess power-dynamics in a collaborative arrangement, see Partos 2020: *The Power Awareness Tool*. The Netherlands

[xxiv] The 'decolonise aid' movement goes to the level of mindsets and interiorised images of self by the aid-recipient that are created by the aid-giver. See also A. Nandy 2005: *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and recovery of self under colonialism*. Oxford Univ. Press - "*colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies…a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socio-economic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories.*" Pp. xi / 3