



Strengthening the Humanitarian Leadership and Capacity of Local Humanitarian Actors

Center for Disaster Philanthropy

**Prepared by Kim Maphis Early
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**“Aid localization is a collective process involving different stakeholders that aims to return local actors, whether civil society organizations or local public institutions, to the center of the humanitarian system with a greater role in humanitarian response.”
(Time to Let Go)**

Background

From February 13-15, 2018, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP), gathered leaders from eight other United States-based foundations¹ for conversations on potential collaborative efforts to advance support for local humanitarian actors.

The goals of the meeting were to:

- Gain a clearer understanding of what local humanitarian action looks like;
- Explore examples of funder practices that demonstrate models working on the ground;
- Engage in a collective conversation of private philanthropies around opportunities, challenges and gaps in funding local humanitarian actors; and
- Commit to a “Call to Action” – the possibility of working together to achieve greater impact in strengthening local humanitarian assistance.

The meeting was prefaced with information on current efforts (e.g., The Grand Bargain emanating from the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016 and Charter for Change²) a summary of challenges and opportunities, and an argument for philanthropic investment in local humanitarian leadership.³ On the opening meeting of the convening, Daniel Maxwell of Tufts University presented his keynote address, drawing from his own experience and research, to outline the problems that drive the humanitarian crises, the barriers to increased involvement of national, regional and local assistance providers, and potential for increased capacity.⁴

Sharing Our Vision, Knowledge and Practices

Carlos Mejia, Director of Humanitarian Policy and Programs for Oxfam International, presented a summary for participants of the key features of Professor Maxwell’s keynote, and how those ideas translate into the guiding vision of the meeting:

“Might our collective work develop the case and provide the evidence that focusing on local humanitarian leadership is the most promising approach to addressing the worsening humanitarian conditions?”

Factors driving the conversation:

- Capacity is not sufficient to meet increasing needs;
- The challenge that local humanitarian actors presented at the World Humanitarian Summit;

¹ The Rockefeller Foundation, the UPS Foundation, Give2Asia, Global Giving, Open Society Foundations, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and Google.org

² See [Progress Toward Implementing the “Grand Bargain” Commitments](#)

³ See digital brochure “Philanthropy’s Impact: Strengthening the Humanitarian Leadership and Capacity of Local Actors”

⁴ See “Local Humanitarian Action: Background, Key Challenges and Ways Forward”

- Local actors are the first responders, hold local geographic knowledge and can assess community needs;
- Local humanitarian organizations can be activated at a lower cost and with greater impact.

Key issues for investigation include:

- Local institutional capacity;
- Adherence to humanitarian principles;
- Ability to scale up to the protracted nature of crises;
- Gaps in evidence around best practices and methods of assessment;
- Keeping the role and work of INGOs “in the mix” as funders consider investments in local actors.⁵

A schematic of Mejia’s report will be forwarded on completion.

Foundation leaders then shared information of varying aspects of their national and international humanitarian portfolios.

Investments are made in:

- Multiple locations;
- Puerto Rico;
- India, Nepal, Bangladesh;
- Hungary;
- Six countries in Asia; and,
- Where gaps in funding are noted.

Programmatic efforts include:

- Global disaster transportation
- Secondees to design supply chains
- UPS Centers for Excellence
- Mayoral Peer Exchange
- Immediate relief funds
- Permanent roofs
- Fundraising capacity
- Assessments
- Funds to leverage additional support
- Low-attention natural disasters
- Legal advice
- Security and resilience training
- Advocacy strategies
- General support
- Local NGO capacity building in areas of repeated disasters
- Convenings
- Service delivery
- System change
- Research and marketing

⁵ See also, [Dalberg Global Development Advisors report for Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#)

- Products for donations
- Research on donor behavior

Current collaborative partners are:

- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- World Food Program
- 20 mayors
- Consultants
- Local organizational affiliates
- Corporations with local employees
- INGOs
- Local organizations
- Local human rights organizations
- Local legal advisors
- Asylum seeker and refugee organizations
- Disaster preparedness and recovery organizations
- Asia Disaster Center
- IRC/UNDP/Department of Human Affairs
- Community Foundations
- Organizational selection link to local partners

Funding patterns ranged from pre-funding to large flexible grants and matching grants. The amounts of funding also varied, from multiple millions to \$3 million to \$1.5 million to \$500-700,000 to \$150,000. Grant length was as short as six months and one year, to annual rolling, three years and multi-year terms. Additional information about the timing of grants was related to the disaster event: preparedness (3 years), relief (3-18 months), or long-term recovery (1 year).

Larger internal institutional capacity to address humanitarian assistance was distinguished by corporate philanthropies that had employees in the field at headquarters in multiple locations or that had local global staff members in international affiliate organizations. Most attendees had fewer staff members dedicated to international humanitarian outreach, but high visibility and support from board members.

An important consideration for this group is awareness of how their philanthropic activity and leadership may impact other actors in other sectors. Among the spheres of influence that attendees noted were:

- Multilateral organizations
- Private sector supply chain and other engagement
- Local governments
- Diaspora on the U.S. Mainland
- Legislators on Capitol Hill
- Corporations
- Private philanthropy
- Asian networks
- Regional organizations
- Local community foundations
- Company leadership and individual employees
- USAID regional staff members
- Europe and the Hungarian government

- Preparedness networks
- General public
- Donors
- Service providers
- Tech community
- Technology users
- Corporate philanthropy
- Funding network and grantees
- Audiences who encounter educational materials

A discussion on the barriers to increased funding for local humanitarian actors lifted up the following:

- “Culpability”
- Media attention
- Supply chain capacity
- Philanthropic disinterest in conflicted and protracted crises
- Assumption that local actors have low capacity
- Staffing
- Particular locations; particularity of context
- Speed of fund mobilization (internal process for releasing funds)
- Lowered consistency of giving for these efforts
- Internal grant and legal requirements
- Global financial standards
- Legal and governmental campaigns targeting humanitarian actors
- Security
- Board knowledge and approval process
- Power of “donor darlings”
- Confusion over what constitutes “local”
- Identifying local partners
- Burdens of reporting, financial and fixed requirements for grantees
- Reputational risk
- Lack of local actor autonomy
- Impact of the local situation on the humanitarian actors themselves

Funders highlighted the ways in which they have developed internal and external processes to counteract the identified challenges to supporting local actors through:

- Centers of Excellence⁶
- Finding particular platforms (e.g., garment workers) for impact
- Waiting to hear from local actors before designating or moving funds
- Pre-positioning funds with partners who have direct knowledge of local situation and with local staff members and organizations
- Consistent direct-funding for long-term recovery
- Long-term repeated investments
- Funds that can distribute dollars locally
- Supporting groups to think about communication strategies
- Greater collaboration to push for transparent and accountable financial institutions

⁶ See UPS Centers for Excellence, when supplied.

- Resources for security and institutional infrastructure
- Cash transfers
- Committing time to this effort
- Establishing local philanthropic boards
- Developing local legal skill sets
- Full-time legal staff person
- Funding national and sub-national organizations
- Changing relationships to emphasize trust and empathy
- Communicating with employees
- Building recovery capacity of local actors
- Working with employees to develop strategies

Valerie Nkamgang Bemo, Emergency Response, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, moved participants to consider their own capacities to alter the narrative about supporting local actors through the story of the Foundation's work in humanitarian assistance.⁷ An overview of the Foundation's strategy, the challenges to their humanitarian work and the resulting learning has shaped their portfolio. Two primary questions remain: How do we document and measure success? and How can we be influential as a philanthropic organization? Group conversation revolved around opportunities to build off the Gates Foundation investments in networks across 7 countries, and continued investments in a particular place.

Following this, participants paired off to isolate the primary challenges most prohibitive to funding local actors, the three most urgent gaps in funding local actors and the 3 most promising opportunities for strengthening local actors. In reporting back to the group, the following were noted, in each category:

Challenges to Funding:

- Finding a diverse set of local actors
- Speed of internal decision-making
- Lack of preparedness organizations and funders
- Enabling environment
- Donor education
- Lack of funding predictability
- Community politics and relationships
- Local government
- Coordination of funding to prevent duplication
- Accountability and measurement
- Two-way trust deficit
- Crowded environment
- Limited foundation human resources
- Less funding for significant change

Gaps in Funding:

- Limited support for preparedness
- Long-term commitment to grantees
- Funding for non-technical capacity building
- Flexible funding

⁷ See presentation slides for a complete record of Bemo's report.

- Coordination for cluster systems
- Local intermediaries to distribute funds
- Poor visibility for fund-raising and capacity building for fundraising
- Funding for risk and application
- Impact learning or evaluation
- Strong, less complicated evidence

Opportunities for Funding:

- Share knowledge of local grantees through a common resource, with regular updates
- Bypassing equivalency determination
- Moving more funding to general operations
- Better definition of local actors, including those who work in INGOs
- Building cases by funding more evidence-based grants
- Increase exposure of local actors in all aspects of work, not just funding

Committing to Internal and External Practices that Support Local Actors

Among the actions that participants are willing to make within their institutions to further the localization agenda were:

- Promoting and reporting on local actors, including those who work with INGOs, and their needs to our audiences through a variety of outlets
- Local leadership represented on grant committees
- Developing evidenced-based knowledge
- Flexibility in funding
- Board and senior management education
- Development of indicators of success in process of supporting local actors
- Convenings
- Alternative reporting requirements
- Sharing support and excitement about grantees with grantees
- Coordinating with peers

External commitments that were brought forward from each funder include:

- Develop intermediary alternatives as fund repositories and organizational referrals
- Transparency regarding grantee network and informal and formal collaborations
- Build evidence over 3-years at the country level (Oxfam tool in process) and linking stories in a systematic collaborative way
- Develop shared general guidelines for stories, indicators, and milestones for measurement
- Engage local researchers
- Share databases
- Link to other funder networks (e.g., Human Rights Funders)
- Share information on immediate context
- Joint funder calls
- Closing civic space by engaging with private sector on de-risking and raising profile of local actors at risk
- Use resources presently at work in the humanitarian space (both in direct aid and philanthropy)

Moving to Collective Action to Strengthen Support for Local Actors

A wide-ranging discussion about potential collaborative efforts surfaced questions and comments from participants. The three primary elements of the conversation revolved around:

- 1) clarity on definitions and indicators;
- 2) potential partners; and,
- 3) the relationship of this work to Sustainable Development Goals.

1) There is agreement that local activism is driving activity in this space. Although some clarity is needed around terms being used by foundations, the argument for localization as an idea and an action has been made persuasively by the conversation and presentations of the meeting. The alignment of institutional philanthropic goals and the localization agenda also appears to be more “doable.” A common language or glossary of terms that identifies specific behaviors that can be tracked is needed to spread the work of the group beyond those who are in attendance, drawing from the prior work of the World Humanitarian Summit. Whatever common vision is developed must be specific to the role of philanthropy in humanitarian assistance.

2) There may be opportunities for partners who would help to shape the work of the group. As an example, the Foundation Center might be tasked to help track and monitor funding to local actors. In addition, “affinity groups” of particular types of funders such as those in the technology sector, might be spun off or added to the group. Other philanthropic leaders could be identified to add members to the group, and the presence of local actors and INGOs will be crucial as the plans of the group go forward.

3) A case was made for tying the localization conversation to the Sustainable Development Goals⁸. Only three U.S.-based foundations are even using SDGs as a guide for grantmaking. Ed Cain shared that Hilton tried to do this with the SDG philanthropy platform, and there is some promise and urgency around the SDGs as they are set to be achieved in 2030. Could philanthropy be a facilitator for this collaborative work? As an example, the mayor of Los Angeles has declared that the city is going to use the SDGs for their framework around poverty, education, gender equity, and other issues facing the city.

Earlier conversations between Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Center for Disaster Philanthropy surfaced potential collaborative actions:

- Expanding knowledge of national, regional and local actors, and sharing that with the philanthropic community;
- Developing relationships with on-the-ground service providers and pre-vetting them for easier transfer of funds;
- Advocating for changes in laws inhibiting the flow of aid in countries that are successful in local humanitarian assistance and where there are opportunities to enhance the organic connections between humanitarian assistance and long-term development;
- Examining internal pressures and external expectations that drive short-term rather than long-term funding;
- Including under-represented voices in needs assessment and program design;
- Streamlining reporting processes;
- Focusing on the Global South as a primary locus of learning and funding; and
- Engaging larger INGOs in conversation about local partners.

⁸See UN Sustainable Development Goals

Participant Recommendations

- With Ed Cain’s observation that “I think that there is something in this group that is worth preserving,” the group quickly moved to a commitment to meet again in about six months, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation offered to serve again as the host.
- Funders were encouraged by the meeting to improve their own institutional practices as a way to lead others in the philanthropic community. Reporting back to the group on the progress of these attempts may shape future plans for the group, and begin to build a body of evidence.
- Some version of a joint investment in one or two countries, leveraging each foundation’s interest and expertise, remains “on the table” as a possible next step, with a plan for evaluation that feeds the literature on best practices. Some evidence exists in health and education, based on community feedback, that local involvement leads to greater impact. This might suggest countries or projects or modes of analysis for any collaborative funding effort. The Rockefeller Foundation has some work around a community of practice on measuring resilience that could be relevant to some of these indicators.
- The ultimate goal would be to facilitate a change in culture about the role and influence of local actors.
- As an accompaniment to this, a “marketing and PR campaign” may be necessary to educate INGOs about how they are working with local actors and educate donors about how their gifts might be used more effectively. This narrative would not diminish the importance of INGOs, but would weight the story differently for the public.
- Identify a consortium of players and fund them to come together to develop a set of localization principles. A “Toolkit and Guidelines” would provide both narrative and evidence for funder investments. Dr. Maxwell offered the database of a graduate assistant at Tufts that tracks literature for building local evidence. This could be a feature of the Tool Kit. The Google team offered information they have about individual giving patterns and behaviors, and knowledge of audience segmentation.
- From this latter idea, a Working Group was tasked to prepare a Table of Contents for a Tool Kit for philanthropic partners to strengthen local humanitarian leadership, and to prepare an agenda for the next meeting of the group.

Working Group Membership:

Mark Lindberg, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
Britt Lake, Global Giving
Sheena Agarwal, Give2Asia
Pilar Pacheco, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Robert Miyashiro, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Courtney Smith, The Rockefeller Foundation
Regine Webster, Center for Disaster Philanthropy
Hector Mujica, Google.org
Robin Spencer, Google.org

The first Working Group call is scheduled for March 1 at 12 Noon Eastern.

An audio recording of the panel presentation can be found here:

[Advancing Local Humanitarian Leadership Audio](#)