

# COMPLEMENTARITY

**The importance of local humanitarian response and the links between the international system and national actors were key themes in 2015–17. Relations between international humanitarians and governments continued to improve overall. There was less progress in enhancing the role of national and local NGOs.**

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## Complementarity

### In brief

While relationships between international actors and the governments of crisis-affected countries vary significantly from one situation to another, the general trend of improving relationships noted in the SOHS 2015 report has continued. Relationships are generally good in countries where the state takes a lead role in the coordination and implementation of humanitarian activities. In situations where government bodies are less engaged in implementation relationships have also improved, but there is often less communication and transparency than governments would like. Problems have also emerged in rapid-onset emergencies, where there is still a tendency for humanitarian surge deployments to ignore local capacity. The poorest relationships appear to be in states where the government is involved in major internal conflicts and in refugee-hosting situations, and there is a growing tendency for states to use bureaucratic impediments to prevent the impartial provision of assistance and protection.

The 2015–17 period saw greatly increased focus on the role of national and local NGOs in humanitarian response. Various policy initiatives were given significant impetus by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and follow-up activities. In particular, there was widespread agreement on the need to increase the amount of funding going directly to national and local NGOs, to support these organisations to develop their capacity and to build more genuine partnerships. While a number of donors and operational agencies have taken action in these areas, overall progress since the Summit has been limited.

### The state, civil society and the international system

Affected states are expected to play the primary role in responding to humanitarian crises, with the international humanitarian system engaging only where the state and civil society are unable (or unwilling) to provide impartial humanitarian assistance. In practice, this is generally not an either/or arrangement, and in many cases government agencies, civil society and international organisations will all be engaged in humanitarian activities.

In the period 2015–17, the importance of national and local actors was evident in a number of high-profile crises. Government and civil society organisations were critical in the response to Ebola in West Africa (Campbell et al., 2017; DuBois et al., 2015; Polygeia, 2016), and a large proportion of the response in areas of Syria outside government control has been provided by civil society groups (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). In refugee situations, host governments and civil society have long played a central role. In the reporting period, this was demonstrated in many countries, perhaps most notably in Turkey, which spent \$8 billion in 2017 on hosting refugees.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the state and civil society in humanitarian response was underlined by the recipient questionnaire, where 22% of respondents said that the government had been the main source of aid, and 23% that civil

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society organisations (religious groups, local/national NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies) had been the main source of aid. Another 9% said that family abroad was the main source of aid, and 5% businesses. This compared with 34% who said that international humanitarian organisations had been the main source of aid (19% INGOs, 12% UN and 3% the ICRC).<sup>2</sup> The results did not differ greatly between people affected by conflict and by ‘natural’ disaster, challenging the idea that ‘in most conflict-affected contexts ... the bulk of the humanitarian response continues to be provided through international assistance mechanisms’ (Darcy, 2016a: 7).

A number of authorities, evaluations and key informants have argued that humanitarian response by the affected state and civil society should be faster, more relevant and more effective than international responses (see Particip GMBH et al., 2016; Sumaylo, 2017; Taylor and Assefa, 2017; Wall and Hedlund, 2016a). Case-based research bears out these assumptions – to a degree. Overall, national and local responders, particularly NGOs, do seem to offer advantages in terms of the relevance of aid (Cohen and Gingerich, 2015; Featherstone, 2014; Ramalingam et al., 2013; Svoboda et al., 2018), though there are exceptions; in South Sudan, for example, questions have been raised around the extent to which civil society organisations were aware of the specific needs of women (Tanner and Moro, 2016). The picture with respect to timeliness is less clear: in some cases, national responses are significantly quicker (Svoboda et al., 2018; Tanner and Moro, 2016), and in others they are not (Featherstone, 2014; Ramalingam et al., 2013). There is also some research to suggest that responses are most effective when international and national agencies work together (Featherstone, 2014; Ramalingam et al., 2013). Organisations based in affected countries may have more interest in recovery and longer-term resilience, and may be in a better position to provide support over longer periods (Featherstone, 2014; Sumaylo, 2017), though securing funding for this type of work can still be a problem.

Interestingly, though, and in contradiction to some of the sources above, the results of the recipient survey for the SOHS did not really support the idea that any type of organisation (national or international, state or non-government) is inherently ‘better’ at fulfilling the criteria than any other. While there were some statistically significant differences between the performance of governments on the one hand and humanitarian organisations (national and international) on the other, these effects were small: those who received aid from humanitarian organisations were slightly more likely to be positive about the quality and quantity of that aid, and slightly less likely to be positive about the speed of aid than those receiving aid from other sources.<sup>3</sup> Most interestingly, there was no statistically significant difference between responses on the quality, quantity, relevance or speed of aid between those who received assistance from local NGOs and those who received assistance from international agencies (international NGOs or UN). Nor was there any difference in the degree to which people were consulted or were able to give feedback.<sup>4</sup>

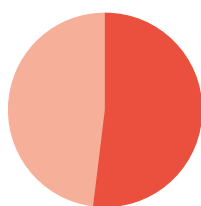



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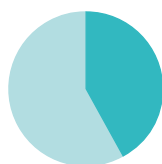
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Of the 1,170 practitioners who completed the SOHS 2018 survey



**52%**

felt that the participation/consultation of local actors was good or excellent. A steady increase from previous surveys:



**42%**

in 2015, and



**38%**

in 2012.

A number of potential benefits to more localised or national responses are not easily captured using the existing OECD DAC criteria. As one report notes: ‘humanitarian aid is not just the assistance delivered, it is also the process ... what makes local actors different is their understanding – and operationalizing – of the principle that humanitarian response is ... a social interaction’. The report suggests that we should ask ‘whether it is appropriate that international benchmarks of effectiveness are the sole criteria for evaluating response’ (Wall and Hedlund, 2016: 16). For this edition of *The State of the Humanitarian System*, we have attempted to address this point by considering complementarity – the degree to which ‘[h]umanitarian action recognizes and supports the capacities and accountability of national and local actors’ (Bourns and Alexander, 2016: 42) – as an additional criterion for assessing the performance of the humanitarian system. This recognises that, for many, achieving national ownership of humanitarian programming is not only a means to more effective programmes (in terms of saving lives in the short term), but also an important end in itself.

#### To what degree does the humanitarian system recognise and support the capacities of the host state?

Over half (52%) of respondents to the practitioner survey felt that the participation/consultation of local actors (including government actors) was good or excellent. This shows a steady increase from 2015 (42%) and 2012 (38%). Practitioners also cited cooperation with host government authorities and local organisations as one of the three most improved areas over the period 2015–17. The relatively small number of government respondents were more positive still: 62% felt that collaboration was good or excellent (though this was a slight fall from the 67% giving the same result in 2015, albeit the question was worded slightly differently). Similarly, a significant majority of the evaluations that considered the relationship between international humanitarian agencies and governments (including a number of evaluations in conflict contexts) suggested that these relationships were broadly positive.<sup>5</sup> Some noted attempts by donors to support collaboration with the governments of affected states (Global Affairs Canada, 2017; Mowjee et al., 2016; Ovington et al., 2017). In the case studies, government representatives suggested that collaboration was very good in Kenya, and ‘very good, fraternal and professional’ in Côte d’Ivoire.

The majority of government representatives interviewed suggested that relations were generally good, but that there was room for improvement. These interviewees tended to be working in countries where humanitarian activities were taking place within an overall framework established by the government, but where the government was not active in planning or implementing specific operations (this appears to be the most common model of government/humanitarian relationship, to judge by the responses to the practitioner survey).<sup>6</sup> There would typically be less contact between humanitarian and




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government actors in these countries than there was in Kenya or Côte d’Ivoire, where humanitarian staff and government employees work alongside one another. Interviews suggested that, in these situations, government representatives were more likely to identify specific problems in the relationship (see also Betts, Blight et al., 2016; Betts and Coates, 2017; ICF, 2016; World Vision International, 2015). In particular, government interviewees felt that internationals should be more open with sharing documentation and plans (Nepal, Afghanistan), and should be clearer about where funding was coming from. Reviewing evaluations of L3 humanitarian responses, one author concludes that ‘the overall impression ... is that more can be done ... than is currently acknowledged’ (Darcy, 2016a: 32). Humanitarians seem to be particularly unlikely to engage with the state in the early stages of large-scale or rapid-onset crises: as one UN manager noted, with reference to planning the Ebola response: ‘We had to get so much done in that 2.5 day period, had the governments been there I don’t think we could have accomplished it’.<sup>7</sup> Even in countries where relations are generally good, there has been a tendency for incoming surge deployments to ignore existing partnerships and relationships, particularly in large-scale responses.

For international agencies, the most challenging issues in relations with governments were where they prevented access to particular areas, or prevented agencies (often NGOs) from working, either directly or – increasingly – through the imposition of bureaucratic constraints. This was frequent in conflict environments such as Yemen and Syria, and was also a problem in a number of refugee-hosting contexts (see section on coverage). The cases and evaluations also provided examples of humanitarian actors actively avoiding contact with the state. In Yemen, government officials appeared philosophical about this, recognising the difficulties NGOs faced in working with two ‘governments’. In Mali, local government officials recognised the importance of humanitarian principles, but questioned whether this meant they should be excluded from humanitarian action. Evaluations suggest that some agencies have also bypassed governments in a number of ‘natural’ disasters (Blake and Pakula, 2016; Darcy, 2016; Ovington et al., 2017). It should also be noted that a small number of NGO interviewees felt that it was the government that was avoiding them, rather than the other way around: the government was disengaged, and quite happy for humanitarian actors to provide services that it was either unable or unwilling to supply itself.

One area that has received attention as part of the wider discussion on state/humanitarian relationships is coordination. There has been criticism that the humanitarian coordination architecture does not take sufficient account of the state, and may exclude government agencies or duplicate existing government mechanisms (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016; Lawday et al., 2016; Hanley et al., 2014; Swithern, 2015). Here again, the situation appears to be gradually improving: 52% of government staff surveyed felt that their engagement in coordination mechanisms was good or excellent, up from 33% in 2015.

## Factors affecting complementarity of governments and international humanitarian agencies

Interviewees suggested that some governments in middle and high income countries had proved ineffective in crises because they did not have significant experience of similar situations.



### *The capacity of the state*

One of the most important factors in determining the relationship between the state and humanitarian actors is the capacity of the government to lead, or at least actively participate in, a humanitarian response (Advisem Services Inc., 2016; Bousquet, 2015; Coombs et al., 2015; Darcy, 2016a; Gardner et al., 2016; Grünewald et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2015; 2016; Watson et al., 2016). This is often a matter of resources. Some crisis-affected states may lack the finances, staff and structures to coordinate or participate in a response. Alternatively, governments may temporarily lack capacity because of the crisis itself: local authorities in Nepal suggested that this was the case immediately after the earthquake in 2015. However, capacity does not always correlate directly with resources – it is also related to experience of crisis response. A number of interviewees suggested that some governments in middle and high income countries had proved ineffective in crises because they did not have significant experience of similar situations.

A number of interviewees (generally from national and international NGOs) also mentioned corruption as an important factor in making state bodies less effective, or more difficult to work with. Corruption is also mentioned in a number of evaluations (Al Nabhy et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2015; Duncalf et al., 2016), and in the recipient survey. According to one recent report, ‘corruption is deeply entrenched in the economy and systems of governance’ in many humanitarian contexts (Harmer and Grünewald, 2016: 4). The report goes on to caution, however, that ‘humanitarian resources are not only manipulated by governmental actors and national NGOs, but also as a result of the practices of international agencies’ (ibid.: 4).

### *The changing context and nature of humanitarian action*

Some key informants suggested that improvements in collaboration may largely be a result of changes in where humanitarian action was taking place – specifically, a move to working more in cities (where state institutions tend to be stronger) and in middle income countries. They noted that collaboration with government was often a result of government pressure: in contrast to the ‘push’ to work with civil society, there were few humanitarian initiatives that focused directly on improving links with states (the Disaster Response Dialogue, one such initiative, closed in 2015).

The increased emphasis on longer-term resilience activities has also inevitably brought humanitarian agencies into closer contact, and led to stronger working relationships with government bodies, as well as with intergovernmental organisations such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, which work more consistently with governments.

### *Differing approaches by different humanitarian agencies*

As one evaluation notes: ‘Implementing organisations vary significantly in their approaches to engaging with government. Some ... partner with and provide material support to health and water authorities, and seek to build capacity of government facilities and staff... At the other end of the spectrum, some organisations work as separately as possible, engaging only where needed to obtain the necessary permits’ (Al Nabhy et al., 2017: 15). This is partly a matter of organisational strategy, but also reflects the variety of organisations in the humanitarian system. UN agencies are intergovernmental bodies, governed by states and generally expected to work alongside the mechanisms of the state. The members of the IFRC are auxiliary bodies, with specific roles in disaster mandated by the law of the particular state where they work. NGOs are civil society organisations, and may be wary of state control (Al Nabhy et al., 2017; Downen et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2015), though NGOs that also engage in development work are likely often to have long-standing relationships with elements of government.

### *The triangular relationship between state, people and external agencies*

One particular example of how the nature and priorities of humanitarian agencies – and particularly NGOs – might influence their dealings with the state arose in situations where there appeared to be a tension between working with the government and working with the community (More, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). In some cases, agencies might be concerned that government bodies do not legitimately represent the concerns of the crisis-affected community, and so attempt to work with the community directly. In others, NGOs might default to working with community groups or traditional representatives at the local level, not through any particular desire to avoid the state but rather as part of regular working practices.

### *Humanitarian principles*

A key constraint for many actors in working with governments is the fear that doing so will lead them to contravene humanitarian principles. As noted in the section on connectedness, this is a particular problem in situations of intra-state conflict, but political interference in humanitarian programmes has also been seen in a number of ‘natural’ disasters/health crises and refugee situations (DuBois et al., 2015; Featherstone and Bogati, 2016; Grünwald and Schenkenberg, 2016; Hidalgo et al., 2015). However, interviewees in the case studies made it clear that, even where the state was keen to suborn humanitarian aid for political ends, it was generally impossible to completely avoid contact: at the very least, government assent was required to allow access to crisis-affected communities. In most cases, the choice for humanitarian actors is not whether to work with the state, but how. Interviewees and evaluations suggested that, even in the most politicised environments, it was often possible to find interlocutors within government structures who would work to enable humanitarian aid to be provided in an impartial manner (AAN Associates, 2016; Clarke et al., 2015; Lawday et al., 2016).



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### *Knowledge and comparability of systems and structures*

A final factor affecting collaboration was the degree to which international actors understood government structures (the opposite may also be true, but did not feature in evaluations or interviews). A number of evaluations pointed out that humanitarian actors did not know which elements of government they should engage with (Austin, 2016; Darcy et al., 2015; Sule Caglar et al., 2016), overlooked local or municipal governments (Citiés Unies France, 2016) or assumed that the government was a more monolithic entity than it in fact was.

### **To what degree does the humanitarian system recognise and support the capacities of national and local NGOs and civil society organisations?**

A number of international humanitarian organisations have called for more authority and funding to be transferred to civil society organisations in crisis-affected countries (Cohen and Gingerich, 2015; Poole, 2014). In 2015, a group of NGOs initiated the Charter for Change (C4C), a set of commitments to change the way INGOs related to and worked with national organisations. These calls were given added momentum by the World Humanitarian Summit process,<sup>8</sup> and subsequently by the Agenda for Humanity and the Grand Bargain. The inclusion of the issue in the WHS and Grand Bargain arguably moved the discussion from one focused primarily on the relations between international and national NGOs to one which aimed to link Southern organisations directly to donors, and reposition these organisations as more central actors in the humanitarian system.

Many of the commitments made in the C4C, WHS and Grand Bargain relate to increasing the funding that goes to national and local NGOs, supporting capacity development and working in more collaborative and less contractual ways. Overall, the progress reports for these various global initiatives (Charter for Change, 2017; David et al., 2017; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018) suggest that awareness of the issue has increased, and many international organisations see it as a priority: “reinforce, do not replace, local and national systems” has become the norm in policy discussions’ (David et al., 2017: 63), and there is ‘a strong interest and appetite for progressing the Grand Bargain commitments’ (Callaghan and Harmer, 2017: 5). This has led to changes in policy in a number of organisations – including some donors – and some changes in funding and coordination. However, these have not been as comprehensive as many in the sector may wish. The independent review of the Grand Bargain concluded that, in 2017, this agenda had made ‘some progress’, but that ‘donors have struggled’ (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018: 38). Some humanitarian agencies have made significant changes, while others have changed very little. Overall, the Grand Bargain review concluded that ‘[m]any signatories, particularly aid organisations, asserted that the localisation commitments are a high-level policy priority and important progress was made in some areas. However, negotiations on key definitions were prolonged and there is limited evidence of what collective progress the individually reported actions add up to. There is also a general sense among signatories that the desired end goal of “localisation” is unclear’ (ibid.: 34).

In the practitioner survey, only 19% of respondents thought that ‘the ability of local NGOs to access direct funding from international donors’ was good or excellent – a very low figure, and one which showed very little change on 2015 (when it was 16%) and below 2012 (25%). The local and national NGOs that responded to the question were slightly more positive than the average – 24% thought that access to direct funding was good or excellent: again, this was only a slight increase on 2015 (19%). In the case studies, some respondents (from international NGOs in Chad and Cameroon, and from national NGOs in Kenya and Côte d’Ivoire) thought that the situation was improving, but this was not a message that came across strongly.

It is perhaps not surprising that progress on direct funding has been slow. Many donors have legal constraints that prevent direct transfers to national NGOs, or eligibility and reporting requirements that make direct transfers extremely difficult. Some governments have addressed these constraints directly, while others have sought to increase funding through indirect routes, such as Country Based Pooled Funds or via international organisations. In 2017 Country Based Pooled Funds allocated \$163.5 million (24% of the total of \$647 million) to national NGOs. While this was a significant increase on the \$74.06 million allocated in 2015 (14.6% of the total), it is still a relatively small sum compared to overall humanitarian expenditure in these countries. In the same year, 14 of the 29 C4C signatories transferred approximately 24% of their humanitarian funding directly to ‘southern based NGOs’ (Charter for Change, 2017). Despite these increases, the NEAR network has suggested that such indirect funding goes ‘against the intent’ of the Grand Bargain commitment, and will ‘perpetuate the status quo’ (NEAR, 2017).

Beyond the direction and amount of funding, challenges also remain as to the nature of the funding that national NGOs can receive – particularly its duration, and the support national NGOs receive for overheads and core costs (Charter for Change, 2017; Mowjee et al., 2017). The multiple constraints of international funding make alternatives attractive, and many national NGOs are attempting to build a funding base through private donations in their home countries, contributions from diasporas and online crowd funding (Sumaylo, 2017; Wall and Hedlund, 2016a).<sup>9</sup> Although these sources of funding have not always proved sustainable over longer periods (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015), this approach may open the way for alternatives to the existing international humanitarian system.

Another area of focus in the period 2015–17 was capacity development for local and national NGOs. In the practitioner survey, 35% of respondents thought that the support of international aid organisations and donors for capacity-building of local actors was good or excellent – a slight rise on 2015 and a fall from 2012 (31% and 51% respectively). The local and national NGOs that responded to the survey were even less positive, with only 30% saying that this support was good or excellent – a figure very similar to 2015’s 32%. The case studies showed that a great deal of capacity-building was going on, and that it

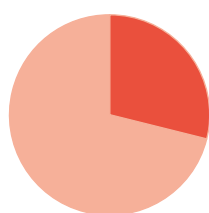



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of respondents rate participation of local actors as good or excellent. An improvement on



**24%**

in 2015.

was wanted where it was not (Colombia, Afghanistan), but interviewees were divided on how useful and relevant these activities were. Participants in DRC and Côte d'Ivoire were positive, while interviewees in Greece felt that they were 'a repetition of ... PowerPoint-based courses, not adjusted for relevance, not adapted to the context, so unfortunately in most cases it is an activity that has to be done because it's written in the project plan somewhere' (see also Betts, Blight et al., 2016). Other reviews confirm that capacity-building activities vary in effectiveness from one place (and organisation) to another (Sumaylo, 2017), and are still often disjointed, rather than being part of a response-wide plan (STAIT (P2P), 2015; 2016c). The literature indicates that longer-running mentoring relationships and working together can be more valuable than one-off training (Betts, Blight et al., 2016; Howe et al., 2015; Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). Some interviewees suggested that the only way to build capacity would be to ensure long-term funding – and that training activities were really a distraction from the real problems. Others felt that, without support in grant management, it would be hard for them to manage larger budgets successfully.

A third area that received some attention in the period 2015–17 is the engagement of national and local NGOs in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. National and local organisations often find it difficult to participate in these mechanisms (and so gain visibility, access funds and link effectively into the larger response) for a number of reasons. Meetings are often held some distance from the site of humanitarian operations, where local organisations may be based. The working language of coordination is generally English or French, rather than the language of the country in which the response occurs, and – particularly where organised by sector – coordination can be extremely time-consuming (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016). In the period 2015–17, a larger number of HCTs have incorporated national NGOs as members (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2018), and there has been a small but significant increase in satisfaction in this area, as measured by the practitioner survey: 32% of respondents, and 39% of respondents from national and local NGOs, rate the participation of local actors in interagency coordination mechanisms as good or excellent, an improvement on 2015 (when the figures were 24% and 32% respectively).

While the aspiration may be to establish working relationships as fully fledged partnerships, based on equality and mutual respect, in many cases the national organisation is a sub-contractor to the international agency (STAIT (P2P), 2015; 2016b; 2016d; Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015; Wall and Hedlund, 2016a). These relationships do not, necessarily, involve a lack of respect (a recent Ground Truth survey found that most national respondents felt that they were treated with respect by international agencies (Ground Truth, 2018)), but they are generally unequal and can be exploitative. Overall, there does not appear to have been a significant move away from sub-contracting towards more equal partnership over the period covered by this report. In only a minority of cases (such as the DRC case study) did local and national NGO staff suggest that their relationships with international agencies were becoming more equal – although international staff tended to be

more positive. Evaluations gave examples of both good (Econometría, 2016; Grünewald et al., 2016; House, 2016; Moughanie, 2015) and bad (Ferretti, 2017; Ovington et al., 2017) relationships. And the practitioner survey suggested that local and national ‘partners’ were more likely to be engaged in programme delivery than in programme design – suggesting that, in many cases, sub-contracting is alive and well: the international agency is taking the large design decisions, and the national partner is then implementing them.<sup>10</sup>

### **Factors affecting complementarity of local/national NGOs and international humanitarian agencies**

#### *International processes: the WHS and Grand Bargain*

Many key informants felt that the World Humanitarian Summit process and the Grand Bargain had provided a major boost to discussions around ‘localisation’ – particularly with respect to national and local NGOs. In some organisations, the issue was already an important one, but the processes lent it force. In others, the WHS and Grand Bargain brought the issue onto the agenda for the first time. Either way, these processes ‘provided a vehicle to galvanise institution-wide efforts to take, or speed up, action’ (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2018: 4).

#### *Differences in meanings and objectives*

At the same time, as these processes developed over 2016 and 2017, it became clear that there was not total alignment over objectives and key terms. In particular, there have been disagreements over what counts as a ‘local’ or ‘national’ organisation (specifically regarding national members of international federations or families), and what should be counted in the 25% of funding that should be going to national and local organisations under the commitments made in the Grand Bargain.

#### *Donor policies and processes*

As noted above, many (although not all) government donors have laws or regulations that prevent them from transferring funds directly to national or local organisations. (Derzsi-Horvath et al., 2017). In some cases, donors have found ways to work around these constraints in order to address needs that could not otherwise be met (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015), or to move towards their commitments under the Grand Bargain (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2018).

A number of other donor processes also militate against localisation. Among the most important are challenges around scale and duration. Many national and local NGOs require only limited sums, but small grants often require too much time on the part of the donor to be economical. Donors are putting money through pooled funds and other mechanisms, such as the START Fund, thus sub-contracting the administrative element. Regarding duration, to develop capacity national NGOs need long-term, consistent funding in order to retain staff and

maintain structures ready for immediate response (Charter for Change, 2017; Sumaylo, 2017). Multi-year humanitarian financing may go some way to addressing this, but – at least in countries where crises are infrequent – alternative ways of funding humanitarian capacity will need to be found (Conoir et al., 2017; Wall and Hedlund, 2016a).

*Capacity: the ability of local and national NGOs to operate effectively at scale*

Limited capacity of national and local NGOs was noted as a major constraint to greater localisation.

This was particularly felt:



in their ability to fulfil onerous reporting requirements for funding;



and their ability to cover large areas and large numbers of people.

A number of evaluations (Grünewald et al., 2016; Kebe and Maiga, 2015; Poulsen et al., 2015) and respondents in the practitioner survey suggested that a major constraint to greater localisation is the limited capacity of many national and local NGOs. This theme also features in studies assessing the potential of national NGOs to play a greater role in humanitarian response (Ramalingam et al., 2013; Sumaylo, 2017; Tanner and Moro, 2016). This lack of capacity seems to be felt particularly keenly in two areas: the ability of these organisations to fulfil the onerous reporting requirements for funding, and their ability to cover large areas and large numbers of people. The problem of scale has been particularly acute in situations where organisations have been required to increase the size of their operations and the number of partners with which they work very quickly (Grünewald et al., 2016). Perhaps understandably, where international organisations have looked for partners in situations of rapid scale-up, they have tended to work with national organisations that already have the ability to cover larger areas (Al Nabhy et al., 2017). Emergent NGOs can easily be overlooked, and so do not gain the experience (and ability to attract resources) needed for larger-scale work.

*Space: the ability of national NGOs and civil society organisations to operate*

A small number of interviewees – from both national and international NGOs – suggested that issues around ‘political space’ were an important factor in the degree to which national and local organisations were able to operate effectively. In some cases, governments strongly supported national organisations – or some national organisations – to take a leading role in response, but more often interviewees spoke of governments blacklisting civil society organisations that took a different political position, or imposing restrictions on civil society organisations (Espada, n.d.; Wall and Hedlund, 2016b).

*Access: the ability of international humanitarian agencies to operate effectively in hard to reach areas*

As discussed earlier (see section on coverage), there are many areas where international humanitarian agencies are not present, and which they find difficult to access. In situations such as these international agencies have increasingly been turning to local agencies, which may be more acceptable to combatants (particularly to non-state armed groups) and so better able to go where risks to internationals might be deemed too high. This

form of humanitarian action is often referred to as ‘remote programming’ or ‘remote management’. Peer reviews by the P2P programme suggest that local organisations have played a vital role in accessing affected communities in countries including Somalia and Ukraine, and SAVE research shows that local organisations consistently had a larger presence in the most dangerous areas (Stoddard et al., 2016). As the international humanitarian system struggles to access populations at risk, this form of ‘localisation’ may become more widespread.

#### *National NGOs and humanitarian principles*

As noted above (see section on coherence), some humanitarian actors – including key informants for this study – are concerned that national NGOs do not necessarily follow humanitarian principles, and that this makes them unsuitable partners for humanitarian responses. The reality, however, is more complex. Most international agencies also struggle to conform entirely to the principles, and should be careful not to hold national NGOs to higher standards than they hold themselves. The case studies for this report, as well as a number of other recent pieces of research, suggest that at least some national NGOs do recognise the principles, and attempt to work accordingly. This was the case with some local NGOs in Lebanon and Mali, and in Syria researchers found that ‘most respondents from Syrian groups interviewed emphasised that they strived for impartiality ... some clearly distanced themselves from the opposition ... or refused funds from political or military groups’ (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015: 15). Similarly, SAVE research suggests that ‘in Somalia and Syria ... affected people and aid actors at the local level do not report that national NGOs are more susceptible to corruption or bias’ (Haver and Carter, 2016: 11). In Ukraine, ‘local actors explicitly referred to the principles as guiding their operations, though in practice adherence to and understanding of the principles was variable’ (Svoboda et al., 2018: 14). Of course, many civil society groups involved in providing assistance in Mali, Lebanon, Syria and Ukraine would not want to see themselves as neutral or impartial (interviewees in Mali and Lebanon were clear that their views did not hold for all NGOs). The important point here, as in any partnership, seems to be that each organisation is different, and entering into partnership requires a clear understanding of the specific values and objectives of the other party.



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#### *Competition and attitudes of mistrust*

A number of reviews have pointed out that national and international NGOs can be in competition for the same funds: ‘On a[n] ... existential level, INGOs are expressing concern that locally-led responses will lead to them being redundant on the ground, challenging their authority in advocacy work and even their very existence’ (Wall and Hedlund, 2016: 14; see also Bennett et al., 2016; Charter for Change, 2017). In the case studies for this edition of *The State of the Humanitarian System*, a small number of interviewees alluded




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The fact that discussions around complementarity combine elements of short- and long-term effectiveness in a highly charged atmosphere of values and attitudes may make progress in this area particularly challenging.

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to this competition, particularly in countries responding to migration crises. But negative attitudes – towards international actors on the one hand and national actors on the other – seem to have sources deeper than immediate competition. The ‘localisation’ discussion also touches on historical and current inequalities and broader assumptions and injustices. Advocates of national action have suggested that lack of progress in this area is a result of ‘racist and neo-colonial’ attitudes (Wall and Hedlund, 2016a: 21), and local actors complain of being treated with ‘snobbery and condescension’ (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015: 16). The fact that discussions around complementarity combine elements of short- and long-term effectiveness in a highly charged atmosphere of values and attitudes may make progress in this area particularly challenging.

### Complementarity in different contexts

Key informants were clear that there is generally less collaboration with governments in conflicts than there is in ‘natural’ disasters or refugee situations. Where the government is party to a conflict, it can be extremely difficult to retain independence and neutrality while working with state institutions. Governments may also have extremely limited access to vulnerable people, and those elements of the government that would normally address issues of health and welfare may be neglected. In disasters and refugee situations, in contrast, specific ministries or departments will often be designated to address the situation, and there should be fewer problems of legitimacy and principle.

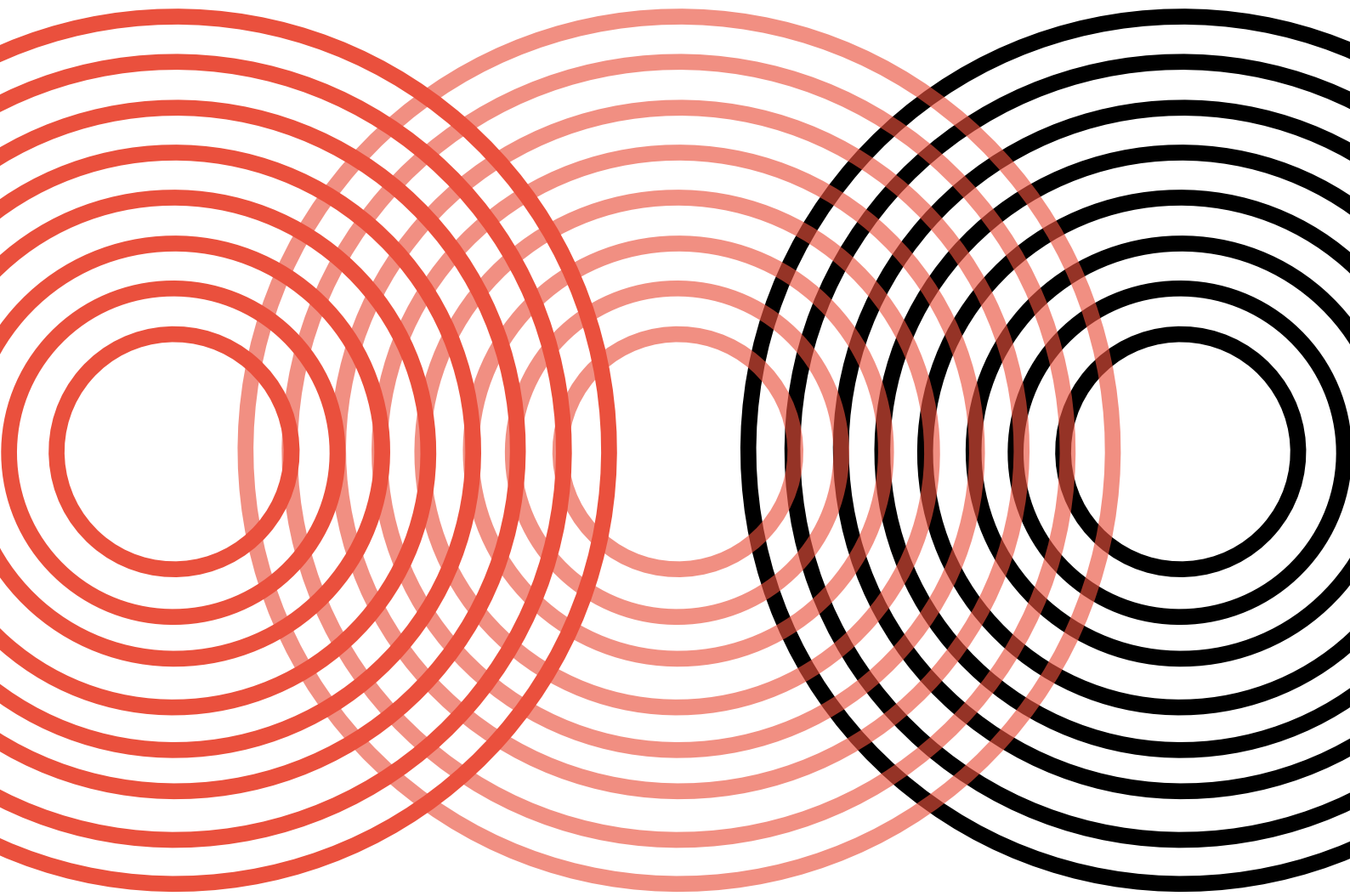
The practitioner survey bore these assumptions out, at least to a degree. The participation of governments in the assessment, design and implementation of humanitarian programmes was 50–60% lower in situations of conflict than in refugee contexts or ‘natural’ disasters.<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that governments were entirely absent in humanitarian programming in conflicts: 17% of respondents said that collaboration with governments in these situations was good or excellent in assessment and implementation (for comparison, around 30% gave the same answer for disaster situations), and 15% of respondents to the recipient survey said that their main source of aid was the government. As noted above, some contact with government in these situations is inevitable, even if only to obtain access, and it may be possible to work with less politicised elements of the state to deliver services (Clarke et al., 2015; Darcy, 2016; Lawday et al., 2016).

It should not be a surprise that governments are political, or that political considerations will be important to governments in situations where humanitarian actors are allocating scarce resources to people in great need – people who are also political constituents. It would also be a mistake to compare ‘apolitical’ ‘natural’ disasters with ‘political’ conflicts – the difference may be more one of degree. In ‘natural’ disasters, too, there is a significant risk that government structures will be disrupted, making collaboration challenging, at least in the early stages.

When it comes to collaboration with national and local NGOs, the picture is slightly different. The practitioner survey suggested that engagement of these organisations was more-or-less similar across the three contexts:<sup>12</sup> international organisations appear to be as likely to work with national and local NGOs in conflicts as they are in refugee situations or disasters. What may differ (and this was alluded to directly in some interviews, and indirectly by the variability among evaluations of 'natural' disaster responses) is the nature of the society in which the crisis occurs: in some places, there may be a tradition of active and formalised civil society groups, which are 'recognisable' as potential partners by international humanitarian organisations. In others, systems of community support and redistribution may be less easy to identify or work with.

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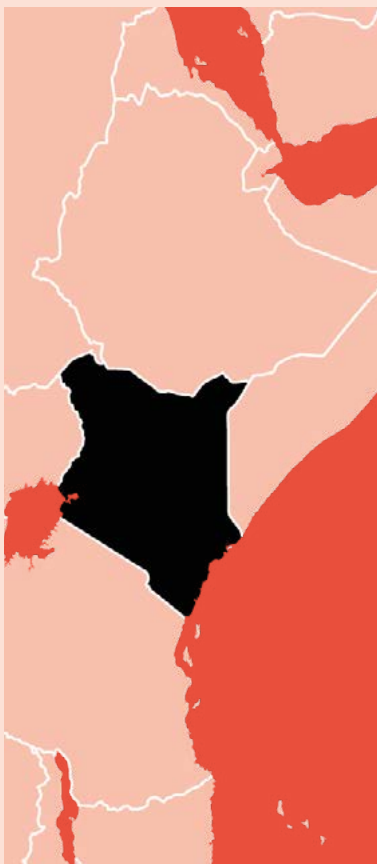






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## Kenya: Drought in the north



The drought in the Horn of Africa from 2016–17 has been described as one of the world's most devastating humanitarian crises. Food insecurity affected an estimated 2.6 million people in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) of northern Kenya, including half a million in the 'emergency' category. Unlike previous drought crises, the response was led, not by international humanitarian actors, but by national and local institutions, notably the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA). In November 2016, the government allocated \$19 million towards the drought response, rising to \$72 million by March 2017, for sectors including food and safety nets, water, livestock, agriculture, health and nutrition, education, peace and security, the

environment and coordination.<sup>13</sup> County governments also played a critical role, supporting activities such as water trucking, the rehabilitation of water points and infrastructure and the provision of relief. At the height of the drought, several counties reorganised their budgets to reallocate funds and prioritise emergency interventions. Meanwhile, international actors have designed increasingly fine-tuned programmes to complement and support government and civil society initiatives.

Cash transfers were widely implemented during the response through national social protection and safety net programmes. The Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) provides regular, unconditional electronic cash transfers

of \$50 to 100,000 poor and vulnerable residents in the arid northern counties of Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir. The programme also contains an emergency scalability mechanism to extend coverage to additional households to cushion them against the effects of crises and shocks, such as drought and floods. As one respondent in Turkana put it:

*The money has less logistical complications with it. You just go and you get the money, you don't have to worry how you're going to transport the food, like they had to do that with the maize before, and then the good thing is you can use it for different needs. You can use it for health, you can use it for education, depending on what exactly you need at that time.*

While some implementing partners considered the amounts distributed under the HSNP insufficient and organised their own cash transfers, the programme's harmonised household register – in place since 2013 – was crucial to a quick response. Although partly out of date, agencies felt that the register was still useful in identifying the most affected households if the information was cross-checked with communities.

The response has also faced a range of obstacles, including shortages of skilled staff, a lack of transparency, poor infrastructure, the geographic distances involved and insecurity in Kenya's northern regions. Conflicts over livestock are escalating, and it is becoming much more difficult to access Marsabit, Wajir and Turkana because of increased fighting among pastoralists and attacks by Al-Shabaab. The response was also coloured by the political



Unlike the 2011 drought, which led to a public response in the shape of the 'Kenyans for Kenya' initiative, there appears to be little general public awareness of the crisis.

atmosphere in the country, with national and county elections in August 2017 and a postponed presidential election in October 2017. Attention focused on the polls, and there was little concerted debate and discussion on an issue affecting a substantial number of Kenyans in the arid north.

Unlike the 2011 drought, which led to a public response in the shape of the 'Kenyans for Kenya' initiative, there appears to be little general public awareness of the crisis.

As one UN worker put it:

*'[T]he focus is on the elections. So that's now a challenge. If it wasn't an election year, maybe the media houses would be talking about the drought, but they are just talking elections only'.*

More broadly, the positive role of the government in leading the response and providing support through existing national programmes cannot make up for years of under-investment in Kenya's pastoral areas. Climate change may be behind the increasing frequency of drought episodes, but poverty, under-development and a history of neglect and inequity are to blame for their impacts. • **CHARLOTTE HEWARD, GROUPE URD**

This write-up is based on a case study conducted for the SOHS 2018 theby Groupe URD. The full case study can be found at: [sohs.alnap.org](http://sohs.alnap.org).

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### Endotes for this criterion

1. At the end of 2017, Turkey was hosting almost 3.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers.
  2. 'Other' sources were 7%.
  3. People who received support from humanitarian organisations (local, national and international) were 1.3 times more likely to be positive about quality, 1.24 times more likely to be positive about quantity and 0.86 times less likely to be positive about the speed of aid.
  4. The WHS preparatory stakeholder consultation for North and South-East Asia also conducted a survey on the effectiveness of various humanitarian responders: 35% thought government was most effective, 30% national and local civil society organisations and 15% international organisations. However, the survey had a very small number of respondents from affected communities, and the majority of these respondents were from China, where national disaster response is very advanced.
  5. Adams et al., 2015; Ambroso et al., 2016; Betts and Coates, 2017; Blake and Pakula, 2016; Coste et al., 2016; Darcy et al., 2015; Ferretti, 2017; Mowjee et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2015; Poulsen et al., 2015; Save the Children, 2015; Stigter and Morris, 2016; Stone et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2016, 2017b; Yila, 2017; YMCA Liberia and YCARE International, 2015.
  6. Only 25% of respondents said that governments were actively involved in assessment, 19% in response design and 22% in implementation. Direct government involvement in these areas was lower in conflict situations, and higher in refugee-hosting situations.
  7. Anthony Banbury, in International Press Institute webcast 'Ebola and the UN's First Emergency Health Mission', 3 February 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv5Vx63N6To>).
  8. Under its 'Core responsibility: from delivering aid to ending need': 'The international community should respect, support and strengthen local leadership and capacity in crises and not put in parallel structures that may undermine it'. The summit also saw the launch of the NEAR network, a movement of civil society organisations from the global South.
  9. A good example is the JEAF initiative in the Philippines, part of the national NGO-led 'convergence and emergence' project.
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10. In the practitioner survey, 49% of respondents said that the involvement of national and local organisations in implementation was good or excellent, while only 28% said involvement in design was good or excellent. Involvement in assessment came between the two, at 37% good or excellent. Again, national and local NGOs took a more positive view of their role – while 46% said involvement in implementation was good or excellent, 38% said involvement in design was good or excellent – a much less stark distinction. The pattern of greater engagement in implementation than in design was repeated in all contexts. The question was not asked in 2015 and 2012, so it is not possible to see any changes over time.
11. Assessment: conflict – 17%; refugee contexts – 29%; disasters – 36%.  
Design: conflict – 13%; refugee contexts – 23%; disasters – 25%.  
Implementation: conflict – 17%; refugee contexts – 27%; disasters – 29%.  
All figures for ‘good’ and ‘excellent’ responses.
12. Assessment: conflict – 36%; refugee contexts – 36%; disasters – 41%.  
Design: conflict – 26%; refugee contexts – 28%; disasters – 31%.  
Implementation: conflict – 47%; refugee contexts – 51%; disasters – 48%.  
All figures for ‘good’ and ‘excellent’ responses.
13. The Drought Resilience March 2017 newsletter produced by the NDMA notes that the government had approved a further Kshs7.4 billion for drought response measures by March 2017. These were funds were for a number of sectors, including food and safety nets, water, livestock, agriculture, health and nutrition, education, peace and security, environment and coordination.

