In February 2013, AusAid supported ICVA to bring leaders of national NGOs (NNGOs) from four countries (Cote d’Ivoire, Pakistan, Somalia and Zimbabwe) to a symposium in Geneva in order to give them an opportunity to: take stock of their experiences with NGO coordination, draw conclusions, and collectively define future strategies for influencing humanitarian leadership and coordination. The workshop participants described their expectations as follows:

Share – Learn from the different experiences of the participants. And be inspired by others to coordinate and influence the humanitarian systems better.

Practice – Find relatively simple solutions to the complex challenges of engaging with the international humanitarian coordination mechanisms while keeping the local context in mind.

Coordination – Establish a good mechanism to enable NGO coordination and follow up. Have a clear understanding of the international agenda and develop achievable approaches for the way forward.

This report is a summary of the workshop discussions. It is not exhaustive, but highlights the key points that were discussed. The group discussions that took place during the workshop focused on the following six key themes:

**How can resources be further mobilized?**

NNGOs need to advocate for more flexible funding models to allow for NNGOs to respond more rapidly and robustly to the situations on the ground. NNGOs need to build their response capacities and showcase their particular advantages, experiences and talents that are adapted to the local context. Moreover, local NGOs need to increase their collaboration and improve accountability and transparency to access funds.

**How can local NGOs compete with INGOs to access funds?**

Rather than competing with INGOs, NNGOs should better articulate their specific added value to a humanitarian response. They should participate in coordinated fund raising approaches but also seek out bilateral funding opportunities with donors. Also, local and national NGOs should seek out training opportunities specifically on how to access funds and on advocacy to enable them to influence and educate donors on funding strategies. Similarly, NNGOs should mentor grassroots organizations to enable them to understand the funding mechanisms in order to overcome the question of “how do we compete in a game we don’t know how to master?” Lastly, NNGOs should be encouraged to build relationships with donors at the national level as donors’ headquarters may have their funds already earmarked.

**How can we improve national humanitarian networks?**
INGOs and NNGOs should work together to create an inclusive system to help bridge the division between small and large organizations. In Pakistan when the NNGO network set up provincial chapters the network expanded and diversified, leading to improved leadership and a broader more representative membership. Adopting a policy of rotating leadership will build trust. NNGO networks must develop systematic follow-up mechanisms to enhance representation, feedback and continuous improvement.

Colleagues from Somalia and Cote d'Ivoire indicated that a common, pooled fund with simpler processes for requesting funds would greatly improve engagement of national NGOs in humanitarian networks. A database of information on national humanitarian organizations listing their areas of expertise and experience would allow donors to search for information on organisations they would like to fund. To be included organizations would have to meet certain criteria and if they did not, they would be given access to capacity building opportunities to improve the skills as needed.

**Be the Change?**

National NGOs must collaborate to advocate for and be part of improved coordination. They should also advocate for NGO inclusion at national-level decision-making. To be effective advocacy must be based on research and evidence. The survey and subsequent advocacy to improve pooled fund standard application procedures in Somalia was a successful advocacy effort based on shared research and advocacy messages.

NNGOs should work together with INGOs more often, including by writing shared position papers. In addition, INGOs should be encouraged to bring national partners to coordination and information meetings to improve transparency, enable local NGOs to have better access to information and mentor national NGOs to take on a leadership role. INGOs should focus on decentralizing and building the national capacities with a view to future responses being more locally driven.

**How do we protect the NNGO space?**

In Cote d'Ivoire the creation of a legal framework that requires registration has been an improvement. The UN and INGOs need to consciously advocate for and support increased space for civil society and national budgets for NNGOs. Also, national organizations need to learn how better and varied communication skills including how to coopt the media as allies. Overall, the focus of any organization needs to remain on the needs and improved outcomes for affected communities and beneficiaries.

**How can we advocate towards governments to avoid or minimize the disasters?**

The wider humanitarian community must invest in capacity building of local, grassroots organizations that will remain after the short-term humanitarian projects are over. Smaller NGOs should work with research bodies to develop shared messages that will influence government policies and laws. Additionally, donors must be convinced to support national coping mechanisms before a disaster occurs. And, community-based initiatives and local philanthropists should be coopted into the response rather
than waiting for big donors and INGOs. Overall, there needs to be an inclusion of preventative aid, not just emergency assistance.

The following day the national participants were active in the larger ICVA conference on innovation. Several participants led working group discussions in the afternoon of the ICVA conference on the following questions:

a) How do we bridge the divisions between humanitarian and development work, and bring in a broader constituency such as human rights organizations, etc.?

b) How do NNGOs get space at the center of discussions? Even when INGOs undertake advocacy on behalf of beneficiaries, they make themselves the central focus!

c) INGOs need to suitably invest in developing capacities of local NGOs and NNGOs. How can we better safeguard local NGOs and NNGOs in the broadest sense and broaden INGO engagement with NNGOs as valued partners?

d) How do NNGOs compete in a game that we do not master?

e) Where is the promise for sustainable investment and development?

f) Not just for emergency response: how do we advocate and influence policies to minimize disasters and impact?

These discussions led to some interesting suggestions and findings that are further elaborated on in the report of the ICVA conference.

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