SYMPOSIUM TO STRENGTHEN THE ROLE OF NATIONAL NGOs ON HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAMS

November 2014
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ICVA is grateful to its membership, Board and partners for dues, other contributions and in-kind support.

We would also like to thank the following governments and organizations for their support in 2014.

- Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations’ International Development Fund (IDF)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark
- European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- German Humanitarian Assistance
- The Nansen Initiative
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- UNHCR
- US Department of State, Bureau of Population and Migration (PRM)
Background

National NGOs play a key role in the frontline operation of humanitarian responses yet often find themselves marginalized from what are predominantly international decision-making bodies. According to OCHA’s 2013 review of membership on Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs), all 40 HCTs included international NGOs, yet only 40% of them included national NGOs.

While National NGOs’ attendance at HCT meetings is often limited due to time and location constraints, there are additional challenges that national NGOs face in their interest and effort regarding contributing to HCTs’ decision-making.

In response to these challenges, ICVA brought together 15 national NGOs who engage with HCTs, in order to have them exchange views on the challenges they face regarding their engagement as well as to identify opportunities for their contribution.

Objects of Symposium

To bring together national NGOs engaged in HCTs for:

- Information exchange - Explore challenges and opportunities for national NGOs engaging in HCT;
- Knowledge provision – Build national NGOs’ understanding of the international system, IASC and other humanitarian policy-making opportunities;
- Further support and advocacy – Identify ways to strengthen national NGO influence regarding HCT decision-making.

Attendance

15 participants representing 14 NGOs attended the symposium. The NGOs are based in Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Turkey, Chad, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria and Senegal. See Annex One for the list of participants.
Summary of key discussion points

1) National NGO Experience of HCT Engagement

To set the scene, participants shared their perceptions of engaging with the HCT

HCT Engagement “Temperature Check”

Basis of Calculations in Comment form:

**Green**
(HCT efforts going well)

“HCT is doing well in National NGO inclusion in the HCT and access to CHAP”

“Periodical meetings are well coordinated; clusters in a good space; funding just starting to improve”

“NNGO membership in HCT began recently so it is still an adjustment period. UN encouraged CSO participation and great recognition by UN and ICRC.”
“HCTs are still considered effective platforms for UN, donors, INGOs and NNGOs to meet but meetings do not occur often and sometimes NNGOs do not even get the invitations.”

“The meetings are too formal and quite ineffective for NNGOs due to language barrier.”

“We are accepted but are not yet considered as a true partner; everything can improve”

“Needs more interaction and coordination with NNGO; more attention to be paid to issues facing NNGOs “

—

“Too many meetings” - “Lack of coordination between government, UN system and NGOs”

“Incorrect topics addressed; INGOs often influence decisions. NNGOs are involved just to say “We have NGOs in HCTs” but with no role.”

“Funding is a major issue; UN agencies take funding”

“Need Improvement; not inclusive of NGOs with no interest in their work and lack of trust towards NGOS”

2) Value and challenges of engaging on HCTs

Participants shared the value and challenges that they found regarding engaging with HCTS. These are illustrated in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>Space to think, plan, analyze</td>
<td>HCT are fearful of taking a stance in difficult government relations</td>
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<td>Access to resources</td>
<td>Donor seats can limit – as well as improve – NNGO conversation</td>
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<td>Platform for common advocacy</td>
<td>Restriction of movement on nationals makes access difficult</td>
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<td>Information exchange</td>
<td>Disparity of treatment between INGO/NNGO decision making</td>
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<td>Developing relationships</td>
<td>Lack of trust between NNGO and HCT members</td>
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3) Discussions with UN

During the Symposium, participants were joined by colleagues from the UN: Neil Buhne, Director of UNDP Office in Geneva; Claire Messina, Senior Coordinator at OCHA; and Manisha Thomas, a Humanitarian Affairs Officer at Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). This provided an opportunity for participants to share the values and challenges noted above directly with UN staff and in turn hear the staff’s perspectives as well.

- The Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) do not have line management over the HCT, so the success of the HCT cannot just rely on HC. The HC needs to be supplemented with a good leadership team.
- The HCT is a team, not just a meeting.
- Problems that can interfere with the HCT cohesion include:
  i. No common purpose
  ii. Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities
  iii. No clarity on decision-making procedures
  iv. Little accountability for results
  v. Humanitarian Coordinators, who either make all of the decisions alone or does not make any decisions
  vi. Lack of agendas and organization

This session helped shed light on the complexity of the requirements for a “good HCT” and was appreciated by participants, especially hearing updates on the training support OCHA’s Humanitarian Leadership Support Unit is seeking to provide HCTs.

4) What would be an ideal HCT

The group brainstormed what would constitute the ideal HCT. There were many ideas presented and some common themes included the following:

- Increased strategic orientation
- Improved representation from NNGOs
- Strong leadership with good knowledge of the context
- Limitation of size
- Transparency in decision-making, selection of individuals on the HCT and information sharing.
- Clearer accountability mechanisms back to the constituents
- Ensuring the HCT is not just the UNCT plus NGOs – it has to have a team mentality
- Useful for the HCT to do periodical joint field visits.

In terms of composition:
- It should aim for 12 people
- Constituent representation (for NNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies)
- Most felt donors should be invited or at least be involved in strategic planning
- Some felt there should be an openness to host governments where appropriate
• Some felt private sector involvement could be useful regarding where they were involved in the response

5) Some Common Messaging

Participants provided some shared messages from the Symposium with 13 Member States in Geneva. The meeting entailed round-table discussions surrounding National NGO concerns in various locations such as Syria, Myanmar and Palestine with presentations of first-hand accounts from the NGO representatives.

Purpose

An ideal HCT should be one where there is equality, where all representatives sitting at the table. Whether these representatives are from UN agencies, donors, INGOs, or national NGOs, they are brought together by the same goal and accountable for what they are doing.

It is also about not forgetting the reason that everybody is there - to change lives. If everyone shares this objective then maybe there would be change regarding the relationship between HCTs and NNGOs.

Partnerships

• Local knowledge has to be respected
• Need equal partnership between the local and international NGOs – not only equal in numbers, but also equitable in values and decision-making
• NGOs & UN must strengthen NNGOs, not replace them. The UN system must support capacity-building programs for local NGOs.

Representation

• HCTs have to be a representative, strategic decision-making body
• Need to have inclusive representation of constituencies in addition to current representation from all parties.
• NGO network representation is critical to ensure the seats at the table are reflective of the wider humanitarian community. Other organizations should also find a way to have representational seats at the table

Structure

• HCT is still considered an effective platform for UN, donors, INGOs and NNGOs to meet;
• Acknowledge challenges of HCT’s structure in regards to representation imbalances. Many are unsatisfied with local NGOs being “token” representatives;
• Still facing major linguistic barriers. Respect local knowledge and language by ensuring translation at all meetings;
• HCTs should have a means of ensuring a good information repository or to share best practice.
Next steps: ICVA will:

- Share this report with participants, Member States, UN agencies, and HCs/OCHA offices
- Create a video of NNGOs for the ICVA YouTube channel and for the OCHA Humanitarian Coordinator induction programs
  - The video will show clips of various Symposium sessions, interviews with participants and event highlights.
- Seek to link specific NNGOs with INGOs serving on HCTs to improve collaboration
- Share this document and future related reports as means of contributing to OCHA’s HCT statistics
- Convene future symposia to continue NNGO support and to track improvements in engagement
Annex 1: List of Symposium Participants:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Names</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Country and Organization</th>
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