



HPG Working Paper

As local as possible, as international as necessary

Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action

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November 2018

HPG

Humanitarian
Policy Group



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Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the steering group for the invaluable guidance at the start of this project. Special thanks to Laura Jump, Sorcha O'Callaghan and Win Tun Kyi for their peer review of this report. John Bryant contributed greatly to this report through leading the online survey and the analysis. Caitlin Wake, Kerrie Holloway and Harres Yakubi contributed significantly to this report through reviewing and synthesising existing literature. Katie Forsythe and Matthew Foley provided invaluable edits to this report. Thanks to Christina Bennett for her insightful comments.

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Acronyms

CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBO	Community-based organisation
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URD	Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Introduction

The Secretary-General's call at the World Humanitarian Summit (UN, 2016), that humanitarian action should be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary', has triggered a whirlwind of initiatives, processes and debates within the humanitarian community. Whether referred to as 'localisation', 'local humanitarian action' or 'locally-led humanitarian action', the humanitarian sector is grappling with what actions and reforms are needed to allow a more local humanitarian response.

While in principle consensus has been reached in favour of supporting local humanitarian action, the localisation agenda has been interpreted and understood differently by actors at the local level and among 'traditional' international humanitarian organisations. As part of the Grand Bargain process, the formal humanitarian sector has committed to more funding going more directly to local organisations as part of a dedicated localisation workstream. Local, national and international non-governmental organisations have come together under the Charter for Change, committing to principles that support more local humanitarian action.

This attention to localisation stems from an awareness – one that in many ways led to the World Humanitarian Summit – that the international humanitarian system is struggling to respond effectively and adequately to humanitarian situations. There is also a recognition that international actors, donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies have difficulty effectively interacting with local humanitarian actors in ways that depart from the transactional arrangements that have dominated these relationships to date.

Those more sceptical about this this push for a more local humanitarianism argue that a lack of local capacity in most humanitarian crises means that localisation is not a practical proposition. Issues of capacity, capacity strengthening, partnerships, collaboration and complementarity are not new in the humanitarian sector (Smillie, 2001; Telford, 2001; Christoplos, 2005; Harvey, 2009; Pouligny, 2009; Eade, 2010; Delaney and Ocharan, 2012; Dichter, 2014). The localisation debate has, however, brought them to the fore. It has also exposed a fundamental lack of clarity around key terms in the

debate, not least what actually constitutes 'local' and 'international', how capacity is assessed, by whom and to what purpose.

Understanding these debates and issues is critical to understanding whether the current diagnosis and proposed solutions to support a more local humanitarian response are the right ones. This Working Paper takes a critical look at this discourse. It argues that defining and assessing capacity is not a technical exercise but a political one; that issues of capacity are not new to the humanitarian sector, but that past efforts at capacity strengthening have not necessarily resulted in more locally-led humanitarian action, in part because they have tended to focus on making local organisations a better fit for partnerships, rather than better or more effective humanitarian actors in their own right; and that, in exploring the interaction between local and international humanitarianism there is a need to identify those factors that support or undermine complementarity between local and international actors.

1.1 The research project and methodology

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) is engaged in a two-year research project looking at capacity and complementarity between local and international actors. The project aims to examine two questions: how can capacity be better understood and applied to support more complementary and collaborative humanitarian response?; and what are the opportunities for and obstacles to harnessing the capacity of and forging more effective complementarity among local, national, regional and international actors responding to humanitarian crises?

This Working Paper reviews the literature in this area with a view to framing the subsequent research. Beyond the wealth of academic and grey literature on localisation that emerged leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit and in its aftermath, literature on capacity, capacity strengthening, funding, partnership, coordination and complementarity was also reviewed for this report. Some literature

Table 1: Survey respondents by organisation type

International organisation	32	58%
National organisation	12	22%
UN agency	5	9%
Local organisation	4	7%
Donor	2	4%

from the development sector, in particular on the definition of capacity and capacity-strengthening, is included to a limited extent (given the large amount of literature that already exists on these subjects in the humanitarian sector). The paper also reviews operational examples and practice, although these appear in more conceptual forms below. To complement the review, a perception survey was conducted consisting of an online survey in English administered through SurveyMonkey. This was disseminated through Facebook and Twitter as well as emails. Survey respondents by organisation type are given in Table 1.¹

The survey was limited in scope and was only administered in English. The results also reflect a very specific population of respondents, and should be understood within these parameters. Even so, with 55 responses from people working in 29 countries, different types of actors and a wide range of types of crises represented, the research team believes that it provides a good insight into how capacity and complementarity are understood and acted on in practice. The survey was answered by 95 people, but most questions had a response rate of around 50% – only 55 respondents completed the full survey. The analysis below is based on these 55 complete answers. The geographic spread of the survey was

wide but thin: 29 countries, of which 22 had one or two respondents per country (see Table 2). All regions except the Asia-Pacific were represented (see Table 3), with a majority of respondents coming from Africa (35%), followed by Asia (29%), Europe (16%) and the Middle East (11%). A majority of respondents work with international organisations, United Nations agencies and donors (see Table 1). A small but significant percentage of respondents work with local (7%) and national organisations (22%). No government representatives responded to invitations to take part in the survey.

The survey respondents worked in all contexts (see Table 4) including armed conflict, environmental crises, development and chronic poverty settings and refugee settings. A small percentage also worked on medical emergencies. The survey respondent population covered all humanitarian sectors, though only a small number worked in emergency telecommunications, logistics, shelter and education. The survey results were analysed per respondent group (donors, UN agencies, international organisations, national organisations and local organisations). The results of the survey are used through this report to complement the findings from the literature review.

1.2 Report outline

This paper outlines key trends and issues highlighted in the literature. Following this introduction, Section 2 focuses on how capacity is defined and assessed, and approaches to capacity-strengthening within the humanitarian sector. Section 3 examines the concept of complementarity, offering a definition and discussing the limitations of current partnership and coordination approaches.

Table 2: Respondents by country where they work

Ukraine	7	Myanmar	2	India	1	Sierra Leone	1
Malawi	5	South Sudan	2	Iraq	1	Somalia	1
Pakistan	4	Turkey	2	Lebanon	1	UK	1
Nepal	4	Afghanistan	1	MENA	1	US	1
Haiti	3	Bangladesh	1	Nigeria	1	Zimbabwe	1
Philippines	3	East Africa	1	Norway	1		
Uganda	3	Ethiopia	1	Palestine	1		
Cameroon	2	Honduras	1	Senegal	1		

¹ The survey did not ask for information on the age, sex and disability status of respondents as it was felt that this had little analytical relevance and would instead be collecting additional personal information that was not necessary for the research.

Table 3: Respondents by region

Africa	19	35%
Asia	16	29%
Europe	9	16%
Middle East	6	11%
Latin America	4	7%
North America	1	2%
Asia-Pacific	0	0%

Table 4: Types of crises respondents work in (multiple answers per respondent)

Armed conflict/violence	32
Refugee or migration situation	28
Development/chronic poverty	26
Environmental/hydrological/geological disaster	22
Medical emergency	6

2 Capacity and localisation: issues of definition, assessment and capacity strengthening

The World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat recommended that a shift to more local and national leadership in crisis management would be aided by analysis of local operational capacities (World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, 2015). However, a review of literature and practice highlights the challenges of defining, assessing and strengthening capacity. Two issues arise when looking at evidence on local capacity: one pertains to the term ‘local’ and the other to the term ‘capacity’. Neither is clearly defined in current humanitarian discourse and literature, making it difficult to assess capacity in a given context.

2.1 Capacity in the localisation debate

Most definitions of localisation in both the literature and in practice refer to the need to recognise, respect, strengthen, rebalance, recalibrate, reinforce or return some type of ownership or place to local and national actors (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; De Geoffroy et al., 2017; Featherstone, 2017; Humanitarian Advisory Group et al., 2017). In this sense, localisation is defined as a process that requires a conscious and deliberate shift to allow for more local humanitarian action. That shift, according to the literature, needs to be made by international actors, reflecting the belief that at least part of the problem stems from the humanitarian system’s exclusion of local actors (De Geoffroy et al., 2017; Featherstone, 2017).

Some have criticised the term ‘localisation’ principally because it puts the international humanitarian system at the centre of the process, as opposed to refocusing on local actors (Jayawickrama and Rehman, 2018). As a result, other terms, such as ‘local humanitarian

action’ and ‘locally-led humanitarian action’, have emerged to reflect slightly different understandings or objectives of localisation. The term ‘local humanitarian action’, widely used in the literature, highlights a localisation agenda that is about recognising the existing contributions of local actors. The term ‘local humanitarian leadership’ is also used, often alongside ‘locally-led humanitarian action’, emphasising the importance, not just of recognising or respecting local humanitarian action, but also that humanitarian action needs to be owned and led from the ground up (Gingerich et al., 2017).

There are a number of obstacles to achieving a more local humanitarian action. For some, power dynamics and incentive structures have been the main barriers – those currently with power are reluctant to give up space and resources, meaning a chronic lack of dedicated and direct funding for local organisations (Bennett and Foley, 2016; Collinson, 2016; Featherstone, 2017). The scarcity of dedicated and direct funding going to local organisations (CAFOD, 2013; Els and Carstensen, 2015), coupled with a lack of commitment to strengthen capacity where gaps exist (Dichter, 2014; Poole, 2014), goes some way to explaining why local humanitarian actors find it so difficult to play a more central role in humanitarian responses (Bennett and Foley, 2016).

Calls for more dedicated resources, including but not limited to funding (human, skills, expertise), to strengthen local capacity have been met with concerns that humanitarian action should focus on responding to needs and not longer-term sustainability issues such as strengthening the capacity of local actors (Telford, 2001; Pouligny, 2009; Schenkenberg, 2016; Wall and Hedlund, 2016). Some also argue that a lack of local capacity in humanitarian contexts

makes the shift to a more local humanitarian action challenging; indeed, there is an argument that the very definition of a humanitarian crisis is based on local capacities being overwhelmed (Harvey, 2009: 2) or insufficient to meet the needs at hand (ALNAP, 2015, cited in Bennett and Foley, 2016). There are also concerns over whether local humanitarian actors can be principled (acting according to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) given their close links to local communities (Pouligny, 2009; IFRC, 2015; Schenkenberg, 2016; De Geoffroy et al., 2017).

On both sides of the localisation debate – those who support it and those who are concerned by it – capacity – local, but also, we argue, international – has become a central issue. Lack of capacity strengthening and dedicated funding means that local humanitarian actors often struggle to play a lead role in humanitarian response during crises. At the same time, however, past efforts at capacity strengthening have not resulted in a more local humanitarian action or addressed capacity gaps.

2.2 Local capacity: issues of definition

2.2.1 Defining ‘local’

Within the current discourse on localisation, it remains unclear which type of actors ‘local humanitarian action’ refers to. Myriad actors are mentioned in the literature on local capacity, including local and national government, civil society, including community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith actors and leaders, the local private sector, communities, diaspora groups and internationally affiliated locally-based organisations such as Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies. An additional debate is over whether ‘local’ refers to national-level actors as well as community-based ones, with terms such as ‘ultra-local’ emerging. National actors potentially may display neither the attributes of local actors (such as relationships with local communities or understanding of local contexts) nor those of international actors (such as the ability to operate at scale, or experience of a range of responses). Networks of organisations such as CARITAS or the Act Alliance have ensured that local faith-based organisations have long been included in partnerships and capacity strengthening (see Gingerich et al., 2017). Volunteers networks such as the Scouts may also be considered local actors in a response.

When discussing local capacity, the literature refers mainly to local or national NGOs, in part due to the long-standing relationships between international humanitarian actors and local NGOs as implementing partners. However, even in the case of local or national NGOs, it remains unclear who is included in or excluded from this group. The Grand Bargain process has reached a consensus that internationally affiliated local organisations will not be counted towards the target of 25% of all humanitarian funding going ‘as directly as possible’ to local organisations. Others consider Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies or local CARITAS offices as part of the local and national NGO group (Telford, 2001; Els and Carstensen, 2015; IFRC, 2015). Further blurring the lines between local and international, local offices of INGOs made up of a majority of local staff could be considered as local capacity (IFRC, 2015; Wall and Hedlund, 2016). Additionally, local staff will sometimes move from national to international NGOs in return for better salaries and employment conditions, or move between UN agencies, local organisations and local and national government in the same crisis context. Arguably they are contributing to capacity in that locale, but their changing employment means that the capacity of individual organisations may fluctuate. According to Wall and Hedlund (2016), the concept of local is further complicated with diaspora organisations that are often considered local due to their cultural and personal ties with local communities, and yet are not necessarily physically present in the local area.

Local capacity is not always understood as including local and national governments, and the various government departments and agencies that may contribute during a humanitarian crisis (Wall and Hedlund, 2016). International humanitarian actors have at times been more cautious in supporting the capacity of local and national governments during humanitarian crises, more so in conflict settings than with disasters linked to natural hazards. For Harvey (2009: 2), local and national governments are often neglected in humanitarian response because ‘neutrality and independence have been taken as shorthand for disengagement from state structures, rather than as necessitating principled engagement with them’.

The local private sector has been largely ignored by international humanitarian agencies, at least until recently, and as such is another missing element in the debate (Christoplos, 2005). The literature points to the private sector’s effective contribution to, as well as potential roles in, humanitarian responses (Pouligny, 2009; Barbelet, 2015; Taraboulsi-McCarthy

et al., 2017). According to Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al. (2017), the local private sectors in Yemen and Somalia have facilitated access to humanitarian aid, leveraged it to win resources and assisted with the distribution of cash assistance. The study concludes that ‘the private sector can provide important skills and capacity to the humanitarian community but the lack of common language, procurement processes and different ways of working can create unhelpful barriers and reduce the pool of potential partnerships’ (p. 26). As Gingerich et al. (2017) explain, while the local private sector may not be primarily humanitarian in nature or readily considered as such, it is part and parcel of local actors’ contribution to the humanitarian effort, and thus should be considered as a partner in more local humanitarian action and leadership.

It remains unclear whether affected communities are – or for the matter should be – included in definitions of local capacity. There is a growing recognition of affected communities not just as victims but also as agents in responding to crises. As one survey respondent stated:

Even before any external emergency support comes in, it is actually the people and their existing local system and culture that help them survive and this capacity should be strengthened, not weakened.

Often referred to as first responders or volunteers, individuals from affected communities are increasingly seen as part of the local response to humanitarian crises. This has not always been the case; Wall and Hedlund (2016) highlight that the activities of local volunteers and first responders are often not captured by conventional mapping of humanitarian responses.

Finally, there is debate as to whether capacity refers to individuals or organisations. Christoplos (2005) argues that local capacity is about individuals because, as personnel move from one organisation to another, they take their expertise and experience with them, and therefore building individual capacity can be more sustainable for the entire sector than building institutional capacity. Some international organisations argue that they are local in the sense that most of their staff are local individuals, though this may not satisfy advocates of stronger local humanitarian leadership given that national staff tend to work under the supervision of international colleagues. While national staff still working in international organisations would not be considered part of local capacity because their work is contributing to the objectives and agendas of an international organisation, it is important to

recognise the career path and experience of national staff as contributing at some point to local capacity.

Finally, local capacity for humanitarian action should encompass more than formal national and sub-national humanitarian NGOs to extend to the broader range of actors, groups and organisations that are positively contributing, or that could potentially contribute to, responding to the needs of affected people. In that sense, local humanitarian capacity could include development organisations, human rights networks and individuals in the host and affected populations. It also means national staff members of international organisations who contribute to local capacity, for instance volunteering outside of office hours or hosting IDPs (see Barbelet, 2017 for examples of this in Ukraine).

2.2.2 Defining ‘capacity’

A predominant theme in the capacity literature is the lack of one clear and universal definition (Dichter, 2014; Few et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015). Capacity tends to be framed in conceptual terms; Kamstra (2017), for instance, uses the following generic definition: ‘the organisational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable countries, organisations, groups and individuals at any level of society to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time’. Coming from the development sphere, Kamstra equates individual capacities with competencies such as experience, knowledge, technical skills, energy, motivation and influence. He defines organisational capacities as internal policies, arrangements and procedures that combine and align individual competencies to fulfil their mandate and achieve their goals. Finally, Kamstra differentiates between individual and organisational capacities and system capacities, which are the broader institutional arrangements that enable or constrain individual and organisational capacities, consisting of social norms, traditions, policies and legislation.

Capacity can be understood in organisational terms (management, governance and decision-making), and in operational terms (delivery of programmes and projects), with an understanding that these capacities are interrelated and enable one another. Howe et al. (2015) note that international organisations tend to be far stronger in organisational capacity than local counterparts, but local organisations tend to be stronger in and more focused on operational capacity. One survey respondent from an international organisation in Nepal highlighted that ‘capacity is within the local context, which has been ignored or side-lined by a bid to meet “Others”’ understanding of appropriateness’. In other words, the capacity of local actors – often more

Box 1: Defining capacity

The survey for this review focused heavily on questions regarding the definition of capacity, and the results were diverse. The analysis by type of organisation highlighted some variations in the elements of capacity that are prioritised by different actors (see Box 2), but not a striking difference. Indeed, all types of organisations tended to have similar categories or components that they felt were critical to incorporate in a definition of humanitarian capacity. These were:

- Capacity as human resources and expertise.
- Capacity as financial resources or the ability to access funding.
- Capacity as the ability to reach the objective of humanitarian action: to respond to needs of affected populations.
- Capacity as individual, organisational,

community and affected people's capacity.

- Capacity as the ability to adhere to certain values (independence, empowerment), principles/standards (Core Humanitarian Standards, humanitarian principles), and approaches (coordinated response, preparedness, people-centred).
- Capacity as something to be strengthened and built through training, mentorship and advice.
- Capacity as the ability to respond in a certain manner: timely, appropriate, effective, quality, at scale, efficient, equitable, professional.

There was little mention of organisational capacity in terms of strong management systems or the capacity to adhere to donor reporting or partnership requirements.

operational capacity – tends to be undervalued over organisational capacity, which tends to be prioritised among international humanitarian organisations.

The series of reports *Missed opportunities* (Ramalingam et al., 2013), *Missed again* (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014) and *Missed out* (Tanner and Moro, 2016) do not define capacity through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria, but instead use them to measure the response of local and national actors in specific crises and to identify the extent to which partnerships between local and international actors contribute to the fulfilment of these criteria. This approach uses the criteria for evaluating interventions (not just the capacity of local implementing partners) and thus could allow for defining and measuring capacity in the same way across international and national actors, based on a consensus on how humanitarian responses should be evaluated.

Two important elements need to be highlighted in regard to defining capacity. Capacity should be understood as the contribution of an actor or an organisation to alleviating the suffering of affected populations. It cannot be narrowed down to the capacity to report to donors or partner with an international organisation. The ability to manage resources and report impact, as mentioned in existing literature, are important elements of how an organisation should operate. However, as noted organisational capacity – or the systems, processes and policies for resource management that make

up an organisation – is too often the main focus of donors and international actors, rather than operational capacity. This means that actors with weak organisational capacity, or where operational capacities sit outside of the organisation, tend to be overlooked. More should be done to consider how to harness the contributions and capacities of all actors present in a crisis context including in weak organisations and those with unrealised potential capacities.

A second important point in understanding capacity is how skills, knowledge and experience contribute to a context, and the specific needs emerging from a specific crisis. In that sense, capacity cannot be understood outside of context. It must be viewed in response to a specific crisis (or crisis type) within which it needs to contribute to alleviate suffering – that context and crisis may require specific knowledge, ways of working or even technical expertise. This is not a standard list of criteria but a much more modular approach to understanding and defining capacity within a given context.

2.2.3 The link between funding and capacity

Funding cannot be uncoupled from capacity, especially as the level of funding links with an organisation's capacity to continue to operate and its ability to retain and attract staff. The literature discusses the capacity of an organisation to attract funding, and particularly to manage large funding pots and to report to donors. The survey results identified the link between funding levels or the ability to access funding, and whether potential capacity is realised or actualised. However,

Box 2: The different elements of capacity

Capacity is often broken down into different elements. Below are two systems developed in the development literature, focusing on capacities in organisations and building strong civil society organisations. In that sense, they inform how capacity can be understood in the humanitarian sector, but do not fully account for how capacity can be defined, assessed and understood in terms of humanitarian crises.

Dichter's capacity levelling system (2014)

1. Capacities
 - i. Organisational procedures and structures modelled on Western business practice, such as board governance rules, administrative systems, human resource manuals, strategic plans and monitoring and evaluation.
2. Capacities
 - ii. Passion, vision, leadership, courage, adaptability, concern for the welfare of a particular constituency and detailed local social and cultural knowledge.
3. Capacities
 - iii. Organisational culture.

The 5Cs approach to developing organisational capacity (Dichter, 2014; Kamstra, 2017)

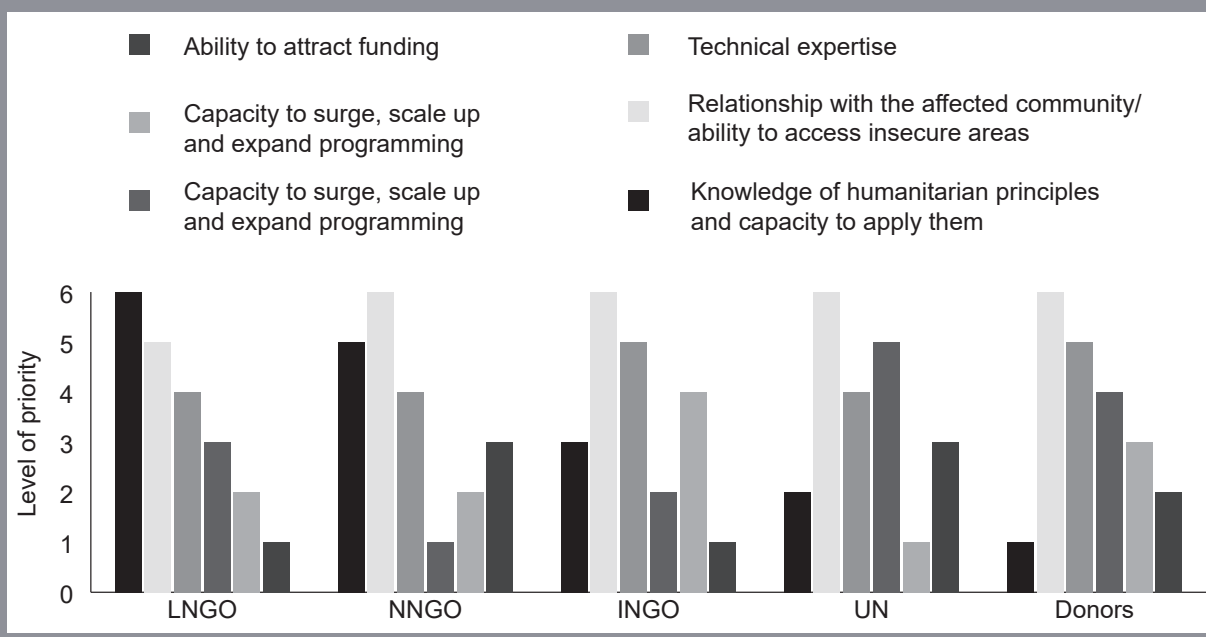
1. Capacity to act.
2. Capacity to generate development results.
3. Capacity to relate to other stakeholders.

4. Capacity to adapt and self-renew.
5. Capacity to achieve coherence.

The survey results provided some indication of the elements of capacity that different actors prioritised as important in humanitarian response. In the table below, the higher the bar, the higher priority placed by that particular actor.

These results are somewhat surprising and counter-intuitive, but perhaps shed light on how capacity is perceived. Local actors have ranked knowledge of humanitarian principles and capacity to apply them as the number one priority element of capacity, while INGOs ranked this fourth out of six, UN agencies fifth and donors sixth. The ability to attract funding was – also surprisingly – a medium to low priority for all respondents. Unsurprisingly, however, the capacity to surge was considered a medium to low priority by local, national and international NGOs, but medium to high by UN agencies and donors, reflecting the fact that surge is often a capacity that lies with UN agencies and is a priority for donors. Finally, there was consensus that the relationship with the affected community and the ability to access insecure areas was a very high priority element of capacity. This was reiterated in the comments section for this question, where a large number of respondents pointed to the crucial importance of the relationship with the affected community in understanding needs and responding appropriately to them. Finally, there was consensus that technical expertise is a medium priority.

Figure 1: Prioritisation of the elements of capacity by type of actor



alongside this discussion is another that focuses on the lack of data, transparency and understanding of funding that goes to local organisations, including through UN agencies and INGOs. These two strands meet when discussing the obstacles and challenges faced by local organisations when accessing funding from donors, as well as the difficulties donors face in providing more funding to local organisations.

There are a range of estimates of how much local organisations get in direct funding. The *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report* for 2018 states that local and national NGOs combined received 0.4% (\$85 million) of all international humanitarian assistance reported to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS) in 2017, a rise of 0.1%, or \$6 million, from 2016 (Development Initiatives, 2018: 51). The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) states that only 1.9% of global humanitarian funding goes directly to national NGOs (CAFOD, 2013). Els and Carstensen (2015) explain that, out of the \$2.74 billion going to NGOs in 2013, 84.2% was given to INGOs, 1.5% to national NGOs, 1.3% to affiliated national NGOs, 1.1% to Southern international NGOs and 0.3% to local NGOs. During Typhoon Haiyan, for instance, only 2.4% of international donor funds went directly to Filipino organisations (Featherstone, 2017).

The above estimates are often caveated by a long list of data that is either unknown or unclear. Indeed, there is a general lack of transparency on how much funding, especially funding to support core costs of local organisations, gets transferred from donors to international organisations to the local organisations acting as the implementing partner (CAFOD, 2013; Poole, 2014; Els and Carstensen, 2015; Mowjee et al., 2017). Not only is the volume of these transfers often not tracked or not easily found, the types of costs also remain unknown (Mowjee et al., 2017). According to Poole, ‘there is currently no way of determining how much money is passed on to national NGOs via UN agencies, funds and international NGOs and consequently no way of systematically assessing the timeliness and appropriateness of funding, let alone the impact’ (2014: 15).

The lack of direct funding to local organisations is seen in part as a result of the lack of capacity of local organisations to ‘meet the accountability demands of international donors’ but also the inability of international donors to ‘use proposal, reporting and accounting modalities, which would allow national and local actors to access available

global humanitarian funding on an equal footing with international agencies’ (Els and Carstensen, 2015). In fact, some literature argues that, rather than having capacity to meet donor requirements, having received funding from a donor previously was the main predicting factor in receiving funding again (Bougheas et al., 2008, cited in IFRC, 2015). While eligibility for funding often includes criteria that local organisations have difficulty meeting, local organisations often feel that ‘international funders do not trust them to manage funds effectively and with proper accountability’ (Poole, 2014:10). For donors, funding small local organisations carries political and financial risks, as well as high transaction costs (CAFOD, 2013).

Many donors have adopted a policy of funding a smaller number of larger organisations (CAFOD, 2013; Poole, 2014). According to Poole (2014), when donors give direct funding to local organisations, they often have a network of staff present and able to identify and accompany that organisation. The low level of donor funding to local organisations is also linked to existing donor policy that may favour NGOs registered in the donor country (CAFOD, 2013). Such policies automatically exclude local organisations from accessing funding. Perception survey results from a study by Poole (2014) highlight that direct funding from bilateral donors, Common Humanitarian Funds and national governments were considered the most difficult to access by local organisations (Poole, 2014). Private donors and INGOs, Emergency Response Funds and UN agencies were cited as the most accessible sources of funds by local organisations (Poole, 2014).

Direct funding, in particular core funding, is important because it allows local organisations to maintain assets and staff between crises and project-based funding. Access to funding links directly with the ability to attract and retain staff with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to respond to humanitarian crises. This means being able to pay a certain salary level consistently through, and between, emergencies and crises. Featherstone (2017: 21) argues that ‘one of the most important factors that is driving the salary differential between national and international organisations is the dearth of funding that is provided directly to local and international organisations’. Funding to local organisations through partnership is often linked to the implementation of a project, which may lead to a decrease in capacity as local organisations cannot use this money to develop their own organisations or the skills of their employees (Dichter, 2014). Indeed, according to Poole (2014: 4),

‘international financing for national NGOs ... is not fit for purpose’. The lack of predictability, volatility, difficulty of access and low level of current funding streams mean that they do not support the capacity of national NGOs (Poole, 2014).

Some good practice and opportunities to address the current challenge regarding direct funding to local organisations already exist. The RAPID fund in Pakistan, established by USAID and managed by CONCERN, has administered 130 grants mostly to Pakistani NGOs since 2009. These fund both immediate humanitarian concerns as well as long-term capacity-building (Wall and Hedlund, 2016). USAID’s fixed obligation grants allow organisations that do not meet their eligibility criteria to access funding, but at lower levels and with more monitoring (Poole, 2014). In some countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Myanmar and Colombia, there are reports that national NGOs are accessing an increasing proportion of pooled funds – multilateral funds managed by the UN at country level (CAFOD, 2013).

2.3 Assessing and strengthening capacity

International humanitarian interventions are based on the premise that local capacity is overwhelmed during a crisis and thus an external intervention is necessary (Harvey, 2009). However, while this may be true in many instances, there are no mechanisms to assess and make an informed decision about how much and what kind of international assistance is needed. This is partly because existing capacity assessments are designed by international organisations to assess the capacity of potential partners to deliver their programmes and policies, as opposed to understanding what capacity exists in a particular context, and how best to support it.

Donor policies and the nature of the international humanitarian system (loose governance, competition for funding and survival) have played a major role in shaping the way capacity is assessed (see Collinson, 2016: 21). It is often assumed that international organisations have capacity in a crisis, while local organisations do not. Internationals are viewed as trusted brands that donors rely on to deliver, without assessing whether that particular organisation is best placed to respond in a particular context and crisis. These assumptions mean that power, authority and control become embedded in any assessment of capacity, and lead to generic statements that local and national capacity is lacking across the board, rather than identifying specific shortages, for instance food or funding, that international assistance could meet (see Collinson, 2016 for a discussion of Barnett and Finnemore’s 1999 analysis of bureaucratic agency).

In addition, existing operational mapping (such as OCHA’s 3W) often does not acknowledge the contribution of local actors because local organisations may not be represented in formal coordination systems or funded through tracked funding. For example, Tanner and Moro (2016) explain that, in South Sudan, church organisations played a key role in peace-building, informing humanitarian assessments, supporting resilience and aiding in trauma recovery, but these contributions were not acknowledged because churches did not take part in the cluster system and their activities were funded by small, informal sources.

Finally, international humanitarian organisations tend to look at capacity assessment as a technical exercise (in part because of the elements of capacity that are prioritised by international actors) without questioning the criteria used, the assumptions made about what capacity is required (capacity to partner as opposed to capacity to meet the needs of affected populations) and the power dynamics and neo-colonial undertone that current capacity assessment processes entail (see

Box 3: Is there sufficient capacity in your context?

The most polarised answer in the survey was to the question: do you think there is a sufficient level of capacity in the response you are working in? Indeed, 47% of respondents said there is sufficient capacity and 53% said there is a lack of capacity. While the survey has few answers per country, the analysis revealed that this polarised result also exists among respondents from the same country. For instance, out of seven respondents from Ukraine, four felt there was sufficient capacity and three felt that was a lack of capacity. This result

may be in part due to the lack of agreed definition of capacity and indicates the potential implications for assessing capacity in a given context. Many answered this question thinking only about the capacity of the organisation they were working with or their partners, not all existing actors and capacities in their context. This highlights how difficult it is for individuals in the sector to think of capacity at the macro level beyond their own organisations or partner organisations.

Poole, 2014). As Harvey (2009) explains, ‘making an assessment is an inherently political act’.

2.3.1 Capacity strengthening and partnerships: the challenges

Traditionally, international humanitarian organisations have interacted with local organisations through bilateral partnerships. These partnerships have often been criticised for being top-down and contractual, rather than genuine collaborations that can promote effective capacity strengthening. Among international organisations, there are different levels of commitment to partnerships with and capacity strengthening of local organisations. At one extreme, INGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and ACTED have traditionally favoured direct implementation, rather than working through and with local partners. De facto, the operational approach of such organisations does not include a focus on working in partnership with local organisations or building their capacity. Other INGOs such as Christian Aid make partnerships and capacity strengthening of local organisations their main mode

of operations. As a result, these organisations tend to pass on a large percentage of their funding to local organisations to strengthen their capacity. In 2012, Christian Aid passed on 80% of its total humanitarian expenditure to national organisations, while CAFOD passed on 70% (Poole, 2014). Other organisations contributed much less, with Oxfam GB at 21%, Tearfund 19%, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 14%, the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 6% and the World Food Programme (WFP) 1% (Poole, 2014).

There are clear policy commitments in the humanitarian sector with regard to strengthening local capacity and working with local actors. Principle 8 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles commits humanitarian donors to ‘strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners’.

Box 4: On terms and definitions: capacity-building, capacity development and capacity strengthening

Different terms are used and preferred when it comes to capacity: capacity-building, capacity development and capacity strengthening (capacity strengthening is not used extensively in the literature). Again, there are no agreed universal definitions (Few et al., 2015). While some do not see a difference between these terms (Telford, 2001; Scott et al., 2015), others have pointed to the importance of using one over another.

Dichter (2014), for example, argues that the term ‘capacity development’ should be used instead of capacity-building, which assumes a deficit of capacity and creates a ‘we’ versus ‘them’ narrative. Instead, Dichter defines capacity development as: ‘anything that enhances a development organisation’s ability to solve its constituents’ problems, adapt to changing circumstances and learn from experience’ (2014: 83). Pouligny (2009) uses the term ‘capacity-building’, defined as ‘the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organize their systems, resources and knowledge, all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform function, solve problems and achieve objectives’. Eade

(2010) believes the main aim of capacity-building should be to enable those on the margins to represent and defend their interests more effectively. Kamstra (2017: 25) notes that capacity development is often linked with empowerment to achieve social justice, and defines capacity development as ‘a process that involves the transfer or mutual exchange of certain skills, ideas, capabilities or resources according to a set of principles to attain development goals’.

Scott et al. (2015) provide perhaps the most comprehensive definition of capacity development: a process occurring over a period of time, rather than a single intervention; a process that should be sustainable so that gains are maintained; a broad undertaking affecting knowledge, skills, systems and institutions; and a process that occurs at different levels – individual, organisational, institutional and societal (see also Few et al., 2015). Telford (2001) emphasises that capacity-building happens at different levels (individual, institution, community), incorporates a range of elements (performance, skills, knowledge and attitudes) and must be based on sustainability (long-lasting impact).

Standard 3 of the Core Humanitarian Standards² aims to achieve ‘strengthened local capacities and avoidance of negative effects’ (Sphere Project, 2015). Principle 6 of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief states: ‘we shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities’ (IFRC and ICRC, 1994:4). Finally, commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit include ‘empower[ing] national and local humanitarian action by increasing the share of financing available to them’ (WHS, 2016: 3), translated in the Grand Bargain as Commitment 2: ‘more support and funding tools for local and national responders’ (IASC, n.d.).

Despite these rhetorical and policy commitments, many humanitarian actors arguably perceive local capacities as ‘useful but not essential’ (Christoplos, 2005), and there are questions as to whether humanitarian organisations should be concerned with strengthening local capacities at all. For many aid actors, there is a tension between the principle of humanity and the necessity to save lives during emergencies and commitments to capacity strengthening, which by its nature takes time. Indeed, Christoplos (2005) explains that there is a genuine compromise to be made between the short-term delivery of life-saving interventions and longer-term capacity-building objectives. Whether this perception is based on evidence or not, it goes some way to explaining why capacity strengthening of local organisations is still not a central feature of humanitarian action.

Beyond this, there is also a lack of evidence that current practices around strengthening local capacity through bilateral partnerships are effective. While the World Humanitarian Summit outcomes and current discussions in the Grand Bargain localisation workstream have attracted renewed attention to strengthening the capacity of local organisations, this issue is not new to the humanitarian sector. And yet, as Featherstone (2017) explains, years of bilateral partnerships have not proved effective in ensuring more local humanitarian action. Indeed, despite calls for greater investment and action in this area, Featherstone (2017: 22) argues that, in places like South Sudan and Nepal, progress has been limited, and there is little evidence that these shortcomings

have been addressed and the capacity of national NGOs strengthened.

Aid agencies are not particularly well placed either to assess capacities or support capacity strengthening through bilateral partnerships. For Eade (2010), aid agencies have neither the skills nor the incentives to work effectively through partnership with local actors and build capacities where necessary. According to Harvey (2009), this is due to the rapid turnover of international humanitarian staff, which prevents agencies from developing local knowledge and maintaining relationships with local actors, especially government counterparts. There are also no good measures or analysis of the impact of capacity strengthening initiatives in the longer term (Christoplos, 2005; Delaney and Ocharan, 2012; InterAction, 2014).

Part of the problem with capacity strengthening through partnerships derives from how international aid actors identify partners in the first place. Current practice tends to favour organisations perceived as ‘Western’, with the time to participate in coordination meetings or visit international organisations’ offices, and with the necessary language skills (Howe et al., 2015). Another part of the problem is that capacity strengthening continues to be done and regarded as one-off training attached to specific projects, rather than as a holistic approach to supporting capacities in an effective and sustainable way (Christoplos, 2005; Howe, et al., 2015; see Few et al., 2015 and Cohen et al., 2016 on the need for long-term approaches).

Finally, building collaborative partnerships and strengthening capacity takes time, which is a perennial challenge in the humanitarian sector. In particular, short-term funding cycles have not facilitated the longer-term investment needed to support effective partnerships and capacity strengthening (Christoplos, 2005; Poole, 2014). According to Poole (2014: 12), ‘investing in longer-term support to sustain standing response capacity will be a huge challenge and one that cannot be addressed through humanitarian financing streams alone’. Similarly, the lack of funding available prior to crises means that capacity-building as part of disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness or in times of peace does not happen (Christoplos, 2005; Few et al., 2015; IFRC, 2015;

2 Launched on 12 December 2014, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) describes the essential elements of principled, accountable and quality humanitarian action. The CHS was developed by Groupe URD (Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement), the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project. It draws together key elements of several existing humanitarian standards and commitments, including the Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGO Code of Conduct, the Sphere Handbook Core Standards and the Humanitarian Charter, the 2010 HAP Standard, the People In Aid Code of Good Practice and Groupe URD’s Quality COMPAS, see www.sphereproject.org

Cohen et al., 2016; Featherstone, 2017). Finally, while international organisations claim a lack of capacity in local organisations, they also contribute – intentionally or not – to undermining what capacity exists by poaching their best staff (see further evidence in Featherstone, 2017).

2.3.2 What works in capacity strengthening

Although there is a recognition that international humanitarian actors have not systematically supported and strengthened local capacity through bilateral partnerships, evidence of successful approaches to capacity strengthening do exist. First, where the existing capacity of local actors is both recognised and harnessed, capacity strengthening tends to be based on local actors' own assessments of what capacity needs support and how. Such an approach also means that there is greater ownership of capacity strengthening initiatives and better results (Fenton et al., 2012; Gingerich and Cohen, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2016).

Second, more successful approaches recognise and accept that capacity strengthening takes time and requires proper investment (Fenton et al., 2012). Longer-term capacity development not tied to project implementation has yielded better outcomes (Telford, 2001; Eade, 2010; Dichter, 2014). In line with this, there is a growing tendency to argue that pre-crisis capacity strengthening should be part of preparedness efforts, and would be more successful than in-crisis capacity strengthening (Cohen et al., 2016; Tanner and Moro, 2016). Similarly, more successful instances of capacity strengthening have been part of longer-term bilateral partnerships that existed prior to a particular disaster (Telford, 2001; Telford and Cosgrave, 2007).

Third, capacity strengthening is more successful when it is contextualised (Fenton et al., 2012; Gingerich and Cohen, 2015). The most effective capacity strengthening initiatives have been country-specific and customised, taking into account local experiences, history, risks and conflict, current capabilities, capacity-strengthening programmes already under way, political will and how the donor has influenced the country historically (Dichter, 2014; InterAction, 2014; Cohen et al., 2016).

Finally, different capacities should be strengthened simultaneously, including intellectual, organisational, social, political, cultural, representational, material, technical, practical and financial (Telford, 2001; Telford and Cosgrave, 2007; Eade, 2010; Few et al., 2015). Few et al. (2015) advocate for strengthening functional and technical capacities concurrently as they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Beyond these principles and values, there is also the practical question of how best to strengthen capacity. There is general consensus in the literature that active learning rather than classroom-style training is a better way to strengthen capacity (Cohen et al., 2016). Two approaches are prominent in the literature. One is deploying more peer-to-peer approaches, where local organisations work with other local organisations to strengthen their capacities (Fenton et al., 2012; Few et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2016). Featherstone (2017) highlights evidence that seconding staff to national NGOs has successfully addressed capacity gaps. While the evidence and feedback from local organisations were mixed during the Nepal earthquake response, Featherstone (2017) highlights that the experience was more positive during Typhoon Winston in Fiji, where INGO staff worked within a national NGO to deliver a joint response. Deploying expertise through seconded staff during emergencies could be a more complementary approach to addressing capacity gaps than side-lining or substituting capacity by having an internationally-led response or through bilateral partnerships, where local organisations become implementing partners (and too often do not get to address their capacity gaps).

2.4 Mapping perceptions of who has what capacity

Local responders tend to have capacity in specific areas: Gingerich et al. (2017), for example, highlight typically long-standing – often very long-standing – presence in their communities, logistical access, community respect and the 'ability to effect social change' in their communities. According to Tanner and Moro (2016), local and national actors responding to the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan have measured up well against the OECD-DAC criteria for an effective humanitarian response, scoring 'moderate' in effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and connectedness, and 'good' in relevance. However, our survey respondents also recognised that local capacity was underutilised, partly because international actors typically do not have the skills to assess, understand or harness it. As one respondent explained: 'at the international level, there is poor understanding of the capacity existing at the local and national level'.

Discussions around capacity among local actors cannot be separated from discussions around capacity gaps among international actors. In that sense, claiming the necessity of international interventions based on the argument that local capacity is lacking can only be valid with a critical review of capacity gaps among

international actors. To take one example, MSF's *Where is everyone?* report highlights the 'genuine capacity issues' in the international humanitarian system, particularly in surge response, funding facilities, technical expertise and willingness and ability to reach insecure areas and hard-to-reach populations (Healy and Tiller, 2014). According to Ramalingam and Barnett (2010, cited in Collinson, 2016: 7), the international humanitarian system suffers from weak adherence to humanitarian principles, unresponsive and politicised funding, weak

accountability to crisis-affected people, poor leadership and coordination and insufficient involvement of national and local actors in affected countries. There is increasing recognition that international actors can contribute certain types of capacities, which local actors then complement with specific skills and knowledge (Ramalingam et al., 2013). The table below outlines the main perceptions recorded in the literature of the capacity and gaps in capacity of both local and international actors.

Table 5: Perceptions of capacities and capacity gaps of different actors reviewed in the literature

Perception of the capacity of local actors	Source in the literature
Understanding contextual knowledge and local dynamics	Telford (2001); Fenton et al. (2012); Gingerich and Cohen (2015); Zyck and Krebs (2015); Cohen et al. (2016); Tanner and Moro (2016)
Responding in a timely manner to crises	Telford (2001); Poole (2014); Zyck and Krebs (2015); Tanner and Moro (2016)
Acceptance by communities	Telford (2001)
Value for money due to lower overhead costs	Telford (2001); Gingerich and Cohen (2015); Tanner and Moro (2016)
More able and willing to access remote areas and hard to reach populations	Poole (2014); Gingerich and Cohen (2015); IFRC (2015); Zyck and Krebs (2015); Cohen et al. (2016); Tanner and Moro (2016)
Adaptable and flexible programming	Telford (2001); Tanner and Moro (2016)
Better able to ensure transition from emergency response to recovery and development	Poole (2014); IFRC (2015); Cohen et al. (2016)
Accountability to affected populations	Poole (2014)
Perceptions of local actors' gaps in capacity	Source in the literature
Lack of ability to subscribe or adhere to principled humanitarian action	BRC (2015 cited in Bennett and Foley, 2016); Tanner and Moro (2016); Gingerich et al. (2017)
Inability to manage resources and avoid fraud	Tanner and Moro (2016); Gingerich et al. (2017)
Lack of sectoral and technical expertise	Schenkenberg (2016); Gingerich et al. (2017)
Lack of surge capacity	Tanner and Moro (2016); Gingerich et al. (2017)
Inability to retain staff	Featherstone and Antequisa (2014); Tanner and Moro (2016); Featherstone (2017)
Perception of the capacity of international actors	Source in the literature
Most effective and efficient way to respond to humanitarian emergencies/bring scale and coverage of needs during emergencies	Zyck and Krebs (2015); Bennett and Foley (2016)
Less political than local actors	Gingerich and Cohen (2015); Zyck and Krebs (2015); Cohen et al. (2016)
Perception of capacity gaps of international actors	Source in the literature
Lack of surge capacity	Telford and Cosgrave (2007); Healy and Tiller (2014)
Weak adherence to humanitarian principles	Ramalingam and Barnett (2010 cited in Collinson, 2016)
Lack of understanding of context	Delaney and Ocharan (2012)
Lack of effective communication with affected people	Delaney and Ocharan (2012)
Poor quality and use of assessments leading to inefficient and inappropriate aid	Telford and Cosgrave (2007)

Recognising that capacity does not necessarily flow one way – from the international to the local – would better reflect the more complex reality in most contexts and allow capacity to be more effectively strengthened. Initiatives such as the Humanitarian Leadership Academy have looked to enhance the flow of capacity going from the local level to the international in its general capacity strengthening work.³

2.5 Conclusion

Current evidence shows that who has what capacity in a particular context is not clear-cut. Assumptions are made regarding which actors do or do not have capacity (largely that international organisations do, and local ones do not), but in reality this can vary between contexts and more critical reflection is needed. International actors' capacity is rarely questioned or systematically assessed in context, and neither is the

overall capacity existing in a context assessed in relation to a particular crisis. Part of the difficulty, as discussed above, is what precisely we mean by 'capacity', and a sense that international humanitarian actors tend only to recognise the capacities and organisations that 'look' like them (Svoboda, 2014). Many partnerships and capacity-strengthening efforts are criticised for being top-down and focusing on building the capacity of local actors to partner with traditional international humanitarian actors. An alternative approach would be where all existing capacities (local and international) within a given context are harnessed and supported, instead of judging local organisations on the capacities that international actors want to see. In that sense, better assessment of capacities in a given context is critical to understanding where gaps exist, and the needs emanating from the crisis. This is also important in informing the increasing focus on how best to work in complementarity, and how to divide labour among a diverse set of actors (Poole, 2014; Zyck and Krebs, 2015).

3 See the Humanitarian Leadership Academy website: www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/

3 Capacity and complementarity

Alongside the call for more local humanitarian action is a call to redefine how local and international actors work together, divide their work and roles and take advantage of specific expertise, capacities and experience in order to lead to better humanitarian outcomes. As with ‘capacity’, calls for more complementarity between local and international actors require more discussion and clarity on what complementarity means. It does not readily equate with coordination: efforts to increase participation in formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms may increase complementarity, but complementary in its fuller sense denotes a much wider set of relationships and interactions. Alongside – or perhaps because of – this lack of definitional clarity, very little is known about the factors or elements that can facilitate or hinder complementarity between local and international actors, or what other models beyond partnerships and formal coordination could be explored to offer more complementary ways of working.

3.1 Defining complementarity

Defining complementarity is difficult, mainly because most existing definitions refer to utilising the comparative advantages of different actors at different levels (see Poole, 2014; Zyck and Krebs, 2015). However, the term ‘comparative advantage’ can be problematic given its original definition in economics. Dividing roles and responsibilities based on comparative advantage would mean that all organisations, local or international, focus on what they do best. If what they do best is food assistance, then all these organisations should focus on doing food assistance, resulting in a response comprising only food assistance interventions.

Rather than comparative advantage, a genuinely complementary response would be one that combines different contributions based on the existing capacities of the myriad actors in that context. For local and international actors to work in complementarity, all actors involved need to understand who has what capacity, and where gaps exist. Complementarity includes both a recognition and assessment of existing capacities at all levels, as well as the combining of

those capacities. As such, we would like to propose a definition of complementarity as:

an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in a way that supports the best humanitarian outcomes for affected populations.

3.2 Complementarity, partnerships and coordination

Current practices of partnership and coordination may not be the best way to strengthen local capacity, but they could provide a model to harness all existing capacity in a complementary manner. The following sections examine how far bilateral partnerships and coordination can contribute to complementarity and their limitations, and other models that could facilitate complementarity.

3.2.1 Opportunities and challenges of the partnership approach for complementarity

Partnerships have yet to prove the right arrangement to support the capacity of local organisations and create complementarity. They can support local capacity and create complementarity if the policies and cultures of international organisations – the power-holders in bilateral partnerships with local organisations, whether or not an organisation wishes it so – explicitly understand partnerships to be about capacity strengthening and complementarity. The challenge is that bilateral partnerships between international and local organisations tend to involve the international organisation as both a partner and a donor, creating an inherent power imbalance. In an ideal world, as Featherstone (2017: xi) argues, partnerships should be defined as ‘mutually empowering relationships, which are aware of power imbalances and focused on mutual growth, organisational development, institutional strengthening and above all, on achieving impact’. However, as Christoplos explains, ‘in reality there always exists an imbalance of power in which Northern partners can leave the relationship whilst Southern partners often have few other options than to take what is offered’ (2005: 46).

Partnerships can also be exclusionary as the first capacity to be assessed is the capacity of a local organisation to become a partner of an international organisation – as opposed to understanding what capacities local organisations can contribute towards better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations. Indeed, partnership requirements often make it difficult to partner with local organisations at all (Bennett and Foley, 2016). Even when local organisations are deemed to have the capacity to partner, their contribution can be undermined or overlooked. Featherstone and Antequisa (2014:8) found that, ‘where there was unequal power skewed to the INGO, it meant the contextual knowledge that NNGOs could bring was overlooked and the nature of the partnership became more akin to sub-contracting’. Partnerships are also often overly focused on delivery, undermining the potential for ‘strategic engagement in coordination or improvement of systems and processes’ (Poole, 2014:18).

The literature provides extensive recommendations on how to improve partnerships, including investing in local actors as an end in itself; equality in partnership; building trust, openness and transparency over time; and sharing goals, values and complementary strengths (Fenton et al., 2012; Nightingale, 2012; Ramalingam et al., 2013; Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Poole, 2014; Howe et al., 2015). The 2007 UN Principles of Partnership defined by the Global Humanitarian Platform (see ICVA, n.d.) call for partnerships based on equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. However, despite evidence and guidance, the donor–partner identity of international actors continues to mean they hold the power in bilateral partnerships with local organisations. As such, bilateral partnerships may not be the best model for supporting complementarity.

3.2.2 Opportunities and challenges of coordination for complementarity

There is a large literature on humanitarian coordination (see Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016). Formal humanitarian coordination has evolved over the years, particularly after the creation of the cluster system following the 2004 tsunami response, which highlighted a lack of leadership and the need for better coordination structures (Bennett and Foley, 2016).

Coordination tends to be led by a UN agency, usually OCHA, although exceptions exist for refugee situations (UNHCR and more recently the International Organization for Migration) and pandemics (World Health Organization, UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response during the Ebola

crisis in West Africa). Leadership is through senior UN staff as Humanitarian Coordinators (sometimes alongside other roles, such as Resident Coordinator). OCHA, with the Humanitarian Country Team led by the Humanitarian Coordinator, is responsible for pulling together annual appeals, establishing an overview of humanitarian needs and managing day-to-day coordination. This is organised around sector-based clusters led at the global level by UN agencies. At country level, these clusters tend to be co-led by INGOs, although there are examples of co-leads from line ministries of national governments or local NGOs (Maina et al., 2018). OCHA is also responsible for managing country-based pooled funds and other humanitarian funding mechanisms at the global level. Alongside the UN coordination system, INGOs set up parallel coordination mechanisms during crises to deal with NGO-specific issues and increase the influence of NGOs in their interactions with the UN-led coordination system. These NGO forums have in some instances been limited geographically to the capital city, with membership drawn exclusively from international organisations.

While formal humanitarian coordination aims to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership, it is unclear whether it has also supported complementarity between local and international actors (Steets et al., 2010; Steets et al., 2014; Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2015; Knox Clarke and Obrecht, 2016). One criticism levelled at formal UN coordination has been its exclusive nature, in terms of participation and influence and funding allocations (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016). National and local governments have often been or felt excluded from the UN-led coordination system (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016). This has resulted in situations where governments have set up their own parallel systems, which may interact or work counter-productively with international coordination mechanisms. While there has been a move towards greater local government leadership of crisis response, this has tended to be in disasters related to natural hazards. In conflict settings government involvement in humanitarian coordination has been regarded as more problematic (Harvey, 2009; Cosgrave, 2010), though there are examples at different levels, and at times more informally.

Local civil society also tends to be excluded from formal UN-led humanitarian coordination (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Tanner and Moro, 2016). Cluster meetings are usually conducted in English rather than local languages, thereby excluding

organisations that do not have English-speaking staff (Tanner and Moro, 2016). Smaller organisations may not have the time or staff to effectively participate in cluster and coordination meetings, or may find it difficult to reach meetings held in distant capitals or at a distance from the crisis location (Tanner and Moro, 2016). Even when local actors do participate, they may have very little ability to influence the agenda and the decisions taken. As Knox Clarke and Campbell explain: ‘existing country-level coordination systems are not good at facilitating the inclusion of national civil society actors’ (2016: 7).

3.3 Factors supporting or undermining complementarity in humanitarian action

Given our proposed definition of complementarity – an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in a way that supports the best humanitarian outcomes for affected populations – there are two levels at which it can be supported or undermined. One is with regard to the ability to assess, understand and harness all existing capacities. The first part of this report discusses the issues pertaining to this, in particular the lack of a clear and agreed definition of capacity; power dynamics and bias in the type of capacities that are prioritised and counted; and the challenges around assessing capacities in terms of who does the assessing (mainly international actors), with what purpose (too often, partnerships) and at what level (bilaterally rather than more comprehensively at the macro level of a crisis or context). The second level is with regard to ‘combining’ these capacities, which entails interaction, collaboration and adapting to other actors in a context.

3.3.1 Factors that facilitate complementarity

Some factors identified in the literature may contribute to greater complementarity between local and international actors. These all tend to link to the fact that, when international actors have to collaborate with local actors, then all capacities, especially those of local actors, tend to be harnessed and combined. This is the case, for example, when national governments insist that international actors work closely with local actors, such as during the response to the Nepal earthquake. In some instances, governments have used this as a ploy to curtail the presence of international organisations. In South Sudan, for example, the NGO Bill passed in

February 2016 criticised international humanitarian organisations for not consulting appropriately with the government, and stipulated that state and local organisations should be supported by INGOs and donors as opposed to being replaced by them (Tanner and Moro, 2016).

International actors may also be forced to work with local actors directly and in more complementary ways in situations where their access is restricted or blocked, for instance for logistical reasons or because of insecurity. This has been the case in Syria (Svoboda and Haddad, 2017). The expulsion of INGOs from Darfur in 2009 left local and national NGOs to fill the void, ‘moving from the periphery to become key aid providers’, and incentivising international organisation to find new ways of working that were more collaborative (Delaney and Ocharan, 2012).

Networks that span local and international levels – such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the ICRC or CARITAS – may offer greater opportunities for complementarity. Zyck and Krebs (2015) remark that national societies straddle the local–national–international spectrum as they are internationally engaged and have access to global resources, they are established by recognition of the State and serve as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field, while they also have large networks of local volunteers that embed them within communities. As discussed earlier, the Grand Bargain does not regard internationally affiliated local organisations as local. It is important to distinguish between networks that are truly localised, such as local Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers or CARITAS, as opposed to the developing practice of large INGOs ‘franchising’ into local offices.

3.3.2 Factors that undermine complementarity

Recent analysis on the international humanitarian system reveals how power incentives and structures play into patterns of collaboration, competition, inclusion and exclusion (see Collinson, 2016; Bennett and Foley, 2016). The level of collaboration/competition and inclusion/exclusion affects complementarity, to the extent that the current humanitarian system has more incentives for competition and not enough rewards for collaboration (see Knox Clarke, 2013 and Ramalingam and Barnett, 2010, cited in Collinson, 2016). Telford and Cosgrave (2007) point out that the number and diversity of actors can make collaboration more expensive and arguably less effective, leading to less complementarity.

Box 5: What factors hinder complementarity?

The survey asked respondents to comment on the factors that hinder or support organisations in working better together. The list below highlights those factors that hinder complementarity in order of significance in the survey responses:

1. Lack of inclusive and effective coordination.
2. Unfair and strong competition for funding and human resources.
3. Lack of culture of partnership and collaboration with the respect for each other's roles and contributions.
4. Lack of trust.
5. Stringent donors' requirements, policies that automatically exclude certain types of actors and lack of donor leadership.
6. Lack of government leadership
7. Lack of certain values and principles such as transparency and respect.
8. Organisations that prioritise presence, owning space or brand protection as an objective.
9. Political dynamics such as continuous political instability and political dynamics that affect the working relations between and among some local and national organisations.
10. Lack of information sharing and good communication amongst all actors.
11. Lack of local leadership and ability to influence.
12. Difficult relationship between humanitarian actors and the government.
13. Lack of direct funding to local organisations and funding that encourages coordination.

Box 6: Level of influence of local actors

Very high	3	6%
Quite high	15	29%
Quite low	25	48%
Very low	9	17%

The majority of survey respondents felt that local actors had either a quite low or very low level of influence on how humanitarian assistance is deployed in responding to a crisis. However, a

significant percentage of respondents also felt that local actors have a high level of influence on the design of humanitarian action due to local actors' unique position in managing local resources, their ability to influence local government, their access to local networks and their ability to access and implement programmes in hard-to-reach areas. These elements were thought to give local actors more clout and influence on how humanitarian assistance is implemented.

Competition within the humanitarian sector is made worse by mistrust and tensions between international and local organisations. The literature provides numerous examples of the critical perceptions that international and local organisations have of each other (Saavedra, 2016; Barbelet, 2017). For instance, Howe et al. (2015) found that local organisations felt that internationals failed to grasp the complexity of their difficulties in managing access, while at the same time international organisations felt that local partners used these constraints as excuses for failing to correctly execute a programme. The lack of transparency on budgets and resources in bilateral contractual partnerships between local and international organisations has further contributed to a lack of trust (Poole, 2014). Competition over funding is often felt to be unfair for local NGOs that may not be able to co-fund, secure core funding or

access opportunities at the international level (De Geoffroy et al., 2017). Local staff being poached by international organisations also corrodes relations between local and international organisations during crises (Poole, 2014; Featherstone, 2017).

Others argue that during the acute phases of crises the scale of needs and the necessity to act quickly requires direct implementation, and that partnerships waste valuable time and resources – this means that international organisations operate alone, and collaboration is side-lined. During the response to Typhoon Haiyan, for instance, there was a feeling that the scale of the devastation led INGOs to avoid partnerships, resulting in 'a perceived competitive aid environment, failing to build response on local knowledge' (Featherstone and Antiquisa, 2014).

3.4 Conclusion

As part of the discussion on how to move towards a more local humanitarian action, there has been a call to rethink the way local and international organisations interact with each other. Most interactions have been through formal contractual partnerships and coordination mechanisms. However, these have not necessarily or systematically led to a more local humanitarian action or more complementarity. A review of the literature highlights that there is little written beyond partnerships and coordination on how

complementarity could be achieved. There is also a dearth of literature on defining what complementarity means in the first place. The lack of research on complementarity between local and international actors means that there is little evidence on the factors that facilitate or undermine complementarity, and little consideration of other models beyond partnership and formal coordination that could offer more complementary ways of working. These shortcomings in evidence and analysis will need to be addressed if complementarity is to become a common and effective feature of the humanitarian landscape.

4 Conclusion

As part of the localisation discourse and in the run-up to and following the World Humanitarian Summit, there has been increased recognition that the humanitarian sector needs to rethink how local and international actors interact and work together, as well as re-examining our understanding of what it would mean to have a humanitarian sector that is ‘as local as possible and as international as necessary’.

There are a number of barriers to reaching that outcome, including a lack of clarity around key terms and the assessment and understanding of capacities – especially local capacities – in a crisis. Because there is no clear consensus on how capacity is defined, it is hard to objectively measure levels of capacity, or for that matter to claim that it is a lack of local capacity that is preventing more local humanitarian action. The absence of a system that maps out existing and potential operational capacity further undermines the ability of humanitarian actors to understand what capacity is present in a context, and where external international interventions can fill the gaps. It is also critical to recognise that there is a power dynamic in favour of international actors. Access to resources (funding and otherwise) is not so much about capacity than of being granted legitimacy by those in power – those with money and who make decisions, in other words Western donors and international humanitarian organisations. This results in capacity being under-utilised, and a less effective humanitarian response.

Despite calls for local and international actors to work together in a more complementary manner, literature on this subject remains thin. Here, we define complementarity as an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in such a way that they support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities. As a starting point to examining complementarity, this report has looked at partnerships and formal coordination as the two main ways international and local actors have interacted in the past. There is little evidence that current practice in partnerships and coordination has led to more complementarity –

although both could be an avenue for it under the right conditions.

While there is some analysis of what supports or undermines complementarity between local and international actors, more evidence and understanding is needed. Further exploration of new ‘models’ of complementarity could also help in identifying different arrangements, networks and partnership models that could lead to more complementarity. These could be informed by ongoing initiatives such as the Grand Bargain commitment to increase the volumes of direct funding to local organisations, or the Charter4Change, where principles and policies of localisation are being taken forward.

This review of current practice, discourse and literature on capacity and complementarity has a number of implications and leads to a number of possible recommendations for action, reform and research. First, the capacity element of the localisation agenda needs to be articulated in ways that address the challenges of international humanitarian organisations’ lack of capacity, and the obstacles faced by local organisations. As such, a consensus between local and international actors on understanding, defining and assessing capacity needs to be reached to inform what ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary’ means in practice. More specifically, continuing to assess capacity through bilateral relationships will maintain the current power imbalance, where international actors decide who has or lacks capacity, with little reflection on their own capacities in a given context. Moving towards a better assessment of existing capacities within a crisis context, where and at what level capacities exist and how they could be better harnessed and combined is necessary to inform humanitarian action that is as local as possible and as international as necessary. This will require rethinking the role that coordinating actors such as OCHA, and affected/host governments, can play in mapping out not only actual operational capacity, but also potential and untapped capacity.

Complementarity is shaped partly by incentives, interests, trust and power dynamics. But it may also be

shaped by the local political economy of a context or crisis, civil society's relationship with government and the role of government. These elements remain unclear and should be the focus of further research. For a humanitarian response that is as local as possible, as international as necessary requires the sector to rethink how local and international actors partner, collaborate and coordinate. Given the lack of evidence that bilateral partnerships and formal coordination

are good models to support capacity strengthening or more complementarity, collaboration to support complementarity must be remodelled. Through its capacity and complementarity research project, HPG aims to tackle these questions and provide more evidence and thinking on how capacity can be better understood, defined and assessed, as well as identifying those elements that support (and hinder) more complementary ways of working.

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Cover photo: Democratic
Republic of the Congo.
Burundian footballer wows her
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