

NHN

National Humanitarian Network

is a decentralized network of National NGOs (NNGOs) in Pakistan, led by an elected Chair and Central Executive Committee nationally, with six provincial/regional chapters.

Founded in 2010 to act as an independent and vibrant voice to engage with stakeholders throughout Pakistan for promotion of humanitarian values by influencing policies and building capacities to ensure right based humanitarian response.

As of 09 March 2015 NHN has 176 members across Pakistan and it is open for all national and local organizations engaged in humanitarian assistance or disaster management advocacy.

NHN is currently chaired by Mr. Sajid Mansoor Qaisrani, Executive Director of a Right Based and one of the biggest Humanitarian Organization of Pakistan, Sungi Development Foundation.



LOCALISING HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS

By Naseer Memon

As disasters are becoming more frequent, capricious and devastating; humanitarian response is also becoming more complex and convoluted. Enormity of catastrophes entails funneling of multi million dollars to reach out to largest possible segment of disaster afflicted communities. This necessitates greater efficiency and transparency to ensure that aid is received timely, effectively, judiciously and transparently. Delays, shortages and leakages are only few of the numerous challenges characterising humanitarian response in disaster affected areas. Body of knowledge is growing with every new disaster, yet peculiarity of each disaster always keep planners and practitioners preoccupied with inventing the wheel afresh with innovative techniques and approaches. Geography, culture, aid flow and governance are key variables contextualising the humanitarian response in particular settings.

Nevertheless most of the fundamentals and principles remain static with some variation in the approach. To ensure efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of aid, humanitarian architecture has been created in many countries. The hierarchy includes government departments, United Nation's humanitarian wings, international funding agencies and local civil society. In case of any humanitarian emergency such as a disaster or conflict, this machine is expected to function immediately and ameliorate the situation through a well-coordinated rescue, relief, recovery and rehabilitation operation. However by the time this system unfurls its procedural folds, affected communities, local tier of government and grassroots community organizations have to act as the first respondent. At times they themselves become a causality of a debilitating catastrophe that severely limits their ability to extend humanitarian assistance to others.

Undeniably their role is always pivotal during initial hours and days of the disaster. During this critical phase, agility of these first respondents is of paramount significance to reduce losses to lives and assets of the affected population. Being torch bearers and trailblazers, their capacity and resourcefulness has critical bearing. By the time any action from upper stratum of humanitarian architecture percolates to the disaster-afflicted people, critical phase of initial shocks is already passed. At this critical stage when every minute matters, funding and relief supplies take days to traverse through labyrinthine procedural prerequisites. Time elapsed between the occurrence of disaster/conflict and an organized response by a sophisticated humanitarian pyramid is a critical factor. It is very important that initial respondents who are lynchpin of humanitarian system are capable, empowered and resourceful to minimise damages till contingents and consignments reach the disaster site. The current funding web does not amply empower and capacitate these pivotal local humanitarian actors. Empirical evidences may not be available to substantiate this argument yet circumstantial evidences are copious to corroborate this assertion. This is a serious lacuna in humanitarian architecture that merits a major overhauling of the funding approach in vogue. Currently funding remains stashed in the coffers of international organization. Even putting it on the fastest track, it takes days to trickle below resources to the end users. National organizations-who act as a conduit to canalise these resources to the affected population, seldom have direct access to the primary donors. They have to rely on intermediary and proxy donors-mainly country-based international organizations-to wring out resources in case of emergencies. The reason is not that primary donors dither from directly funding to national organizations but it is mainly because the national organizations are located oceans away from primary donors e.g. governments, corporations and charities located in developed world. This physical gap invariably involves bridging agencies having direct access to or located in the immediate proximity of the primary sources. As the magnitude of funding swells, risk of corruption also mounts proportionally, particularly in the countries with trajectory of delinquent governance and murky management of pecuniary affairs. Munificent tax

payers of developed world have genuine anxiety that their hard earned coins should reach to the deserving people rather than veered to the pockets of predatory corrupt elements. This necessitates an institutional array that can minimise the risk of unscrupulous syphoning and enhance the effective use of these precious resources to the hilt.

The second major barrier is perceived lack of capacity of national organizations to manage large volumes of direct funding. This may be a valid concern for countries having a dearth of quality human resource and credible national entities. However countries like Pakistan where institutionally mature organizations with national footprint are not unknown, this excuse loses steam. With a certain degree of handholding and oversight by international organizations, national civil society in Pakistan can be entrusted with this task. One reason to trust this prognosis is that international organizations in Pakistan are almost fully manned by Pakistani national staff with a smattering of expat staff at top management. Sturdy management systems can easily be embedded in national organizations to fortify their capacity. Sifting of potential organizations can be carried out through a structured assessment process. Their capacity can further be bolstered through a time-bound capacity shoring up plan. However capacity building should not be confined to routine trainings. Snap-shot project-based partnerships with sporadic and disjointed trainings would not suffice for this purpose. It should be an all-encompassing institutional development plan through a long term technical and financial support to develop seamless organizational systems inter alia human resource development, finance, accountability and quality control mechanisms. A robust three-sixty degree accountability mechanism would be the lynchpin of institutional capacity building plan. This would be a key driver to entice international funding entities. It also requires a strategy to benefit from hundreds of nationals who acquired a wealth of knowledge and skills over the years. Such a covetous treasure of human resource ought to be roped-in to serve their compatriots at the time of dire need. A gradual substitution plan with clearly delineated milestones can culminate into a larger role of national civil society in humanitarian response.

Localisation of humanitarian response will have several advantages over the present model. Shifting steering to the national civil society will considerably reduce the cost of operations. International organizations have much higher administrative cost as their employees draw hefty salaries and perks. In case of expatriate staff, special arrangements are required for their residence, security and mobility. The current security environment puts severe strictures on their mobility that practically confines them in fully fenced compounds. Maintenance of their everyday life costs astronomically. Additionally, they require special permissions and intensive security care to set their feet on ground where affected people live. Local civil society also has an advantage of having easier access and acceptability within the communities. Understanding of local socio-cultural and political under currents equips it with ability to find local solutions to local problems. All these compulsions hemorrhage meager resource meant for devastated poor people. This becomes an imperative in the wake of rapidly deflating international aid. Tepid response to humanitarian appeals has squeezed international aid. It is becoming insufficient when juxtaposed with a spike in the number of people-in-need of humanitarian assistance. Some of the recent conflicts in Syria, Central Africa, Yemen, Iraq and Sudan have spurted an unprecedented spate of refugees. A synchronous spiral in natural disasters in different parts of world has created havoc. According to the world's leading reinsurer Munich Re, the number of people who died in natural catastrophes worldwide increased sharply in the first six months of this year. The total losses incurred in the first half of 2015 were \$35 billion. This indicates the burgeoning need of resources to meet humanitarian needs. While the volume of aid has substantially increased, it has been out-paced by alarming increase in the number of affectees jostling for timely assistance. Unmet humanitarian need has steadily increased during recent years. In 2013, over a third of the required humanitarian needs remained unmet. UN solicited \$ 12.8 billion to fetch assistance to 78 million people but the response could barely generate 65% of the appealed amount. Such a mindboggling pressure on humanitarian aid demands prudent use of every dime. Sizeable resources spent on maintenance of international organizations' administrative and human resources can be partly

diverted to under-resources humanitarian assistance. The present picture is in a stark contrast where national organizations receive just crumbs of the total aid. A recent study by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) made a startling revelation that between 2009 and 2013 local and national NGOs received (directly) only 1.6% of the amount received by international NGOs, and 0.2% of total funding for humanitarian action. They received 12% of funding from country-level emergency response funds (ERFs) – less than might be expected given the intent of ERFs to provide funding to NGOs. Some international NGOs are structured around a 'partnership model', passing on over 70% of their humanitarian funding to national organizations. The study underlines the distorted funding pattern in humanitarian realm. A drastic overhauling is an obvious need.

Localisation of humanitarian aid would help feeding more mouths and build resilient communities through local initiatives. It requires a paradigm shift in the humanitarian funding by veering more resources and institutional investment on national civil society and lower tiers of government.

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