

Group work on supporting capacity strengthening

How do we best empower civil society organisations to lead humanitarian response, advocacy and local development? What capacities are needed and prioritised by local partners? Local actors often report that capacity strengthening in the aid system is a one-way transfer of capacity from international actors to local actors, short-term based, project related and takes a top-down approach where international actors are telling them what they need to learn rather than the other way. The session will focus on how we engage in dialogue and trust building that enable us to bring all our collective capacities and knowledge in play effectively. The session includes good practices on capacity dialogues and risk-sharing.

Before we start each group work: ask for permission to record and introduce note takers. We suggest two participants to feedback in plenary. If no one volunteers, the facilitators will share the 3 key points from each session in plenary in the end of the workshop.

Group work – Round 1: inclusive approaches to capacity and risk sharing

In this group session we will explore what capacity strengthening means to DCA and local partners. When local actors report that capacity strengthening in the aid sector is very much directed by international actors, is short term and defined largely by donors' priorities – how does this speak to the reality that DCA and our partners work in?

Key questions:

- How can local actors' voice be heard and included in defining and assessing capacities and to influence what capacities are needed and not?
- How can we enhance a two-way capacity sharing approach with partners?

Moreover, the aid system works on the basis of 'as international as possible, as local as necessary' rather than the inverse. This needs to change. In many contexts, and not least as COVID-19 has demonstrated, that local NGOs deliver life-saving assistance and protection in the most insecure parts of the country. They are the front-line workers locally. They face all the risks, but struggle to cover basic running costs from month to month, and violence (harassment) against their staff often happens with impunity. Too often, it does not feel like the international community has their back. Very often women-led organisations are forgotten before anyone else. The dominant model remains one of 'risk transfer' rather than 'risk sharing'.

Key questions:

- How does DCA include risk management as part of capacity strengthening of our partners and what do we do to share the risk burden with our local partners?

Group work – Round 2: meaningful capacity strengthening

In the second round we will explore in further detail some of the good practices around meaningful capacity strengthening and capacity sharing. Two central complexities that have posed obstacles to donor and INGO progress toward greater equity for local actors are the lack of trust in their capacity to adhere to due diligence standards and accountability models. While donors frequently cite

increasing pressure to account for taxpayer funds, conversely, recent Grand Bargain research finds too little emphasis is placed on accountability toward local partners and the end beneficiaries. Current partnerships, they argue, are characterised by ad-hoc and transactional funding relations: *'Many local and national organisations do not receive the support they request or believe they need to maximise their effective contribution to the humanitarian system.'*

DCA has over the years developed several tools for improved partnership and capacity strengthening, e.g., through establishing a learning infrastructure (LLAB) that takes into account the needs and aspirations of local actors, developing frameworks for partner capacity and risk assessments and enabling corresponding levels of ownership and autonomy over programming. Particularly important is investments in accompaniment for mutual enhancement of organisational and due diligence systems.

Donor support for investment in institutional strengthening directly to local partners, or included in funding through intermediaries, is one important element to facilitate institutional strengthening. But far too little of the pot is benefitting local actors.

Key questions:

- How do we escape the project based and short term nature of capacity strengthening and start investing in the organisational development of local actors?
- How do we make risk sharing and relationship building walk hand in hand in our approach to partners?
- What are good models for more effective capacity strengthening that allow for mutual capacity sharing among local actors and INGO partners?

Good practices:

- Supporting local leadership through engaging with C4C national groups and GB National Reference Groups, supporting the national NGO forum
- Supporting mechanisms for institutional capacity strengthening (such as CHS fast-track for local partners)
- Supporting local coordination mechanisms and local advocacy initiatives
- Empowering women-led organisations to take a stronger leadership role
- Enhancing mutual capacity assessment dialogues between DCA and partners
- Enhancing inclusive and equitable governance structures that allow for joint-up analysis and decision-making