Charter4Change Annual Meeting-Report and agreed next steps

10-11 October, 2017
Hosted by Oxfam-Novib and Cordaid, Den Haag, Netherlands

Day 1

Introduction

The second annual Charter4Change meeting began with reflections from a number of stakeholders; signatories from the INGO community and endorsers from local and national settings. 34 staff representing 21 signatories attended this meeting, as well as 10 local endorsers. Three additional guests were also present on the first day, representing the Dutch and Belgian governments, and the IFRC. The Executive Director of Oxfam-Novib formally opened the meeting with a sentiment that was echoed by everyone else present in the room, and would set the tone for the next two days; 'the building of local institutions in a sustainable way means different ways of working and financing'.

The meeting had three main objectives:
1) Ensure that the feedback and priorities of the endorsers in terms of C4C commitments are considered and influence the outcomes of the meeting and priorities/plans of C4C for the future;
2) Collectively identify practical and tangible steps that Charter4Change signatories can take to comply with the C4C commitments by May 2018;
3) Facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration and joint action among international and national organisations and actors.

Progress made, and challenges faced, by the Charter4Change community so far were presented to the group. Particular attention was given to local-international interaction, local engagement with Charter4Change and internal challenges faced (collectively, and by individual organisations). To review the challenges and obstacles presented by Charter4Change signatories in the 1-year progress report, please click on this link.

The top priorities to address included: funding (more funding for core capacities, resilience and overcoming restrictions); shifting of responsibilities; overcoming bureaucracy; speed and effectiveness of response (and support for first responders); (less) competition between INGOs and L/NNGOs; more engagement with local governments, local donors and other local civil society actors; struggle of local actors to scale up (quickly enough), and; better representation in decision-making forums.

Input from local actors

This gathering was built around the inputs of local actors, and their perspectives were central to the discussions that took place across the two days. What stood out for a lot of participants was the similarity of challenges faced, regardless of the context, setting or location.

The most pressing and critical issues are access to funding, and support for organisational capacity strengthening. Better and more direct lines between donors and implementing organisations are needed, as well as improved and more equitable funding opportunities at the local level (either through creating a more competitive and accessible national funding space or through pooled funding mechanisms that focus on the needs of local actors). More meaningful and long-term investment is needed between crises, to allow actors to respond quicker and more effectively when emergencies occur.

Equality emerged as a major discussion point over the two days, and particularly in the design and proposal stage of programmes. Related to this is the need for clearer communications and consistency between headquarters and field offices of INGOs, and how there are often disconnects (or completely different priorities) between the two levels. And building even further on this point, better recognition of the affected communities is needed, as these are so often left out of strategic level discussions (and the need for humanitarian action to be demand, not politically, led).

The issues raised reflect the need for better recognition by the international community of the added value that local actors provide in humanitarian contexts.

Panel discussion: Overview

The first day was focused around a panel discussion, that included guests from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Belgian Embassy in Den Haag and the IFRC. It was insightful for both the panellists and the audience, and in particular to provide donors with insights and opinions to help them to solve the issues they face, especially with regards to risk, visibility and the public/political pressures encountered in their home countries.

The guests from the donor community reassured us that local NGOs and CSOs are considered important and central actors in times of humanitarian response. Furthermore, there was a recognition of the need for funding between crises, support to resilience-building strategies, and for more equity and accountability in decision-making processes.

Panel feedback session: Group work

Participants heard about the challenges faced by donors with regards to **branding and visibility**. But similarly, there are opportunities to update the messaging around the importance of local actors. For example, what can we do to speak to people in donor countries more effectively (the example of the White Helmets in Syria was brought up, but other case studies would also be great); how can we show the cost-effectiveness; how to make the link between the tax payer and local communities, and; would we consider using the private sector and marketing agencies more, to support our agenda?

Creative ways to address **funding** for local organisations were raised by meeting participants. Examples included INGOs taking a step back and offering more of a *guarantor* role between donors and local actors, and for donors to demand that local organisations take the lead. Importantly, there was agreement that we need to move away from funding tied to project cycles and to invest more in *peace-time* support; developing capacities before disasters occur.

The funding group came up with 4 top-line suggestions:
1) Work to build new country level pooled funding mechanisms led by NNGO networks in country – starting by piloting in 3-4 countries – including a rapid response fund and an institutional strengthening fund – with an INGO as guarantor/mentor, but with the NNGO network in the driving seat;
2) Building on Denmark's lead, urge donors to incentivise accelerated localisation action by asking that their UN and INGO funding partners, as a criteria for status as "framework partner", demonstrate how they are helping to move forward the GB localisation agenda;
3) Given that NNGO partners can achieve response funding during disasters but experience financial fragility during peacetime, INGO and UN funding partners of NNGOs should commit to predictable multi-year funding support;
4) C4C agencies should commit not to bid for funds ourselves in funding opportunities where our local partners are bidding and we might compete against.

And also 4 considerations to keep in view:
1) We should urge donors to invest in research to continue to evidence the benefits of promoting localisation in different contexts;
2) We should emphasise the linkages with other Grand Bargain workstreams as a means of helping to market the localisation agenda;
3) We should advocate toward Southern governments to fund national NGO disaster response, to tap new domestic sources of funding;
4) We should promote a 25% increase in overall humanitarian funding (a) because this is needed as there is an unacceptable gap between supply and demand; and (b) so that the 25% target would not necessarily threaten UN and INGO budgets but rather be additional.

Regarding **reporting and transparency**, the point was raised about asking signatories to report against *how* not *if* they are meeting the Charter4Change commitments, and for better collaboration and shared learning amongst signatories. And also, what are the implications for an organisation if they do not meet their compliance commitments?

From the donor side, there was also some good advice to help the Charter4Change community to advance this agenda, including:
- More collaboration and consistency on key messages;
- Considering the limited staff capacities of some donor governments, and their reasons why it is easier for them to support pooled funds and large grants/consortia;
- Lobbying governments (elected officials, not just civil servants) to advance localisation. How can we bring our supporters on board?

- Highlighting that international actors will need to understand that if more funding (including better overheads) is shifting towards local actors, their share of funding is likely to shrink as humanitarian funding overall is not likely to continue growing.

We talk a lot in divides (INGO vs local NGOs), but we form one Civil Society space looking for complementarity to best serve those in need. We should therefore talk of **mutual accountability**, rather than downward or upward accountability, as all actors have a critical role to play and each has accountability to their respective constituencies. The narrative should be one of *Sharing* the Power (rather than *Shifting* the Power). The assessment/planning stage and indicators (to validate whether the localisation commitments are being met and whether accountabilities are being served) need to be co-created, co-led and agreed among all stakeholders. Real participation is an essential element of this process.

Day 2: Notes from discussion groups

The second day provided the opportunity for participants to address some key issues and challenges, and to put forward some concrete suggestions on a range of themes. Notes below provide a quick summary of each group's discussion. In some instances, copies of notes from this section are available, in their entirety, in the annex.

The Charter4Change signatories would like to take a second to acknowledge and thank the local partners and endorsers who were present in The Hague, and who provided their perspectives and priorities in advance. It was particularly meaningful to these discussions to help better understand what localisation means, in their contexts. Some of the key points that came out of these presentations included, but are not limited to:
- The need to prioritise strategic funding and capacity strengthening, during peace-time and between emergencies.
- For INGOs, improved communications between country-level and headquarters regarding localisation priorities.
- The increasing need for better coordination and equitable collaboration between local/national and international actors, including better representation in decision-making forums.

Governance

The primary criticism of the current governance structure revolved around a lack of local engagement, and too much focus on the central coordinating body, which cuts out the passion found within the endorser community. There is also not enough clarity on the roles/distinctions between endorsers and signatories. Some concrete suggestions to take forward include:
- Create national level C4C partner and endorser groups, supported by INGOs with a presence in that country. Support one another to advance the localisation agenda in the given country/location, and to have local actors/endorsers help monitor how signatories are compliant with the 8 C4C commitments.
- Country-level forums report back to the central group.
- Ensure better endorser participation at the senior, coordination level.

- Clarity of endorser and signatory functions, including clear terms and MoUs.

Communications

Commitment 8 (promoting the role of local actors to the media and public) is an area of improvement for most C4C signatories. To address this effectively, we must ensure that this is a priority for each organisation's communications team. Several suggestions were put forward, some more direct (such as calling out signatories who fall short of this commitment) and others more subtle (for example, encouraging smaller-scale changes and content that is more easily adapted for each organisation's target audience).

Notes from this discussion group available in their entirety, in the annex.

Representation of local NGOs in Humanitarian System

A lot of discussion around this issue is grounded in lack of awareness and common understanding: of the role of local actors; of what we mean by localisation; who should be engaged in this process (beyond the aid/NGO sector and traditional donors); what questions around neutrality and impartiality must still be addressed; what needs to be done to ensure local voices are brought into decision-making forums, at all levels and that these discussions arent' dominated by INGOs (and what are the inhibitors to this happening)?

Notes from this discussion group available in their entirety, in the annex.

Organisational Change

Every Charter4Change signatory will have to change how they work, to varying degrees, to fulfil their commitments. But in reality, changes will also need to be made across the humanitarian system, incorporating a range of themes and actors (including local actors). It is easy to get bogged down in detail, and priorities vary depending on which side of the table you are sitting. But as a starting point, all stakeholders in this debate should aim to ensure that the people affected by crisis are at the heart of every response, that responses are delivered collaboratively and considering the added-value of different actors, and that resources are distributed equitably and transparently during humanitarian response.

Notes from this discussion group available in their entirety, in the annex.

Partnership

A lot of the points raised by the partnership group echoed those already mentioned in earlier discussions, and in particular the session on funding. Suggested next steps include:
- The need to better embed the Principles of Partnership into our policies and ways of working, and to raise awareness of these principles amongst all parties to the partnership (INGO and local/national actors);
- Partnership led from the ground (depending upon the existing capacities and capabilities of the local partner);

- Really understand the standards and expectation of donors, and recognise that it will be easier to change their perspectives with a groundswell of local actors, rather than through the INGO intermediaries.

Funding and advocacy to donors

The funding and advocacy to donors discussion group came up with a short list of priorities, and suggested members of the C4C signatories group to take them forward:
- Getting donors to include localization as criteria for funding– write up case study on Danish donor experience (Michael and Betina (Christian Aid and Caritas Denmark)).
- Pooled funding mechanisms: address barriers to accessing PF; advocacy targeting UNPF as well as donors who want to spend more on PF (Reiseal, Trocaire).
- National-led PF model– linking to START review of localization (Anita, Oxfam)
- Principled humanitarian response in conflict context (can this be delivered by local actors?). Synthesize joint agency learning and recommendations for advocacy – linkages to ODI report (Syria, Ukraine); rely on genuine academic research

Annex

Communications sub-group

Aim: Promote realisation of commitment 8 in the C4C (on communication)**.**
Quality and quantity-wise there is room for improvements: Apart from Oxfam and Christian Aid, very little progress to report and widespread sense that most signatory "comms professionals" are reluctant to engage seriously with the C4C commitment #8.

How to move forward:

Stick:
Shaming and blaming: have a independent consultant write a **report on state of affairs**, in this field; probably much needed but it's also a rather negative approach with some risk of collateral damage (criticism could have repercussions in media that reflect all - even those who try to do better/less bad). Negative drivers has been tried before in this field with only limited and short lived effect if they are not combined with other (positive) drivers.

Carrots:
- Develop a **slogan for C4C** that is so catchy that everyone wants to put it on their website - e.g. something along the lines of "Local & Global is more than only local - and just global => 1 +1=3" …. Just needs to be phrased smarter!
- All signatory agencies' senior management to advise their respective communications/fundraising departments to, **every month, produce at least one substantive "coms product"** (video, article, visual narrative, podcast, info-graphic), **which focus on the work and role played by a national partner/affected communities in a specific humanitarian intervention.** This "comms product" to feature prominently on website and be promoted on all relevant social media. The product needs to be produced in complete understanding and agreement with the respective partner organisation. After one year, the effect/pick up etc. of these specific products should be evaluated with an eye to learning and giving direction for future related communication.
- During (or parallel with) next C4C annual gathering, C4C organise **a public panel discussion** on the subject of journalistic practice, ethics, stereotypes and innovative storytelling in communicating major humanitarian crisis.
- Connected to such a panel/event, C4C in collaboration with Guardian Development, IRIN, VICE or other relevant/willing/interested outlets to give an **award** to three good examples nominated. This could be repeated for five years or more to make it a reoccurring "carrot" and forum for debate/emerging network on this subject.

Representation of local NGOs in Humanitarian System

- Why is the debate happening as if this is a new issue – need to raise awareness about what is a local actor, who are they and what are they doing. What is their role as resilience builders, they are the bridge between humanitarian response and development;

- Localization – presumption as if it is happening now and hasn't been happening before;
- Non-traditional actors – local actors; traditional actors – ICRC (why is this the view from donor level – particularly in Geneva);
- INGOs – take for granted that we know what local response is and the donors might not understand – semantics;
- Humanitarian Principles question – can local actors be truly impartial and neutral – this is education part; do we have enough evidence that this is (or isn't) a challenge;
- Cannot access funding for pilot projects for local actors;
- National/Local actors are not represented at the coordination committees;
- UN – OCHA is heading dialogue (essentially mostly a "monologue") on how to open up coordination at the local level;
- Look at the narrative within C4C; why do we have signatory vs endorser
- Donors – broaden discussion beyond just western donors because some of the larger donors are in the Middle East (Saudi, Qatar, Turkey, etc). How do we bring them to the conversation;
- Where is the process with simplified and joint reporting processes from the donor side related to Grand Bargain;
- CHS – where is donor awareness on CHS?

Questions for Donors

- How can donors ensure greater global South local/national organization representation/input at higher level discussions, like Grand Bargain, ECOSOC, Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD);
- What are Donors doing at their national levels (through Embassies) to promote dialogue with national actors at the country level;
- How are Western Donors, through GHD and other avenues, engaging non-Western donors in the discussion around the Grand Bargain;
- How do the donors incentivize localization – the mechanisms that are put in place to ensure their partners in START;
- Would be interested to see how donors see the progression of the localization agenda. What is their view of how it has gone in the last 1.5 year? What is their view of pooled funding mechanisms.? Where do they see the representation/decision making around localization agenda;
- Challenge back donors on the way that they utilize their funding – just giving to the UN and saying they have done their job, but then at the same time saying that local actors are very important;
- Challenge – increase in donor funding towards private sector and large contractors. What are donors' future plans in terms of amount of funding that will go towards private sector vs. local/national actors;
- Representation – meetings tend to be in Geneva or other western countries which makes it difficult for global south local/national actors to participate due to visa issues, finances, etc.

<u>Organisational Change</u>

From perspective of endorsers…

- Whole of system change is needed - including local government, UN system, private sector (multinational level & local level) if a system of support to local organisations (first responders/ local organisations/ CBOs);
- During crisis a surge of UN and INGOs during crisis. Need for presence is justified by need for speed/ standards/ and these override practical needs of community. We're always reminded of the standards (Sphere, CHS, etc) although we know on the ground these can't work (culture/ speed/ maximising resources/ what people want). Types of goods distributed are often inappropriate/ not what the community want. Local partners are forced to consider priorities of donors. Local organisations want INGOs *'who support us do what we want to do….and meet community needs';*
- System Demands: Lack of access to sites in Syria and local partners unable to provide documentation required. Yet internal demands (full documentation and standards) have not been revised. Demands for due Diligence / transparency / audit requirements yet the Softer standards (participation/ culture/ conflict sensitivity) take second place;
- Before crisis, little funding for local organisations to become better prepared.

From perspective of signatories…

- So many pressures to spend quickly, to reach community fast;
- Back donor demands;
- Emphasis is on numbers/ speed rather than quality of the response;
- Pressure to spend. For example, in Germany you have to pay interest on public funding if you don't spend in 4 months (back to Government). But, the interest rate is currently low;
- Compliance requirements.

So, what needs to change to enable locally-led response?

1. **Voice of crisis affected people needs to direct type of response required**/ voice of programme participants should be documented in the system (in monitoring system/ evaluation system etc);
2. **Type of partnership**: needs to change to invest in local partners strategic and institutional plans, support the institution rather than the time-bound project. **Joint planning of projects** with INGOs (before it goes to the donor / **Joint Preparedness**: some INGOs do and others don't **/ Expediating decision making process:** to ensure a rapid response decentralised decision making needed. Local organisations want to be supported to implement their own plans to do what they want to do for the community;
3. **Addressing unfair competition from INGOs including affiliates in countries**-Promote local organisations as led agencies in consortiums (INGO take role of technical partner). Facilitate access to donor funding / Lobby against special conditions for local organisations e.g. from EU;

4. **Encourage collaboration/ complementarity,** e.g. make strategic use of technical expertise but don't patronise - 'My partner'…'my partner'…'my community'…it's not your partner…it's not your community…maximising comparative advantage of different actors. **Thinking beyond our own survival** …community need should be at the forefront;

5. **Document good practice examples** to persuade other donors/INGOs it's possible to work in a different way;

6. **Strong Co-ordination – further exploring commitment number 2:** Building national networks to have with a stronger voice. UN Coordination system doesn't work for local agencies. Where co-ordination has worked best for local partners is where we have strong government controls and direct co-ordination (acknowledge there are positive and negatives). Leadership and participation are not the same thing;

7. F**inancing / Overheads:** Splitting the administrative percentage received from donors between your recipient agency and local partner. Some agencies have included a capacity building percentage in each grant;

8. **UN not participating in Grand Bargain discussions.** While there are some good individuals working towards localisation, there needs to be more present and involved in localisation discussions;

9. What about **development funding within the localisation debate**? So many local partners implement both humanitarian and development programmes. Can we advocate across into the development sector on localisation?