

Changing Dynamics

Southern Leadership in Humanitarian Response

July 2019





KUNO is an initiative of ten NGOs and five knowledge institutes from the Dutch humanitarian sector. KUNO's goal is to strengthen the humanitarian sector in the Netherlands. KUNO is a platform for joint learning, reflection and debate. We organize expert meetings, working sessions for professionals, webinars, training and public debates. All of our events are cross-sectoral and organized in cooperation with our partners.

www.kuno-platform.nl

kuno@kuno-platform.nl

Cover photo: Smruti Patel and the panelists at the public debate, picture taken by Mathijs de Vries, Dorcas

Author: Peter Heintze and Eliza Snel

Public debate

In July, Field Coordinators from Afghanistan, Sudan and Iraq of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) visited The Hague. KUNO and the DRA used this opportunity to talk with them about southern leadership in humanitarian responses, the challenges of southern leadership and what is needed to stimulate it. This debate was facilitated by Smruti Patel, co-director of the Global Mentoring Initiative, who kicked off. After her introduction, the Field Coordinators shared their experiences and insights on engaging local actors and supporting local leadership.

The panellists were:

- Abdur Rauf Safi, Field Coordinator Afghanistan Joint Response
- Tino Muzivashi, Field Coordinator Sudan Joint Response
- Ahmed Hussein, Field Coordinator Iraq Joint Response

The visitors to this public debate were from very diverse backgrounds. The main group of participants are working for the different partner organizations to the DRA. Besides this, there were also participants present from the International Institute of Social Studies at the Erasmus University and people working for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The main conclusion of the debate was that INGOs should reinforce local organizations, and not replace them: INGOs should help local NGOs to thrive. Currently, the partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs are not equal.

Examples of unequal partnerships:

- INGOs should not only work on capacity strengthening, but also on organizational development of local NGOs and allow local NGOs budget for overhead;
- Uncertainty about longer term financing leads to a lack of long term planning of local NGOs;
- INGOs tend to use local NGOs as sub-contractors: they use the local NGOs for implementing their projects and do not ask local NGOs what they think is needed;
- Local partners are usually not part of decision-making processes;
- A strong national platform of local NGOs can strengthen the position of local organizations; however, we often see the INGOs take control of successful national platforms (the language switches to English and membership fees rise);
- In national NGOs local staff is often hired, but expats are in control;
- The brain drain of local staff towards international organizations is undermining the quality of local NGOs;
- Local NGOs do not have the skills to write proposals for international donors and do not have access to international donors;
- INGOs indicate that local NGOs bring a relatively high risk of corruption, but there are also ample examples of corruption within INGOs;
- Too little attention is paid to what local NGOs do bring, also unique features such as local knowledge and a greater necessity to be accountable to local communities;
- Local NGOs often remain invisible for international donors, because their names do not appear in reports and evaluations.

Finally, Smruti Patel offered some suggestions for practical ways to stimulate localization, referring to a recent report by Koenraad Van Brabant and herself ([The Finance and Economics of Localisation](#)):

- Enhance local visibility and acknowledge local efforts. Right now, they don't see their names anywhere.
- Work on trust (also the trust of the donor). For trust, you need to understand who the local NGOs are. What is their background? What is the cultural practice? Need to understand the fear of the donor for biased aid to local organizations. INGOs are working with few local NGOs but not all of them, for a reason. There are some very genuine organizations. But sometimes, there are also fears of financial irregularities. The quality of relationship depends on who the local NGO is.
- Work on the capacity of local NGOs to meet donor-specific requirements.
- Local organizations have more legitimacy on the ground. But they also have the biggest risk. They cannot pull out if something goes wrong. We need to work on risk management and risk sharing.
- Joint partnership agreement with local organizations to see them as equal partners. Need more involvement. Changing the partnership to be more holistic to everyone.
- Learn from local organization: asking a local organization to assess the INGOs can also increase its confidence level by allow it to make recommendations to INGOs.
- Share ICR (overhead: Indirect Costs Recovery) with local partners.
- Establish a localization working group at local level.