



Local Leadership and the Case of Somalia

Expert meeting with local leaders from Somalia and Dutch humanitarian professionals.
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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.

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Cover photo: A bit of rain resulted in this puddle. Due to lack of water in the Sanaag region, Somalia, Faisal (right) says he and his family have no choice but to drink this, even though it gives them diarrhea.

Credits cover photo: Petterik Wiggers/Oxfam

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Introduction

Three leaders of national NGOs from Somalia visited the Netherlands and, on the initiative of KUNO, Oxfam Novib and the DRA, an expert meeting on local leadership in Somalia was held in the Hague on 3 December 2019. The theme of the meeting was the effects of inequalities in the aid system, unequal risk sharing, and power imbalances. But the discussion also highlighted the way in which the different organizations complement one another and the partnerships between local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) and international NGOs (INGOs).

Complementarity

Mr. Abdirizak Bashir Libah, Executive Director of Candlelight, for Environment, Education and Health.

Mr. Abdirizak stressed that all NGOs, whether local, national or international, have the mandate to serve those in need, and all these different organizations need each other. The advantage of INGOs is that they have access to donors and knowledge of sources of funding. For L/NNGOs, these sources are often very difficult to access. L/NNGOs have a good understanding of the local context and have better access to communities. INGOs and L/NNGOs need to complement one another.

Furthermore, in order to improve, different organizations need to question one another on their functioning: what knowledge or skills are lacking and how can we improve them? L/NNGOs are often hindered by logistics when trying to reach donors, and unless they receive funds they cannot grow or improve. Capacity building is therefore an important aspect which can be facilitated by INGOs. If INGOs help L/NNGOs to build institutional capacity, L/NNGOs can grow and attract new donors, which can lead to a lasting impact.

Risk transfer

Mr. Omer Jama Farah, Executive Director of Taakulo, a Somali humanitarian and development NGO.

Mr. Omer indicated that INGOs often transfer risks to L/NNGOs, especially in conflict settings (where INGOs do not have strong access). This is a major concern. INGOs state that L/NNGOs do not have the right capacities. At the same time, INGOs sub-contract assignments to L/NNGOs, and L/NNGOs are held fully accountable. Meanwhile, L/NNGOs are not allowed to reimburse costs for administration, capacity building or risk mitigation. In short this means that: L/NNGOs do not get direct access to donors, have to endure unequal partnerships, and do not get the opportunity to invest in capacity strengthening. As a consequence, a transfer of power towards L/NNGOs, which is an important commitment of the Grand Bargain, will not become reality.

Strengths and vulnerability of women's organizations

Ms. Nefisa Yusuf Mohamed, Executive Director of NAGAAD (network of 45 women's organizations in Somaliland).

Ms. Nefisa pointed out that only INGOs can access the big funds. In many cases, the funds go to the government and not the NGOs. The L/NNGOs therefore experience a shrinking space.

Furthermore, Ms Nefisa would welcome a coordination mechanism that brings together INGOs and L/NNGOs. INGOs do not want to sit with L/NNHGOs but with donors. A call for proposals that is open to L/NNGOs only, as the EU initiated, is welcomed strongly by L/NNGOs

Another challenge is the full participation of women. Women-led organizations receive no direct support from humanitarian organizations. However, women are more vulnerable than others within society. She also stated that it is important to know what women need. Actually, every situation could use a women-led organization.

Partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs

The available funds determine the kind of partnership. Partnerships based on a contract offer little freedom or possibilities for involvement for L/NNGOs. Partnership cooperation agreements are a better option because they allow for a consortium to be developed with input from all partners. The length of a partnership is also determined by the funds available. It often comes down to a project of one year, which is developed without consultation. A longer project allows for more input from local partners.

As of now, one of the main reasons INGOs connect with L/NNGOs is because of their access to and knowledge of an area. INGOs, when writing a proposal for a donor, will thus always say they have access and then use a L/NNGO to actually access the area. When an L/NNGO is consulted for such a project they could say no, however. Another L/NNGO will then take on the job and provide the INGO with the necessary information and access.

Networking among L/NNGOs

L/NNGOs in Somalia do sit together and share information, for instance in the recently instated localization taskforce. The cooperation and coordination is not as strong as it is among INGOs, however, but it does allow for an amplification of the voices of L/NNGOs in the localization debate.

Currently, INGOs are taking over the role of the Somali government. The government thus feels threatened and restricts the possibilities of NGOs. In order to speak out against the government, the L/NNGOs need to act together.

The climate crisis

L/NNGOs integrate their plans to adapt to climate change. However, there is a need to harmonize humanitarian interventions and environmental plans. To do so, L/NNGOs need more information and training on climate change, its possible consequences for the region and how to prepare the region. L/NNGOs also try to inform people about the use of natural resources. Droughts lead to IDPs, which often need help to be integrated into urban life.

Another way of working is the Cash For Work programmes. In these, L/NNGOs work with local people, often women, and conservation agencies. For example, trees are planted by women who will then receive cash for their work. In these programmes L/NNGOs usually work with women because they are more likely to share the cash with the household.