



Localisation of humanitarian aid in Ukraine

28 March 2023, The Hague

Summary report

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded and occupied parts of Ukraine: a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014. Over the past year (and a month), Ukraine has received pledges of almost 17 billion USD for humanitarian aid. Both donors and international NGOs initiated fierce responses to support the people of Ukraine with humanitarian aid. Yet despite this support and all these financial resources, Ukrainian civil society organisations and humanitarian volunteer initiatives are struggling; local partners do not feel supported adequately by international partners. This was strongly underlined at the National Workshop on 'Localizing Humanitarian Aid' in Kyiv Ukraine on 17 February.

On Tuesday 28 March, KUNO (the Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands) organised a roundtable discussion to explore how Dutch humanitarian actors could improve the way they organise their work and how they can improve the quality of partnerships with local actors in Ukraine.

Speakers

- **Tetiana Kalenychenko**, Executive Director of the European Center for Strategic Analytics, and co-author of 'Responding to the Russian Invasion: From the Grassroots.'
- **Anna Medvedieva**, Partnership Technical Lead, People in Need Ukraine
- **Kees Huizinga**, a Dutch farmer living in Ukraine for already 20 years
- **Kees Zevenbergen**, director of Cordaid and chair of SHO-Giro 555 Ukraine
- **Renet van der Waals**, Coordinator Mental Health and Psychosocial support in crises, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Tetiana Kalenychecko

Tetiana Kalenychenko highlighted key points of the report "Responding to the Russian Invasion from the Grassroots". She emphasised the need to transform emergency response in Ukraine, since grassroot civil society networks have neither the resources nor the mandate to completely replace governmental services. To make the emergency response more sustainable, the approach in Ukraine should also address issues related to developmental topics, and economic and social recovery initiatives. In this context, there is a distinction between newly liberated regions in need of humanitarian assistance and regions that have been liberated for some time and are more in need of development assistance and support to regain self-sufficiency. In this regard, more attention should be paid to the aid dependency that arises and the need for coordination among international actors.

Another important key issue is the question of trust in the Ukrainian government and its de-bureaucratization. For a long time, there was a strong distrust of the Ukrainian government. However, with the de-bureaucratization of the government procedures due to the war, the public administration is perceived as optimised, which has positively increased trust. In addition to an issue

of trust in government, there is also a lack of trust in large international organisations due to untransparent decision-making and discriminatory practices. International actors need to restore this trust by proactively communicating and informing the public to manage expectations, as well as reducing bureaucracy and managing partnerships.

Finally, Tetiana emphasises the high need for systemic psychosocial and mental health support and the special role religious actors play in the humanitarian response, since they are a local actor with a high level of trust.

Anna Medvedieva

Anna Medvedieva presented best practices and approaches to better implement localization in Ukraine. In February 2022, PIN was one of the first INGOs to respond to the situation in Ukraine. By liberalising procedures while respecting the principles of good governance, PIN was able to respond quickly and expand its network with over 200 new partners (70 of which became official certified partner organisations). PIN's response to the crisis in Ukraine was an exception as it had never used such a localisation agenda in other responses before.

The following points regarding PIN's localization strategy were presented. Firstly, PIN introduced an Emergency Partnership Assessment Tool (E-PAT), which is a simplified algorithm for the assessment of new partnerships. Secondly, PIN mainstreamed the duty of care for its partners by providing personal protection equipment (PPEs). Thirdly, PIN conducted capacity-building activities for its partners, balancing their needs for learning and safeguarding principles. The capacity assessment was done by surveys and sharing sessions with local partners. Furthermore, PIN translated all its policies in Ukrainian and promoted ethical recruitment principles. Lastly, PIN wants other INGOs to also adopt a localised way of working in Ukraine. It hopes to achieve this by focusing on advocacy and sharing and promoting its best practices with other INGOs.

For the future, PIN hopes to test some new ideas for the localisation agenda in Ukraine, for example the establishment of a regional advocacy platform or an alternative pool of funding which also includes smaller donors. Furthermore, PIN developed a balanced approach to supporting volunteers and a more flexible approach to overhead in partners' budgets. Especially on the latter, there is still room to improve the flexibility on allocation of funding. In addition, PIN will continue to promote the duty of care to be included by donors towards local organisations, and aim to offer more offline learning and training sessions for Ukrainian organisations.

Kees Huizinga

Together with a group of local entrepreneurs, Kees Huizinga, living in Ukraine for already 20 years, has an organisation called *The Leeuw Kyiv Foundation*, which used to support a Dutch school in Ukraine. After the invasion, they decided to provide humanitarian aid and funding for displaced people. They were able to respond quickly to the needs of these people and also adapt to their changing needs as the contexts of war changed. As of now they have raised 2 million euros, in addition to 8 million euros in goods that were distributed through different small local organisations in Ukraine. While Kees understands the difficulty for large INGOs to provide effective aid in Ukraine, he is also quite critical of them. INGOs are unable to provide flexible and hands-on aid as they lack the crucial "boots on the ground", practical experience and understanding of what the people need. The most crucial thing in a localised response to the war in Ukraine is, according to Kees, trust. By auditing if all the donor's money is correctly spent, the response ends up being too slow, inefficient, inflexible and even more expensive. In this context, Kees re-emphasized the issue of trust and the bureaucratic and inflexible way large international organisations work, which Tetiana also mentioned earlier. In other words, Kees' presentation was again a call to empower the local actors, as they are pivotal for an effective humanitarian response in Ukraine.

Kees Zevenbergen

Kees Zevenbergen began his presentation by distinguishing the two roles he has. On the one hand, he chairs the SHO campaign for Ukraine, stressing that SHO is a collaboration in fundraising, not implementation. Thus any feedback on better coordination or localisation should be addressed to the individual SHO member organisations.

Moving on to his role as director of Cordaid, Kees explained that Cordaid was able to respond fully localised to the humanitarian needs during the war in Ukraine through the local Caritas network present in Ukraine. The Caritas network is Cordaid's 'boots on the ground', meaning it was not necessary for Cordaid to send their own people. The only weakness of this localised approach was that the people working for the local Caritas organisations were also victims of the war, which is why Cordaid did send some technical staff for support, but still under the leadership of the local organisations. Cordaid was striving for total transparency towards Caritas from the escalation of the war last year, also regarding funding. By being open about the amount of money raised and putting Caritas in the lead on establishing the priorities, Cordaid aimed for this transparency. A last important point that was mentioned was that humanitarian funding cannot be used for military purposes because of the humanitarian principles. Not all local actors are aware of this, yet this is something that is pivotal for many larger international organisations, such as Cordaid.

Renet van der Waals

Renet van der Waals closed the presentations by reiterating that the humanitarian sector needs to use what is currently happening to see where they can improve the way they operate and how they can create a better and more equal way of working with local partners. Furthermore, this discussion is more about capacity sharing rather than capacity building or strengthening. This capacity sharing is not primarily about funding, but more about decision-making processes and participatory ways of deciding what the needs are, since it is not the donor who should decide what capacities others need. Ultimately, it was highlighted that localization is about power and who sets the agenda. Therefore, the focus should be on improving the inclusiveness of the humanitarian system to achieve a fast, flexible, needs-based and people-centred approach to aid.