LOCAL HUMANITARIAN STRENGTHENING INITIATIVE

DECOLONISATION & LOCALISATION WORKSHOP

08 April 2025



Local Humanitarian Strengthening Initiative: Capacity Strengthening Workshop Report

Meeting Details

- **Date:** 08 April 2025
- **Time:** 0900-1600
- **Location:** Monomutapa, Harare
- **Meeting Purpose:** Capacity Strengthening
- **Chairing:** Tariro Washaya (Methodist Development and Relief Agency-MeDRA)
- **Minutes and Workshop Report:** Privilege Murambadoro (MeDRA)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Welcome Remarks and Agenda Overview

Presenter: Hope Dunira (AWET)

The presenter delivered a welcoming speech that set a collaborative tone for local humanitarian organisations in Zimbabwe. The speaker highlighted the importance of networking and capacity building among faith-based and community-based organisations to effectively address humanitarian crises worsened by climate change. The Local Humanitarian Strengthening Initiative (LHSI) aims to facilitate knowledge sharing and create a learning hub that promotes continuous improvement in humanitarian initiatives. The presenter also introduced the day's objectives and topics, which included Decolonisation, Localisation, and Protection in Emergencies.

2 Decolonisation and Localisation

Presenter: Giant Mudimba

2.1 Presentation Summary and Highlights

The presenter explained the themes of humanitarian change, decolonisation, localisation, and the importance of community engagement within the humanitarian sector. It begins by acknowledging the ongoing shifts in humanitarian work and the necessity to understand its origins, referencing the World Humanitarian Summit and related initiatives such as the Pledge for Change and the Charter for Change. The presenter emphasises the need for collaboration, particularly the involvement of local communities in project design and implementation. As discussions progress, the importance of documenting experiences and successes to share knowledge and best practices is highlighted. The dialogue shifts to exploring core concepts like localisation, decolonisation, and survivor-led approaches, which necessitate the empowerment of local actors and prioritisation of their input in crises. Furthermore, the presenter underscores the necessity of transparency, partnerships, and robust organisational support to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. The session wraps up by encouraging further discussions and emphasising the critical role of local NGOs, particularly in response to crises and within the broader humanitarian framework. Below are the highlights:

Highlights

- **Humanitarian Change:** Ongoing shifts in the humanitarian sector require a collective understanding of the background and recent commitments.
- **Pledge for Change:** Emphasises the importance of understanding commitments that shape the future of humanitarian responses.
- **Decolonization Discussion:** Engaging communities in decision-making processes strengthens humanitarian efforts and addresses their unique challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** The speaker motivates participants to document their experiences, fostering a cooperative spirit for better outcomes.

- **Localization Focus:** Key stakeholders, including communities, governments, and private sectors, must be involved in humanitarian efforts to ensure relevance and appropriateness.
- **Sharing Best Practices:** Documenting lessons learned is vital for growth and informing future humanitarian strategies.
- **Evolving Approaches:** The session discusses the need for community-driven responses and anticipatory actions for effective crisis management.
- **Empowering Local NGOs**: The Pledge for Change actively focuses on enhancing the capacity and leadership of local NGOs in development initiatives.
- **Three Core Pledges**: It encompasses three key commitments: equitable partnerships, authentic storytelling, and influencing wider change.
- **Amplifying Local Voices**: The initiative prioritizes amplifying stories from affected communities to represent their realities more authentically.
- **Building Consortia**: Encourages INGOs and local organisations to form consortiums for comprehensive and bankable proposals to attract funding.
- **Shift Towards Decentralisation**: It addresses the power dynamics in aid delivery, calling for more decolonised practices.
- **Strategic Timelines**: The initiative has laid out a pathway with a target for transformation completion by 2030.
- **Data for Decision-Making**: Highlights the critical role of data collection and analysis in refining programming and fostering partnerships.

2.2 Key Discussion Insights

- **Pledge and Charter Significance:** The Pledge for Change and the Charter for Change serve as frameworks for accountability and action within the humanitarian sector, emphasizing collaboration between international and local NGOs. By adhering to these frameworks, organizations can map strategic directions that enhance their engagement, thereby allowing for a mutual exchange of resources and knowledge that cater to local needs.
- **Localization as Empowerment:** Localization is not just a buzzword; it represents a paradigm shift towards empowering local actors. Involving communities in the planning and implementation of humanitarian projects ensures that responses are relevant, culturally appropriate, and impactful. This approach fosters local ownership and resilience, ultimately enhancing outcomes during crises.
- **Importance of Documenting Experiences:** Effective mechanisms for documenting successes and failures can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities local NGOs face. This documentation is essential for

learning and adapting strategies, solidifying the potential for innovation borne out of real-world experience, and establishing evidence-based practices in humanitarian responses.

- **The Role of External Forces:** The discussion highlights how external NGOs often dictate the narrative and responses to local crises. This indicates the urgency for local NGOs to reclaim their narratives by showcasing their successes and advocating for their roles in the humanitarian process—which often are disregarded in favor of external perspectives. It stresses that understanding local contexts is indispensable while designing interventions and projects.
- **Survivor-Led Responses:** Positioning affected community members as the primary decision-makers in their recovery processes leads to more effective emergency interventions. Survivor-led approaches signify a shift from traditional top-down approaches to inclusive frameworks that recognize the wisdom and experiential knowledge of survivors. This approach reflects respect and acknowledgment of community capabilities, ultimately facilitating meaningful recovery efforts.
- **Shift in Operational Dynamics**: The Pledge for Change indicates a significant shift from a historically top-down approach of INGOs to a more equitable partnership model that recognizes the value of local knowledge and leadership. This move towards decentralization reflects a growing acknowledgment of the limitations of traditional global aid frameworks and a desire for more contextual and relevant interventions.
- **Authentic Storytelling as a Tool**: By focusing on authentic storytelling, the initiative places affected communities at the forefront, helping to humanize the issues at hand. This approach not only combats stereotype-driven narratives but also fosters empowerment by allowing local voices to frame their own realities. It underlines the importance of empowering communities to tell their own stories through training in documentation and storytelling techniques.
- **Dialogue and Continuous Learning**: The essence of the Pledge for Change revolves around continuous dialogue between stakeholders to foster adaptation and learning. This iterative process allows for feedback from local communities to be incorporated into program adjustments, enhancing the efficacy and relevance of interventions while building trust and respect within these relationships.
- **Need for Consortiums**: Formulating consortiums emerges as a strategic necessity for local NGOs and INGOs, as it helps consolidate resources, expertise, and funding applications. Such collaborations allow organizations to specialize in different areas while presenting a unified approach to funders, which is becoming increasingly vital in a landscape with diminishing large-scale funding opportunities.
- **Understanding Gaps and Opportunities**: The discourse suggests there are understanding gaps regarding localisation and decolonisation. This insight reflects the need for educational efforts among NGOs to bridge knowledge differences and ensure all stakeholders comprehend the broader implications of their work in a global context.

3 Protection in Emergencies

Presenter: Josphat Mangunda (Christian Aid)

3.1 Presentation Summary and Highlights

This presenter delivered a comprehensive discourse on the concepts of protection, specifically focusing on child protection as well as the broader implications of humanitarian aid practices. The speaker emphasised the essential need for respect towards individual rights, urging that all humanitarian initiatives aim to uphold dignity and reduce harm. The reflections delved into the flaws within current practices, referring to the disconnect between numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the affected communities they aim to serve. Throughout, the speaker critiques the ineffectiveness of existing support systems, highlighting issues related to localisation, respect for individuals' experiences, and genuine community engagement. The speaker also discusses the importance of systemic, participatory strategies in emergencies while advocating for more sensitive and inclusive decision-making processes that consider the voices of local populations.

Highlights

- **Child Protection as a Central Focus**: The discussion emphasises the necessity for protecting children's rights and well-being within community practices.
- **Rethinking NGOs' Impact**: A strong critique is made of NGOs, questioning their effectiveness and their capacity to genuinely uplift communities.
- **Respect for Individual Rights**: The narrative stresses the importance of respecting individual rights and the dignity of those served by aid organizations.
- **Principles of Protection**: Four key elements of protection are outlined, setting a foundation for humanitarian activities.
- **Short-term and Long-term Strategies**: The text makes a distinction between urgent responses in crises and longer-term development strategies, advocating resilience-building.
- **Community Empowerment**: Empowering local leadership and integrating local insights into aid practices is presented as a critical strategy for effective protection.
- **Need for Accountability**: The speaker calls for improved accountability measures within NGOs to enhance their transparency and community trust.
- **Redefining Protection**: The speaker navigates complex definitions of protection, arguing for a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond mere policy adherence to genuine respect for beneficiaries' rights. Aspects of emotional and physical safety are intricately tied to meaningful participation from the communities served.
- **Critique of Traditional Assessments**: The speaker points out how conventional assessments often fail to capture the real experiences and needs of the community—suggesting that those assessing should also consider who benefits and whether their approaches are sustainable.

- **Transforming Perspective on Aid**: Viewing individuals not as mere beneficiaries but as partners in the aid process can drastically change outcomes in protection-related initiatives. Such partnerships can ensure services are relevant, accessible, and respectful.
- **Diverse Approaches to Protection Needs**: The presentation emphasizes that protection needs can vary widely based on socio-economic contexts, urging that interventions should be tailored to local norms and specifics. This can lead to better-targeted responses and more reliable support mechanisms.
- **Questions of Accountability**: There is a strong call for internal accountability measures within organisations. This involves ensuring that feedback mechanisms are functional, transparent, and responsive to community needs, fostering a culture of learning and adaptation.
- **Navigating Gender Dynamics**: The discussion on gender roles points out that women and children face unique vulnerabilities, and humanitarian responses must take these dynamics into account to be effective in protecting their rights.
- **Community Responsibility**: Organisations must act responsibly in providing protective resources like condoms in easily accessible locations.
- **Moral Dilemmas**: The conversation reflects on the moral complexities faced by marginalised communities, particularly women and children, in vulnerable situations.
- **Funding Challenges**: The sustainability of protective measures is threatened by inadequate funding from both governmental and non-governmental agencies.
- **Understanding Policies**: There's a clear need for organisations to ensure that all members understand safeguarding policies and their implications to prevent abuse within the community.
- **Safeguarding vs Protection**: A crucial distinction discussed is between safeguarding (internal organisation policies) and protection (community interactions involving abuse).

3.2 Key Discussion Insights

- **Moral Complexities in Vulnerable Contexts**: The commentary about a young girl seeing her mother engaged with economic survival strategies (like selling bananas) underscores a complicated moral landscape faced by disadvantaged groups. The talks reflect on how societal pressures and realities compel individuals, particularly women and children, to make difficult decisions that often put them at risk.
- **Funding Gaps and Dependency**: There is a shared concern over the reliance on international funding and the repercussions of funding shortages when projects run out of money. This highlights a systemic issue where local organizations feel under-supported, resulting in weakened safety mechanisms. The voices suggest that it is vital to establish more self-sustaining models that do not leave community members vulnerable.

- **Enhancing Policy Understanding**: A significant emphasis was placed on ensuring that all organizational members understand safeguarding guidelines. By improving the clarity and accessibility of these policies, organizations can enhance their practical implementation, effectively minimize violative behavior, and promote a culture of accountability.
- **Safeguarding and Protection Definitions**: The nuanced distinction made between safeguarding (pertaining to an organization's contract employees) and protection (concerning the community's broader safety) presents a pivotal understanding for organizations. By firmly differentiating these concepts, organizations can better strategize their interventions while providing clarity on their responsibilities.
- **Cultural Contextualization**: The dialogue reflects a pressing need to adapt global safeguarding and protection frameworks to align with local cultural contexts. By prioritising Ubuntu—an African philosophy emphasising communal relationships—organisations can create more culturally sensitive interventions that resonate with local populations.
- **Critical Need for Accountability**: The dialogue illustrates widespread concern regarding the ability of organisations to hold themselves accountable for actions taken within communities. The speakers advocate for systemic changes that empower communities to demand accountability while ensuring that organisations are responsible for the impact of their programs.

4 Action Points and Way Forward

Moderator: Logic Duma (NAZ)

Action	Responsible
Drafting of the LHSI Localisation Charter and Policy Framework	Privilege (MeDRA);Tonderai Chikuni (DoMCCP); Lembani Francis (YMCA)
Identification of Organisations' Knowledge Management System Admins	ALL
Have a separate chat platform (WhatsApp group) for organisations' admins of the Knowledge Management System	Privilege (MeDRA), System Developer (FMG)

The meeting enhanced learning and continued collaboration among humanitarian actors, identified key gaps in response, and outlined practical steps for future actions.