



## **Copenhagen Conference: Another step closer in supporting local actors across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus?**

In recent years we have seen a lot of new policy commitments on promoting locally led action across the HDP Nexus, but this has not always been matched by “Action”. As such the Charter4Change coalition welcomes the initiative from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to convene a Conference over the next few days to set a common agenda in supporting local actors across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus.

The organiser’s framing of the Conference agenda rightly recognizes that operationalizing the HDP Nexus needs to place the experiences of local actors and communities at the centre of planning and interventions. Understanding these realities from the ‘bottom-up’ brings persons ‘affected knowledge to the fore and may help to address certain operational and technical challenges in implementing the nexus approach.

As such, this event represents an important opportunity to promote meaningful participation, voice and leadership of local actors to influence the policies and practices of donors and their intermediaries in working across the HDP Nexus based on principles of equitable partnership.

Ahead of the Copenhagen Conference, the Charter4Change coalition consulted amongst its members on what they saw as priorities to be raised at the Conference and beyond. Lots of our members have lots of relevant experience and some of them will be in Copenhagen to bring their experience to the discussion. Based on our consultations so far on the Conference’s priority themes, we highlight the following points:

- 1. Integrating local actors in planning and processes from the outset to advance locally led solutions can improve coordination and collaboration across the HDP nexus.**

C4C signatories and endorsers consistently highlight the importance of national/local NGOs being involved from the initial design stage of proposals for programmes and consortia, rather than being invited in after initial INGO-led concept notes or proposals are approved by donors. For this to happen, it requires both institutional donors to frame Calls for Proposals and the timeframes and methods involved in them in ways that enable meaningful engagement of national/local actors from the outset. This requires deliberate actions to be taken to make Calls for Proposals and planning processes (eg strategic planning processes of UN agencies, INGOs and donors) to take additional steps in the use of national/local intermediary networks and platforms that have strong, demonstrated relationships with national/local actors.

**2. Practical capacity strengthening initiatives that can enhance institutional capacities and collective resilience of local actors to become more effective and sustainable.**

The experience of many C4C signatories and endorsers over the years has demonstrated the importance of sustained, multi-year investment in institutional capacity strengthening which centres a national/local organisation's own assessment of its capacity-strengthening needs and priorities, and ensures their ownership/leadership of the process rather than being driven by a donor or INGO or UN agency agenda or compliance/reporting requirements. Support for local-to-local capacity-sharing or mutual capacity-exchange between international and national/local partners has also been a consistent advocacy message by C4C signatories and endorsers in the recent times.

However, we note that to varying degrees both the Danish government and US government already understand and support the above approaches. So, looking forward, we hope to see the US and Danish governments, and other donors present in Copenhagen, promote taking these approaches to scale and systematically hold all UN agencies and INGOs accountable for such approaches. At an inter-agency level, clusters or other inter-agency humanitarian, development and peace coordination processes and platforms could benefit from a review and action to promote the mentioned approaches.

Another idea shared by C4C members is that donors and other agencies could adopt and promote a new global 'norm' on a minimum percentage of emergency appeal funds raised that can be dedicated to capacity-strengthening. For example, for any emergency appeal that raises over a certain threshold which enables an emergency response and recovery over a multi-year time frame (ie 24 months or above), then a minimum of percentage (for example eg 5%) should be allocated to invest in institutional capacity-strengthening priorities determined by the local/national NGO partners based on their own assessment of their capacity-strengthening needs. Underfunding of institutional capacity-strengthening remains key challenge to support such effort, and establishing a norm like this could help to address that challenge.

**3. Practical strategies to leverage on to maximize the effectiveness of existing funding streams across the nexus (including how to incorporate and leverage climate finance)**

C4C members strongly welcomed the attention to these issues in the Copenhagen Conference Agenda. Beyond an interesting discussion in Copenhagen, C4C members were keen to hear if there could be appetite from donors to implement a systematic, independent review of their development and climate finance funding streams, mechanisms and institutions using an agreed set of criteria to review their approach to



promoting equitable partnership with national/local actors, and their support for local leadership?

Donors present in Copenhagen channel vast sums of finance, and exercise considerable policy influence, and/or promote multi-stakeholder partnerships across the HDP Nexus through multilateral development institutions such as the World Bank, European Development Bank, Africa Development Bank and Asian Development Bank. A number of these development banks provide support to humanitarian response using governments' social protection systems and other means. In different contexts, multilateral development banks have contributed to multi-donor trust funds or programmes through national governments, which national/local NGOs have been direct or indirect recipients of funding. Feedback from many INGOs and national/local NGOs points to these institutions being often incredibly top-down, slow and inflexible as a donor, which is problematic in any context but even more challenging in dynamic, risky humanitarian contexts.

As C4C, we also encourage donors to share insights about how to unlock climate finance to humanitarian contexts, and – within this – ensuring that climate finance also reaches national/local organisations. Most global climate finance is not reaching fragile and conflict states as the risk management approach of these mechanisms (eg Green Climate Fund) is not conducive to working in humanitarian contexts. In addition, the accredited organisations able to access the GCF are mostly governments and international organisations (only one INGO, is potentially going to be accredited so far).

#### **4. Opportunities to overcome barriers for local actors in accessing higher quality nexus funding.**

From our consultations with C4C members, one of the first priorities that always comes forward is that donors and other agencies need to ensure that local actors are invited to and actively participate in all decision and policy making processes that shape their global funding and partnership policies, as well as their consultations and analysis to inform the specific HDP Nexus funding strategies for specific contexts. Unless this happens, and unless the staff time and expertise of national/local actors to input to these, is recognized and resourced, then progress is likely to be inadequate. We have seen how participation by national/local actors in processes like clusters, the Grand Bargain and the IASC has resulted in these processes better defining the barriers to their access to quality funding (including across the HDP Nexus) and identifying potential solutions to these.

Secondly, C4C members urge donors to pursue cascading of multi-year, flexible funding to national/local actors, as these aspects are essential to enable quality planning and programming in the protracted crisis settings in which HDP Nexus policy/funding frameworks are relevant.



Thirdly, an important barrier to national/local NGOs accessing quality Nexus funding is the extent to which they suffer from staff turnover, in part due to the short-term funding they receive as well as poaching of their staff by INGOs and UN agencies. As such, donors need to find ways to level the playing field for national/local organisations; including through processes like salary benchmarking to reduce salary disparities and by .

Fourth and last, C4C members underline the importance of donors and intermediary agencies building on good practices, and addressing the bad practices, that exist in different models of NGO consortia that work across the HDP Nexus. In a number of contexts, there are already national/local NGO consortia that directly access funding from institutional donors, and support local-to-local capacity-sharing on HDP Nexus programming. In other contexts, there are mixed INGO-national NGO consortia doing this, which are at different places in terms of their approach to partnership and enabling leadership by their national/local partners at all stages of consortium design, governance and implementation. C4C recently collaborated with NEAR on a webinar to share experiences across major NGO consortia (including TOGETHER, Dutch Relief Alliance and Start Network), and a report will be published soon to share the key findings from that. Collaborative work through NGO consortia is a key entry-point to scale-up access to quality Nexus funding, but we can do better on the partnerships and local leadership approach in NGO consortia.

The above recommendations will require concerted and coordinated efforts by donors, international agencies and national/local actors. C4C wishes the Copenhagen Conference well and these ideas as food for thought. We hope that the Conference acts as a bold step in the right direction towards more transformative, locally-led aid across the HDP Nexus.

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