



**THE HUMANITARIAN  
PLATFORM** FOR LOCAL  
AND NATIONAL  
ORGANISATIONS IN UGANDA



**2<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEMBERS' FORUM**

**29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021**

**HOTEL AFRICANA**

## **1.0. Introduction**

The Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF) organized and moderated a one-day annual members' forum meeting at Hotel Africana, Kampala on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021 aimed at sharing experiences and reflections and perspectives on how members could position themselves and strategise to influence the localization agenda in the humanitarian sector.

## **2.0. Presentation of the humanitarian platforms journey.**

The UNNGOF presented the humanitarian platform journey to participants in the meeting noting that UNNGOF is the secretariat for the humanitarian platform which is an inclusive national platform for non-governmental organizations across a wide range of sectors such as organisations in service delivery, policy advocacy, urban refugees, and women rights, youth, faith based, among others, formed to influence governance, development processes and operating environment.

The UNNGOF argued that it has partnered and collaborated with various government agencies including the National Planning Authority (NPA) Expanded Board, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework Steering Committee (CRRF), National Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Task Forces, National Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) working group, among others and boasted with of wide range of membership not only at national and sub national levels but also at regional and international levels.

The UNNGOF noted that the humanitarian platform was birthed following Oxfam's recommendations for the need to improve coordination among local humanitarian agencies and thus launching it 2018. It was observed that membership of the platform is voluntary but open to only local and national organizations that subscribe to the stipulated objectives of the humanitarian platform. Lastly, UNNGOF shared successes and achievements of the platform including conducting three quarterly steering committee meetings, development of a position paper and four regional papers on the role of local humanitarian response, organizing a donor dialogue with members on issues of compliance and risk, research and knowledge generation, among others. However, members were informed that a lot needed to be done including strengthening coordination mechanisms, enhancing members' compliance with regulatory framework, strengthening research and advocacy as well as partners' capacities.

## **3.0. Keynote Address**

*“The value of deepening the localization agenda in the humanitarian sector.”*

Mr. Francis Iwa, Executive Director, CAFOMI & Chairperson, Humanitarian Platform steering committee thanked members for supporting the work of the humanitarian platform and for turning up in spite of their commitments. While making his address, he shared the journey of Care and Assistance for Forced Migrants (CAFOMI) and noted that after returning to Uganda, there were a number of issues such as the Congolese refugee influx in western Uganda.

According to him, these and other humanitarian issues that provided an opportunity to reflect on how they could contribute to the sector and which kind of partnerships were required noting that such experience was eye opening. He argued that was the ideas of forming CAFOMI was birthed in 2012 following that reflection and in the subsequent years started providing humanitarian assistance in the districts of Kisoro and Bundibugyo after registering with the relevant bodies including the Uganda National NGOForum and partnering with others such as United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). He informed members that over the years, many conversations and commitments have been made among some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.

He noted that despite the need to work together efficiently, transparently and harmoniously with new and existing local partners, including the private sector, individuals and nontraditional sources of funding, little is being done at the local level yet local organisations were always the first responders in cases of emergencies. He reminded attendees that localization meant working as complementary and that trust at community level was important in responding to crises and other emergencies when they occurred.

He concluded by informing participants in the meeting that localization is when there is a bond and that funding mechanisms were sought to address humanitarian challenges in real time and therefore, partnerships were critical given the cross cutting nature of issues dealt with. He therefore, advised members to address governance related issues in their respective organisations that might have stalled the localization agenda from taking off.

#### **4.0. Presentation-Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).**

Mr. Gerald Menya, Assistant Commissioner, Disaster Preparedness, OPM agreed with the keynote address especially recognizing the importance of localization adding that the world was increasingly recognizing the importance of localization in humanitarian responses to crises and other emergencies and the subsequent commitments of the grand bargain including the following;

- 25% of all resources for international non-governmental organization should be going to local actors to respond to crises occasioned by disasters and influx of migration of refugee,
- At least 1% of international non-governmental organizations' budgets should be going to environmental restoration; the need for sustainability of interventions by local actors especially where International non-governmental organization have completed their projects to prepare skill the local organizations and lastly,
- That at least 5% of the entire donor budget should go to administration and the remaining percentage (95%) to programmes activities.

He however, informed attendees that there was need to establish mechanisms to enforce the grand bargain commitments on ground with laws and policies adding that localization is a participation evolution that enables more locally led interventions through provision of opportunities to local actors by optimizing the comparative advantages by playing to respective strengths and using them collectively as efficiently and effectively as possible. He shared some of the merits of localization including it being cost effective, improves quality of response, contributing to strengthening the capacity, and leads to creation of employment, among others.

He concluded by highlighting some of the hindrances to the localization agenda including mistrust brought about by issues such as tribalism, nepotism, and low financial absorption capacity by local actors, lack of transparency around budgets particularly salaries, lack of skills, poor referenced documents and conformity issues, weak policies and legislations, among others.

#### **4.1. Emerging Issues**

A number of perspectives emerged in the general discussion. Participants questioned the capacity of government to regulate operations of international organisations in enforcing the localization agenda.

Participants noted that for localization to be successful, an honest individual organizational capacity assessment needed to be conducted to assess the strength and weaknesses. This not only would provide knowledge on areas of engagement but also what would inform the kind of partnerships to be formed.



Other participants wanted to know which international organisations participated and were signatories to the commitments at the grand bargain and if those commitments were legally binding.

Participants also questioned why there were no policies to address donor restrictions on using foreign-based resources and what plans existed to address such challenges while others highlighted unfair competition when international organisations rebranded to operate as local organisations.

Participants also highlighted that some of the resources were lobbied to support local interventions but local partners were rarely involved citing capacity gaps instead of involving local organizations, which are quick to access and reach areas of need and therefore best suited to sustaining outputs. So participants suggested that local context and uptake of things should be strengthened to ensure that there is capacity and they can have practical information.

## **5.0. Panel Discussion (*Perspectives on localisation in the humanitarian sector*)**

### **5.1. Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

Ms. Mitchell, Program Manager, CRS argued that in some places at the local scenes across the country, the localization agenda was taking place whereby training to empower local actors and institutions was done with the aim of scaling it up in areas where is working. She noted that international organisations could empower local actors with the needed capacity and skills in order to position themselves in sustaining project interventions and other responsibilities afterwards.

She observed that international aid and donor organisations have to change the way they responded by working with local communities since one of the major challenges to the localization agenda in



humanitarian response was lack of ownership. Therefore, citing the need to test and document successful models of localization with the aim of scaling them up to boost local content.

### 5.2. Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)

Mr. Michael Bruce, Analytical Advisor, CRRF informed attendees that one of their major priorities this year was development of the localization road map in the humanitarian response. He observed that localization is about governance, design and sovereignty in decision-making. He added that it is not about redistribution of resources from international organisations to local actors but rather about local actors and local leadership in humanitarian interventions.

He observed that one of the main impediments to the localization agenda was the single year donor funding cycle instead of multiyear. He suggested that local humanitarian actors needed to follow up on such issues through strong collaboration with development partners and incorporating capacity strengthening in their partnership agreements. He noted that it was important to meet aid organisations in their spaces to have such discussions. He noted that 25% benchmark was important but instead suggested having the maximum of all the resources. He concluded by noting that international organisations were ready to respond on issues related to capacity but there was need to focus on systems, policies, governance and redistribution for this to be achieved.

### 5.3. Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG)

Mr. Mitchel Ainebyoona, Policy Specialist at CSBAG shared his perspectives on financing for localisation. He noted that there is hardly any information relating to funding flows and mechanisms to humanitarian work especially in Africa arguing that a lot of aid is tagged with many restrictive conditions. He observed that in terms of planning, donor agencies were more prepared and had better intervention plans compared to local actors.

He informed members that if one were to break down those plans, direct funding was less than 1%. He relatedly argued that in 2016 for instance, of the total direct funding, only 13% was allocated to the humanitarian work, which was slashed in the subsequent year to only about 9%, therefore, little was being allocated to national and local organisations. He noted that the limited capacity among local actors and the weak legal framework were to blame for reduction in funding streams to local and national organisations in Uganda arguing that it was difficult to support humanitarian work without a strong legal framework. Attendees were informed that it was quite saddening to learn that only about Uganda shillings 40 billion was allocated to the contingency fund and that about 15% of that was earmarked for disaster specific responses and not preparedness.



He noted that at as a country there was a disaster national atlas meaning the country could identify and locate possible occurrence of disasters and therefore were in a better position to plan better. The question however, was “how is that information is being used?” He noted that local actors were in a much stronger position to advocate for concrete commitment for capacity building and localization agenda going forward. He concluded by arguing that disasters undermine economic development and that there is need to address the legal framework challenges particularly at the national level were decisions are made.

#### 5.4. Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)

Ms. Juliet Donna, Policy Dialogue Expert, CEFORD agreed with the presentations of the previous speakers and informed attendees that localisation meant that people affected by humanitarian crises and other emergencies are at the centre of decisions for their wellbeing if such interventions are to be effective. She informed that localizations meant placing the people exposed to risks of disasters at the forefront. Regarding the absorptive capacity, local partners were advised to work with international organisations in consortia to harness team strengths. Attendees were informed of the need to enhance

trust amongst themselves as well as forging strong partnerships by holding each other accountable for delivering on their commitments if they were to be respected by donors and aid organisations. In conclusion, she appealed to members to continue working together and have a stronger voice as they advocated and pushed for the localisation agenda.

#### 5.5. Chairperson Local council III, Lamwo district

Mr. Obong Charles Okwera, LCIII chairperson, informed members that many international organisations operating in the local communities bypassed local government structures yet claimed to be working for them. He argued that it was important for donor agencies to support and complement existing national coordination mechanisms as well as working with local and national responders to address crises and other emergencies. He noted that local actors have the required capacity and experience to implement humanitarian interventions, integrate what is working while arguing local actors to continue lobbying and advocating for improved service delivery in their respective areas.

### **6.0. Emerging Issues**

From the panel presentation, a number of emerging perspectives were raised in the plenary;

- I. Several participants noted that there is adequate capacity among local actors to implement humanitarian interventions as evidenced by local champions who have excelled at it previously.
- II. Other participants suggested that members should refer to commitments of the grand bargain to help them understand better the context of localisation.
- III. Some participants highlighted the need for more structured engagements with relevant stakeholders on the issues of localisation and accountability, if trust is to be built.
- IV. Other attendees wondered if there was some money at OPM for local governments to implement disaster preparedness interventions but were informed that OPM did not have such resources but would liaise with the mother ministry to include such resources in their budgeting.
- V. Members were also informed that the government's contingency fund did not cater for disaster preparedness but as country, in collaboration with relevant agencies through the risk and vulnerability atlases knew where different emergencies were likely to occur including slope failures, hunger and drought, among others.



VI. Lastly, members were informed that the country was still using the refugee act of 2006 but the review of the disaster preparedness policy and bill were under way in addition to the refugee policy.

### **7.0. Presentation of the final Platform Guiding Document**

Members received, considered and deliberated on the guiding document that defined the structure, membership and way of work as below:

The guiding document will contribute to strengthen coordination and capacity of local and national organizations in humanitarian preparedness and response where the potential local and national organizations in Uganda has not yet fully been exploited. It will also provide a collective voice for local and national organizations to influence policy and practice in the humanitarian agenda at different levels.

Given the minimal contribution to broader policy debate on humanitarian agenda, the guiding document will ensure that local and national organizations are well coordinated, informed and able to influence the humanitarian agenda in Uganda.

Institutional members will be able to have their technical capacities strengthened given the gaps by the current humanitarian response framework, which do not fully recognize local and national institutions as critical and first responders in times of crises. Consequently, members moved a motion to adopt the guiding document and accordingly, it adopted. Attendees then recommended further consultations with their respective responsible officers regarding taking up different functions on the humanitarian platform' general assembly as provided by the guiding document.

### **8.0. Key take Away/Action Points**

Following fruitful deliberations, below are the key takeaways:

- There is need to improve coordination and partnerships among stakeholders and duty bearers, integrate planning and mobilise local actors to actively participate if localisation is to be achieved.
- There should be broader engagements with all relevant stakeholders including relevant ministries, agencies and departments, among others from which resultant recommendations will be used to inform planning and decision-making.

- There should be alignment of priorities among international aid organisations, international organisations and local actors including national and local organisations as well as communities as a catalyst for improved localisation in the humanitarian sector.