Coordination of Disaster and Humanitarian Interventions: The Missing Link in the Grassroots Actors in Developing Countries

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Abstract: **Worldwide, millions of people are annually affected by conflict and other natural calamities which call for humanitarian intervention from both cluster lead organizations and grassroots actors. Recently, 30 million people were estimated to be internally displaced and 23 million to be refugees who were seeking refuge across international borders, the vast majority of whom were fleeing conflict zones. The main objective of this paper is to look at the missing link in grass root actors and cluster leads in the various sectors in humanitarian interventions. There is need for continued coordination and collaboration among cluster leads and partners in order to mitigate the effects of emergencies and disaster. Additionally, it will look into the principle of partnerships, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) code of conduct number six which outlines developing capacities of local actors and lastly the Sphere core standard two on coordination in regard to humanitarian intervention. In life, disasters come to test the reactivity of our systems, especially the capacity of different actors to work together for a common goal. It will also outline ways through which capacity building grassroot actors can be achieved and sustained. Lastly, it will recommend on the necessary actions to be taken in order to enhance the coordination between grass root actors and external actors.**

Keywords: **Humanitarian Interventions, Coordination and Capacity building.**

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, disasters may occur anytime especially when it is least expected. When they happen, people need to be prepared to manage the emergency and mitigate the effect caused by the disaster outcome. Globally, in the recent days disasters like earthquakes, tsunami, typhoons, ferry disaster among others have occurred leaving many people in need of humanitarian assistance. Effective humanitarian interventions needs partnership and close coordination among cluster leads such as World Food Programme (WFP), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), NGOs and their patners. Coordination is the organization of different elements, people or organizations to work together effectively with the aim of achieving a given goal. Coordination occurs to ensure the resources of the organization are used efficiently in pursuing given objectives along with monitoring, organizing and controlling given activities (Pawlowska, 2005). When it comes to humanitarian interventions, there is need for coordination between the major stakeholders. Smock, (1996) points out that the aims of humanitarian intervention are to save lives, reduce suffering and maintain human dignity during and after an emergency. He adds that in order to effectively do this, there should be proper coordination between cluster leads actors and grass root actors. Humanitarian interventions often include material relief assistance like shelter, sanitation, water, and health services, food aid and relief coordination, support and protection services.

According to Pawlowska (2005), humanitarian coordination is about delivering assistance in a cohesive and effective manner in order to save lives and reduce suffering among those affected in the context of an emergency. Whatever the specific mix of actors involved, there is always going to be a need for some level of coordination in order to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian effort. Coordination is thus a means of creating an enabling environment where independent organizations can collaborate with the aim of delivering best services to the affected population during and after a disaster. In order to come up with this enabling environment, it is helpful that some general guidelines and procedures are put in place. Nevertheless, much will depend on the specific situation of the emergency. Subduing these challenges will need judgements based on the context. Therefore, the role of international co-ordination mechanisms is to create an environment where viable judgements are made to ease a crisis situation.

2. CAPACITY BUILDING GRASS ROOT ACTORS

Brough, (2004) asserts that a critical feature of an effective disaster preparedness capability is determined by the extent to which different actors and entities operate in a coordinated and timely manner. It must function by avoiding response gaps, duplication of effort by various groups, and parallel structures put in place by different humanitarian agencies. Skilful coordination among the wide range of potential stakeholders that may provide assistance during an emergency (such as the military, NGOs, utility companies and private sector entities) is critical to avoid confusion and to facilitate an effective response to the disaster at hand.

The Sphere Project is a voluntary initiative that brings together a number of humanitarian agencies from all parts of the world with the aim of improving the quality of humanitarian assistance and accountability of actors to their donors and affected people. Governed by common principles and universal standards, this initiative outlines the need of coordination between international humanitarian organizations for effective interventions (Sphere Project, 2011). Although these initiatives have distinct mandates, constituencies and structures, all these initiatives share a commitment to ensure greater harmonization and impact in their work.

In 2011, the Sphere Project agreed to work in coordination with the local actors with the aim of strengthening their collaboration. Though not directly involved in standard-setting, Sphere Project has established itself as a force for convergence and collaboration within the humanitarian community. It emphasizes on the need for international organizations to involve grass root actors during humanitarian interventions. Although initially it focused on institutionalizing and training sphere principle within NGO networks, overtime it has earned recognition with the humanitarian sector. In the modern days, most actors involved in the humanitarian intervention missions have embraced the minimum standards of quality and professionalism in humanitarian aid. Sphere Project outlines Four Protection Principles (FPP) that are applicable to all facets of humanitarian activity. Core Standard two of the Sphere Project has expressed the conviction that humanitarian response should support the capacity of people affected by disaster or conflict. It shows the need to empower the local community and grass root actors.

3. CAPACITY BUILDING LOCAL ACTORS

Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IRC) and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief number six stipulates that all agencies dealing with humanitarian interventions should attempt to build disaster response on local capacities. Where possible, they should strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. However, there are no defined attempts to build capacities of various grassroots organizations (Local NGOs, CBOs and other formal groupings) to be able to respond and intervene in humanitarian assistance related interventions. In order for humanitarian interventions to succeed, they must be planned and implemented in coordination with relevant authorities, humanitarian agencies and civil society organizations engaged in impartial action working together for maximum efficiency, coverage and effectiveness. Badmus, (2009) asserts that for an intervention to be effective, close coordination and collaboration are required not only with other sectors but also among grass root organizations.

Badescu, (2008) emphasizes that for effective humanitarian intervention, there is need for the cluster leads to devise strategies to build the capacity of the grass root actors in the various sectors they are involved in. They can do this by conducting capacity gaps analysis in grassroot actors whose missions are in line with humanitarian interventions especially in the organizational systems. Empowering them with knowledge regarding various interventions will be a good step towards ensuring that emergencies are handled well before they get out of hand.

4. THE PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN SUPPORT OF COORDINATION

Handling humanitarian emergencies is a daunting undertaking with time being a vital factor. There is no one-on-one process to be adopted in coordinating a humanitarian action. Because much of the action will depend on the situation on the ground, the capacities of the actors involved will matter most. To guide the whole process of humanitarian aid, the Global Humanitarian Platform endorsed five basic principles to support the process and address any challenges that may hinder the spirit of partnership. This platform recognised the need for national NGOs to recognise partnership when handling crisis situations. Through partnership and collaboration, the key players will be able to create an enabling environment that is necessary for effective humanitarian aid. The five principles agree by the Global Humanitarian Platform are:

✓ **Equality:** This principle requires that there should be mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of power and size. This means that the actors, both international and local should have respect for each other's mandate, independence, and obligation. In addition, they should recognise and appreciate each other's commitments and constraints. Mutual respect is key for effective coordination. No player should discriminate the other on grounds of any factor whether social, economical or political. With such equity, it will be a smooth ride in delivery of humanitarian aid.

✓ **Transparency:** This principle can be achieved through dialogue and emphasis should be laid on early consultations and sharing of information. No company should keep information as a secret. It is encouraged that international actors should share information with local actors so that all of them read from the same page when it comes to humanitarian intervention. Transparency and communication will include financial transparency and increase trust among the participating actors. For effective results to be achieved, there is need for the humanitarian aid providers to be honest and transparent in their activities.

✓ **Result-oriented approach:** Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities. It means that at the end of the day, the humanitarian intervention providers should impact change on the affected population. Their aim is to assist the affected community lead a better life.

✓ **Responsibility***:* This principle requires that the humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation of achieving their tasks in a responsible manner, with integrity and appropriate way. There is need for them to be committed to the activities only when they have skills, competencies, means and capacity to deliver on what they are supposed to deliver. It is upon the humanitarians to ensure the affected population is not abused.

✓ **Complementarity***:* This means that the humanitarian community can effectively achieve its objectives if it can build on its advantages and complement the contributions given by each player. Local capacity is a major asset that external actors need to build on and enhance. If possible, the humanitarian organisations should work hard to make it an integral party in emergency response. The most important thing is to overcome the cultural and language barriers which hinder communication and effective participation of humanitarian organizations.

Through partnerships, cluster leads and their partners can build capacities of grass root entities for the effective humanitarian interventions. This is because grassroots systems have knowledge of the affected population's culture and language and are highly accepted within their areas of operation. This is why efforts need to be put in place to strengthen and support grassroots actors' ability to deliver humanitarian interventions while promoting high standards in ethics, accountability, and management. This clearly indicates that grass root actors can play a vital role in humanitarian interventions if there is proper and sustainable capacity building initiatives.

5. WHY INVOLVE GRASS ROOT ACTORS IN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

In humanitarian interventions, cluster leads need to work in close relation with the local actors. This collaboration will empower the local community and create an environment that is more conducive for affected population. When disasters strike, members of the community find themselves in a crisis situation that needs urgent humanitarian interventions.

Wood, (1996) emphasizes that the effectiveness with which cluster leads will deliver their intervention will largely depend on their ability to work in harmony with the local actors. This way they will be able to understand the conflict

situation and try to mitigate peace. For instance, in case of a war, the post-war rebuilding is something that should be done with coordination between the local actors and external actors. This is because the local actors have a holistic and in-depth understanding of the challenges and ways through which the problem can be solved using the available resources. It is good to note that donors of humanitarian aid can be insensitive to cultural and social conditions and concentrate on rebuilding a society. This means that they have ignored a very vital contextual issue. Failure to mobilize the community can lead to conflict between local actors and NGOs, worsening an already bad situation (Uvin, 1999).

There should be a constructive discussion on how to facilitate and empower the local community to offer solutions to their local disasters and emergencies. The external actors need to be aware of the positive changes and should understand the need to include the grass root actors in understanding the needs of the community affected by the crisis. In a nutshell, the local community owns the intervention process. Nakagawa, (2004) argues that if grass root actors are involved effectively in humanitarian intervention activities, good relationships between the local community and the external forces will be enhanced.

Through grass root actors, it will be easy to mobilize the local communities. By doing so, it will be easy to minimize dependency and create a sense of intervention ownership. Such effort will tap the local knowledge and resources of the community to help in successful intervention. They will help in facilitating conflict resolution mechanism and promote the local values. This means that even after the program is withdrawn, the community mobilization will continue. Through community mobilization, the locals will be empowered to make crucial decisions and strengthen their ability to address disasters. This is something that will not be possible if only the external actors were involved. Empowerment of the grass root actors will promote self-awareness and encourage the public to participate in disaster intervention. It will create some sense of responsiveness in the local people. The local actors will help in formulating goals for the future and their voices should be heard in decision-making. They are the ones who will help in encouraging the local people to participate in disaster management (Nardin & Williams, 2003).

Bennett & Bertrand, (2006) assert that participation of grass root actors in the process of humanitarian intervention is vital since it will enhance self-sufficiency and sustain development and re-building of the society. If there is no local ownership of the re-building process, the intervention process will entirely lie on external actors. In an event where there are no active local members, then the people in the grass root will not be part of the re-building process. However, if there is local ownership of external assistance, then there will be confidence and urge to build the local capacities. In order to create the ownership, there should be transfer of control from the external donors to local actors and allow them to acquire skill and confidence needed to manage the disaster. With time, it will be good that the role of external actors is reduced in supporting and facilitating the intervention process (Holzgrefe & Keohane, 2003).

Moore, & Daniel, (2003) indicate that involving local actors will help in assessing the merits of re-building operations and plans of development. There is need to involve local actors in planning and evaluating the operations. By being accountable to the local community, the external donors will be taking part in the re-building process. They add that the main role of the cluster leads should be reinforcing local communities, but to support the efforts of the local community. However, in most contemporary intervention, the involvement of grass root actors is limited. The evaluation and implementation of the humanitarian intervention is basically done by the external actors.

6.   APPROACHES OF CAPACITY BUILDING GRASSROOTS ACTORS

Capacity building is a conceptual approach to development that focuses on understanding the challenges that hinder people, governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations from achieving their developmental goals while enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results on their own. According to Linnell, (2003) capacity building often refers to strengthening the skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities in developing societies so that they can overcome the causes of their exclusion and suffering especially the marginalized groups and communities.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines capacity building as a long-term and continuous process of development that involves all stakeholders in the society; including ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, professionals, community members, academicians among others. It further indicates that capacity building uses a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, and institutional resources to achieve its goals. Deborah,

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(2007) asserts that the main goal of capacity building is to tackle problems related to policy and methods of development, while considering the potential, limits and needs of the people of the country or the society concerned. The UNDP outlines that capacity building takes place on an individual level, an institutional level and the societal level.

Duane M, (2007) indicates that there are four approaches of capacity building which includes; the top-down organizational approach which usually begins with the changing of organizational policies and practices. Bottom-up organizational approach is an approach where the staff is equipped with skills so that they can contribute effectively in achieving organizational goals. Partnership approach has also been widely used in capacity building. It involves strengthening the relationships between organizations aiming to achieve a specified common goal. Lastly, community based approach involving organizing communities or drawing individual community members to form new organization or joining the existing ones to improve their living standards.

Although each of this approaches individually is sometimes referred to as capacity building, change in one domain will often impact on the other domain Smillie, (2001) argues that capacity building has not occurred unless more than one domain has been impacted upon. They point out that it is often difficult for organizations to change or develop without external assistance unless incentives exist. Thus, capacity building typically involves the provision of financial resources, material support and other resources to organizations from external sources. However, the main aim of capacity building is to increase the self sustaining ability of people and organizations to recognize, analyze and solve their problems by more effectively controlling and using their own resources. When assisting organizations or communities to gain control over issues that affect them, there is need to ensure that the dependence on humanitarian aid or other external funding sources does not result (Brough, 2004).

According to Wagner (2003) women and youth face distinct challenges in participating in the productive sectors of the economy which affects their vulnerabilities. He adds that although they are not a homogenous group and their circumstances vary according to age, class, education, ethnicity, location and other cultural- and socio-economic characteristics, they need to be empowered in order to work with the lead organizations in dealing with disasters and offering humanitarian assistance to their immediate community members. Duane (2007) emphasizes that community capacity building at the societal level should support the establishment of a more interactive public administration that learns equally from its actions and from feedback it receives from the local population at large. It must be used to develop public administrators that are responsive and accountable. In order to achieve this community based organizations which have direct contact to the members of the society are empowered to drive the humanitarian agenda on the ground.

7. BENEFITS OF CAPACITY BUILDING GRASSROOTS ACTORS

Capacity building is an integral part of development assistance. It seeks to build the understanding, skills and knowledge base of individuals and institutions in developing countries. Linnell, (2003) asserts that capacity-building activities contribute to improved economic, environmental and social outcomes through four main pathways. Firstly, the individual human capital emphasized in capacity building raises the productivity and hence the earning capacity of the individual, reflected in higher lifetime income. Secondly, the efficiency of the organization as it captures part of the returns from the individual improvement in productivity, and due to the echo effect improving the productivity of other workers via complementarily for example, extension of their learning and adding to the local stock of knowledge. This is reflected in improved levels or reduced cost of services or outputs delivered by the organization to customers. Thirdly, innovation in the organization as the culture and mindset changes, new and better ways of doing things are introduced and new products and services are developed. This is reflected in the changes in the services or outputs the organizations delivers to customers and lastly, capacity building increases the effectiveness of the organization within the policy environment, improves targeting to areas of need, attracts more resources and engages more effectively on policy, due to the networks and enhances perceptions of the views of the organization, as well as its competency. This is reflected in the contribution the organization makes to the enabling environment for adoption of the organization's outputs and enhances the value-added services of the organization.

8. CONCLUSION

Millions of people are annually affected by conflict and other natural calamities which call for humanitarian intervention from both cluster lead organizations and grassroots actors. The aims of humanitarian intervention are to save lives, reduce suffering and maintain human dignity during and after an emergency. When it comes to humanitarian interventions, there

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is need for coordination between the major stakeholders to enhance harmonious working relationship. A critical feature of an effective disaster preparedness capability is determined by the extent to which different actors and entities operate in a coordinated and timely manner. It must function by avoiding response gaps, duplication of effort by various groups, and parallel structures put in place by different humanitarian agencies.

Community capacity building often aims at strengthening skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities in developing societies so that they can overcome the causes of their exclusion and suffering. It helps grassroots actors in the society to be empowered and acquire knowledge and skills to avoid overdependence on external agencies. Cluster leads and International NGO's involved in humanitarian interventions must adapt to appropriate and sustainable approaches to capacity building.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. There should be a constructive discussion among the cluster lead organizations and International NGOs on how to build capacity, facilitate and empower the local communities and grass root actors to offer solutions to their local disasters and emergencies.

ii. The external actors need to be aware of the positive changes and should understand the need to include the grass root actors in understanding the needs of the community affected by the crisis.

iii. A lot of effort is needed in order to deliver effective humanitarian aid. To achieve this, there is need to have coordination and collaboration between grass root actors and cluster leads including their partners.

iv. Developing countries should embrace capacity building as an integral part of development and build understanding, skills and knowledge base of individuals and institutions.

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