



Our Voice at Istanbul

Outcomes of a civil society conference

Executive Summary

In February 2016, the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, Kenya Red Cross Society and Start Network co-hosted a two-day conference aimed at bringing together civil society to examine practical and creative solutions for humanitarian effectiveness, in the effort to build a road map of opportunity towards and beyond the World Humanitarian Summit.

Over the last two years, the humanitarian community, has heard from the UN World Humanitarian Summit's (WHS) regional consultations how national and local organisations need to be at the forefront of the responses. While there is enough evidence to demonstrate that we need to recognise and prioritise national and local organisations, there was still a need to construct how to concretely put this into action, using our collective voice.

The conference was convened to set up a roadmap of clear commitments, from the numerous stakeholders participating, in order to practically advance the collective civil society voice ahead of the summit in May 2016.

The conference brought together over 60 community-based organisations, national NGOs, international NGOs, governments, donors, civil society activists, academia and membership networks.

Participants discussed the challenges to achieve localisation, explored what would success look like in three to five years' time, and together came up with possible actions and creative solutions to the challenges posed. The participant's contributions, documented throughout this report, are rooted in their experiences, successes and less successful stories of working in and with the humanitarian sector.

From the conference, 12 recommendations were collated (see back page) and 72 practical actions were conceived. The following proposed commitments (centre pages) have been drawn up from these recommendations and actions to provide possible commitments civil society can support and implement as part of the World Humanitarian Summit process and beyond.

Proposed Commitments

Theme 1

National and local structures

National governments should promote local ownership/leadership of preparedness, response and recovery, through reform of policies, budgets and coordination.

- We commit to encouraging national governments to reform and/or develop legislative frameworks (policies and budgets), regulatory bodies and coordination mechanisms, for preparedness, response and recovery, so that decision making can be devolved to the most appropriate level.
- We commit to encouraging national governments to ensure the local availability of a minimum acceptable capacity for preparedness and response by investing in local communities.
- We commit to promoting the voice of civil society and facilitating their engagement with governments and other humanitarian organisations.
- We commit to encouraging INGOs to adopt a supportive approach and consider disaster affected communities as leaders and participants rather than beneficiaries.
- We commit to collaborating with governments to reinforce and/or establish local and national early warning mechanisms, including forecasting capabilities, disaster risk reduction strategies and local action plans, thereby embedding a culture of anticipation.

Theme 2

Investing in local systems

Global organisations and NGOs should collaborate with local government to invest in demand-led, non siloed, accessible and locally coordinated systems/networks, which ensure effective participation by local communities.

- We commit to reinforcing responsive local structures and prioritising local capacities to ensure effective and timely response.
- We applaud the emergence of objective-led networks that can accelerate learning on what is and is not working.
- We commit to supporting local structures, which incorporate local knowledge, to collect and analyse relevant data for contingency planning, preparedness and response.

Theme 3

Technology

All stakeholders should embrace the use of technology: to promote improved transparency and accountability to affected populations, to streamline the delivery of assistance, and to enhance information sharing.

- We commit to working with others to establish multi-stakeholder portals/platforms at the regional level to enable free access to relevant information, management tools and exchange of community knowledge for all humanitarian stakeholders, including in local languages.
- We commit to foster collaboration between communities, the private sector, academia, and other stakeholders to enable communities to get access to relevant, existing and innovative technology solutions (for example, to facilitate matching supply and demand).
- We commit to using technology to promote and/or strengthen monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning activities, to enable affected populations to rapidly assess and communicate the impact of interventions (feedback mechanisms).

Theme 4

Core standards

All stakeholders should promote the use of core standards for collective action in support of locally led, demand driven, capacity strengthening initiatives.

- We recognise the value of sustainable mentoring and peer-to-peer support in humanitarian action and commit to promoting and facilitating such programmes at all levels.
- We commit to promoting the adoption of common information management and reporting standards, in order to improve efficiency and reduce costly administrative burdens.
- We encourage national academic institutions to research, assess and recognise experience of individuals and organisations in humanitarian action.
- We commit to applying relevant core standards (such as the Core Humanitarian Standards and Sphere) and ensure they are always relevant.
- We commit to working with others to identify core humanitarian skills, including sector specific skills, and to promote related local training programmes, accreditation and certification, and databases of local surge capacity.

Theme 5

Financing

All stakeholders should collaborate to adapt funding mechanisms to support local leadership, streamline delivery and enhance anticipation and preparedness.

- We applaud efforts to establish mechanisms for flexible, timely funding to enable early interventions and promote local decision-making (for example pooled funds or local civil society forums).
- We commit to collaborating with all relevant stakeholders to review funding mechanisms to ensure that all partners contribute added value to a future, demand driven financing architecture.
- We recognise the importance of sustainable local capacity and commit to encouraging donor organisations to provide funding for local actors, including reasonable administration overheads.
- We commit to working with others to assess the potential for local risk financing mechanisms in fragile contexts.

We were reminded throughout the conference of this poignant African proverb, *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"*.

It highlighted the importance of coming together and the true power of collaboration. For a group as large and diverse as civil society, the value of coming together in ways, such as the sub-set at this conference, will be paramount to the success of our collective voice.

It was acknowledged that these proposed commitments, recommendations and actions alone do not address all the issues in relation to humanitarian action, nor do they intend to. They are instead to be seen as a menu of opportunities from which, with collective action, we can build an improved humanitarian response for humanity.



"Collectively, an exciting message did emerge. It was strong, articulate and clear: put down the egos, share out the knowledge, and place people at the centre."

Building collective micro-revolutions

The main output from the conference was to draw up a collection of concrete recommendations, and experienced based actions, conceived by the large variety of stakeholders present at the conference. Below are 12 of these recommendations, and a menu of 72 actions can be viewed in the full report (which can be downloaded from: <http://bit.ly/Kenyareport>), which were documented throughout the conference. This executive summary lays out a summarised version of this list, with actions translated into commitments relevant to the UN Secretary General's Agenda for Humanity and Grand Bargain that civil society are invited to engage with pre, during and post the World Humanitarian Summit.

Recommendation 1: Use technology to address the barriers to localisation and increase accountability and transparency to affected populations.

Recommendation 2: Support governments to enable localisation of preparedness, delivery and recovery of the humanitarian response in an effective and timely manner, through reform of coordination and development of policy and budget frameworks.

Recommendation 3: Promote and invest in local networks that enable the development of demand-led, non siloed, accessible and locally coordinated systems.

Recommendation 4: Build a momentum around collective accountability, feedback and complaints, which in turn impacts on actions.

Recommendation 5: Gather, document and disperse local and national level information to build knowledge on what already exists locally.

Recommendation 6: Anticipate crises at local and national level in recognition that local responders are the first to respond and the actors which will stay after it has passed.

Recommendation 7: Transcend the humanitarian-development divide.

Recommendation 8: Core standards for collective action in support of locally led, demand driven, capacity strengthening initiatives.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen and/or develop national and international bodies in order to assess and recognise experience of individuals and organisations.

Recommendation 10: Ensure effective participation by local communities in identifying local capacities and existing gaps in local, formal and informal structures of governance.

Recommendation 11: Change the funding landscape (conduits) to ensure each are fit for purpose and relevant.

Recommendation 12: Locally driven decision making and financing.