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Dealing with Disasters

Capacity Building Toolkit for National
Civil Society Organisation Platforms



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**Capacity building
and strengthening**



Capacity building and strengthening

Capacity building *before* disaster events is vital, but often under-resourced. National CSO Platforms (NCPs) address this challenge with an emphasis on two aspects of capacity building. Firstly, through improving the operational response of their members by forming partnerships, accessing resources, and participating in clusters and other groupings. Secondly, through improving the visibility, credibility, and influence of members by strengthening accountability and governance.

Operational response

In responding to intensive disasters, the issue of capacity is thrown into sharp focus. During the surge of international agencies in response to a major crisis, local and national CSOs are often side-lined because of their limited capacity. Local CSO leaders in Nepal describe this experience in relation to the 2015 Gorkha earthquake. The 'cluster system,'⁸ employed in large disasters such as this one, groups agencies together to address different aspects of response, but often excludes local CSOs. These are treated as service delivery contractors during the crisis, but when international agencies move on, local CSOs are expected to sustain the recovery effort.⁹

The NCP FECONG, in Mali, places an emphasis on creating a chain of communication between its own national level work and that of regional coordinators, who in turn link to local member CSOs. Through this structure the NCP can undertake activities to strengthen the capacity of members and also group together requests for information with specialists and technical advisers.

Visibility and credibility

ASONOG, in Honduras, constantly works to strengthen CSO capacity in risk management, so they can adequately manage adverse situations when they occur. Examples are capacity building for CSOs to reduce the impact of disasters, and establishing partnerships with other actors, such as Chambers of Tourism and businesses.

Bangladesh NCP NAHAB makes a strong link to the theme of 'localisation', placing an emphasis on advocating for localised resourcing to strengthen the capacity of local CSOs, as well as strengthening information sharing and collaboration.

Indian NCP VANI highlights the need for capacity building before disaster events, for example by helping members to improve their internal governance and systems. It explains that this preparation is vital to ensure members have capacity to handle crisis events.

Recognition and support by local and national government is important. Fundación Azimuth (FA), in Colombia, sees the 'invisibility' of local CSOs as a major problem. Though government claims it recognises local CSOs, in practice as soon as there is a crisis they are ignored. FA are undertaking advocacy to achieve greater recognition and support for local CSOs.

Capacity building and strengthening: Action Points

- Build the capacity of members in stable times by facilitating workshops to identify needs and conduct knowledge exchanges so that members' expertise is shared.
- Document knowledge to make it available to all members.
- Where knowledge gaps are identified, access technical knowledge and make it available to members.
- Strengthen relationships with the humanitarian system through better partnerships with INGOs, access to the cluster system, etc.
- Map relevant actors and secure meetings and agreements with them.
- Advocate for localisation, and develop groupings of CSOs to work together locally and regionally to share knowledge and resources.
- Provide tools and information to improve organisational accountability and governance, strengthening the credibility of CSOs.
- Advocate for recognition and for partnerships of members with local and national government through building relationships with these actors.

FOOTNOTES

⁸ See summary of cluster system: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach>

⁹ GFCF: Pathways to Power Podcasts (2019) episode 3: https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Podcast3_Transcript.pdf

See Case Studies 3 and 4 for examples of capacity strengthening.