CAPACITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

JOHN BRYANT, HUMANITARIAN POLICY GROUP

15 JULY 2019
**HPG Research Project: capacity and complementarity**

- How can capacity be better understood and applied to support more complementary and collaborative humanitarian response?
- What are the opportunities for and obstacles to harnessing the capacity of and forging more effective complementarity among local, national, regional and international actors responding to humanitarian crises?
Case studies

Bangladesh: Response to the Rohingya displacement in Cox’s Bazar

Democratic Republic of Congo: conflicts in South Kivu and Kasai

Models of complementarity: British Virgin Islands Red Cross, INGO brokering role, mixed consortium and more
Investigating capacity is difficult …

- Capacity is not well defined or commonly understood
- One-sided conceptualisation of ‘gaps’ and ‘assessments’
- Capacity assessment is limited to bilateral processes

… but critical

- To recognise power dynamics and support local responses
Complementarity is defined as an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in such a way to support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities.
Defining capacity: key findings

- Not one understanding of capacity
- Capacity defined as the capacity you have
- Capacity defined in isolation with context and crisis
- Capacity defined in isolation from outcomes for affected people
Defining capacity: the problems

• Problem 1: who defines capacity leads to unequal power dynamics and narrow definition of capacity
• Problem 2: lack of consensus on definition means impossible to decide how local humanitarian action can be and the necessity of international humanitarian action.
Assessing capacity: key findings

• Assessing the capacity of locals for the purpose of funding and partnerships lead to risk management approach rather than understanding who contributes what

• Lack of knowledge of who has capacity highlighting lack of context wide approach and failure of coordination
Assessing capacity: the problems

• Problem 1: Who decides who has capacity? Power dynamics need to be addressed in how capacity is assessed.

• Problem 2: Burden of evidence on local organisations – to demonstrate they are better, cheaper, more effective leading to humanitarian action that is as international as possible, as local as necessary.
Strengthening capacity: key findings and problems

• A process generally done for the purpose of delivering projects as implementing partners
• Capacity ‘strengthening’ not systematic, and focuses on technical skills and standards
• Little reflection on the ability of international actors to strengthen capacities, or evaluating what worked
Capacity and capacity strengthening: ways forward

- Define capacity through a wider range of stakeholders, including affected people, and in relation to specific crises.
- Move toward context-wide capacity mapping.
- Fill gaps through complementary approaches and capacity strengthening.