Transforming the Humanitarian Response Framework of the Philippines through Partnerships and Legislation

An opinion paper by:
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1.   Summary

This paper serves as an opinion piece and not a recital of facts and figures. I will relate my observations of Humanitarian Response in the Philippines based on the experiences of A Single Drop for Safe Water(ASDSW). Note that it is our observation that every organization, government, non-government, local and international responds to these situations with the best of intentions. There are several factors that impact on the implementation of aid, accountability of agencies to communities and funders being a crucial element.

The Philippines is prone to many natural and man-made disasters. It has a very strong civil society sector and a multi-level democratic government system that can supply good services, depending on the area and local political climate. The Philippines is a developing country, but has a reasonable education system and other governmental services.

Over the last few years humanitarian response agencies have been working with local Civil Society Organizations for the implementation of aid. ASDSW has been involved in this process and is advocating/implementing a change to these relationships balancing the partnership between International and Local organizations. By involving local development organization in a decision making role, international agencies can be more effective. This is because the local agencies can identify the needs of the affected populations better, relate to the local leaders and communities because of their existing long term relationships, and can identify the long term impacts on the local communities. This process still requires oversight by the international organizations, who also are tasked with building additional capacity within these local organizations and, providing the resources for them to be effective. Two types of partnership that ASDSW is involved in is detailed in section 4.

In addition to this, a legislative framework is needed to ensure that the government remains the major player in meeting the response needs of the country. The passing of Republic Act 10121, The "Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act of 2010" changes the mindset from pure response to mitigation and preparation. It provides civil society a justification for advocacy at local levels of government for the implementation of the act. The act provides a framework for community development plans and activities for risk management in an era where natural calamities are increasing in scale and frequency.

Communities are the recipients of aid and should also be instrumental in deciding what and how this aid should happen. The legislative framework has changed in the Philippines to help facilitate this. The creation of effective partnerships between international agencies and local CSO's, as shown in the Mindanao experience and the creation of the Humanitarian Response Consortium, begins to bridge the gap between communities and local government with international organizations.

The eventual evolution of this is that the capacities and resources of the Local Governments and CSO's will allow them to lead responses. This will require an environment where communities proactively manage their risks as well as being empowered to demand the correct response while holding outside agencies and government accountable. International Agencies have a vital role to play in this evolution. They need to promote balanced partnerships, build capacity within their partner organizations and hold all stakeholders (themselves, partner organizations, government and the community) accountable for their actions

2.   Context

2.1   ASDSW

A Single Drop for Safe Water Inc. is a non-profit organization based in the Philippines that concentrates on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). It was started 5 years ago as a partnership in 2006 between Ms Gemma Bulos and Kevin Lee, with seed funding raised by Ms Bulos and an Echoing Green Fellowship in 2007.

Initially it concentrated on implementation of the Bio-Sand Filter as household water treatment but has since expanded its scope to include:

- Participative community/Local Government Unit planning and project development processes
- Organizational development for service providers and product implementers
- Technical Engineering Trainings
- Technical implementation for source development and improvement, treatment and distribution.
- Technical implementation for household sanitation systems.

These are all development related efforts, working in communities throughout the Philippines. This program concentrates on the increasing of capacity within the community to deal with their WASH issues while also promoting and executing good governance and unity within communities.

2.2   Philippines

The Philippines situation is well documented. However in bullet points:

- Consists of an Archipelago of 7000 plus islands consisting of 3 major island groups.
- It's a democracy, however this democracy can be controlled at local levels by factions.
- Combination of large cities with a large urban poor population and rural communities consisting mostly of subsistence farmers and fisherfolk.
- One of the most disaster prone countries in Asia. Is impacted by:
    - Typhoons
    - Flooding from Typhoons or heavy rains
    - Landslides caused by deforestation and high rainfall
    - Volcanoes
    - Earthquakes
- In addition to this there is ongoing conflict:
    - Central Mindanao between government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
    - Nationwide between the New Peoples Army and Government
    - Presence of Clan Warfare in many areas.
- A strong and active Civil Society with development and advocacy groups and organizations dealing in all aspects of development.
- International NGO's and UN agencies are well entrenched due to the continuous supply of emergencies and needs.
- Core group of professionals and organizations that work in assessment and response field with the international and UN agencies

<u>2.3   Work in HR</u>

The formation of ASDSW in 2006 coincided with the early recovery period for the landslide in Southern Leyte and Typhoons Milenyo and Reming which caused wide spread damage in the Bicol region. Typhoon Reming coincided with volcanic activity in Mt Mayon and the resulting flooding and lahar flows severely affected the province of Albay and city of Legaspi.

During this period of response and recovery ASDSW started working with Humanitarian Response agencies (UN and INGO's) in early recovery programs in 2006/07 but as a training organization building capacity in some technical areas under the direction of these agencies. This expanded in 2009 to working with partners(INGO and Local NGO's) in the long term displacement in Maguindanao and North Cotabato because of conflict . Initially this was in a technical advice and support role to implementers, then expanding into more detailed capacity development of communities and government units as well as direct implementation in partnership with communities.

Also in 2009/2010 ASDSW has moved into the assessment and direct response phase of Humanitarian Response (HR) working with local NGO's and Oxfam to develop the Humanitarian Response Consortium which works together to assess and respond to humanitarian emergencies. Humanitarian Response has been added to the mandate of ASDSW.

3.   Difficulties faced by Development Organizations

<u>3.1   Disaster affects the vulnerable</u>

It is well documented that disasters affect the more vulnerable populations the most. Socio economic factors force these populations to live and work in the more hazardous locations, they are usually isolated from the provision of basic services such as Water, Sanitation, Healthcare and Education. And because of their economic condition are less able to cope with destruction of property and livelihood that occurs during disaster (ie. living day to day during their regular existence).

Development agencies working in these communities are seeking long term gains in capacity, infrastructure and governance. When a disaster strikes, the priorities of the community will change, out of necessity, into survival mode. Gains made maybe wiped and development activities will be "put on hold".

Governance, quite often is the first thing sacrificed in these situations as aid is coursed through local government units, churches, local NGO's, other social institutions and individuals, favoring certain sectors.

In addition to this, displacements will often spread the community over several locations destroying the continuity of organizational structures needed for development. This breaks the communities focus on long term gains, even when they return to their places of origin.

3.2   Coping Capacity Diminished

When large scale disasters occur the aid reaches only part of the affected population. Some communities are so isolated that they are not reached but they cope with the situation as they always have. Many communities are not aware of the aid available. And many sections of the community do not even think they need assistance. These populations have an inherent coping capacity, unaffected by the impacts of relief assistance.

However it is observed in communities that are constantly exposed to relief operations their apparent coping capacity is severely reduced. Their actual capacity is not affected in anyway, however through exposure to repeated relief efforts they realize what services that they can avail. Because of the nature of relief efforts the motives and capacity of these communities is not often questioned. These communities appear to be victims and aid agencies believe that they are incapable of participating in their own response. For long term displacements this can manifest in displaced peoples not returning to their places of origin as it is easier to just sit and wait for services to be delivered.

A large influx of resources into the community and implementation of projects, also affects the Local Government Units and leaders of these communities. Because it is a supply driven effort they have little choice in the services that are being delivered, however there are many suppliers and so they can pick and choose who they work with depending on what they have to invest in the process. Many times they will chose the alternative that requires the least counterpart. However as has been proven in development the less a community invests (counterpart) the less chance of sustaining efforts succeeding.

This is not saying that all communities and people in this situation take advantage, quite often it is a loud or decision making minority. But response efforts are staffed and funded by people outside the community or even the country. Their perception is the rule and this perception tends to color their perspective of accountability of the relief/response/recovery process and directly implements resources that are available for the process.

Response agencies must not only hold themselves accountable but also the communities that they are serving. The ultimate aim of these agencies should be striving to reduce the vulnerability of the communities they are serving.

3.3   Community Reaction and Resource Allocation

As the community enters the early recovery phase, large response agencies along with existing small development agencies receive a large influx of money and resources. These projects are usually aimed at increasing community resiliency but are also funder driven. The overall motives of all agencies is to improve the quality of life, however the implementation can adversely affect the community.

- **Overloading of government officials and local leaders.** This capacity development and infrastructure aid is typically coursed through the local governments into the communities. Note that there are only a limited number of people in these positions (with their existing jobs) and they are often inundated with activities in several different areas. Their position requires them to attend to all of these needs to make sure their communities receive as much assistance as possible, but these pressures pulling them in many different directions results in no focus and their attendance becomes compliance only.
- **Creating a culture of dependence.** Counterpart is an important part of development. In the need to meet funder requirements, (ie. no. of facilities, no. of people attending workshops etc) counterpart is often overlooked in the design of the project or if the counterpart requirements are not met then the project still pushes through. When this happens and other organizations working with the community expects counterpart then the community says "why should we with you because XXXX organization gives it away"
- **Human Resource Drain**. International Organizations have much more resources and hire local staff at much higher rates than local organizations can afford to pay. This results in a "talent drain" from the local NGO's who are often resource limited. Not only this when these local NGO's work with INGO's implementing projects their administration costs are often strictly limited to unsustainable levels. This means that local NGO's are limited on the capacity of the staff that they hire.
- **Meeting the needs.** Coordination by the major stakeholders and government agencies is a constant issue in all phases. This results in an inequitable distribution of aid, where there is duplication in some areas and none in other areas. In addition to this is when agencies supply aid that is not needed by the communities as they are not consulted about what they need, ie installing WASH facilities when they need food security and livelihood assistance. These issues are readily apparent to the communities and agencies their integrity is questioned.
- **Inefficient Implementation.** Local communities observing the implementation of projects grade the work being done. The use of expensive imported materials and labor, particular for projects that they are capable of performing, signifies that resources are unlimited and they are not part of the process.

Note that corruption and graft are not mentioned here as the issues above have a much larger affect on the communities attitude, culture and capacity for development. When you take away the incentive for development and create a culture of dependence it is difficult for communities to be mobilized to support these efforts. Reducing the capacity of the community to implement by hiring away the talent and limiting the resources to staff development efforts you compound the issue. This resource shortage is not believed by the community as they see open check books and wastage of money by duplication of efforts.

4.   Partnerships amongst INGO's local NGO's and community

Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) are a strong component of Philippine society and are on the most part represented as NGO's. These organizations are developmentally focused or advocacy organizations dealing with either, sectors of society or certain issues. They are made up of people from the community itself and are empathetic to the needs and desires of the community. Often they work with local government units as well as the community.

Because of their position and skill-set these organizations are well placed to serve as a bridge between community and response agencies. They have served in this capacity for several years. This partnership is now evolving from a "Humanitarian Response Contractor" to being more involved in the design and management of the response.

Listed below are two examples of these partnerships that ASDSW has been involved in.

4.1   Mindanao long term response

In 2008 there was a resumption of hostilities between the MILF and the Government of the Philippines. This resulted in large evacuations in Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces of Mindanao. This evacuation has resulted in an ongoing evacuation where some of the IDP's have been in camps till now. This displaced population has varied over the last 3 years, but the needs remain.

To meet the WASH and Humanitarian Protection needs, Oxfam formed a partnership with Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. (KFI) and Mindanao Tulong Bakwet (MTB) for the first response. At the end of this response, to the immediate evacuation, another response was initiated. This new response's nature had changed as agencies were realizing that there was no clear cut ending to the situation. In addition to the conflict there are ongoing cases of clan warfare and incidents of flooding which also impacted on the situation.

With this change, ASDSW joined the partnership to enhance the WASH capacity. The project is headed by Oxfam dealing directly with the funders, in this case UNICEF. However the project is operated as a partnership:

- **Management** is through a Project Management Committee. Decisions are made by consensus and decision making is for all aspects of the partnership.
- **Targeting** of response and the nature of the response is determined by the implementing organization (in this case MTB and KFI), it is based on their operational areas as well as the jointly carried out assessments.
- **Technical Working Groups** (TWG) were set up for each sector of the response. This allows the organizations to level off on their individual responses. Note that standards such as the "Sphere Project" as well as local standards are used in the designing of the response.

This partnership has been repeated twice more with the inclusion of 2 more partners in the last project, concentrating on helping IDP's to establish WASH services back in their places of origin. Note that at the end of each project there has been a "Reflection Workshop" to document learnings and to improve implementation in the future.

Because of this collaboration between organizations and using established CSO's the communities are more involved in the response efforts. There are significant events that have occurred because of this style of partnership. These include:

- **IDP Forum**. This was where IDP's, service providers, government agencies and conflicting parties were all gathered in a forum so that IDP's could express their needs. Prior to this forum, the IDP's were coached on how to approach the issues in an arena they had never been exposed to.
- **Increased presence in the WASH cluster**. The cluster approach is where service suppliers in each sector along with the appropriate government departments meet regularly to try and coordinate efforts. The efforts of the partnership promoted the use of performance standards. Sphere Standards were localized to make sure that many different types of intervention could comply with a standard of performance.
- **The WASH Technical Working Group** developed designs and a manual for WASH implementation.
- **Organizations** were able to implement interventions in their own ways and leverage their existing programs in working with communities. ASDSW ran a program where communities implemented the infrastructure themselves with full participation from the LGU in return areas.
- **The PMC** participated in decision making for the negotiation on some of the projects and actually turned down funding as it wasn't in the spirit of the partnership. The funder then repackaged the project to meet requirements of the partnership.

As with all partnerships of course there were issues during the implementation of the project, however because of the PMC and structure of the relationship, there is more transparency and accountability for implementation of the projects.

The other big advantage, is that it supports the existence of these NGO's. Money normally spent on setting up project management structures, hiring staff and other admin costs is used by the local organizations for the same thing. This can be used to strengthen these organizations as well as ensuring that this money stays in the affected communities going towards repairing the affected economy.

This type of partnership is an extension of the "Humanitarian Contractor" where the INGO still takes the lead role and management responsibility for the response, however the local NGO's have more participation in the decision making process and implementation of the project is based on the local organizations way of working ,with oversight. This improves the accountability/transparency of the response as more local personal and organizations are involved in the management of the response. Most importantly these organizations serve as a bridge to communities and local government, and because of the local organizations developmental mandates the long term effects of the response can be structured to provide a more positive impact on the community.

4.2   HRC

The Humanitarian Response Consortium (HRC) is made up of 6 NGO's

- A Single Drop for Safe Water inc.
- Kadtuntaya Foundation inc.
- Peoples Disaster Risk Reduction Network
- Rural Development Institute of Sultan Kudurat
- Balay Rehabilitation
- Oxfam

Over the last 12 months we have developed an intent for the consortium which spells out the identity of the consortium as a locally led group that provides a holistic approach to response. It leverages the individual skill sets of the organizations with the capacity of the larger group. Oxfam as an international NGO has been instrumental in supplying resources and capacity development opportunities.

In addition to the intent a series of activities and process have been done including:

- Levelling off on Humanitarian Protection and Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Developed procedures and capacity for site assessment.
  - Data gathering
  - Analysis and response design in the field
- Determining a 2 year business plan and mobilizing resources for continued development of capacity, keeping the consortium operational.

This is also managed by a Project Management Committee with a coordinating agency taking the lead. ASDSW is the coordinating agency until December 2012.

The HRC in October 2010 responded to Typhoon Megi.

- Sent out assessment teams and assessed 6 provinces with feedback within 72 hrs of the event
- Based on initial assessments, mobilized navy ship, warehouse space and 200,000GBP
- Reassessed/validated assessment as situation evolved
- Changed response from initial lifesaving response to early recovery response (livelihood for farmers with destroyed crops)
- Refused funding for life saving based on need and managed to redirect it to livelihood response.
- This project was implemented by one of the partners.

This consortium is still evolving but by December 2012 it will have the capacity to provide response services for up to 25,000 people, anywhere in the Philippines. As a consortium it will manage the response and mobilize resources as needed from traditional and non-traditional funders. Community participation within the response design will be maximized and design will include allowances for the differing organizations to input their way of working to ensure the coping capacities of the communities are enhanced.

5.   Changing the Humanitarian Response landscape through Legislation

An important part of the humanitarian response framework in the Philippines is that the local and national governments do respond in various capacities to these situations. The capacity of these government units vary from situation to situation, however it does exist and all responses need to take into account these factors and coordinate/enhance these efforts.

In 2009/2010 the national government passed Republic Act 10121 the "Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act of 2010". This is AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE PHILIPPINE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, PROVIDING FOR THE NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONALIZING THE NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT PLAN, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Passing of this act changes the legislative framework from passive response, to mitigation and preparation. This movement has been spearheaded at a local level in areas that are high risk and in response to the seemingly increasing number of Typhoons and flooding events attributed to climate change. Implementation of this act at a local level is dependent on the local government, however civil society and NGO's can now use this legislation to justify their local advocacy efforts in improving the capacity and focus of their local NGO's. This legislation also provides a framework to hold non-government agencies more responsible for their actions.

Bullet points of the act are:

Policy Statements

- Uphold people's constitutional rights to life and property
- Adhere to & adopt the "universal norms, principles & standards on humanitarian assistance"
- Incorporation of DRM international principles to national, regional & local sustainable dev't. plan,
- poverty reduction strategies, policies, programs & budget
- Development of comprehensive DRRMP
- Adopt DRRM Approach
- Adopt and implement DRR program integrated in the development plan
- Mainstream DRR and Climate Change in the development processes
- Institutionalize the policies, structures, coordination mechanisms and programs
- Mainstream DRR in the peace process & conflict resolution
- Gender responsive, sensitive to indigenous knowledge and systems

Salient Features of RA 10121

- Existing Disaster Coordinating councils at every governmental level are renamed and Disaster Risk Reduction Management Councils
- Department of National Defense Leads at national level
- Office of Civil Defense (OCD) takes a lead role in these councils at regional level
- Mandated particular departments to be members of these councils
- OCD with 1 Billion PHP fund
- CSO/Private is assured at all levels
- Accreditation of volunteers
- Integration of DRR education in school curricula
- Renaming of local Calamity Fund into LDRRMF – not less than 5% of estimated revenue (30% as QRF, unexpended shall accrue to a special trust fund)
- Mechanism for International Humanitarian Assistance
- Remedial Measures
- Prohibited Acts
- Penal Clause
- Congressional Oversight Committee

ASDSW has now included DRR as part of its development module and is now working with its local government partners advocating the implementation of the legislation and using the available resources to build capacity within the government and community.

In addition to this the HRC and its individual organizations are also advocating and supplying resources to local government for the implementation of this legislation.