

Lessons in localisation: the *Fondation de France*'s experiences in Nepal and in Indonesia

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At a time when local actors' capacities are progressively gaining recognition in the field of international aid¹, what lessons has the *Fondation de France* drawn from its twenty years of experience in giving priority to these local actors? In this article, we provide a comparative analysis of two recent experiences, from Nepal and Indonesia, in order to better understand current trends and meet the challenges that they represent.

When earthquakes struck Nepal in April and May 2015, and Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, in September 2018, the two countries were in the midst of respective political and administrative reforms.

A look at local realities

Nepal was emerging from a bloody civil war. The monarchy had given way to a federal democratic republic that was struggling to establish its new constitution. The disaster sped up the process and the constitution came into force in September of that same year. The corresponding institutions weren't put in place until 2017 with the legislative elections, followed by the presidential elections in 2018. Given the vastness and overwhelmingly mountainous nature of the country, decentralisation proved to be a laborious process. In the meantime, the still-nascent civil society played a decisive role in emergency response and relief in the districts affected by the earthquakes. Concerned for its sovereignty, the Nepalese government insisted that international organisations must work with Nepalese NGOs. From 2016 onwards, rules and controls were tightened, taxes proliferated, and procedures multiplied.

This phenomenon was observed to an even greater extent in Indonesia, where the same international actors who had intervened with near-total impunity in Aceh in 2004 were subjected to very strict criteria for delivering aid to earthquake/tsunami/soil liquefaction victims in Central Sulawesi fourteen years later.

Political stability and economic growth had been increasing for several years in Indonesia, which had been subjected to strong turbulence up until the late 1990s. Decentralisation policies were put in place from 2000 onwards. Nevertheless, the geographical location of the country expose it to multiple disaster risks. As a result, the Indonesian government passed a law relating to risk management in 2007: public agencies were set up at every level, as well as funding tools. The aim

¹ The Grand Bargain's second commitment, established in the wake of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, pledged "More support and funding tools for local and national responders". Coordination Sud, *Localisation de l'aide. Plus de proximité permet-il d'assurer une meilleure autonomie des projets ?*, novembre 2019.

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was to reinforce the country's capacity to react in the face of disasters and to enable civil society to play a more decisive role in the management of these crises.

The very strict measures applied to international interventions during the disaster in Central Sulawesi were a mark of the maturity of the deployment of this policy, which functions on the principle of subsidiarity. Since the disaster was declared to be a "local-scale disaster", the presence of international actors was only tolerated as a complement to local and national capacities. An aid control mechanism was also applied to guarantee the coherence between the aid that was deployed and the real needs on the ground.

Support arrangements for local actors

The *Fondation de France* is not usually actively involved in countries when they are hit by disasters. It therefore immediately seeks to identify local partners. This search can take different forms: consultation with national and regional associative² or diplomatic networks, exchanges with French NGOs present in the field, immediate visits to the country to meet actors who are in a position to take action, etc.

In the cases of Nepal and Central Sulawesi, more than 75 % of the projects supported by the *Fondation* were implemented by means of local associations. A significant number of them are associations working in development or social missions and they initially had very limited skills in terms of emergency management. Since the *Fondation* tends to centre its funding on the post-emergency phase³, there were several possible support options. A technical office made up of French and Nepalese architects was set up in Nepal to reinforce local reconstruction efforts. Since 2016, *Triangle Génération Humanitaire* (TGH) has been working in close cooperation on the organisational development and operational implementation of projects by the *Fondation's* local partner, Arrow. The expertise at the regional Asiadhrra network was mobilised in order to equip the Indonesian partner, Bina Desa, with agricultural recovery experience garnered from its Filipino members following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

This kind of support requires great sensitivity, whether in terms of the fluidity of financial transfers that are appropriate for local management capacities, administrative flexibility balance with local relationships of trust, or partnership incentives that respect each party's identity.

The scope of the *Triangle Génération Humanitaire*/Arrow partnership in Nepal

Throughout its history, TGH has acquired practical experience in the implementation of multisectoral programmes in response to natural disasters, and strong skills in the financial, administrative and logistical management of emergency programmes. ARROW-Nepal has been present in the Thangpal valley, which was hit by the earthquake in 2015, for more than twenty years, with strong links to local and national networks and a thorough knowledge of civil society.

The two NGOs are complementary. They have been working together for three years. TGH

² We can cite Forus, formerly known as the International Forum of National NGO Platforms, which is an essential database of contacts. It works towards developing its members' skills in terms of disaster management and, more generally, towards the defence of an environment that is favourable to them.

³ Emergency actions are estimated to make up less than 5% of the sums invested by the *Fondation* in post-disaster solidarity programmes. Yet the first financial contributions are usually transferred to partners within the first month after the disaster's occurring in order to launch activities aiming to get people back on their feet as quickly as possible.

provides technical and organisational support, whilst ARSOW-Nepal contributes its knowledge of the field and understanding of the context.

The atmosphere of sharing and trust which they have established sheds light on and improves the quality of partnership strategies between actors from the West and the Global South. It helps with developing relevant actions involving the populations and local authorities, to support the reconstruction of village societies affected by political troubles and the earthquake.

By creating a coordination committee at the rural community level, the current programme encourages local actors (rural and district councils) to adopt Nepal's new administrative structures. Exchanges with the local authorities and community leaders regarding the implementation of an integrated waste management plan enabled them to identify the strong points and obstacles to building a waste collection, storage and recycling facility at the Ward (village) level.

Amongst the key factors that were experimented with, territorialisation and the sustainability of actions often turned out to be relevant in terms of localisation. The challenge was to develop local, citizen-led counter groups that could engage with other actors. Anchoring the action sustainably in a given territory, often chosen for its relative isolation or for the marginalisation of the people and ethnicities who live there, reinforced this relationship of trust and the efficiency of locally grounded action. Dialogue with local authorities, which is necessary for the sustainable development of these actions, was made easier. The third phase of the integral development programme in the Thangpal valley, carried out by the Arsow and TGH partners in Nepal, therefore included the very recent Municipality as a key actor in the project. The resulting close relationship facilitated the involvement of institutional donors, such as the French Development Agency (AFD). At the national level, the NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN), which the *Fondation* has supported since 2016, is working towards the field implementation of the new Disaster Management Act. In Indonesia, several months after the triple disaster in Central Sulawesi, the *Fondation's* local partners were on the front lines defending the rights of the victims through the creation of disaster forums that were structured enough to submit their claims to the local authorities.

Giving the voice to the survivors

Bina Desa's experiences in facilitating the growth of critical mass of rural communities in Indonesia through community organising and the local value of "musyawarah" became a major advantage when the magnitude 7.4 earthquake that triggered tsunami and soil liquefaction hit Central Sulawesi on 28 September 2018.

KSP Sangurara, a local rural community organisation that has been working with Bina Desa since 2010, became a driving force for the advocacy movement in the disaster survivor community. Six months after the disaster (March 2019), it managed to bring together 20 victims forums from 3 districts (Palu, Sigi and Donggala) to hold a Survivors' Congress. Thousands of survivors gathered in the provincial capital to deliver their demands to the Central Government – a reconstruction and rehabilitation programme designed to protect the rights of the victims and to be implemented with strong involvement by the survivors. This demand was in reaction to the Central Government's iron-fisted control over the implementation of the post-disaster programme that led to inefficient, bureaucratic coordination, including in budget planning, a lack of respect for the local authorities, and slow processing of survivors' rights.

Since December 2018, advocacy for survivors' rights has become concern for several local NGOs, including Bina Desa. The Government's post-disaster paradigm is highly centralised and tends to create communities with little resilience, that are highly dependent on aid and cannot ensure sustainability. This was the case after the tsunami of Aceh and Nias, as well as West Sumatra Earthquake. The Pasigala Centre, founded as an advocacy platform by these NGOs, aims to propose an alternative encouraging close involvement by the survivor community and gives priority the ensuring victims' rights.

In addition to facilitating survivor forums, the Pasigala Centre has produced a wide range of critical writings, criticizing among other things the Masterplan for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation formulated by National Disaster Management Agency and the Provincial Government.

Prospective issues

The role of first responders in the event of a catastrophe falls to civil society actors on the ground, regardless of the country affected (including France), and the scale of the efforts required. The reinforcement of their capacities in terms of emergency response ought to be regarded as a "no regrets" investment.

Despite this major priority given to building capacity amongst local actors, it must be recognised that their actions are most often limited to responses which are themselves very localised⁴. The involvement of international actors remains absolutely essential in the event of larger-scale disasters.

In any case, the challenge for these international actors is to pursue their efforts to best adapt themselves to the local cultural and political contexts. In this regard, collaboration with local actors is indispensable. Their in-depth knowledge of local issues is an invaluable asset in the sensitive work of identifying and mobilising local people and institutions whilst respecting the socio-political balance at play⁵.

Proper understanding of the different issues that unfold in the wake of a disaster, many of which predate the disaster itself, is also essential. This analysis goes beyond the affected area and requires a broader perspective across space and time. The rise of national and regional organisations⁶ in the coordination of humanitarian interventions tends to facilitate this process.

Beyond humanitarian action, might not international actors, building on their experience and their neutrality, benefit from greater involvement in capacity-building at the local, regional and national levels, and in facilitating links between actors who do not always engage with each other? Since they are not themselves directly affected by the disaster, what could their added value be in bringing together and supporting these actors in order to ensure a global response that leaves no one behind and fits into a more sustainable perspective?

⁴ Humanitarian Country Team in Indonesia, *Emergency Response Preparedness in Indonesia*, April 2016.

⁵ This task is even more delicate in the case of post-conflict interventions where the *Fondation* is often absent, seeking to balance out support so as to preserve its neutrality.

⁶ AHA (ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management) was in charge of the coordination of international aid during the emergency response in Central Sulawesi in 2018, not the United Nations.

Translated from the French by Juliet Powys

Biographies

Karine Meaux • Manager of Emergencies and International Solidarity at the *Fondation de France*, Karine Meaux initiates and coordinates the *Fondation's* commitments in the wake of major emergencies, as well as its support for family farming in West Africa. She formerly held various positions within the national coordination at French NGOs, Coordination SUD, and the Caritas network, namely for the post-emergency phases, in support of local partners and with regard to issues such as camp management and the revival of local associative initiatives.

Haryanti Sunarta • A humanitarian aid worker and public policy analyst by training, Haryanti Sunarta has worked in South-East Asia (especially in Indonesia) for several international organisations, including French organisations and the UN. Her work focuses on post-emergency programmes, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable environmental management. Currently based in Paris, she is pursuing her academic project on territorial resilience in the face of natural disasters.

Chaerul Umam • Chaerul Umam holds Bachelor's degree in agricultural industrial technology from Bogor Agriculture Institute. After his graduation, he pursued his career in development work starting in 2009. He currently serves as PME Manager of Bina Desa, a national NGO in Indonesia that works closely with rural communities, particularly with marginalised groups of peasants, artisanal fishermen and rural women. His primary interests include the promotion of people-led development in the local context (musyawarah, gotong-royong), the development of participatory monitoring and evaluation system, and organisational development.

Patrick Verbruggen • Patrick Verbruggen began his career in humanitarian action in 1986. As part of "Amitié Pologne", an association created to support strikers from the independent union Solidarnosc, he organised road convoys for basic necessities (baby food, medicines). As head of transport for the association ÉquiLibre, he organised road convoys to Armenia (after the 1988 earthquake) and North and Sahelian Africa (1989), subsequently coordinating programmes in Romania (1990), Iraq, Mauritania and Mali from the organisation's headquarters. In 1994, he founded *Triangle Génération Humanitaire* with Christian Lombard, becoming its codirector. The association now has 80 employees and nearly 500 collaborators recruited in their countries of origin. It intervenes in 10 countries in Africa and Asia, in the sectors of water and sanitation, food security and education.

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