



Survivor-Led Response: Local recommendations to operationalise building back better



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Resilience
Transformation
Humanitarian response
Survivor lead response
Psychological support

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of interventions, emergency response is yet to be integrated effectively with long-term development. NGOs have suggested resilience as a potential framework for bridging this gap. Simultaneously, there has been a push towards localisation in development programming and a call for a shift of power towards those affected by crises. However, resilience is a largely theoretical concept that has been driven from the top-down and as such lacks local voice and a means for practical implementation. This paper responds by investigating resilience building as a mechanism to align short term humanitarian aid with longer-term development from the perspective of crises survivors and local field staff involved in eight humanitarian interventions. Transformative, adaptive and absorptive modes of resilience are identified. Six mechanisms for Survivor-Led Response are proposed: psycho-social support, early livelihood support, community empowerment, community cohesion, government collaboration and addressing the root causes of vulnerability. Survivor-Led Response and reconstruction show demonstrable ability to enhance local capacity and improve development prospects and, as such, should remain an overarching ambition of humanitarian interventions in the context of the SDGs and Build Back Better agenda.

1. Introduction

The Sendai Framework [1] calls for a Build Back Better Agenda: for countries to work with agencies leading response and reconstruction to take on the responsibility for enhancing local development opportunity and wellbeing through their actions. This is an urgent and challenging agenda. There are few cases where humanitarian response has accelerated human flourishing. Ambition stalls at ‘doing no harm’, and even this aim is too often missed. To offer specific programming input to move beyond this impasse a Christian Aid-led consortium of humanitarian NGOs and King’s College London studied eight events from the perspective of local survivors. This differs from previous analysis which has focused on the views of those responsible for programming. Findings confirm a desire for Survivor-Led Response and reconstruction to Build Back Better, and identify six priority mechanisms proposed by local actors. This does not provide a complete template for Building Back Better. Taking account of structural conditions and long-term processes (such as global environmental change) may not be visible locally, but the results do identify a core set of principles and a tangible agenda to move the Build Back Better agenda forward.

The importance of enhancing local leadership, including through the promotion of local viewpoints in response and reconstruction programming, has broader significance through the World Humanitarian Summit, Localisation Agenda [2]. This encourages national and international NGOs to facilitate more locally-led response and financing for humanitarian action. The timeliness and importance is reinforced by initiatives such as the Charter for Change [3], the Grand Bargain [4] and Time to Let Go [5] which are increasingly influential throughout the humanitarian and development sector. These initiatives advocate for the benefits of shifting power from donors and INGOs to local actors and locally-led responses. Investment in community preparedness allows a more effective and efficient humanitarian response as well as smoother transition to recovery and development [1]. For this to happen an evidence base is needed of pathways for moving towards locally led action. Survivor-Led Response provides one such approach.

Bene et al.’s [6] framework was deployed as an analytical framework to distinguish between the absorptive, adaptive and transformative facets of resilience in humanitarian action. This was applied to eight humanitarian interventions across seven countries (Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Indonesia, Kenya,

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Pakistan and the Philippines). These interventions were selected to cover a diverse range of scales of crisis, hazards (including conflict, cyclone, drought, floods, tsunami and typhoon), and development contexts. The aim was to identify local views common to these diverse contexts as a starting point for the design of localised resilience-building agendas.

The paper first outlines the relationship between Build Back Better, resilience thinking and long-standing debates on the linking of relief, rehabilitation and development, followed by a methodological note. Results provide a summary of local perceptions of resilience and identify six core recommendations for Survivor Led Response. The paper concludes with reflections on implications for the wider international aid sector.

2. Resilience and the humanitarian sector

Resilience has many faces, and one application of resilience aims to describe interventions that draw development gains from humanitarian action. From this perspective, the UNISDR Sendai Framework [1] calls on nation states and their partners to build resilience through response and reconstruction by Building Back Better. Enhancing sustainable development through humanitarian action is ambitious. Many responses are challenged even to reach pre-disaster standards of land distribution, livelihood, housing, health and ecological integrity. To date, most of this debate on the barriers to better linking humanitarian response to long term development has been framed by the viewpoints and experiences of donors [7] and humanitarian agencies [8–10] rather than the views and preferences of the local actors who are central to humanitarian responses. Their input has remained at the edges of debate, too often filtered through expert and professional opinion. It is here that this paper makes its contribution.

Aligning development and humanitarian assistance seems straightforward and sensible; yet implementation has proven challenging [11,12]. Solutions to this impasse have been sought in better understanding how disasters occur. Debate has shifted from conceptualising disasters and humanitarian response as a linear progression, to understanding the cyclical nature of disaster management [12] where development, response, preparedness and recovery can overlap. In response, donors have supported aid agencies through, for example, flexible programming to allow emergency response to support longer term resilience building; flexible funding mechanisms, such as USAID's 'crisis modifiers', to meet newly emerging short-term needs within long-term projects; and programmes that seek to build capacities to address existing and future risks such as DFID's Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters programme [13].

In practice, the international aid sector continues to struggle to align preparedness, response and development interventions. Within the context of humanitarian response, the holism associated with wider thinking on resilience as a management approach offers an opportunity to bring together the two types of international assistance by focusing management through flexibility, innovation, preparedness and cross scale integration [14]. But here again, resilience is constructed largely through the perspectives of implementing agencies.

3. Linking relief and development

Conceptualisation of the relationship between disaster response and underlying development has evolved from discussion of a relief continuum [11], to the relief contiguuum [15] and the securitisation of humanitarian interventions [15]. All three positions have been criticised for under-theorising the complexity of interaction between humanitarian and development interventions [14]. More recently calls were made to understand resilience's role in the debate [12,14].

The relief continuum presents a linear relationship between response and development. Consequently, policy recommendations focus on innovating methods for progressing from humanitarian aid to

development programming. Uncertainty around what should be handed over, to whom and when, led to criticism that this linear model was unable to capture the complexities of intervention and the cyclical, multiple stages of crises management [4].

In response, the contiguuum offers a more comprehensive and holistic model. It is cyclical, explores all stages of post-disaster response and recognises that linking relief and development should be about all events, not just natural disasters, and non-events (everyday life) as well. It takes a human rights approach, specifically focusing on duty bearers' responsibility and the ability of people to claim their rights. It incorporates governance and introduces the idea that a shock or crisis can create the social, political and economic space needed to address root causes of vulnerability and tackle human rights issues [12,15–17]. In its turn, the contiguuum approach has been criticised for assuming a stable government willing and able to take up responsibility for citizens' welfare and for conceptualising crises as one-off events. The contiguuum does not fit well with the challenges of protracted crises and events that can lead to, trigger or act as a catalyst for future shocks, stressors and crises [12,15,18].

The 1990s was a period of considerable debate around humanitarian neutrality, drawing on experience from interventions in Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Following the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack in 2001, the international development sector began to align more closely with the securitisation agenda. Greater attention in aid and development budgets was given to terrorism, global security and stabilisation. Consequently, the World Bank began to receive pressure to deliver assistance to failed states. Here, the need to better link humanitarian support with longer-term development became politicised and intertwined with the war on terror [20]. This new era of aid politicisation has created an environment where interventions have been increasingly scrutinized on the principles of humanitarian neutrality, impartiality and independence [12,15] making it harder to bridge between emergency response and development programming.

Strategic reviews of the humanitarian sector, such as the UK government Humanitarian Emergency Response Review [20] questioned the goals of humanitarian assistance, as well as the actors and capacities required to deliver it. Whilst a greater focus on working in protracted crises has seen increasing innovation and cross-disciplinary work to better align humanitarian and development interventions, significant tactical and systemic problems still exist and the development of a practical methods for overcoming them are under-developed [12,15].

Ultimately, there appears to be an absence of a strategic framework and set of common principles that span the humanitarian and development sector [15]. More work is required to trial, pilot and document sustainable humanitarian response programmes that link to longer term development initiatives [11,12,15]. Mosel and Levin [12] outline six ways in which the humanitarian and development sector could begin aligning work in practice. They encourage humanitarian interventions to (1) be flexible and risk-taking with an openness to learning, (2) begin with a thorough contextual and political analysis, (3) work with local institutions, (4) include joint analysis and learning at country level, (5) be centred on realistic programming and (6) promote adaptive capacity. The guidance outlined in this paper builds on these principles to articulate a community-centred mechanism for Building Back Better.

3.1. Community resilience for practical and localised relief to development

The resilience agenda came to the fore during the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s and the subsequent Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–15 [21,22]. These initiatives were themselves an extension of the "build back better" debate of the 1980s and have been returned to the Sendai Framework in its call for Building Back Better. A parallel process was ongoing within the climate change community. Both communities of practice developed their own definitions, terminologies, departments and dedicated funding. The IPCC Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters

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