

Responding for Impact: Lessons and learning from the Australian humanitarian sector

AHP-HRG Seminar Paper

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Executive Summary

Over 60 participants from non-government organisations (NGOs), government (DFAT, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Defence Force and GeoScience Australia) and academia gathered for a day to discuss the questions below, and others relating to the Seminar’s theme of ‘*Responding for Impact: Lessons and Learning from the Australian humanitarian sector.*’

<i>If you could change one thing to achieve greater localisation, social inclusion or accountability in evaluations of humanitarian crises - what would that be and why?</i>	<i>How would you improve the impact of evaluations of complex humanitarian crises?</i>	<i>For responses to humanitarian crises, how do we know what is 'good enough', and 'not good enough' according to whom?</i>
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The Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) and ACFID’s Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG) jointly hosted the seminar at the Australian National University (ANU) on 25 July 2019, which began with the launch of three AHP Evaluations (Yemen, Bangladesh and South Sudan). The seminar focused on three cross-cutting themes: **Localisation**; **Social inclusion** and **Accountability to beneficiaries**. Sessions included an interactive Q&A panel, parallel deep dive sessions, a plenary report back and reflections. A pre-seminar survey captured participant’s perceptions of the cross-cutting themes, and Slido¹ was used to stimulate participant’s thinking through real-time polls and to capture questions for panellists and evaluators. Key messages arising from the day relating to the cross-cutting themes are presented below.

Localisation:

- Genuine partnerships with local organisations help to support localisation efforts
- Localisation requires long-term investments in relationships, capacity strengthening and financial support beyond project cycles
- A strong understanding of local contexts is critical to support localisation efforts

Social inclusion:

- Participants agreed that social inclusion needs to be embedded across humanitarian response, as well as ongoing programs and practice instead of being considered an ‘add-on’
- Improved efforts are needed to engage with hard to reach, marginalised groups which often incur additional costs
- Participants noted the relatively common practice of ‘outsourcing’ inclusion rather than incorporating inclusion principles into everyday practice

Accountability to beneficiaries:

- Progress towards accountability to beneficiaries is evident through widely implemented codes of conduct and competency frameworks
- Feedback mechanisms have also supported beneficiaries to provide inputs, and systems that respond to such feedback are helping to ‘close the feedback loop’
- Competing priorities (e.g. urgency to assist those in need versus time needed to build trusting relationships) was an outstanding challenge reported by participants.

Seminar outcomes highlight how the Australian humanitarian sector is increasingly reflecting on its own organisational practices, and is embracing efforts to learn and improve, particularly around the three cross-cutting seminar themes. The seminar contributed to ongoing dialogue around the cross-cutting themes. Feedback indicated participant’s appreciation of the opportunity to come together as a sector to work towards improving the practice of humanitarian response.

¹ Slido is an online real-time polling platform. See Slido.com

1. Introduction and overview

1.1 Overview of the seminar

The Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) and the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG) jointly hosted a seminar entitled ‘Responding for Impact – Lessons and Learning from the Australian Humanitarian sector’ on 25 July, 2019 at ANU’s Crawford School of Public Policy. Over 60 participants from non-government organisations (NGOs), government (DFAT, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Defence Force and GeoScience Australia) and academia attended the seminar. Three cross-cutting themes: **Localisation; Social inclusion and Accountability to beneficiaries** underpinned the day’s discussions. ‘Futures thinking’² approaches were incorporated into the seminar to support participants to think of ways to overcome current challenges to reach preferred futures relating to humanitarian response.

Box 1: Slido – Online Q&A and Polling Platform

Participants were encouraged to utilise Slido as a means to contribute questions to presenters and through answering live polls throughout the day.

The majority of seminar participants engaged with Slido either through the polls or submitting questions. Participants submitted 37 questions (see Appendix 6.3.2) and voted in five polls across the day, with an average of 36 votes per poll.

A pre-seminar survey was completed by 47 respondents, which helped to understand participants’ perceptions of the cross-cutting themes and enabled participants to submit questions they were interested in discussing. See Appendix 6.1 for a list of the organisations represented at the seminar; Appendix 6.2 for the seminar agenda and Appendix 6.3.1 for pre-seminar survey results. The seminar incorporated the use of Slido (see Box 1 for details).

Mr Jamie Isbister (DFAT’s First Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian, NGOs and Partnerships Division) opened the seminar and launched three AHP Evaluations (Bangladesh, South Sudan and Yemen) which were presented in the morning plenary session. Bernard Vicary (Independent Evaluator) presented the South Sudan Evaluation, followed by Nadine Haddad (Humanitarian Advisor from Save the Children), who presented the Yemen evaluation on behalf of lead evaluator, Charles Schultz. Scott Rankin (Independent Evaluator and Director of Rural Resilience and Livelihoods) presented the Bangladesh evaluation. Jess Kenway (AHP Support Unit Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager) provided an overview of SenseMaker – a monitoring and decision-support tool that was used in the AHP evaluation of the response to the earthquake in Papua New Guinea.



The seminar included an interactive Q&A Panel session with the following panellists (see photo with panellists from left to right):

- Jordan Hoffman:** Program Development & Grant Management, CARE;
- Steve Darvill:** Director Humanitarian Reform & Performance, DFAT;
- Cedric Hoebreck:** Humanitarian & Emergency Affairs Portfolio Manager, World Vision;
- Anna Gero:** Lead facilitator & Research Principal from the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney;
- Peter Chamberlain:** Independent Evaluator;
- Scott Rankin:** Independent Evaluator & Director of Rural Resilience and Livelihoods;
- Nadine Haddad:** Humanitarian Advisor, Save the Children.

² Specifically, ‘visioning’ and ‘back-casting’ techniques were drawn upon, see: <http://designresearchtechniques.com/casestudies/backcasting/>

Three Deep Dive parallel sessions linked to the seminar themes (see below) were held with the following co-facilitators:

- **Anna Bowen** (Australian Red Cross) and **Stefan Knollmayer** (CARE): Localisation
- **Emily Dwyer** (Edge Effect) and **Karen Alexander** (CBM): Social Inclusion
- **Jeremy Wellard** (ICVA) and **Carly Sheehan** (Oxfam): Accountability to beneficiaries



The seminar concluded with an afternoon plenary session which involved each parallel session reporting back their activities, and broad discussion around common themes and next steps.

1.2 Aims and contents of this paper

The aim of this Seminar Paper is to draw on the findings and outcomes of the ‘Responding to impact’ seminar to capture the Australian humanitarian sector’s current understanding of the cross-cutting themes (Localisation, Social inclusion and Accountability to beneficiaries). Importantly, this paper will also highlight opportunities to improve humanitarian response around these themes and present suggested ways forward for the sector’s continuous improvement. Data sources supporting this paper include the pre-seminar survey and participant contributions throughout the day via Slido and note-takers. Section 2 summarises the AHP Evaluations, Section 3 provides findings on the cross-cutting themes, Section 4 provides a discussion and Section 5 outlines the next steps and ways forward.

2. AHP Evaluations

2.1 South Sudan

The crisis: Famine was declared in South Sudan in February 2017, prompting the Australian Government to activate the AHP with funding of \$5 million. Oxfam and World Vision led the AHP response which focused on food security, livelihoods, nutrition, health and WASH, social inclusion/protection, and strong attention to women and girls, gender-based violence and disability.

The AHP evaluation: The evaluation found that the cross-cutting themes were reportedly successful and mutually reinforcing in the South Sudan response. This message reinforces the evaluation’s ‘systems thinking’ approach, which avoided viewing elements in isolation, rather thinking of the whole system and how the parts interact. *Localisation-* Wherever possible, the response sought to devolve appropriate levels of decision making to those proximate to the crisis. The response involved partnership with national NGO, UNIDO, and a high proportion of local staff within the implementing partners. *Social inclusion-* the evaluation noted that “inclusion goals should be commensurate with capacity building and pitched to local context”, highlighting the careful and sensitive ways in which inclusion was incorporated into the evaluation. *Accountability to beneficiaries-* The lead evaluator noted that “The vitality and dedication of local staff in South Sudan was evident and AHP NGOs were paying careful attention not to undermine local structures”. This approach supports the principles of accountability and helped to build trust with local partners – an essential element that supports all three cross-cutting themes. See [here](#) for the AHP evaluation of the South Sudan response.

“The complexity of an environment like South Sudan demands a ‘systems thinking’ approach when designing an emergency” (South Sudan AHP Evaluation).

2.2 Yemen

The crisis: The Yemen crisis was described as a triple threat: hunger, disease and bombs, severely crippling the population. Over 24 million people required humanitarian assistance in Yemen, with 250,000 living in famine. Save the Children led the AHP supported response, which involved US\$4 million over 2017-2018, with the aim to reduce the risk of morbidity, mortality and malnutrition through the provision of integrated emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security and new-born and emergency obstetric care.

“Working with local partners in humanitarian response doesn’t automatically mean you are building capacity, or that capacity exists. We need innovative ways to build capacity outside of the program cycle” (Yemen AHP Evaluation).

The AHP evaluation: The evaluation of Save the Children’s response involved collecting primary qualitative data and relying on secondary quantitative data submitted by the client. *Localisation-* The evaluation reported a strengthening of local capacities and leadership, particularly health centres. Strong relationships were also reported with local authorities, which were instrumental in delivering Save the Children programming. There were, however, concerns about accountability of local authorities, and the evaluation found that strong local partners don’t always have the systems to support the management of injections of cash. *Social inclusion-* Efforts were made to make the response inclusive, however some specific challenges were faced. Limited resources and elements of project design were cited as reasons for not meeting all the needs of more vulnerable individuals, in spite of staff appearing to have good knowledge of inclusive approaches across the target sectors. *Accountability-* Efforts were made for transparency and accountability in response, with mixed success. Where Save the Children were able to engage with beneficiaries, they were responsive and transparent. See [here](#) for the AHP evaluation of the Yemen response.

2.3 Bangladesh

The crisis: The mass migration of Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh has led to the largest single refugee camp in the world. The population have experienced severe trauma, especially women. The AHP supported Oxfam and CARE through funding of \$6 million, specifically focusing on a gender and protection focused WASH approach, with CARE placing specific focus on gender-based violence (GBV).

The AHP evaluation: Led by an independent evaluator, the evaluation included representatives from Oxfam, Save the Children and DFAT who brought a range of technical, country and contextual expertise to the evaluation. A literature review was followed by semi-structured interviews with a range of key informants. *Localisation* was widely regarded as a weakness of the Rohingya response. Challenges included a shortage of existing civil society partners with suitable skills, language barriers and the urgency and complexity of the onset, which led to direct implementation. Efforts to directly utilise the affected population faced challenges, including cultural constraints in relation to women’s employment. *Social inclusion-* there was significant GBV directly experienced or observed. Progressing gender issues was challenging and compounded by cultural attitudes and space issues. *Accountability-* Crowding and lack of space critically affected accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, language and literacy issues intersected with restricted mobility of many in the community, which also influenced accountability. Accountability approaches therefore needed to accommodate language challenges faced by the majority. See [here](#) for the AHP evaluation of the Bangladesh response.

2.4 Introduction to SenseMaker (PNG Methodology)

The crisis: On 26 February 2018, the New Guinea Highlands experienced a 7.5M earthquake. Over half a million people were affected, and 270,000 needed immediate assistance. DFAT (through the AHP) and MFAT funded one-year projects implemented by CARE and CAN DO. Their focus was on early recovery. CARE implemented a multi-sectoral approach including WASH, livelihoods and protection (and shelter through other funding). CAN DO project focused on WASH.

Box 2: Slido Poll 3 – What challenges will be the most difficult to overcome to evaluate the impact of complex humanitarian crises?

The 30 participant responses to the 3rd Slido poll centred around the following themes:

- Competing interests and priorities
- Donor requirements
- Working in uncertain and complex environments
- Data and measuring changes
- Integrating the learning from evaluations
- Access to communities
- Ensuring the needs of communities are considered

AHP evaluation: Led by an independent evaluator, the evaluation also included representatives from CARE and CAN DO, and the AHP Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Manager. In addition to more traditional evaluation methods, the AHP evaluation involved a partnership with Geoscience Australia and trialled the monitoring and decision-support tool – SenseMaker, which was supported from the company Cognitive Edge. SenseMaker is a monitoring and decision-support tool designed particularly for use in complex settings. It involves collecting stories of people’s experience, then analysing the stories to produce quantitative data. The tool allows the evaluator to move seamlessly from quantitative to the qualitative data. A benefit of the tool is that it draws on local perspectives through a story telling approach. It copes with larger sample sizes, collecting greater volume of data and has a sophisticated yet easy in-built analysis approach. [See here for a link](#) to information on Cognitive Edge’s SenseMaker tool.

3. Seminar cross-cutting themes

The evaluator’s reflections of the cross cutting themes provided participants with additional food for thought during the deep dive sessions. These sessions involved participants diving deeper into the cross-cutting themes and developing future visions (20 years into the future) of the humanitarian sector, where key challenges had been overcome. Participants developed steps to achieve these futures – this is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Future visions and steps to achieve future vision (from deep dive sessions)

	Localisation	Social inclusion	Accountability to beneficiaries
Future vision	In 20 years, the sector will work through a consortium of groups (local society, NGOs etc.). Voice and local participation help dictate what local populations need, while beneficiaries provide feedback. Development was linked to SDGs and local organisations are supported by local funding and peak capability (inclusive, impartial etc.) leads action.	In 20 years, inclusion in humanitarian policy and practice doesn’t exist. It has become part and parcel of good practice and good policy. Social inclusion is not an extra consideration. Inclusion is embedded and automatic, through an approach that recognises diversity. Different ways to shift world views have been incorporated to take equitable approaches.	In 20 years, the humanitarian sector will have achieved institutional accountability across all locations of change. Humanitarian response will be people and population centred, support genuine participation, access and equality, to improve programming.

<p>Steps to achieve future vision</p>	<p>Proper contextual understanding, particularly in conflict settings.</p> <p>Strengthening and investing in local civil society.</p> <p>International community sets aside funding for support and investment. This occurs outside of project lifecycle and humanitarian assistance.</p> <p>Civil society needed in governance and accountability.</p> <p>Community level investment in governance.</p> <p>Avoiding political instability. Achieving step 1 in localisation is community level structures and governance.</p>	<p>Changes at an internal level within NGOs, organisations</p> <p>Long-term investments are prioritised</p> <p>The importance of bringing diverse actors together is recognised</p> <p>Contextual analyses are valued and mainstreamed</p> <p>Making inclusion an instinct and common practice</p>	<p>Multi-layered buy in of groups – from household to institutional to government</p> <p>People, tools and processes – common elements</p> <p>People contribute to accountability – staff etc. need management buy-in, resources and tools to increase accountability – e.g. budgeting tools, legal frameworks, training</p> <p>Partnerships outside of the humanitarian sector</p> <p>Adherence to international standards to operationalise accountability</p> <p>Shifting the power- 'embed the rights of communities to be heard, and organisations' duties to respond, in institutional culture and practice.</p>
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Box 3: Slido Poll 4 – Which of these actions best drive change to respond to these futures resonate with you the most?

The 28 participant responses to the 4th Slido poll centred around the following themes:

- Leadership and agency for improved response
- Inclusion as the norm rather than the anomaly
- Learning to live with uncertainty and messiness
- The need for long term investments in partnerships with local organisations
- The importance of context analysis
- Acknowledging the Humanitarian-development nexus

Box 3 provides participant responses to Slido poll 4, which asks ‘which of these actions best drive change to respond to these futures resonate with you the most?’ Actions relate to those reported from each of the deep dive sessions, and summarised in Table 1.

3.1 Localisation

Headline messages:

- Genuine partnerships with local organisations help to support localisation efforts
- Localisation requires long-term investments in relationships, capacity strengthening and financial support beyond project cycles
- A strong understanding of local contexts is critical to support localisation efforts

3.1.1 Current thinking

Seminar participants described their organisation’s perceptions, understanding and current practice around localisation around the following themes:

Working with local partners and supporting local leadership: Developing genuine partnerships with local organisations to enable and support local leadership in humanitarian response was a recurring theme raised by participants.

“Localisation can improve accountability. People who are most affected need a voice, need to be leading, need to be involved. Other actors can amplify these voices”
(Seminar participant).

Capacity strengthening and professional development: Investing in local organisations (including governments and communities) as a means to build resilience, support local decision making and leadership. Seminar participants noted the importance of building capacity for localisation outside of project cycles.

“We need to build capacity for localisation outside of project cycles”
(Seminar participant).

Funding models: Specific funding models to support localisation, for example, direct funding of local and national partners; providing core funding to local partners and providing the majority of funding to local partners.

Developing systems to support localisation: Building the operational and programmatic capacity of local partners and developing systems to manage risk and identify opportunities for greater localisation.

Understanding local context: The importance of contextual analyses, including capacity and needs analysis of local stakeholders.



3.1.2 Challenges

The main challenges raised by participants in relation to localisation are presented below.

- **Requirements and compliance of INGO head offices and donors:** Top-down imposition of reporting processes and compliance obligations and expectations without allowing time for culturally appropriate discussion and familiarisation.
- **Power sharing challenges:** The absence of, or insufficient, shift in decision-making power from INGOs to local partners – an *“unwillingness to hand over the reins”* of INGOs to local partners (as noted by a survey respondent). Participants noted that this requires a whole-of-sector relinquishment of power, and relates closely to accountability.
- **Limited or reduced capacity and resources of local operators:** Limited resources of local partners and the feasibility of localising operations on a small scale in local context was noted to be a challenge. Further, while strong partners were accepted by the local communities, they often did not have the systems established to receive injections of cash, as noted in the Yemen AHP Evaluation. And once these partners received funding from outside organisations, they were perceived differently by their local communities.

3.1.3 Opportunities

Seminar participants agreed that investing in partnerships provided an opportunity to support localisation efforts. Supported by evidence from the AHP evaluations presented at the seminar, strong relationships are instrumental in supporting the transfer of decision making and other responsibilities to local organisations. Such efforts take time, pointing to the need for long term investment in relationship building outside of project or response lifecycles.

3.2 Social Inclusion

Headline messages:

- Participants agreed that social inclusion needs to be embedded across programs and practice instead of being considered an ‘add-on’
- Improved efforts are needed to engage with hard to reach, marginalised groups which often incur additional costs
- Participants noted the relatively common practice of ‘outsourcing’ inclusion rather than incorporating inclusion principles into everyday practice.

3.2.1 Current thinking

Seminar participants described social inclusion in terms of their organisation understanding and current practice with the following themes emerging.

Working to understand the barriers to inclusion: Individuals noted they, and their organisations, were working to ensure barriers to inclusion and the multiple and intersecting drivers of exclusion, were understood.

Partnership with specialist organisations: Participants noted the benefits of working with organisations with specialist expertise in the various aspects of social inclusion, e.g. working in consortium with disability-focused organisations to mainstream disability more effectively; or working with local organisations that work with the LGBTQI community to raise awareness on specific vulnerabilities and needs during emergency response.

“Making something inclusive for the most excluded group means it is inclusive for everyone else” (Survey respondent).

Mainstreaming of inclusion issues into codes of practice and programming: Some organisations were developing minimum standards with regards to social inclusion and supported the social inclusion to be integrated in the Council for International Development Code of Conduct.



Improved collection of disaggregated data and baselines: Organisations were improving practices around disaggregated data collection and baseline studies (e.g. to identify people living with disabilities) to support and inform policy and programming.

Prioritising marginalised groups: Numerous responses were described around prioritising marginalised groups (women and girls, people with disabilities and people of diverse sexual and

gender identities) in humanitarian response. A survey respondent noted that *“Making something inclusive for the most excluded group means it is inclusive for everyone else”*.

Inclusion as the norm, rather than the anomaly: Discussions at the seminar highlighted that inclusion should be embedded in every day practice, and not as an afterthought. A participant noted that *“LGBTQI* is not a Western agenda,”* and that social inclusion very often intersects with human rights, makes humanitarian and development work more effective.

3.2.2 Challenges

The challenges participants reported around Social inclusion are described below.

Difficulty in reaching and engaging hard to reach groups: In some crises, the need amongst the general population may already be significantly high and thus additional efforts to reach marginalised populations and people with disabilities can be challenging. Additionally, not knowing or understanding who the most vulnerable are (i.e. lack of data around people with disabilities); and the costs associated with reaching and including the socially excluded were reportedly significant.

Lack of awareness and understanding of social inclusion: While there are a few specialised NGOs, there is a lack of greater knowledge and understanding of implementing appropriate social inclusion approaches. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding and acceptance of everyone's role in including people and the general feeling of trying to ‘outsource’ inclusion.

Cultural, social and political barriers: Participants raised the challenges around pre-existing societal systems that create exclusion, and the differences between our and our partner's culture, values and beliefs around inclusion and rights of minorities. Some saw a prevailing attitude of “it’s just too hard”.

3.2.3 Opportunities

Integrating disability within evaluation approaches has proven difficult to implement. As a result, low numbers of people with disabilities are reported amongst beneficiaries. This is in part due to inadequate systems for the identification of people with disabilities (as reported in the Bangladesh evaluation, and by seminar participants). Opportunities exist to improve on these efforts, which can be achieved through long-term partnerships with local organisations who are better placed to gather disaggregated data on local populations. Concurrently, capacity strengthening around psycho-social and invisible disabilities will further support the inclusion of marginalised individuals and groups in beneficiary statistics.

3.3 Accountability to beneficiaries

Headline messages:

- Progress towards accountability to beneficiaries is evident through widely implemented codes of conduct and competency frameworks
- Feedback mechanisms have also supported beneficiaries to provide inputs, and systems that respond to such feedback are helping to ‘close the feedback loop’
- Competing priorities in times of humanitarian response (e.g. urgency to assist those in need versus time needed to build trusting relationships) was an outstanding challenge reported by participants

3.3.1 Current thinking

Participants provided significant contributions to unpacking the concept of accountability to beneficiaries, both in the pre-seminar survey and on seminar day, as described below.



Codes of conduct and competency frameworks:

Organisations were held accountable through the Core Humanitarian Standard, along with various international, domestic peak bodies, and individual agency codes of conduct and competency frameworks.

“Accountability can only work if it involves a participatory process” (Seminar participant).

Understanding cultural barriers regarding accountability: Participants reported the strengthening of reporting on practice around accountability and exploring the cultural barriers to beneficiary engagement in difficult conversations such as harassment or abuse. In addition, discussions arose around power imbalances, and the systems needed to give people agency and provide accountability.

Developing robust feedback mechanisms: Organisations have improved systems to enable genuine feedback mechanisms, including responding to feedback and addressing project design challenges as fast as possible. Improved community engagement was reported, e.g. through community and partner complaints and feedback mechanisms, in-country design and development, budgeting transparency, sharing of information, minutes, data, in-country mid-term/milestone program reviews, in-country wrap-up/lessons learned workshop with partners and community stakeholders.

Creating ethical and transparent systems to allow for beneficiary input: Consideration of specific ethical issues were raised, including efforts to ensure that project participants are able to provide input into program design and implementation through participatory practices and robust feedback mechanisms and ensuring informed consent is obtained for all personal data, photos and case studies collected. Further, sharing of program information through case studies, successes and challenges with donors and participants was also reported by participants.

“Trust has been a really key factor for success” (Chair of Deep Dive session).

3.3.2 Challenges

The challenges participants raised with regards to Accountability to beneficiaries are provided below.

Competing priorities: Finding time in high pressure disaster responses to meet all expectations, i.e. time and effort required to involve local beneficiaries and report back to participants, balanced with the need to act fast in emergencies and other competing priorities. In addition, competing priorities around identifying the most effective accountability mechanisms in a short, intense period of time that may require appropriate resourcing.

High staff turnover: Accountability was in part dependent on long-term, trusting relationships which were disrupted by the relatively high staff turnover reported by participants.

Challenges associated with feedback mechanisms and community engagement: Participants noted the challenges associated with establishing trusted methods of community feedback and complaints mechanisms, capturing and incorporating lessons learned into future activities. Similarly, the difficulty in closing the feedback loop, and lack of interest or time to communicate before a response is underway, and poor planning.

“Shifting power is fundamental to enhance collaborative process on the ground to improve accountability”
(Seminar participant).

Accountability requires shifts in power: Linked to the power sharing challenges associated with localisation is the idea that accountability also requires shifts in power. Empowering local partners with decision making power and leadership supports the principles of accountability, but requires trust and time.

3.3.3 Opportunities

Participants noted the significant progress their organisations had made in developing feedback mechanisms, however, opportunities exist to further integrate learnings from feedback into action. As a participant noted in the pre-seminar survey

“We have a lot of learning throughout responses, but how do we ensure that this actually translates to action across other responses in future?” Similarly, opportunities exist to strengthen feedback processes such that beneficiaries can report honestly without fear of retribution.

4. Discussion

4.1 Intersection of three themes

Three main themes emerged that related to all three of the cross-cutting themes as described in Figure 1.

Firstly, the concept of partnership was discussed as a means to address the three cross-cutting themes concurrently. Partnerships with local organisations supported the transfer of decision making and other responsibilities and help to ensure local contextual factors are built into humanitarian response.

“Better planning is fundamental to improve delivery and evaluation of humanitarian action”
(Seminar participant).

Secondly, seminar participants reported that disasters were function of development, have a level of predictability and can therefore be planned for. Better planning and understanding of contextual factors contributing to disasters and crises (environmental, political, social, cultural etc.), coupled with

building of partnerships with local organisations outside of disaster times, helps ensure a fit-for-purpose and efficient approach to humanitarian response.

Thirdly, the need for long term commitments and investments from humanitarian and development actors also relates to all three themes. As one participant noted: *“We’re looking for long-term behaviour change, which is not normally what humanitarian work is normally trying to aim at.”* Such commitments require flexible and multiyear funding to enable partners to engage longer term.

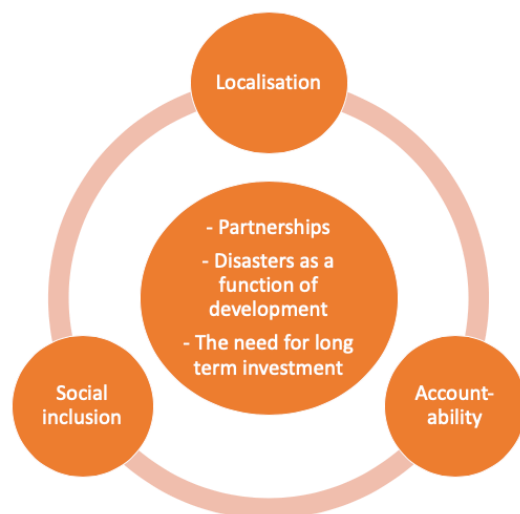


Figure 1: Intersection of cross-cutting themes

4.2 What does this mean for humanitarian response?

Humanitarian response can no longer be considered a discrete and time constrained activity led by outsiders. Rather, effective responses to humanitarian crises rely on local leadership and decision making, supported by well informed and context specific support from partners that ensures an inclusive and accountable approach. These findings were evident from participant discussions, and highlight how the Australian humanitarian sector is increasingly reflecting on its own organisational practices and embracing efforts to learn and improve, particularly around the three cross-cutting seminar themes.

Much of what was discussed and proposed as ways forward to improve humanitarian response is supported by the Grand Bargain commitments. For example, participants noted the need for long-term partnerships with local organisations, and also long-term behaviour change within their own organisations. These actions were recognised as not traditionally in scope for humanitarian actors (as noted in the quote above), yet they support efforts to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development actors. Box 4 includes participant responses of the last Slido poll, describing actions participants will take after participating in the seminar. Responses highlight actions that particularly support localisation, as well as bringing a critical lens to their work.

Box 4: Slido Poll 5 – What actions will you take as a result of participating in today’s event?

The 16 participant responses to the last Slido poll centred around the following themes:

- Actively supporting local leadership
- Bringing a critical lens to individual and organisational practice
- Thinking about how to support long term investments in local partners
- Follow up on using SenseMaker

5. Next steps and ways forward

The AHP South Sudan evaluation included the following recommendation:

“The AHP support unit should facilitate NGOs engaged in AHP humanitarian response, to develop learning priorities and a learning agenda and drive a joint performance management, evaluation strategy and systems for each response. This will require DFAT resources and NGO commitment to collaboration, learning and adaptive management. This will require resources to assist partners with capacity building their staff responsible for performance management and evaluation.”

The seminar provided an opportunity to enact this recommendation by bringing DFAT, AHP partners and others together for a time of learning, reflection and dialogue around humanitarian response. Participants expressed their appreciation in the feedback survey, with one participant noting: *“Overall, excellent joint learning opportunity. I would strongly encourage DFAT to continue with such events.”*

Ongoing activities, expert dialogue and knowledge platforms already exist around the seminar’s cross-cutting themes. The AHP-HRG seminar sought to contribute to and potentially reignite these discussions by bringing the Australian Humanitarian sector together, and providing the space to discuss these critical issues. Given the positive feedback from the seminar, the AHP and HRG will continue to support reflective practice for the Australian humanitarian sector where possible through similar events in the future.

6. Appendices

6.1 Organisations participating in the seminar

Organisation	Number of participants
ABCID	1
ABM	1
ACFID	3
Act for Peace	1
ActionAid Australia	1
ADF Peace Operations Training Centre	2
ADRA	1
ALWS	1
Australia for UNHCR	2
Australian National University	1
Bureau of Meteorology	1
CANDO	2
CARE	3
Caritas	1
CBM	1
ChildFund	1
DFAT	10
Edge Effect	1
GeoScience Australia	1
Habitat for Humanity Australia	1
ICVA	1
Independent	2
Japan NGO Centre for International Cooperation	2
Japan Platform	1
Korean Council for Overseas Development	2
Live and Learn SI	1
Nossal Institute	1
NZ Council for International Development (CID)	1
Oxfam	3
Plan	2
Red Cross	1
RedR	1
Save the Children	2
TEAR Australia	1
Transform Aid International	1
UNICEF	1
Uniting World	2
World Vision	1
TOTAL	62

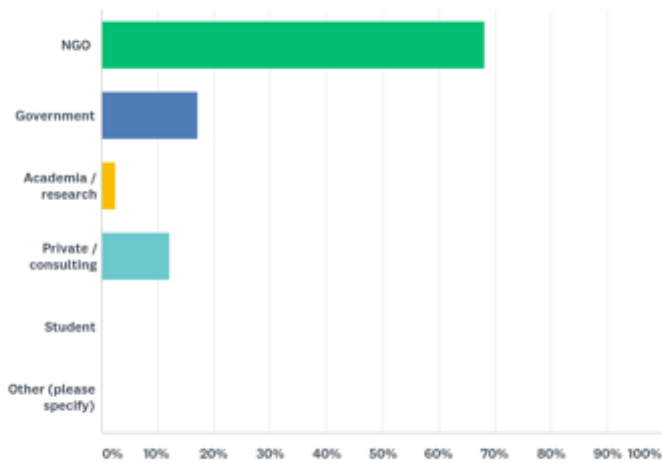
6.2 Agenda

Time	Agenda Item	
8:30 – 9:00am	Registration	
9:00 – 9:30am	Welcome and launch of the evaluations	Barton Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledgement of Country - Official opening & Launch of AHP evaluations – <i>Jamie Isbister, DFAT First Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian, NGOs & Partnerships Division</i> - Overview of agenda & housekeeping – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator</i> - Setting the scene for the seminar – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator</i>
9:30 – 9:40am	Future visioning exercise and participant introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction to futures thinking – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator</i>
9:40 – 10:40am	AHP evaluation presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yemen - Bangladesh - South Sudan - PNG 	Barton Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentations from AHP evaluation independent leads: Nadine Haddad on behalf of Charles Schultz (Yemen); Scott Rankin (Bangladesh); Bernard Vicary (South Sudan); Jess Kenway (SenseMaker, PNG)
10:40 - 11:00am	Morning tea	Foyer
11:00 – 12:30pm	Interactive Panel Session	Barton Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploring the evaluations, key learnings and the seminar themes (localisation, social inclusion, accountability) – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator and panellists</i>
12:30 – 1:20pm	Lunch	Foyer
1:20 – 3:00pm	Deep Dive Parallel Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Localisation - Social inclusion - Accountability to beneficiaries 	Acton, Barton & Weston Theatres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-facilitated deep dives sessions - Localisation – <i>Australian Red Cross & CARE</i> - Social Inclusion – <i>Edge Effect & CBM</i> - Accountability – <i>Oxfam & ICVA</i>
3:00 – 3:30pm	Afternoon tea	Foyer
3:30 – 4:15pm	Plenary report back and discussion	Barton Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report back from facilitators/groups – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator</i>
4:15 – 4:30pm	Reflections, next steps and close	Barton Theatre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where to next? – <i>Anna Gero, lead facilitator</i>

6.3 Raw data

6.3.1 Pre-seminar survey responses

Q1 Please select your stakeholder group:



Q2: How would you describe the following terms, in the context of monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian crises/disasters (use key words, narrative, short phrases – whatever comes to mind)?

Localisation:

practice capacity best including community shifting power
 national actors power organisations local
 international response needs funding design partners
 decision making led



Social Inclusion:

disability_{access} participation_{power} left behind
 marginalised groups people activities response groups
 including decision making ensuring marginalised
 vulnerable_{better} needs_{engage}
 people disabilities decision-making program_{participate}



Accountability to beneficiaries:

humanitarian_{response} including_{information} impacted_{made}
 programming_{decisions} beneficiaries_{affected}
 Transparency_{processes} feedback_{mechanisms}
 Ensuring_{Ensuring beneficiaries} communication_{community}
 planning change



Q3: List three things that your agency is doing now to help improve localisation, social inclusion and accountability outcomes during humanitarian crises:



Q4: List three main challenges that prevent us from achieving greater localisation, social inclusion or accountability during humanitarian crises:



Q5: What innovations, new ideas or ways of working (approaches, methodologies, technology) do you think will help us to better learn from our responses to humanitarian crises?



Q6: Do you have any questions around monitoring, evaluation and learning in humanitarian contexts that you would like addressed? Either in general or in relation to the 3 themes mentioned above (localisation, social inclusion and accountability to beneficiaries)? If so, please note them below and they may be put to panellists for discussion on the Seminar day.

- With all the data and information available to us, is it important to be able to support communities (overseas and in Australia) to make strategic decisions based on a breadth of information (data, knowledge, policy, political context)?
- How should we be better sharing Australian experiences to build on but not duplicate the findings of last year's CHS Alliance Humanitarian Accountability Report chapters 2,3,5 7, <https://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Humanitarian%20Accountability%20Report%202018.pdf> ?"
- In the Pacific, there seems to be a potential that responses and associated frameworks are somewhat 'over-engineered' for the scale of some Pacific contexts. How can we streamline things without losing due diligence?
- "How is DFAT progressing with measuring localisation?"
- What new initiatives are emerging in engaging participants in a more meaningful manner e.g. around reporting, accountability?"
- What's the right balance between the focus on donor risk-management and working within local environments to open discussions on significant risk factors (safeguarding/preventing terrorism financing), which require significant legal, social and attitudinal changes to make a difference.
- How do we measure our impact around advocacy? E.g. advocating for (elements of) system reform? Addressing barriers to localisation?
- What activities do other organisations do for localisation?

- How do you monitor/evaluate those activities
- As an 'association of NGOs, what/how do you encourage member NGOs to consider social inclusion? "
- Why is M&E not more central to collective efforts - treated as project only not a shared goal
- What is the DFAT-MFAT humanitarian MEL framework, in detail (we have only seen a two-pager)? How is DFAT addressing the donor compliance barrier to effective localisation? How do you and your organisation balance the scale of humanitarian need with the depth of need of the socially excluded?
- "We all agree that reducing disaster risk is important and can help build local capacity to prepare for and respond to crises, but why is it so hard to change our culture of response?"
- How do we select reliable and capable local partners and then how do we monitor and measure their effectiveness?
- How can we shift our focus from viewing women and girls, people with disabilities as just needing protection, to acknowledging them as humanitarian actors and leaders?"
- Data is talked about as being the new oil, as it continues to transform our world we know there will be opportunities and risks for humanitarian action many of which can't imagine. What practical steps can the people in the audience take to unleash the potential that data offers for innovation including agency of affected populations and more effective and inclusive humanitarian action noting that vision and skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities may sit outside of the current system? In other words how can we build it so they will come?
- How to get operational partners to understand the importance of, and how to do, the basics of M&E.
- What is the best way to ensure local, inclusive participation of affected people in monitoring and evaluations?
- Two comments and a question: This discussion on concepts such as localisation and accountability will be challenging to have in full, unless key stakeholders including the UN are present. Given the previous questions, we really need to be referring to the process as Monitoring, Evaluation, 'Accountability' and Learning which supports creating an accountable platform/voice for all stakeholders.
- The Grand Bargain suggest that a commitment of 25% of all funds should be transferred directly to local and national stakeholders which is a key to progressing the localisation debate. Yet, we still see vast amounts of funding through the multilaterals (60% of all funding in 2016) and to an extent some INGO's. If only 2.9% of funds went to local first responders in 2017 (with only 0.4% of this going to local NGO's), what realistic measures are being considered to reverse this trend but also maintain quality in the response activities?"
- How best can we tailor Social Inclusion in a holistic MEL since PWD consists of different status
- What are the most effective ways to address those cross cutting issues such as social inclusion in rapid response programs where there is little time for detailed planning?

6.3.2 Slido questions submitted by participants

- If gains in localisation in South Sudan are dependent on broader political structures over the longer term how do we maintain local NGO participation?

- The issue of establishing credibility. Was that an issue with State or community members not seeing local actors as credible as opposed to international actors?
- It would be great if Bernard could talk more about transparency and managing the expectations of beneficiaries and what mechanisms were used to achieve that.
- South Sudan localisation: how much does corruption impact on moves towards greater localisation in humanitarian response
- Bernard, you were just talking about the value of systems thinking in these very complex and unstable contexts. Can you expand on this please with an example.
- Thanks Bernard for an insightful presentation. Were there any specific recommendations from the evaluation on strengthening SGBV responses?
- South Sudan localisation: how much does corruption impact on moves towards greater localisation in humanitarian response
- There seem to be similar issues with feedback/complaints mechanisms - lack of mobile phone coverage, and lack of written literacy. How can we get around these?
- Q for DFAT - are similar evaluations taking place for other partners in these responses (e.g. UN)? Would be good to see if challenges/successes are similar.
- For South Sudan do you see an opportunity to work with women's rights organisations working on women, peace and security?
- Is lack of capacity and literacy of local government a legitimate reason for not engaging/being accountable to?
- Is it also possible to work with S. Sudan diaspora of Australia as they still have great influence
- For Rohingya the evaluation confirms that this crisis is long term, complex and needs integrated, comprehensive response and the need to rethink our engagement.
- Across the evaluations, is the UN system/mechanism helping or hindering the move towards localisation?
- Could sense maker be mobilised in low literacy settings such as Coxs Bazar? Could it be used to more effectively design in real time?
- Similar question for DFAT re. UN evaluations - is DFAT funding that is channelled through local actors also being independently evaluated and disseminated?
- With SenseMaker triangle exercise, were the 3 options predetermined, and if so how do you ensure other important options/ideas are captured?
- What about work around shelter & settlements? Intersectional issue, critical to integrated response but little attention in these programs/evals (program scope?)
- What language was used for the Sense Maker interviews in PNG?
- Q for CARE re PNG: For the triad on information sharing where would churches fit, given their substantial role in the response?
- We partner with local organisations on project implementation. Do we partner enough with local organisations on evaluations?
- Can Nadine talk about the strengths and challenges of working with Local consultant and data collectors and remote evaluation lead?
- What sort of resources are required to use SenseMaker in an evaluation?
- Can Jess or Marty elaborate on the challenges of asking communities about disability inclusion in the PNG SenseMaker trial.
- In terms of emergency shelter and WASH infrastructure, how are interventions considered in the context of the longer-term development in the communities?
- How do you maintain humanitarian principles in context like Yemen where the local authorities are very instructive. How to manage that?

- How much does government funding impact unrealistic expectations of immediate impact and can this be changed?
- Does a tool like SenseMaker assist in making evaluations more “blame free”?
- Having worked for many years in South Sudan the same time you were, implementing through national partner-NGO/national staff works. Do you see peace prospect?
- Having worked for many years in South Sudan the same time you were, I agree working with local partners/national staff works better given the ongoing conflict.
- Greater collaboration did not come across well in the evaluation summaries. Lots of focus on drawing out data. Is this really happening in evaluations?
- Can joint evaluations improve overall learning? Scott says the joint evaluation was a positive. What are the views of Save, Oxfam and CARE?
- Did the evaluators detect fatigue among the affected population from participating in the evaluation (ie. FGDs), esp in a camp setting (Rohingya response)?
- How do we move to collaboration that is locally appropriate and led rather than 'managed' by INGOs for their purposes?