

July 2020

## **The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) Statement: COVID-19**

We welcome the latest iteration of the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) which crucially calls for more urgent funding to support 63 vulnerable countries. However, the plan does not go far enough. Despite the increased funding call of \$10 billion – only \$300 million will go towards bolstering the rapid response from NGOs. Whilst we are encouraged by the recognition of the need for more direct funding to reach local and national organisations (LNNGOs), we stress that the need is far greater and more urgent than the sum suggests.

The latest GHRP states that the *'COVID-19 virus could infect up to 640 million people and kill 1.67 million of the world's most vulnerable populations in 32 low-income countries.'* With the situation dramatically worsening for countries in the Global South, there must be a corresponding shift of focus to support the response and leadership of LNNGOs. As Global South LNNGOs, we are best placed to urgently respond to the specific vulnerabilities of affected communities. We know in our communities the specific needs of different age groups, those most vulnerable and those at risk of increased exposure to gender based violence. As LNNGOs we are ready and have been actively attempting to claim space to lead the design and implementation of national-led responses, in cooperation with other local actors, led by the government.

Following NEAR's first statement on COVID-19, and the ongoing gaps in the response, we further reassert the need for the international community to work closely and meaningfully with local civil society and for responses to be effectively coordinated.

**Coordination:** To ensure an effective and sustainable response, there must be complementarity and synergies across plans and responses, this can be achieved via existing coordination bodies (Government, UN Cluster Systems, National/Local Coordination bodies, etc.) which effectively engage LNNGOs. We also encourage donors to channel funding for strengthening existing coordination mechanisms instead of establishing parallel coordination systems in country, specific to COVID-19. Coordination of efforts linked to COVID-19 can easily be integrated into existing national coordination mechanisms in country as led by local actors.

**Funding to LNNGOs: Despite reports of funding being passed down to LNNGOs, limited funding has in fact reached LNNGOs.**

*Current funding (both current grants and any recently allocated grants):*

- We call for flexibility on current funding (inclusive of direct and indirect budgeted lines), cost extensions of current grants and subgrants to local partners, overhead costs and a donor waiver of no-cost extensions requests for the remainder of 2020.
- While struggling with the severe impacts of COVID-19, most of our fragile contexts have begun to respond to and recover from annual disasters such as hurricanes and monsoons. We request the continuation of funding to cover these cyclical stressors on our countries.

*Future Funding:*

- We welcome the GHRP's call for the donor community to go beyond the OCHA Country Based Pool Funds and to work with already existing community foundations, national funds, activist

funds and Global Funds such as the Global Fund for Community Foundations, the Global Fund for Women, and the Global Fund for Children (to name a few), who are already structured to manage both small and large grants to local and national NGOs.

- It should be a condition of acceptance of GHRP funding that UN agencies report to the financial tracking service on both the speed and volume of sub-granting to LNNGOs, including disaggregated data by type of recipient organisation (i.e. national or international NGO). Reporting on the direction of funding should be timely, compulsory and transparent. Justification should also be provided for the proportion retained for the agency's own programs. This would allow a better understanding of whether the COVID-19 response is being adequately resourced, early identification of blockages, and the ability to quickly address those.
- We also encourage support for national mechanisms allowing sub granting – with effective risk sharing and partnership principles in place – in order for LNNGOs to access funding.

**Partnership:** With international actors continued limited footprint in aid recipient countries due to the pandemic, increased partnership with and support to national and local actors – being local and national governments and/or local and national NGOs will ensure immediate and continued action in relation to the COVID-19 crisis. The necessary local and national actions to save lives, communities and economies must be rapidly scaled up. This can only be done through the active role and leadership of LNNGOs.

Complementarity in partnerships between LNNGOs and international actors can be achieved with effective capacity sharing. With effects of COVID-19 going beyond health, it is imperative to recognise the indigenous knowledge that LNNGOs have as something that is vital in informing an effective response. Principles of inclusivity and diversity must lend itself to mutual respect and understanding, including accessibility via language sensitive meetings.

We encourage the holding of country-based dialogues to inform future revisions of the GHRP which will allow the expertise and unique knowledge of LNNGOs to shape the direction of the humanitarian response.

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Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) is a Global South network of local and national NGOs, present throughout the Global South. We advocate for a world where local communities have the capacity, resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them. As a network we work towards restructuring the global response to human, economic and environmental challenges so that actions to address these are locally driven and owned, and promote equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships.

For any question or comments, please reach out to us at [advocacy@near.ngo](mailto:advocacy@near.ngo)