



Dealing with Disasters

Capacity Building Toolkit for National
Civil Society Organisation Platforms

7

**Relationships with,
and advocacy to,
national and local
government**



Relationships with, and advocacy to, national and local government

Effective coordination depends on building good relationships with national and local government before disaster strikes. National CSO Platforms (NCPs) can engage at government level to build relationships and institutions, making a clear 'value offer' from CSOs to government. They should take particular responsibility for making the needs and priorities of local populations visible.

When disaster strikes, effective coordination between everyone involved in response is vital. This depends on strong relationships with government, allowing effective advocacy concerning the needs and priorities of affected communities and of the CSOs working with them.

NSET reported that coordination in Nepal was a challenge in response to the Gorkha earthquake of 2015. While everyone – agencies, communities, volunteers, agencies and government – did the best they could, stronger coordination was required with central and local government and local municipalities.

There are challenges to effective coordination. Local CSO members of NCPs often have weak relationships with local government units. These are often burdened with pressures of upward accountability to national government and have limited understanding of local needs.¹³ CCONG recognise this problem in Colombia. They encourage their members to work with local government to ensure coordinated action.

Platforms can support individual members in forging proactive relationships with local government. For example, in Kenya, ADSE worked proactively with local government to establish joint steering groups, develop climate governance policies and secure seed funding from international donors for local projects.

In Uganda, the government recognised the need to collaborate with CSOs to supplement the government's limited resources. This led to the establishment of UNNGOF to facilitate relationships with CSOs.

These examples illustrate a principle described by CCONG as making an '*oferta de valor*' or 'value offer', demonstrating added value to local government. This is a basis for forging constructive relationships in times of stability, so that when a crisis strikes there is strong coordination and local voices are heard.

Advocacy for the needs and the priorities of local populations is an important role. Both ASONOG (Honduras) and Fundación Azimuth (Colombia) refer to the 'invisibility' of local knowledge and voices. Wider evidence shows that local voices are often least heard in policy, planning and action. Correcting this is particularly important in terms of everyday disasters. In Uganda, for example, the national Platform UNNGOF and the Humanitarian Platform (HP) collaborate on advocacy, as well as on action. HP has strong links with members and their local knowledge. They apply this in policy advocacy and engagement.

Making inputs to national level policy and planning concerning the needs and priorities of local populations is a focus of many NCPs. In Colombia, CCONG sees this as their most important role. They are present in many national forums, including councils dedicated to planning, participation, peace, etc. Similarly, in Bangladesh, NAHAB sees this as an important aspect, promoting '... collective voice advocacy at the national level, as well as at the local level, for inclusion of local organisations in the local coordination process, as well as at the national level coordination, so the voice of the local is taken into consideration for national level planning and implementation mechanisms.'

Relationships with, and advocacy to, national and local government: Action Points

- **Effective coordination between all actors working in response to disasters is vital. Ensure that the NCP has the capacity and expertise to develop relationships with government actors as part of preparedness.**
- **Making the voices of those at the frontline heard so that response is appropriate and effective is important. Develop methods of presenting such information persuasively by establishing a presence on relevant forums and councils.**
- **Local government is often under-resourced, so identify ways of demonstrating a 'value offer' from civil society which is attractive to local government, as this is often an effective entry point for building mutual understanding and coordination.**

FOOTNOTE

¹³ GNDR (2019) *Coherence Cookbook* (page 8): https://www.gndr.org/images/newsite/Programmes/Coherence/Coherence_cookbook_EN_web.pdf

See Case Studies 1, 3 and 5 for examples of relationships with and advocacy to national and local government.