'We hear the participation music but why is nobody dancing?'[1]

The 12 Essentials for System Change

CDAC Network and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

Global Forum

'The authenticity challenge to the *Participation Revolution*'

22-23 May 2017, Bangkok

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[1] Nick Van Praag, Director, Ground Truth Solutions, quoting Nelson Castano, Head of Disaster and Crisis Prevention, Response and Recovery, Asia Pacific, IFRC

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*"**A participation revolution**: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives…We need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient. We need to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people'. [2]*

The forum: One year on, how close are we to a revolution?

On the first anniversary of the World Humanitarian Summit, the CDAC Network and Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) gathered more than 110 humanitarian workers, thinkers and leaders to debate ' **authenticity challenge to the Participation Revolution'** on how to engage affected communities and recognise them as decision makers in humanitarian response.

Such participation and equitable recognition would have seemed beyond reach just a few years ago. But a sea change has happened in global thinking, if not in practice. One reason for this change is that people caught up in disasters are using technology to make their voices heard in ways that are not dependent on an aid filter. The agencies most involved in international humanitarian aid are still adapting and catching up. Decades of research and standards on engagement have not resulted in the dramatic shift that is now being witnessed in many emergencies thanks, for example, to mobiles and connectivity.

This isn't to say nothing is happening. 'Business as usual' in any emergency response does, of course, mean considerable involvement with people, communities and national responders facing extreme difficulties. But this has traditionally been a vertical relationship from international to local actors where, as one main contributor at the Forum put it, 'money may trickle down but power doesn't'. Such relationships are defined by agendas set elsewhere and often finish when the funding ends, seriously disrupting the capacity of a local 'partner' as the internationals put to bed 'their' project in a way that helps future relations with the funder.

So are agencies 'participation ready?'

The Forum demonstrated an overwhelming desire to see more participation by affected people in decision-making. However, it was clear also that most international agencies, at least, are struggling to make it work. The final judgement about whether organisations are 'participation ready', and whether engagement is 'authentic', can only come from the communities themselves. If there was one point that garnered unanimous agreement at the forum, it was that this is a time when such judgements should matter and result, one way or another, in a demonstrable shift in power.

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[2] World Humanitarian Summit, commitment 6 of "The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need", Istanbul, Turkey, 23 May 2016.

The 12 Essentials

1. Participation and authenticity: new actors, new tools

Dr Dhananjayan (Danny) Sriskandarajah, Secretary General and CEO of CIVICUS observed that while we have built a very sophisticated system for delivering humanitarian relief we have not been successful in being serious about community involvement or feedback so that citizen voice is heard and amplified. We need to "avoid tokenistic consultations or insultations." While humanitarians in general are deeply committed to principles of participation and accountability, we haven't built many institutions that keep those principles at their heart. Instead, we are too busy obsessing over log frames to please our donors that we have lost sight of the crucial ways in which we work with communities.

We can't talk seriously about the Participation Revolution unless we talk about a new set of actors, a new landscape, a new eco-system for how we do humanitarianism. We need to focus on old principles, new institutions, and new tools. See Dr Danny's full video reflection on *'Authenticity and the Participation Revolution'* here.

2. We need to engage at a deeper level, and in different ways: The example of community philanthropy

Jenny Hodgson, the Executive Director of the Global Fund for Community Foundations, told participants that over the last two decades, another, rather quieter, revolution has been taking place in communities around the world, largely beyond the radar of 'big aid'. Community philanthropy has much to offer to turn the current aid system on its head and to shift power closer to ground to give people greater control over their destiny.

Community philanthropy organisations, which include women's funds, community foundations, environmental funds, grassroots grant makers and other public foundations, are as diverse as the contexts in which they emerge. However, they all share some common core characteristics which unite them as a distinct group and set them apart from other parts of civil society.

These organisations are increasingly finding themselves on the front line of local responses, whether natural disasters or violent political conflict; the "boots on the ground" that are already there, or the "community anchor" that local people know, trust and turn to first.

They have deep relationships in local communities and a long-term commitment to their well-being and resilience. They have the skills and capacity to manage different kinds of funding in an accountable and transparent manner. As such they would make good partners for INGOs or UN agencies and bring knowledge and expertise, even if their financial resources are limited, and should attract donor interest in their own right. Community philanthropy can help support feedback processes and trust, but only if this is about changing power dynamics and not as a tokenistic exercise that does not lend itself to system change, or worse, ends up harming the

local organisations. After all as Jenny said, 'When people bring their own resources to the table they become co-investors'.[3]

3. The private sector are powerful enablers of participation

Kathleen Reen, Director of Twitter's Public Policy and Philanthropy in Asia Pacific Region, spoke of the role of social media in emergencies, with the example of the Philippines where hashtags helped bring attention to those in need. In terms of key lessons she said they believe that preparedness for emergencies is where the most important work is done, and an acute crisis is the worst time to attempt to introduce a new app.

Calls for a 'Participation Revolution' may not have happened but for the changes brought about by digital technology and connectivity. The companies that provide this are therefore an essential component of humanitarian action, particularly around communication, engagement and participation. **Dulip Tillekeratne** of the Groupe Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA) itemised several 'myths' that have frustrated interaction between humanitarian and telecom companies in the past, including the perception that all companies are created equal; that the values of non and for-profits are widely different; and that we can't engage until there is a crisis.

The Mobile Operators are frustrated by multiple requests from different parts of the sector and would appreciate having a single focal point with whom they could engage.

The private sector is present increasingly as humanitarian response changes and becomes more innovative. Cash and voucher programmes have often led to less direct contact with communities and so, while serving as an amazing enabler, work needs to be done to ensure people's perspectives are considered in decision-making.

4. Innovation demands systems change, not just 'magic puzzle pieces'

Dan McClure, Innovation Design Lead at Thoughtworks, told participants that if we are to make the substantial leap forward required by the Sustainable Development Goal's 'we can't just optimise our performance, we need make deep change to the status quo'. Innovators like Dan are supposed to be a key player in this change, but too often what is delivered is limited change with pieces that fill only small holes in the aid effort. These innovations can be worthwhile. But the ability of organizations in the humanitarian sector to pursue bigger high impact change is still largely missing.

System level innovation is needed at scale, and innovators can't do this alone. The Participation Revolution is a necessary enabler of transformative change. System change requires deep insights from communities and diverse organizations, including local and non-traditional actors. Dan stressed that this kind of change is a long journey, one that requires

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[3] See also the forum background paper for *Jenny's contribution, titled "Seeing the woods and the trees: the quiet rise of community philanthropy" http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20170522015033-cdpka*

everyone involved to be active ongoing participants. Impactful change will not occur with everyone working in separate silos.

Challenging the audience, he said, "Impactful innovation requires the Participation Revolution. Innovation that matters can't succeed without you!" There are many opportunities to drive change forward. He pointed out that the first day talks included representatives from government, national and international civil society, the Red Cross Movement, United Nations agencies, the private sector and academia. Far from having just one answer to the challenge of participation, there were at least seven very different strategies under consideration. We can pursue many paths to both participation and high impact change. The Seven Forms of Participation are presented in diagram form later in the report. See [Dan's full Power Point presentation by here.](#)

5. 'Willing' and 'Trying' is not good enough

Beat Schweizer, Head of the Regional Delegation for the ICRC in South East Asia, reminded participants that the same things have been said about participation and engagement for years. There is, he said, a need to 'open our humanitarian world, which has been traditionally rather closed'. In a similar vein of honesty **Dr. Gaya Gamhewage** of WHO said that engagement had been routinely overlooked too often in the past but this was changing with a recognition that participation built community resilience. In the latest outbreak of Ebola in the DRC, local social scientists, not internationals, were being engaged to guide actions. Overall though, big international agencies struggle to define and understand communities.

Efforts to involve local organisations and indeed local staff fail to understand the impact on those organisations, local power structures and existing efforts. Too often localisation and participation requirements are box ticking exercises which have an effect of negatively impacting on the organisations critical to community resilience. We need to honestly recognise our shortfalls if we are going to move forward.

6. Engaging communities systematically in non-crisis phase is critical

There are good examples of government feedback and community information systems. **Mr. Iyan Kusmadiana**, Deputy Director for Management of Disaster Affected People in the Ministry of Social Affairs, Indonesia described an information based disaster management system that uses formal and informal channels, including WhatsApp and images, to collate and monitor material from across its vast territory and islands. It is a community-based system where communities take the lead in response, and regional and national bodies get involved depending on severity and requests. **Ms. Monitta Putri**, Assistant Advisor at the Executive Office of the President of Indonesia spoke about a feedback system that requires a response to an individual within five days of the request being received in a government department.

The lessons for humanitarian aid bodies are obvious. Feedback from a complex entity like the Indonesian government is possible with easily set monitoring of performance. In addition,

community emergency response can be monitored and enhanced as required while leaving those affected in charge.

7. Money might trickle down but power doesn't

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah described the current institutional landscape that we have created as a series of '*fundamenaries*' that pass resources down the line. While we know money might trickle down, power doesn't. He called for the creation of an institutional landscape that is not so top heavy, not so northern led, and is far more democratic.

A shift in power in favour of communities during a humanitarian intervention will not be possible if there is not a change in the type of organisations that receive funds. The lack of money or funding for civil society groups, or organisations such as those involved in community philanthropy, is one reason why the system as a whole is so unequal, and this was something raised by Jenny Hodgson. There is a need, she said, to get past tinkering at the edges and reimagine the system. This might involve a way of funding organisations that as yet do not have huge capacity, perhaps by looking at ways of utilising vertical investments and the horizontal capacity of communities. She said that many of her organisations come with locally raised money. Their inclusion in a humanitarian response would add many dimensions, and in terms of accountability, those closest to their own community are more likely to be trustworthy and to ensure value for money.

8. Donors could be 'market regulators' for change in the sector

Donors can play a powerful role in challenging the status quo and incentivising deep systems change**. Mr Huq Mozharul**, the Secretary General of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, asked for donors to be 'more flexible to accommodate views of community when there is a need to change a project'. **Nick Van Praag**, Director of Ground Truth Solutions, argued that the current donor-agency relationship is too much like a "cartel" and asked "how can we shift this status quo to help agencies to do better"? It's time for donors to scrutinise proposals with a participation lens and call out those who give lip service or a half-hearted response on how they ensure participation. "Donor must correct the market failure". To aid this process donors were requested to;

- funding flexibility to allow for adaptation based on feedback, which donors are already doing
- put money into participation
- encourage organisations to invest in good programme officers with a proven track record for building community engagement into their proposals and ways of working

When asked what a good project looks like from a participation perspective, one donor responded, "it's certainly not one that is written specifically to participation but one that mainstreams participation in sectors of activity". Three donor organisations - DFID, ECHO and Australia's DFAT – said that they would look positively on proposals that included such

provisions to change implementation in response to feedback from affected communities, while both **Pedro-Luis Rojo Garcia** of ECHO and **Andy Wheatley** of DFID suggested they did not see nearly enough with such explicit undertakings. DFID said it would look to see how a proposal would set about getting feedback from people affected by crisis and bringing that knowledge to the Humanitarian Coordinator or UN Country Team in an emergency. **Jess Petersen** of DFAT suggested that it was looking for the involvement of new partners and different types of organisations at the local level and would seek ways to fund such bodies. During the discussion, payment being contingent on results, including participation and feedback, was put forward as a possible future donor requirement.

There should be recognition that reworking the aid infrastructure to utilise myriad participatory approaches including, for example, accommodating dialogue in multiple indigenous languages, mapping of potential partners, involvement of national experts and pre-planning with communities for emergencies, establishment of shared platforms based on principles of equality, needs to be funded. There should also be more effort to provide funding matches for local organisations with money going to those with a 'local appetite' for community impacts. Such funding could be a benchmark for demonstrating commitment to participation and securing a real shift in power. Nevertheless some participants suggested that this wasn't necessarily about "new money" but could be about re-prioritising existing resources.

9. We must know and support local ecosystems to enable communication between communities

The need for increased diversity through participation was repeated throughout the forum. Dr Gaya Gamhewage of WHO said that 'local social scientists were being used to advise the response the latest Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo rather than internationals, and said that in general 'people are not waiting for us to help them'. **Alan Kuresevic** of SES Techcom spoke of the need to enable communities to return to the communication systems they are familiar with. To do this, practitioners must know the community influencers and enablers to engage with. Pedro-Luis Rojo Garcia of ECHO referenced the evolution of needs assessments to needs and capacities assessments, while **Kristen Knutson** of OCHA noted the importance of preparedness and asked whether we were prepared to engage with actors such as the military.

The importance of private sector work with governments in humanitarian aid was highlighted, along with the need to be more open within the humanitarian to private sector involvement. Alan Kuresevic expressed also the need for relationships with non-traditional actors and private sector involvement in preparedness planning. Linking this kind of on-the-ground capacity with global tools is key to shifting to being really, truly participation ready.

10. Accepted standards must be applied to the context

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability has value as a common reference framework and presents a new way of working by putting people at the centre. The CHS Alliance Executive Director, **Judith Greenwood**, noted that the current accountability

model to donors does not work for communities in terms of enabling a Participation Revolution. The CHS is not just a new way of packaging humanitarian assistance; it incorporates lessons from the past and puts renewed emphasis on improvements for the individual and/or organisation. Importantly, it also sets out what one should expect as a member of the affected community when dealing with an aid organisation.

Kate Halff, Executive Secretary of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, noted that the third-party quality assurance services provided by the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) enable diverse entities, whether enable small, medium or large organisations to objectively demonstrate where they stand in the application of an internationally recognised standard, such as the CHS, thus equalising the playing field for local and national organisations. She highlighted the fact that the input from people affected by crisis is an integral part of the quality assurance processes.

11.   We can ask for more data, but we need to make sense of the data we have

The collection of data and its use is vital for the efficient targeting of resources in emergencies. This should not be 'extractive' without consent, but be an integral part of the overall participative approach. Some applications such as 'Ushahidi' have implied consent as people take part in 'crowd sourcing' of information by reporting incidents and thereby contributing to mapping. But, as with others, this system struggles, because usage is often tied to a specific project and there is no way to fund development or longer-term use.

Humanitarian responders should be engaging now in thinking around data and developing good practice, both internally, and as part of networks and sector wide emergency preparation as well as data security in a humanitarian context. They should also be working to ensure that multiple data sets are not collected as part of different projects. As much is already known, there should also be efforts made to make sense of the data already available.

12.   The Media - work with the communicators already active in the revolution

Media as a sector represents a professional area of communication that is wholly concerned with the dissemination of material and, in most places, will also be reacting to what they hear from their audiences. In a disaster or national crisis, in most circumstances there will be a heightened level of demand for transparency and accountability. As such the media represents another complex area of engagement for humanitarian responders, but one where feedback loops are already established. It is a sector also that will have established relationships with government, business and civil society and should therefore be a valuable knowledge source for a humanitarian response if the relationship goes beyond a simplistic approach of seeing 'media' simply as a way of pushing out messages.

This complexity was reflected by both **Daniel Bruce**, CEO (Europe) for Internews and **Len Manriquez**, the Projects Coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON). Daniel argued, that too often media is engaged in a formulaic or traditional way and seen, wrongly, as rather one dimensional, while Len emphasised how media working with communities involved in a crisis may have a humanitarian role and provide a link to communities, which is vital in terms of participation and localization.

Humanitarians often also focus on systems such as community radio as a target for their projects or involvements, while ignoring the mass consumption of commercial media.

It follows that national and local media involvement in a humanitarian emergency needs to be planned for and funded, with efforts being made to utlise their knowledge and skills at a policy level. Humanitarian leaders should be watching for ways to use and fund the monitoring of what is being said, particularly if there are issues around minority groups and languages, which may be overlooked.

What now? The Next Defining Steps

Technical change is not enough; systemic change must happen

Participation will not happen within the existing humanitarian architecture.

To imagine that meaningful interaction can be retrofitted into the existing, well-established systems and structures falls short of a 'revolution'. Revolutions denote a change in power dynamics, which is happening as people affected by disaster have access to new technologies. The humanitarian sector has proven over the years to be capable of huge delivery in extreme conditions, but not of changing its vertical approach. What is needed now is system change that switches focus from organisational, top down approaches to those which build capacity and decision making at the national and local level. This will not be easy as it involves changes to an established architecture made up of different bodies each with their own mandates, commitments, funders and culture. But they also have much in common, including shared commitments to common standards.

Unleash new leadership models

One of the hardest tasks of a leader reforming an organisation is to lay to rest functions that were once considered core. Kate Halff of SCHR said during the Forum that any change toward a truly participatory approach would involve humanitarian leaders welcoming both positive and negative feedback from communities and taking action in response to this feedback. It would also require regular links between frontline staff and senior response managers and ensuring findings are shared with the right people at the right time.

If fundamental changes are to be made, and organisational cultures adapted, leadership that demonstrates drive toward a shift in power will be essential. At the very least, a change of

mindset will need to be nurtured. More organic, grassroots approaches to assessing how well the organisation is doing and the promotion of participatory approaches by ensuring incentives for implementers must happen. Part of this process should involve community-led audits rather than the measuring of outputs established by an organisation or donors. And in any large-scale response involving many international agencies, there should be a very clear mechanism or platform that allows for viable coordination and participation by national actors and communities.

Such change is going to be hard. Aid agencies show considerable sensitivity around criticism, vulnerability in the media and the possible effect on fundraising. This must be an area where leadership pays particular attention and works to develop knowledge and understanding around the changes, while demonstrating personal commitment. Inevitably the kind of changes that should result from an environment where agencies are judged by affected communities will have consequences. But leaders are needed now that will take humanitarian aid to the participatory place that has been promised for decades.

Use collective models to achieve a common purpose

Providing collective platforms to support participation within a humanitarian response has clear benefits whether they are for the purpose of independent needs assessment, common language platforms or collaborative models on communication and community engagement. Benefits include:

- The potential for collective development and standardisation of tools
- Improved coordination and efficiencies
- Shared approaches and understanding for language and translation issues and putting the people who need the information in charge of having the translation when they need it;
- The ability to have greater outreach and therefore increased understanding of trends and issues affecting populations;
- The potential to reduce confusion, tensions and conflict with and between communities through consistency of messaging; and,
- Stronger advocacy based on collective messages.

But such approaches are still not institutionalised at the Global or National level and not routinely taken into account by Humanitarian Country Teams or Humanitarian Coordinators. This should change. It is not that participation should become another cluster. More than it should be an overarching goal on humanitarian action. A new 'collective' way of working could be encouraged if steps are taken to ensure that feedback is directly and visibly used to improve programming and assessment. Currently, three percent of humanitarian spend is on monitoring and evaluation. This is an area where the affected population could be part of the process and asked for a separate judgement as part of an overall judgement on the services, actions and policy direction.[4]

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[4] For more on Collective Models, see the CDAC Policy Paper on *'The Role of Collective Platforms, Services and Tools to support Communication and Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action'*

In his closing remarks, **Sir Brendan Gormley**, Chair of the CDAC Board, called for greater investment in National Platforms pointing to the examples of Bangladesh, South Sudan and the Philippines and the ongoing work of the DFID-funded Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme.

A roadmap for participation for transformative change

An analysis of the contributions of speakers and participants on Day 1 by Dan McClure highlighted that while there was broad agreement on the mission, a number of very different strategies were being discussed. Seven distinct strategies ranged from actions that Empower Traditional Aid models to more deeply disruptive System Innovations. Taken together, they provide something of a roadmap for turning the current power dynamics on its axis. In Dan's model, if we want a sustainable, resilient and independent system we need to consistently address seven challenges as outlined as follows in **Figure 1: Participation's Seven Forms**

Seven Strategies for Fostering a Participation Revolution
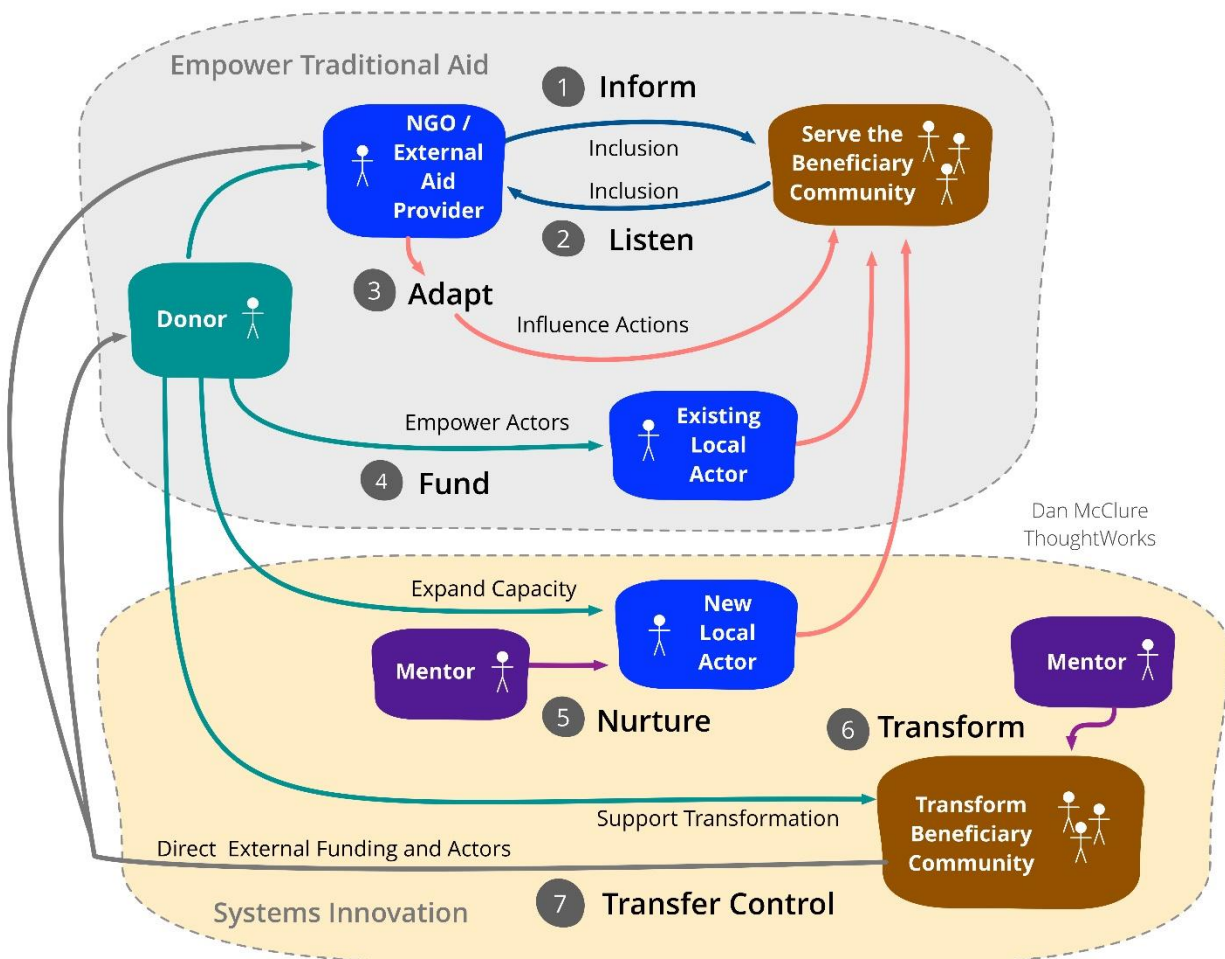
All seven steps need to be taken on if the goal of changing power dynamics and challenging the established hierarchy is to be achieved. He noted that Steps 1-4 were the easiest to achieve, often indicative of short-term response efforts:

1. Informing the community
2. Listening to the community and
3. Adapting and changing actions as a result
4. Funding the changes to make them happen

If it's a longer-term crisis, and with "more than 90 per cent of humanitarian appeals last longer than three years and the average length of a humanitarian appeal is now seven years" [5] participation must drive complex innovation leading to transformative change and go as far as including the following additional steps 5-7:

1. Nurture: Develop new capacity within the sector, new national and local actors and support, guide, nurture and learn from them
2. Transform the affected community
3. Transfer control

A number of participants suggested that Steps 1-4 were still not being achieved in the sector and that a phased approach should be taken with initial focus on achieving these.

Conclusion

A 'revolution' demands new approaches. The aid agencies that can adapt to a shift in power toward communities will be ones that will be the most relevant in the future. The energy at the Global Forum and the acceptance of the need to change was striking. How to do it was a tougher question. What is certain is that significant change is happening without us. Humanitarians need to decide if their task is to be part of the solution or whether, as one contributor suggested, they should 'just get out of the way'. All those wanting to save lives and involve the most affected would embrace change.

This must involve some of the most dominant actors in humanitarian response becoming willing midwives to a new and exciting dynamic, where the opportunities of technology and increased expectations are exploited for the gain of all. It must mean that private sector and other bodies such as community foundations become part of response and emergency planning as, increasingly, aid is happening 'without us'.

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[5] UNOCHA (2015), 'Fit for the Future Series An end in sight: Multi-year planning to meet and reduce humanitarian needs in protracted crises OCHA POLICY AND STUDIES SERIES July 2015