



Church Agencies Network
Disaster Operations

Localising Evaluations through Participatory Evaluation Planning

CAN DO Ambae Volcano Response

Introduction

On 23rd September 2017, increased volcanic activity of the Monaro Volcano on Ambae Island, Vanuatu, led to the evacuation and subsequent repatriation of the population of Ambae. The Church Agency Network for Disaster Operations (CAN DO)¹ received funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to respond to humanitarian needs of the population. The CAN DO response is managed by two CAN DO members Anglican overseas Aid (AOA) and Adventist Development Relief Agency Australia (ADRA), and implemented by two local churches, the Adventist Development and Relief Association (ADRA) and the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM). The project works with local community and church leadership to assist in conflict prevention and protection of women and children during crisis resettlement and relocation as a result of volcanic activity on the island of Ambae in Vanuatu.

CAN DO agencies work through church networks because they are strong grassroots networks that have a long established presence and shared worldview with local communities in many regions across the world. An important mandate of CAN DO agencies therefore, is the 'localisation' of humanitarian programs.

CAN DO was due to conduct an evaluation of the response in early 2018. However, by March 2018, the humanitarian context for this program significantly worsened with the Monaro volcano continuing to be active. The environment on Ambae deteriorated so significantly due to heavy ash-fall, acid rain and landslides, that the Government of Vanuatu again declared a national State of Emergency (April-July 2018) and is currently preparing for the permanent relocation of the worst affected Ambae residents. Accordingly, the humanitarian response program been extended and the key evaluation activities, design of tools, data collection, analysis and synthesis, are still due to occur. Therefore this case study draws on results from the mid-term workshop through which participatory evaluation planning was conducted and how this will be assessed against a localised response.

The mid-term workshop achieved a high level of *participatory evaluation planning* through locally led activities, including:

1. Defining localisation
2. Identifying what needs to change in order to achieve localisation
3. Establishing a team vision
4. Establishing evaluation criteria

¹ CAN DO comprises Act for Peace, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency Australia, Anglican Board of Mission, Anglican Overseas Aid, the Australian Lutheran World Service, Transform Aid International (Baptist World Aid Australia), UnitingWorld, and Caritas Australia.



5. Identifying Localisation indicators

Using this method it has set a firm foundation for a localised evaluation. The following is a report that documents the approach taken to the evaluation planning as well as the specific evaluation planning and localisation group activities conducted throughout the workshop.

Methodology and approach to participatory evaluation planning

Evaluation planning was conducted through the project's mid-term workshop in Vanuatu, held over four days in April 2018. The overall purpose of the workshop was to reflect on the progress of the program to date and to begin evaluation planning. The key objectives were to:

- Conduct participatory evaluation planning
- Determine locally defined evaluation criteria
- Identify ways to measure localisation.

Approach to Evaluation Planning

The approach taken to evaluation planning was just as significant as the activities carried out themselves, as they manifest participatory practice to support local and national actors to drive the direction and the content of the workshop/evaluation planning.

Evaluation planning was enhanced by using the following approaches:

- Participation ensured representation across CAN DO coordination unit, CAN DO member agencies, and implementing agencies.
- Research strategies designed to 'walk the talk' of localisation:
 - Co-facilitation by CAN DO representative and local researcher;
 - Higher representation of national (7 staff) to international counterparts (3 staff), and inclusion of community-level representation (2 staff);
 - Strategies in place to support national and local actors to actively participate and lead the discussion more than international actors;
 - Adoption of qualitative methods utilising contextually relevant methods including visual and storytelling activities.
- High level of participation and ownership by national and local counterparts, for example defining localisation from the perspective of the project team without international input.



Developing a definition of localisation. Emergency Response Manager, Joe Tjiobang, ADRA Vanuatu.



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- Measurement approaches combined qualitative and quantitative data and extended across multiple dimensions of localisation.

Evaluation Planning & Localisation Workshop Activities

1. Defining Localisation

Setting a team vision for localisation is critical to achieving localisation in this response. The objectives of this suite of activities was to establish the meaning of localisation from the perspective of the national/local project team and to identify what they see needs to change in humanitarian response, so that this could be measured in the evaluation.

CAN DO partners defined localisation as follows:

Localisation is a process where local people's capacity is strengthened to lead, plan, prepare, and the local context is respected; from response to recovery.

An interesting point to note is that whilst the team identified that local capacity still needed to be strengthened they were clear not to state that local capacity needed building. Rather that the capacity was already there and it just needed to be strengthened.

2. What Needs to Change for Localised Response

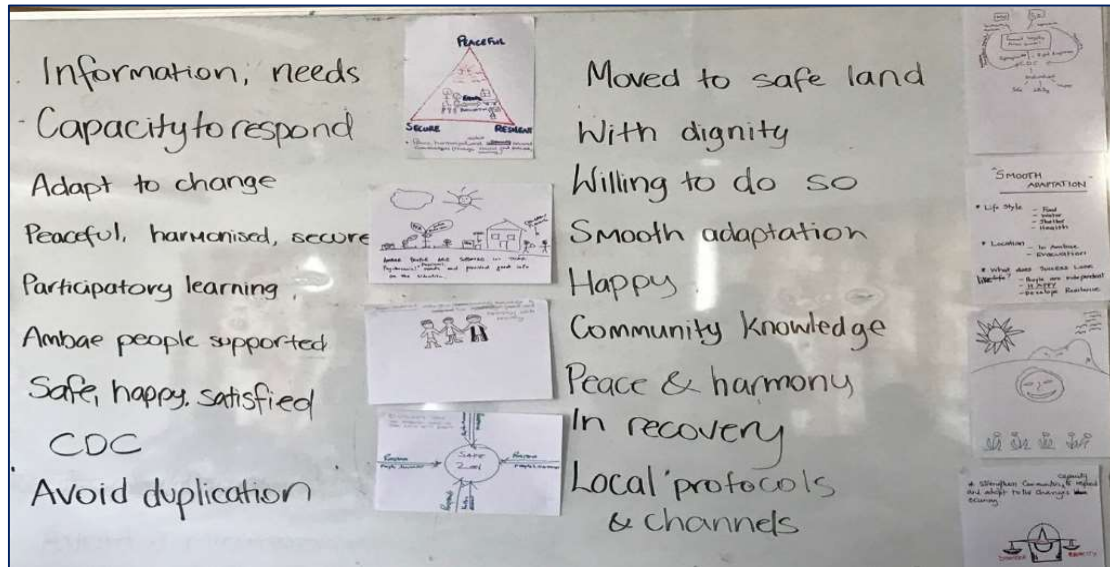
Following above activity, the team were asked what needs to change in the humanitarian sector to move to the current state to the future state – ie. to achieve their definition of localisation. Key themes were identified, drawing from individual responses. Most of these insights were drawn from the recent humanitarian response, although not only from the project involved in this evaluation.

Key areas identified by the team on what needs to change for a localised response

- *Women are involved in the response and are represented, and their leadership is part of the decision making process.*
- *Humanitarian actors draw on the existing capacity of people affected in communities and evacuation centres.*
- *Existing capacity of local and national actors is strengthened through capacity building initiatives, including through coaching and mentoring.*
- *People who are affected by the response participate in both the response and disaster preparedness initiatives during peace time, and are better prepared for potential future humanitarian crises.*

3. Establishing a Team Vision

Establishing a team vision for the response project was intended to provide insights into 'what success looks like', while assisting the team to develop a shared vision to guide their work, inform decision making, and monitor progress.



Brainstorming a team vision for the response

CAN DO partners team vision was defined as follows:

Utilising local channels, Ambae's people's capacity to adapt to change is strengthened through participatory learning, information sharing and support and meet people's physical and psychosocial needs. To provide a smooth, peaceful and harmonised recovery in which people are safe, happy, satisfied and respected.

4. Locally Defined Evaluation Criteria

An evaluation capacity building approach was taken to establish evaluation purpose and questions. A brief presentation was given on the different purposes of the evaluation and on the evaluation questions. The combination of group evaluation planning and localisation activities led to a very clear understanding of what the program team identifies as most important to them:

Project Objectives

- Did we achieve project objectives detailed in the design? What progress was made towards specified targets and indicators?
- Did communities benefit?
- Did we achieve the team vision?
- Did we achieve 'Gender and Protection' objectives, and were they significant?

Relevance to Communities

- Did the project respond to needs identified by communities: families are safe, their basic needs are met and they have the information they need for a dignified relocation or resettlement?
- Did the project draw on strengths through existing capacity and respect for local culture?



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- Did the project build resilience through capacity strengthening and strengthening resilience to future emergencies?

Partnership and Coordination

- How well did partnering agencies/churches partner together in the project?
- How well did the partnering agencies/churches coordinate with Government and other actors in the humanitarian sector e.g. Humanitarian Clusters and other responding humanitarian agencies?

Humanitarian Principles

- How did the project demonstrate Humanitarian Principles in the local context?

Localisation

- Did the project perform according to its stated definition of localisation?
- How did the project perform on the specified localisation indicator?

The key themes underlying these criteria have been validated by the team during a workshop in June 2018. They will be validated in full when evaluation planning continues again at a later point in the program.

5. Choosing Localisation Indicators

An activity centred on identifying specific localisation indicators was used to identify tangible measures for the evaluation. The activity was one of the last of the workshop so that it was informed by previous discussion and vision casting. This activity utilised the framework of indicators proposed in the HAG Intention to Impact Report (Flint & Lia 2018).²

The indicators chosen were as follows:

FUNDING: Increased number of national/local organisations describing financial independence that allows them to respond more efficiently to humanitarian response.

Indicators:

- Mechanisms are available for local organisations to access funding directly and immediately when crisis hits.
- Local and national actors fully shaped and participated in the budgeting process.

PARTNERSHIPS: Equitable and complementary partnerships between local, national and international actors.

Indicators:

- Increased power and decision-making of local and national actors within partnerships.
- Projects are co-designed and implemented with national and local partners.

CAPACITY: Local and national organisations are able to respond effectively and efficiently, and have targeted and relevant support from international actors.

² https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/HAG_Intention-to-impact_research-paper_FINAL-electronic_140218.pdf

<p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity strengthening in partnerships has clear and jointly agreed objectives. • Increase in the proportion of common humanitarian standards, tools and policies that have been contextualised, and key documents, such as emergency response procedures that have been translated or partners facilitated to develop their own. • The degree of national leadership of the organisation in the last response i.e. national staff member formally appointed in a leadership role.
<p>COORDINATION AND COMPLIMENTARITY: Application and respect for commonly agreed approaches to 'as local as possible and as international as necessary'.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national actors leading national coordination mechanisms. • Increased visibility and voice of local and national actors in collaboration forums. • Participation of national and local organisations in coordination meetings. • Increase in coordination meetings undertaken in local language. • Increase in NGOs sending national staff to coordination meetings.
<p>POLICY INFLUENCE / ADVOCACY / VISIBILITY: Humanitarian action reflects the priorities of affected communities and national actors.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National actors are recognised as key stakeholders in national debates about policies and standards that may have significant impact on them. Policies are informed by the experience and voice of affected communities. • Local and national influence donor priorities in-country including program design and implementation. • Increase in national organisations reporting better access to the largest in-country donors.
<p>PARTICIPATION: Local and national actors fully shape and participate in humanitarian response.</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which communities feel active participants in their own individual and community preparedness, response and recovery. • Local and national actors fully shaped and participated in the project design and budgeting.

Lessons learnt

The approach and activities of the mid-term workshop resulted in strong participatory evaluation planning. The workshop itself reflected many characteristics of participatory evaluation planning:

- **Distance** between the evaluator and those carrying out the project was significantly reduced than in a typical evaluation setting;
- **Local knowledge** of the team and the community members present was highly and influenced the evaluation design, even more than the scientific or technical knowledge offered by other sources such as from Government agencies and international actors. Although the scientific and technical knowledge was considered, local knowledge was the primary content of the workshop rather than been sidelined which can happen at such forums. Thus, knowledge from all sources was considered in parallel with the perspective of the local team leading decision making.
- **Level of participation** demonstrated that those traditionally less powerful in the humanitarian sector (i.e. local actors) was central to the production of knowledge.



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- **Capacity strengthening activities** were integrated into the workshop through evaluation planning activities and role modelling participatory learning. This approach was taken in order to ensure that the process itself reflected localisation, intentionally shifting power dynamics within the broader humanitarian sector.
- Activities were carried for the purposes of **participatory reflection and action for program improvement and organisational development**. For these reasons evaluation planning through the workshop has been assessed as on the transformative end of the spectrum, reflecting building capacity to sustain change – in both the participating organisations and in the sector more broadly.

Conclusion: strength and alignment of participatory evaluation planning with localisation in humanitarian response

It is clear that this practice of participatory evaluation planning is critical to localisation, if we are to see meaningful changes to the systems we are striving to achieve in international development and humanitarian response. Ultimately, we need to improve the way we 'walk the talk'. This is not easy to do as there are practical challenges and it takes discipline and insight to target the levels of interaction across evaluation activities.

By Grace Asten, Anglican Overseas Aid