01 Localising the Research Process
Walking the Talk Insight Series

April 2017

Introduction

The Red Cross and Swiss government were co-conveners of the Grand Bargain work-stream on localisation at the World Humanitarian Summit. Reflecting the agreed commitments and building on a joint pledge between Australian Red Cross (ARC) and the Australian government on strengthening local humanitarian action, particularly in the Pacific[1], ARC has identified localisation as a key policy and influencing priority. In its ambitions to further understand the challenges and opportunities of localisation, ARC commissioned research on achieving a more appropriate and fit for purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific.

This insight series will capture and explore the experience of walking the talk with regard to this research. This first paper in a three-part series explores the concept and process of partnering to conduct research on localisation in the Pacific. Funded by ARC, with financial support from DFAT, the research endeavours to 'walk the talk', bringing together practitioners and researchers from Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Fiji National University, Humanitarian Advisory Group, and independent consultants from Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu. This team comes together to explore the question: *what would a successfully localised disaster management ecosystem in the Pacific look like, and what changes do Red Cross and the broader humanitarian system need to make to get there?* The project takes a localised approach to research using qualitative methods to ensure the presence of a strong Pacific voice; this is achieved by developing partnerships with local academic institutions and local researchers, to develop contextually appropriate and relevant solutions to humanitarian challenges.

Background

Localisation, whether or not explicitly labelled as such, has long been a feature in the discourse of the humanitarian sector. This is particularly so for Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies with their extensive networks of volunteers embedding them at the local level, combined with unique auxiliary relationships with national public authorities. In 2003, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles articulated the need to "Strengthen the capacity of affected countries and communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners[2]."

As previously mentioned, the Australian Government and ARC jointly pledged to strengthen local humanitarian action, with a strong focus on the Pacific. The Pledge's action plan which includes training, technical support, public information materials and regional meetings, is now being implemented and will be reported on at the end of 2019.

The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 again brought to the fore a range of reforms targetting the architecture of the humanitarian system, with the aim of developing a more inclusive approach that effectively leverages the comparative advantage of international, regional, national and local actors. The Summit saw donors and aid organisations commit to an historic bargain to strengthen humanitarian financing and localise aid. The Grand Bargain commits donors to ensuring 25 per cent of global humanitarian funding goes directly to local and national responders by 2020,

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[1] Joint pledge from 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: http://rcrcconference.org/2015/12/17/strengthening-local-humanitarian-action-with-a-strong-focus-on-the-pacific/
[2] Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, 2003

along with more un-earmarked money, and increased multi-year funding to ensure greater predictability and continuity in humanitarian response, among other commitments.

Also on the localisation agenda at the Summit, the INGO-led Charter for Change laid out commitments to provide greater support for national and local actors, calling for stronger leadership by, and roles for, national and local actors in humanitarian response, with a focus on reinforcing and not replacing national and local systems.

In this context, ARC commissioned a literature review in 2016 that highlighted the breadth of issues facing the humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific and the implications this has on the implementation of ARC's strategic and operational work. The literature review found that the Pacific region has a unique humanitarian architecture and set of actors, offering a great opportunity to move localisation forward. There is already a strong investment in disaster risk reduction programming in the region and increasingly in climate change, providing an eminently suitable foundation to build upon.

This primary research will explore the unique nature of the Pacific disaster management ecosystem, its needs, and the extent of localisation in current practice. In addition, the research will seek to obtain insight into how Red Cross, and the broader humanitarian ecosystem, can better support localisation by shifting their approaches to and understanding of the humanitarian architecture, including capacity building, leadership, financing, legal systems, and power relations. Case studies will be developed based on research being conducted in four Pacific Island countries– Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu – as well as with key stakeholders based in Australia and other locations.

A Localised Approach to Humanitarian Research

This research project endeavours to 'walk the talk' of localisation. From the outset, it was clear that the approach to this research must be localised. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for this project outlined a desire that Pacific voices feature prominently in the research, and the Steering Committee who informed the development of the ToR includes representatives from across the Pacific. In line with this, the submission made by the research consortium prioritised the inclusion of national researchers from each of the case study countries. This localised approach resulted in one of the consortium's lead agencies being a Pacific academic institution, Fiji National University, and at least 50 per cent of the research team being comprised of national researchers from Pacific island countries.

The team's Pacific researchers will lead the research in their own countries with Australian-based colleagues performing a support function, rather than the usual approach of Pacific staff supporting their international counterparts. This ensures that local consultants drive the research process. Due to time constraints regarding submission, the national researchers did not have substantive input into the development of the EOI. To compensate for this, the EOI did not articulate a detailed methodology and it was proposed that the methodology be developed in a collaborative workshop with researchers from the Pacific.

The full research team convened for a four-day methodology design workshop in Suva, Fiji, hosted by Fiji National University. During this workshop, the research team worked collaboratively to design and test innovative research tools for use in this project. The tools were designed and tested by researchers from each of the case study countries to ensure their contextual relevance; national approaches, such as the use of traditional Talanoa sessions rather than focus group discussions in Fiji, were adopted as a result. This collaborative process ensures the research is developing locally appropriate solutions.

The methodology workshop provided the research team with the opportunity to go through a process of reviewing the research questions together, to:

a. Ensure a common understanding;

b. Determine the kind of data required to answer each question; and

c. Determine traditional and locally appropriate data collection methods that would produce the type of data required to answer the research questions

The research team then collaboratively developed a working definition of localisation appropriate to the Pacific context that will be referred to throughout the course of the research project.

> **lo.cal.is.a.tion** *(n.)*; is a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision-making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations.

As a result of these efforts, every element of this research project has been designed with input from Pacific representatives and draws heavily on their experiences and understandings of their context. Thus far, our approach has prioritised local-input at every stage of project design, to ensure the research is closely integrated with culture, policy and the overall context of each case study country. The approach to research is captured below in Figure 1, which shows the different stages of the research process and the concrete steps being taking to ensure a localised approach is achieved.
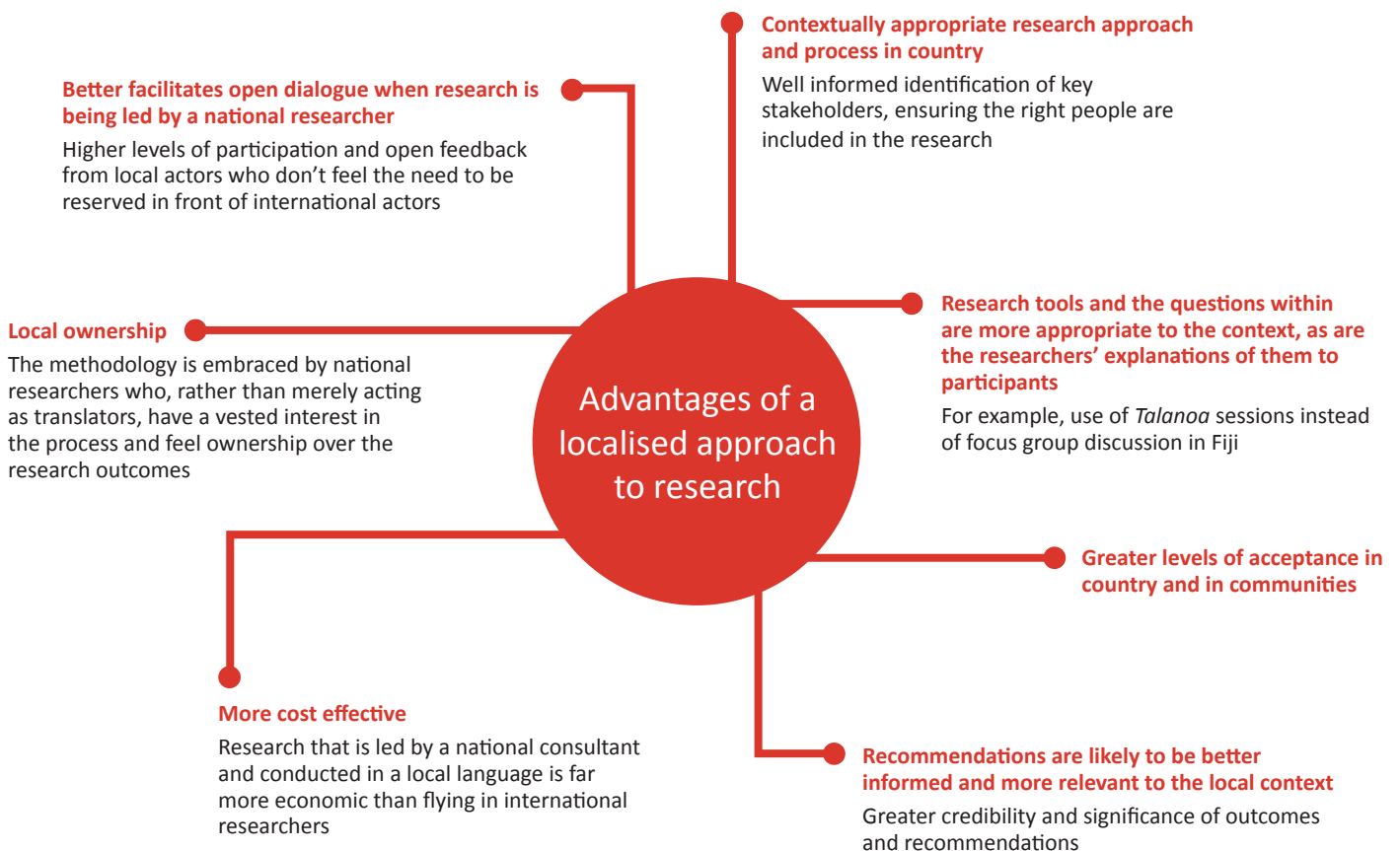
Figure 1: Localising the Research Process

Localising the Research Process

1 **Define the Problem –** Include the perspectives and input of national representatives when developing the ToR; when forming a Steering Committee, ensure it features national or regional representatives

2 **Review the Literature –** Include diverse resources in the literature review; seek recommendations from national representatives on whether there are any essential resources or documents that should be included

3 **Design the methodology –** Design and test the methodology and tools with extensive input from national researchers to ensure contextually relevant methodology

4 **Carry out the Research –** National researchers lead the research in their own country contexts

5 **Interpret your Results –** National researchers are significantly involved in analysing and interpreting results

6 **Report the Research Findings –** Ensure that research findings are disseminated through national networks as well; where applicable, ensure research outcomes are fed back to participants at all levels in their local language

The Advantages of a Localised Approach

Given the subject matter, it brings great value to approach this research in a localised manner. Not only is the research process more contextually appropriate, but so too are the research outcomes. With the prevalent nature of localisation in humanitarian discourse at present, localising this research adds greater credibility and significance to outcomes and recommendations that arise down the line. The advantages of localising the research process are detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Advantages of a localised approach to research

Contextually appropriate research approach and process in country
Well informed identification of key stakeholders, ensuring the right people are included in the research

Better facilitates open dialogue when research is being led by a national researcher
Higher levels of participation and open feedback from local actors who don't feel the need to be reserved in front of international actors

Local ownership
The methodology is embraced by national researchers who, rather than merely acting as translators, have a vested interest in the process and feel ownership over the research outcomes

Advantages of a localised approach to research

Research tools and the questions within are more appropriate to the context, as are the researchers' explanations of them to participants
For example, use of *Talanoa* sessions instead of focus group discussion in Fiji

Greater levels of acceptance in country and in communities

More cost effective
Research that is led by a national consultant and conducted in a local language is far more economic than flying in international researchers

Recommendations are likely to be better informed and more relevant to the local context
Greater credibility and significance of outcomes and recommendations

Lessons Learned for the Tendering and Design of Localised Research

- The development of ToRs for research projects should take into account perspectives of national actors
- Where possible, the time frames for submission of EOIs should be extended to allow teams adequate time to reach out to and gather input from national actors
- There should be flexibility around EOI content, so that methodology can be developed collaboratively with local researchers rather than submitted in the initial submission
- Methodology design should be undertaken with the entire research team and tools developed with significant national actor input
- Testing of tools should take place in the country of research with the national researchers

Acknowledgements