

Philippines Learning Brief:

# Learning from survivor and community-led crisis responses in the Philippines

*One important aspect we have learned is the need to ensure that those in the forefront - the communities and people affected by the disasters - should be considered to have the capacity to help themselves, plan their own action, manage the response and design the program.... Too often though, a disempowering process and relationship between INGOs and L/NNGOs, which often is replicated between L/NNGOs and the very survivors and communities, means that such opportunities for initiating real change are missed.*

Regina "Nanette" Antequisa in a 2017 correspondence with Charter4Change

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## Executive Summary

Since 2011, the Local to Global Protection initiative (L2GP)<sup>2</sup> has been facilitating action-research with a range of local, national, and international NGOs in different contexts on how to support communities to better lead their own responses to humanitarian crises, be they sudden onset or chronic. In late 2016, L2GP began work with Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits, Inc. (ECOWEB)<sup>3</sup>, a Philippines NGO based in Mindanao, to develop and test practical ways to support survivors and communities in their own direct responses. ECOWEB itself had been growing increasingly frustrated with many of the shortfalls<sup>4</sup> of conventional, externally-led humanitarian aid programmes having witnessed them first hand and was keen to develop and test alternative ways in which to work. The development of the **survivor and community-led responses to crisis** (sclr) approaches being promoted by L2GP appeared to provide a good opportunity for collaboration.

An initial small grant from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA)<sup>5</sup> and subsequent support from a number of international NGOs<sup>6</sup> allowed ECOWEB and L2GP, to start testing sclr programming in different contexts in the Philippines. With the continuation of devastating flooding of marginalised upland communities in the Agusan river basin, a severe earthquake<sup>7</sup> in Surigao in February 2017 and catastrophic outbreak of civil war in Marawi a few months later in May, ECOWEB and its local and international partners had no shortage of tragic humanitarian crisis in which to test sclr approaches in practice. Using the initial HLA grant to co-design, pilot and capture lessons from the initial methodology, ECOWEB was able to rapidly leverage further funds through INGO offices in the Philippines to expand the application and testing of sclr programming.

This brief paper describes what has been learned from the process of co-design, training and initial piloting, how the process has developed, where it might be leading. The paper also introduces the core components of the methodology and the associated training and ongoing mentoring.

- i. lessons learned from the “how” of the initial co-design and piloting process that underpins the action research (and how it might be improved);
- ii. components of the core sclr methodology being developed and tested by ECOWEB, L2GP and other partners (national and international);
- iii. outcomes and lessons learned from its application in

practice in different humanitarian contexts (assisted through independent social research);

- iv. opportunities and constraints for building on this process to accelerate the institutionalisation of locally-led humanitarian programming in the Philippines, and some experiences of ECOWEB in trying to do so

The key lessons emerging from the sclr practises in the Philippines will be explained in detail in the following sections, but may briefly be summarised as:

- The core components of an emerging practice for facilitating survivor and community-led crisis responses (sclr) that were used and further developed in this case study appear to be relevant. However, there remains plenty of room for further action-learning and improvement,
- The application of methodologies for supporting such community-led responses to both rapid-onset and chronic crises in Mindanao generated significant benefits in terms of increased responsiveness, cost-effectiveness, speed, outreach, psychosocial recovery and linking to longer-term recovery,
- The skills and systems needed for local NGOs to start supporting community-led responses in practice can be co-developed rapidly and cheaply. What appears to be most important is creating the space for them to try the approach in the first place and then maintaining a process of mentoring and learning-by-doing to allow the ‘practice’ for applying sclr to continue to emerge to fit with local contexts,
- While there is institutional resistance to the mainstream adoption of sclr approaches, ECOWEB’s persistent advocacy was able to leverage additional funding for sclr approaches from a number of INGOs who were already working through partnership approaches,
- The institutional relationships between international and national NGOs need to change to provide space for national actors to fully develop the potential of supporting community-led responses.

As L2GP continues to work with partners in developing ways in which outside actors can support genuinely locally-led survival, protection and recovery responses, the emerging sclr approaches appear to generate considerable benefits<sup>8</sup> in terms of responsiveness and efficacy, speed, cost-efficiency, psycho-social well-being, emerging stronger and, in some cases, addressing root causes of vulnerability. **In short, these approaches appear to help survivors and communities achieve greater resilience and protection.**

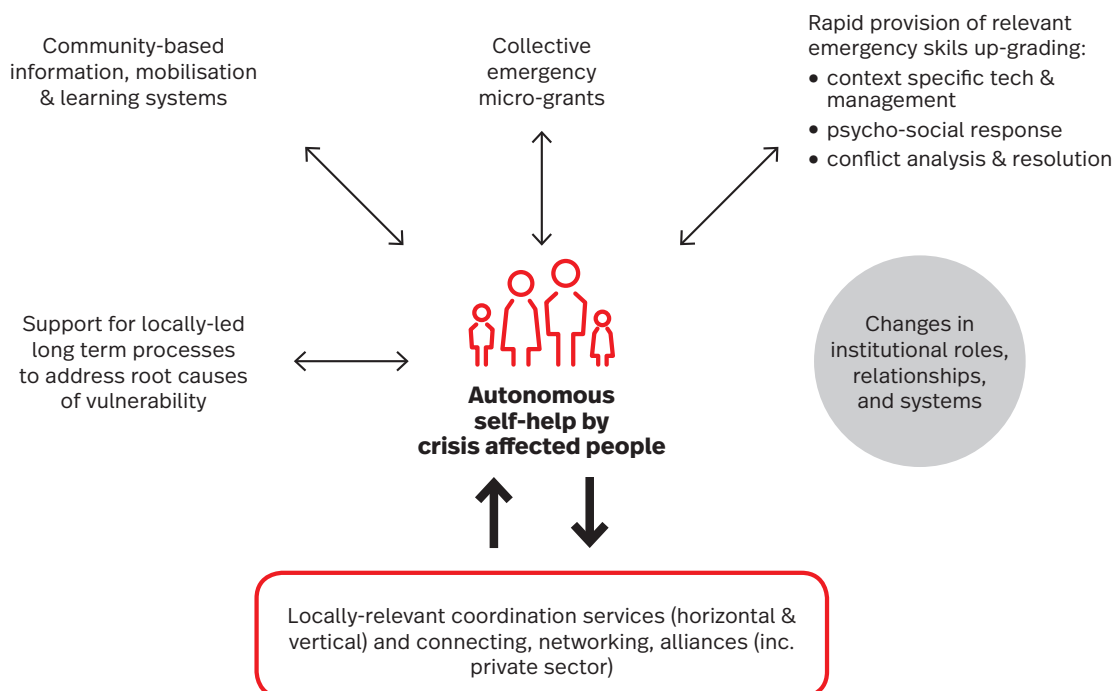
## Background:

### What does survivor and community-led crisis response look like?

Ongoing practical learning in Palestine, Sudan, Philippines and in conjunction with the multi-country research and practise oriented Linking Preparedness, Response and

Resilience (LPRR) initiative<sup>9</sup> have identified a set of core elements and principles of a locally-led response. These elements are outlined in figure 1:

**Figure 1.** “Community-based information, mobilisation and learning systems” is used as short-hand to describe a community-owned process of rapid situation analysis, appreciative inquiry, information-management, mobilisation, gap-analysis and learning that prioritises building on existing capacities strengthening opportunities for self-help. This process is also referred to as Participatory Action Learning in Crises (PALC).



Experiences with sclr approaches so far, have also highlighted the following basic **guiding principles** underpinning the approach:

- i. A recognition that crisis-affected communities are always first-responders - and that often they are involved with more significant local and immediate “humanitarian” interventions than those led or supported by external aid actors<sup>10</sup>. The emerging sclr approaches focus on trying to maximise the potential of that autonomous local response - not only to help it better address immediate needs but also to strengthen longer term resilience.
- ii. In developing sclr approaches, we are not seeking rigid tools or blueprints, but rather adaptive methodologies that will keep changing according to context and our own cumulative experiences.
- iii. These sclr approaches are not being promoted as some new ‘silver-bullet’ to replace all externally-led humanitarian aid interventions. The aim is to promote a more balanced overall response that recognises the primary importance of local agency and of supporting

it, while still having externals ready to fill gaps as needed.

- iv. In developing sclr approaches, we talk of “crisis” rather than “humanitarian” response because we continually find that communities will prioritise a much broader range of interventions (based both on need and on opportunities) than those typically covered by conventional humanitarian programming. Initiatives focusing on livelihoods, education, peace building, psycho-social well-being, exclusion, root causes, advocacy, even governance are often seen alongside more typical relief activities.
- v. Finally, the term “locally-led” is used as a generic term that recognises populations in crisis are made up of multiple communities each one of which is heterogeneous, generating multiple ‘leadership’ opportunities by multiple self-help groups, CBOs and active household members. This is not a hierarchical leadership model but rather a network with many leaders at different nodes.

## The co-design and training workshop

To get going, a series of conversations between ECOWEB and L2GP helped clarify objectives and the overall approach. This allowed ECOWEB to develop a sufficient sense of ownership and control of the process from the outset and thus ensure that it became their own action research. L2GP then took responsibility to facilitate a seven-day residential **co-design and training workshop** having agreed on the basic content and schedule. ECOWEB invited the 29 participants (11 of its own staff, 11 representatives of five local NGOs & CBOs, five local Government officers, one independent researcher and one representative of the INGO Cordaid), arranged the venue and later selected the sites for subsequent piloting. The workshop had two core aims:

- i. To facilitate participants to draw on their own experiences and on those introduced by L2GP to co-design a methodology for supporting crisis-affected communities to lead and manage their own holistic response to emergencies in ways that could also strengthen their longer term resilience;
- ii. To develop the capacities, skills, plans and relationships needed for subsequent testing of the methodology in practice.

The first day explored the aims and concepts underlying locally-led emergency programming in general (and survivor/community-led in particular) and the institutional constraints to such approaches within much of the mainstream humanitarian sector (Box 1 below aims to clarify how the terminology is being used here). This brief overview included an introduction to the practical skills and tools already found to be useful in support of a locally-led responses in other countries. The participants were then asked to prioritise the skills and tools they considered most relevant to their situation, including some not on the initial list. Annex 1 shows their selection, which then comprised the subsequent 6 full days of the workshop.

### Box 1. What's in a name: terminology around *locally-led* responses to *crises*

Inevitably, the interest in localisation is adding to the already heavy terminology and acronym load of humanitarianism. While there are (as yet) no widely accepted, absolute definitions, Wall and Hedlund<sup>21</sup> suggest adopting a usage that sees **locally-led** as an umbrella term encompassing all responses that are genuinely conceived by local actors (i.e. those who are already part of the local political and socio-economic geography of the affected area). This definition distinguishes such responses from other types of **localisation** that see international agencies supporting local actors to undertake projects that remain externally driven (including the practice of sub-contracting). Within the range of locally-led initiatives, it seems useful to distinguish further those that are led by **the crisis-affected populations** themselves (i.e. the survivors and crisis affected communities). This paper focuses on how to support such **survivor and community-led responses** to crises (occasionally referring to them as **sclr** approaches<sup>22</sup>). A final point on terminology: while the crises themselves are clearly humanitarian (whether natural or man-made), it seems inaccurate to also refer to the responses as “humanitarian” since they so often are operating within the humanitarian-development nexus and promote initiatives that would fall outside current siloed understandings of humanitarian programming.

Overall, the initial sclr co-design/training workshop was surprisingly successful given the less than ideal schedule of seven long days of intensive workshop with only 1 day off and with no direct community work. It also proved a valuable learning experience, being the first time that L2GP had tried to introduce so many sclr ‘components’ to one group at once. Some of the key strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvements subsequently identified by the participants are summarised in Annex 2.

Conceptually, the thinking underpinning the need for sclr approaches appeared to make sense to all participants. Having witnessed many of the drawbacks of the conventional externally-driven relief, participants wanted to see something more agile and responsive that they, as local actors, could facilitate - not least as they saw the likelihood of climate-related disasters increasing. Furthermore, there was a strong feeling that the disempowering nature of much externally-led aid needed to be reversed, and that sclr approaches might allow that. In that sense, participants preferred a generic term of “support for survivor and community-led response to crisis” (rather than just “locally-led”) to emphasise the point that “localisation” needs to be taken all the way down to the households experiencing and dealing with emergencies.

Similarly, participants considered that many of the key mechanisms suggested for applying sclr approaches in practice were relevant, highlighting in particular:

- The whole micro-grant system allowing for a rapid, collective, holistic and demand-driven action by multiple different groups, within a “safe-to-fail” space
- Aspects of Participatory Action Learning in Crises (PALC) that combine community-based appreciative inquiry, rapid situation analysis, strengthening opportunities for accountable and inclusive self-help with gap analysis for external intervention
- Community-self protection and conflict sensitivity/transformation
- Supporting emergent self-help groups as well as existing CBOs
- Provision of emergency training and connecting and networking
- Enabling demand driven coordination and linking to Government systems
- Supporting crisis affected communities to start tackling root causes

Participants worked on draft guidelines developed in the workshop to start creating their own working systems for subsequent piloting. During the course of this, they gave the sclr term a local name in Cebuano: Kaya Pag sama-sama (KAPAS) Community-led Action in Response to Emergency and formed a network of advocates into Community-led Emergency Action Response Network (CLEARNet).

## Training social researchers

Given the action-research nature of the pilots carried out by ECOWEB and partners following the workshop, it was agreed in advance that local but independent social researchers should be responsible for capturing the lessons from testing the practical application of sclr approaches. A number of experienced local practitioners were identified (with experience both of community development and humanitarian response) and L2GP facilitated a two-day workshop to develop the core social research methodology and associated skills for capturing lessons. This generated a simple research framework and checklist of core questions to guide focus group discussions and key-informant interviews.<sup>13</sup> Four

months after the initial workshop, and two months after ECOWEB and partners had completed their sclr pilots, two of the social researchers spent 10 days to meet and interview communities that had participated in the pilots in Butuan and Agusan del Sur (flood-response initiatives) and in Surigao (earthquake-response activities). The social researchers, self-managing and with very limited support or back up, produced an insightful report<sup>14</sup> that, while not following all aspects of the agreed research framework, described in detail the context and content of the pilots and captured the perspectives of many different sections of the participating communities that spoke to the core issues of sclr approaches.

## Key outputs and outcomes of the pilots

### Responding to flooding of Agusan River

In Agusan, the existing volunteer network of an established CBO (“Save Mindanao Volunteers”) working with the indigenous Manobo Indigenous People carried out their own assessments of local coping mechanisms and needs. They covered very remote areas, often deemed inaccessible by outside organisations and even by local government due to poor infrastructure, long distances and insecurity. In many cases, local communities devastated by floods were not only the *first* responders but also the *only* responders, even months after the initial disaster that resulted in mortalities, injuries and destroyed many homes and livelihoods. This exclusion reflects in part the inaccessibility of the area, in part the capacity of local duty bearers and in part the general trend of isolated indigenous peoples being overlooked by service-delivery agents and duty bearers

The situation analysis carried out by local volunteers proved effective at identifying targeted gaps in basic survival needs (which could be filled quickly through collective grants for local food purchase) as well as identifying local livelihood recovery priorities, which could also be addressed with micro-grants.

**“This (approach) will correct the system where agencies decide to offer something to us which can’t be used. For instance, there was an institution who gave us nylons intended for fishnets. But the size won’t fit for fishing. It’s too thick to make it as fishnets. Those nylons were unused, wasted.”**

Focus group discussion with Kelubidan survivors<sup>45</sup>

One community decided to take the huge decision to move their village to a new location less prone to the recent phenomenon of flash floods (caused by outsiders’ deforestation of the uplands watershed) and used the micro-grants to help them to do so. Another group (a community woman’s association) decided to start a floating restaurant on the lake not only as a means of generating income for their group, but also as a means of encouraging outsiders (Government and NGO staff, private sector) to visit their area. The rapid provision of simple training in financial management for this group was seen as an important part of the enabling process.

**“We decide on what is permissible within our means. We would have loved having food packs too but with limited funds, we strategize to buy fishnets instead to improve our economic means. It’s more sustainable”**

Female head of self help group.

In addition to the high levels of responsiveness and cost-efficiency, there was much feedback to indicate that the psycho-social impact for these marginalised communities of being for the first time consulted, let alone enabled to lead their own response, was considerable.

**“We feel in charge of our own interventions; it always feels good ... Through meetings, we were able to determine if any project is destructive to community’s culture**

It is too early to tell to what extent these multiple experiences of constructive external interaction through sclr will lead communities to start tackling *root-causes* of their vulnerability: lack of basic services; illegal or ill-advised upland deforestation; political, economic and social exclusion of indigenous people. And clearly, it would be beyond the scope of this very small pilot to expect to see any changes at this stage in this regard. However, it is interesting to note that both the national NGO involved and the local government offices indicated that the exposure to the self-help efforts of the affected communities facing such huge challenges encouraged them to consider more carefully the exclusion that they are currently facing.

### Responding to earthquakes in Surigao

In Surigao, an emergent self-help group (SHG) had already started their own assessment of how affected families could repair their earthquake-damaged homes and make them more resilient to possible future shocks. It was driven by an individual, a qualified engineer who lived in the Barangay and was moved to action both by the lack of external support and the opportunities that he saw for local households to repair damaged homes. He and a small team of local residents needed little additional help to turn the information that they had collected into a simple project plan and budget. With only limited additional facilitation they also identified the most locally acceptable systems for



ensuring effective targeting, efficient implementation and local accountability. As one member explained from a local SHG (that led a renovation initiative with support of microgrant) *“We can easily agree because all households are consulted on what we need considering the limited budget”*.

While initially looking to purchase all the repair inputs (e.g. timber, nails, roofing, cement, tools etc.) in bulk for all 63 targeted households, the SHG realised that this would incur centralised transport costs and reduce flexibility for each participating household. The group therefore switched to using micro-grants to manage their own household cash transfer response, which proved very effective. Since that time, the SHG went on to lobby local Government for further support for earthquake-affected households in the Barangay.

### Responding to the conflict in Marawi

Following the rapid spread of armed conflict in Marawi in May 2017, almost the entire population of 200,000 people were displaced, with most of them moving to the city of Iligan. ECOWEB rapidly mobilised its own networks, supporting existing CBOs and new volunteers, to initiate their own PALC process. One of the immediate findings was that the majority of IDPs were not choosing to move to the evacuation centres rapidly set up by Government, UN and INGOs. Instead, they moved in with extended family-members and friends, or attempted to make their own temporary shelters and settlements. Local networks were ideal for helping to locate and communicate with these scattered displaced populations. This helped inform them of their options and services available and provided them the chance to strengthen their own self-help initiatives. Some 9,000 families (or 47,900) individuals) have subsequently benefitted from the sclr approaches including micro-grants in response to the Marawi crisis. People went on to use these grants for a number of purposes: Buying of staples (or often additional ingredients to contribute to food aid distributed by Government and aid agencies), buying NFIs not provided by aid, establishing crèches to allow parents to move around in search of work, assistance or information along with a range of small-scale individual and collective livelihood initiatives such as selling street food or gardening providing additional nutrition and income.

**“This is the first time I received cash assistance that I never felt that I am an IDP, and I observed the process is dignifying”**

(Norjana Taurak, IDP leader, Ma. Cristina Evacuation Center, Iligan City)

At the same time, other community leaders were exploring options for dealing with divisions appearing between Muslim and Christian communities through creating safe spaces for dialogue, while also attempting to inform Government strategies both for aid delivery and for dealing with the political root causes.

By supporting a community-led response, ECOWEB found that the approach was able to contribute better to the longer-term objective of people’s empowerment than conventional relief models, while still complying with the core humanitarian standards - including financial accountability. Affected people were not treated solely as victims in need of outside assistance but were able to see themselves as active survivors with their own capacity to address immediate needs and recovery and start to think about reducing longer-term vulnerability. In this way, the organisational forces and resources mobilised to support this response thus also contributed to text-book resilience building - i.e. enabling immediate coping, a proper recover<sup>16</sup> and the start of transformational processes to address root causes.

### Institutional issues

ECOWEB’s experiences with supporting community-led responses in the Philippines also highlighted how changes in relationships between international, national and local actors are central to the promotion of sclr approaches. In ECOWEB’s experience, INGO-NNGO “partnership experiences” are too often characterised by inflexibility, bureaucracy, by upward accountability in the name of donor compliance, INGO “policies” and the need to implement and expend according to plans pre-defined by the international organisation. A turning point was achieved when the international actors supporting ECOWEB in developing these new approaches, realised that their most important role was to stand back and thus enable ECOWEB to lead (while still providing essential financial assistance, technical know-how and mentoring). As the locally rooted actor ECOWEB in turn could then make space for communities themselves to take a much higher degree of control and decision-making in the entire response cycle.

To allow the potential for sclr approaches to emerge in the future, it will be important that local and national actors such as ECOWEB are given the programmatic, operational and financial space they need to engage in further learning, experimentation and capacity-building. This requires developing institutional relationship that are built on the trust that grows from agreeing on approaches,

defining boundaries and applying adaptive management principles such as “safe-to-fail environments”.

Although to date ECOWEB has managed to engender interest and tacit encouragement from individuals in local and national Government, there is still much work needed to help the relevant Government departments mandated with crisis response and to possibly trying to test sclr approaches themselves. While the potential is there,

the typical top-down culture of Government provides a further challenge. It would be important if relevant international institutions (such as the World Bank, which is tasked with coordinating support for rebuilding Marawi) were actively promoting such approaches. The chance for sclr approaches to contribute to more effective local government responses – and strengthen civic-public trust and collaboration – would be interesting to explore

## Learning from practise and experimentation

Since ECOWEB and its local and international partners started to develop and test methodologies for supporting affected communities to lead their own responses to humanitarian crises, experiences indicate that such approaches do add value to conventional, external humanitarian programming. From the cases studies explored to date, it seems that such survivor and community-led approaches can:

- Provide effective, responsive and cost-efficient means for addressing immediate prioritised needs as identified by the survivors themselves,
- Generate the self-help potential of survivors needed to find solutions that might not otherwise emerge,
- Strengthen the level of collaboration between different groups within affected communities and promotes local leaders to work together to solve problems,
- Increase the role of women in the response,
- Heighten awareness within communities of the importance of local systems of accountability and transparency,
- Provide opportunities for vulnerable communities to emerge from catastrophe with a level of dignity, pride in their own achievements and resolve to further improve their future,
- Reveal longer term causes of vulnerability and provoke communities and local civil society actors to start addressing root causes,
- Change the relationship between service-provider/duty-bearer and local community and challenge humanitarian agencies to rethink their role and reconsider how they can add value to the autonomous front-line responders found in every vulnerable community.

Of all the feedback collected from different stake-holders, perhaps the most prominent has been that of communities highlighting the psychological and social importance that they perceived in being supported to lead their own aid-assisted responses. This fits with what L2GP (and others)

are learning from other countries. The opportunity to actually lead in assessment and response is significant for a faster and more appropriate response and at the same time also promotes a sense of dignity and empowerment rarely encountered in external driven aid-activities. While too early to draw definitive conclusions, it may be that such impacts - related to confidence, self-worth, a shift in mind-set from that of victim to active resolver and a reminder of the power of collaboration and collective response - contribute as much to the recovery and transformative aspects of resilience as do more conventional DRR projects.

Writing in the context of an e-mail exchange of experiences with partnerships and community-led actions, one of the authors of this paper, Nanette Regina Antequisa, summed up her own and ECOWEB’s many years of experience with humanitarian responses in an earlier communication with the Charter4Change<sup>17</sup> initiative: *“One important aspect we have learned, is the need to ensure that those in the forefront - the communities and people affected by the disasters - should be considered to have the capacity to help themselves, plan their own action, manage the response and design the program. Often such actions would be directed towards a strategic way of addressing underlying causes of disasters, as they are understood by the communities themselves. Along with actions of local and national NGOs familiar with the context and the local/national systems and power structures, this may enable survivors and communities to create a vibrant and viable force that not only responds to the immediate crisis - but also try to achieve changes that will have strategic impact in reducing future risks - multi-dimensional and complex in nature, as they are.*

*Too often though, a disempowering process and relationship between INGOs and L/INGOs, which often is replicated between L/INGOs and the very survivors and communities, means that such opportunities for initiating real change are*



*missed. Survivors and local communities respond to the emergency with meagre resources, but always tap the best of their culture, i.e. helping those in need as much as they can. However, more often the community initiatives are lost in the intricacies of the official humanitarian system. Local initiatives are seldom captured in the reports of humanitarian organizations.*

*Adapting and working with sclr approaches, we have seen much hope in an intervention that may empower survivors and communities to become more responsible over their own lives, their survival and their recovery. With such a changed paradigm and supported by more contextually knowledgeable local, national and international NGOs, we can then effectively and cost-efficiently implement humanitarian responses, which are more responsive to the needs of the survivors and communities – and which encourage greater local accountability and ownership.”*

Clearly, work is still needed to develop a broader practice for supporting locally-led responses to humanitarian crises that can be embraced as a core part of mainstream aid. But the on-going efforts of ECOWEB and its partners (in local Government, local civil society and INGOs) are providing an important contribution to such a process of practice development and learning in the Philippines.

## Conclusion

The lessons emerging from ECOWEB’s and L2GP’s collaboration in Mindanao also include a set of experiences regarding the process of promoting and developing survivor and community-led responses to humanitarian crises.

First, the extent of *institutional* resistance to the adoption of sclr approaches should not be under-estimated. Despite considerable efforts by ECOWEB to share their experiences and encourage such approaches, none of the “big players” (national or international) supported any departure from the conventional, externally-led “strictly humanitarian” programming. Indeed, ECOWEB’s efforts to help other humanitarian actors recognise that some of the well-meaning (externally-conceived) plans were not always relevant (e.g. widespread provision of bottled water in Surigao to communities who didn’t need it or the almost exclusive focus on IDP camps which most Marawi displaced were avoiding) had no apparent effect. While senior directors from UN and the national government in Manila (and back in INGO head offices elsewhere) always

There is a clear rationale to scale-up the financial and institutional support needed to allow such an active example of praxis to develop its full potential. This is reinforced by certain considerations linked to the context: given its location, topography, land-use and population density, the Philippines is one of the most at risk countries in the world to large scale natural disasters (related to climate change but also earthquake).

As a middle-income country, the infrastructure, administrative capacity, human resources, markets and private sector in the Philippines all contribute to making sclr approaches even more applicable. ECOWEB itself is well networked with Government and NGOs at a national level<sup>18</sup> and is thus in a particularly good position to champion community-led humanitarian responses locally and nationally.

At the same time, helping new clusters of local, national and international actors in other countries to initiate similar processes for developing effective sclr approaches requires much greater support. Not only will this allow learning across different contexts, it also would provide opportunities for creative international networking, cross-learning and mutual support between national NGOs.

expressed “interest” in sclr approaches, little was done to support, scale-up or even learn from the new approaches.

This may reflect the inertia encountered when trying to change any long-established way of doing things. Without sufficient senior champions for change within the system actively promoting new approaches, the system itself (and those who comprise it) will remain risk averse and the status quo will prevail. Based on experiences of this case-study and elsewhere, it appears that some still feel that “victims” are not in a position to know what is best for themselves. Others just appear reluctant to let go of the power invested in externally-led approaches.

At the same time, examples of change willingness to experiment with new approaches, emerged from some of the *smaller, more partnership-oriented* INGO country offices. As a result of ECOWEB’s ability to demonstrate positive impacts, coupled with its persistent lobbying and advocacy, a small number of INGOs in country made efforts to channel funds through ECOWEB to support

community-led responses. Experience from this and other case studies tentatively<sup>19</sup> suggest that characteristics for such uptake include:

- Agencies with less rigid operational humanitarian protocols retain more ‘space’ for adaptive programming and responding to local opportunities when they arise
- Agencies with less separation between their ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ departments have a greater readiness to support more empowering approaches even during emergency responses
- Agencies that already have experience of handing-over funds to local groups are less risk-averse
- The growing global call for change from respected institutions and analysts and movements such as the Charter4Change provides confidence and inspiration for organisations and individual managers to try new approach.

In addition, individuals within national, regional and local government are at least encouraging ECOWEB to keep trying<sup>20</sup>. Despite the institutional inertia, it seems that the catalytic action provided by a national NGO can result in a wider group of agencies starting to introduce community-led, holistic approaches alongside conventional ‘humanitarian’ programming. This case study has already generated significant outcomes: the development of a working sclr approach by local NGOs; the positive impacts resulting from its application with communities facing a wide range of different humanitarian and protection crises; the support leveraged from other actors many times greater than the size of the initial grant awarded by HLA.

Integral to this progress has been the commitment by ECOWEB to take on the significant extra workload generated by its advocacy efforts to promote sclr approaches. This in turn can be attributed to its strong existing vision and values as a national NGO, which normally focuses on ‘development’ processes. ECOWEB

was thus already convinced of the need for greater community leadership in ‘humanitarian’ programming; its interest in sclr was values-driven and not donor driven or grant driven. This would appear to be a prerequisite when identifying national or international agencies as initial entry points and “champions” for promoting sclr approaches in different contexts. The crucial starting point is the *mind-set* and *approach* that recognises communities in crises as having multiple opportunities to lead their own responses and are not just helpless victims dependent on external interventions.

Following on from this point, when introducing local NGO and government teams to the emerging sclr practice, it does seem important (and possible) to facilitate a co-design and training process that allows participants to refine and adjust the basic approach to better fit their contexts. This case study (in line with other L2GP experiences) also shows the importance of ensuring that the process of learning-by-doing and developing-by-trying is sustained as a core part of the approach.

Support for the type of action-research documented in this paper does not need big money – indeed it needs little or no more funds than would be used by existing emergency grants being awarded for any disaster response. What is needed is the institutional willingness of humanitarian donors and INGOs to start walking-the-talk about promoting and learning how to enable crisis-affected communities, as first responders, to direct and manage aid resources as part of their response. This requires that all actors (donors, INGOs, national Government and NGOs) recognise that “localisation” can, and should, be taken all the way down to crisis-affected households themselves. To take this learning forward, humanitarian donors and INGOs are needed to champion the approach and make funds available to allow suitably transformative *national* actors to significantly scale-up praxis in many different countries and contexts.

## Annex 1

### Subjects selected by participants for workshop focus

#### **Module 1: Why sclr? Current approaches, relationships, organisational cultures (2.5 hrs)**

- Autonomous local responses to crises – global and local experiences
- Reflecting on existing emergency response programming
- Existing Organisational Culture: of your organisation and those around you
- Inter-agency working environment and Coordination

#### **Module 2: Introduction to SLR: an Overview (2 hrs)**

- Practical scenarios of SLR in practice – what it looks like
- Roles: Implementers, Facilitators & Supporters, Enablers
- SLR complementing existing responses (30 mins)

#### **Module 3: Core programming tools and systems for supporting locally-led crisis response**

- A. Participatory Action Learning in Crises (PALC), inc. situation and response analysis, with conflict/gender/age sensitivity built in (1-2 days)
- B. Community micro-grant scheme design and management for maximising immediate local humanitarian and protection response by communities while building resilience (4-8 hrs)
- C. Household multi-purpose cash grant programming - design and implementing (4-8 hrs)
- D. Household in-kind support, private sector collaboration - design and implementing (1-4 hrs)
- E. Promoting and strengthening community-based self protection and psycho-social aspects of resilience building (gender/age/conflict sensitive) (4-8 hrs)
- F. SLR in conflict situations: conflict-sensitivity, do-no-harm, holistic programming, that could include conflict transformation, planning for peace, additional psycho-social, remote management and accountability (2-8 hrs)
- G. Establishment of demand-led coordination services (inc. provision of rapid, context-specific capacity support skills. Logistics, communications, resources) that are actively used by local actors and to OCHA/INGO-led Cluster systems and IASC as relevant (4-8 hrs)
- H. Emergency OD for CBOs and emergent self-help groups responding to large crises (2-8 hrs)
- I. Helping local actors to mobilise 'local' financial/in-kind support: local, national and international – public, civil society, private-sector, Government, Diaspora

#### **Module 4: Designing SLR methodologies to fit your contexts: components and guidelines (1 day)**

- Rapid-onset v. Protracted crisis response, conflict, scale
- Stake-holders and roles: Government, local/national/international NGOs, UN, private sector
- Agreeing on objectives, components, sequencing, scale and speed
- Selecting the components, adding in your own
- Action planning, logistics, communications and budgeting
- Analysis of additional capacity and/or resources needed

#### **Module 5: Organisational and institutional issues for national agencies undertaking SLR**

- A. Changing roles, relationships (programmatic and financial) and types of partnerships (2 hrs)
- B. International fund raising, grant management, reporting (2 hrs)
- C. SLR and contributing to a process of system-wide institutional change: Interactions with other aid actors at institutional level: UN agencies, other INGOs, National Government (2 hrs)

## Annex 2

### Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the Co-design workshop

#### Workshop Strengths

1. Demand-led: participants wanted the workshop, and helped design its content
2. The overall sclr concept was one that they immediately appreciated, but one that they had felt would never be addressed – so an element of welcome surprise characterised the workshop.
3. A strong and encouraging local civil society leader (Director of ECOWEB) was hosting
4. All participants had experiences in community development and participatory approaches and had witnessed the shortfalls of conventional relief.
5. The practical sclr components made sense to the participants – they saw their applicability
6. Trainer was able to draw on many practical case-studies and examples from other countries
7. Good mix of participants: men, women, older, younger, NGO, CBO and local Government
8. Much of the workshop, as co-design process, could be done through group work in local language.
9. Plenty of role play, energizers, games
10. Trainer had the confidence of having facilitated sclr approaches personally in different contexts
11. The venue was “local” with good facilities – participants felt at home and ate well.
12. Participants knew that funds were available for immediate testing in practice.
13. One CBO was available to start micro-grant process during the workshop (to respond to Agusan floods)
14. The co-design approach – that allowed participants to generate their own guidelines for testing their own version of sclr – reinforced local ownership and gave them a strong sense of achievement.

#### Workshop Weaknesses

1. Too many participants for one facilitator
2. Too many different new topics all at once – too much to adsorb
3. Facilitator had no direct work experience in Philippines
4. Several of the topics had not been delivered as workshop modules before by the facilitator
5. Many felt that donor representatives should have been present to provide assurances that such sclr approaches could indeed be funded.
6. More clarity was needed on how PALC process is facilitated in practice
7. Additional training was requested on provision of organisational development for emergent self-help groups wishing to become longer term CBOs

#### Recommendations

1. Avoid such long workshops: better to do an initial 3 or 4 days, then allow piloting in practice over several weeks/months, then facilitate second 3-4 days of workshop
2. The content and facilitation approach of several of the sessions has already been improved based on feedback
3. Increase the funds available after the workshop for piloting to at least \$20,000 per agency
4. Include or senior Government representatives so that they can assist in institutionalisation.

## End notes

1. L2GP is hosted and funded by DanChurchAid and Church of Sweden with additional financial support from Danida. DCA and CoS are both members of the ACT Alliance. See more at [www.local2global.info](http://www.local2global.info)
2. Ecoweb was established in 2006 and has been responding to humanitarian crisis and development challenges of communities since then.
3. See for instance ODI HPG Time to let go, London, April, 2016 <https://www.odi.org/hpg/remake-aid/> and A design experiment: Imagining alternative humanitarian action, London, 2018, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12010.pdf>
4. A 6-month grant of GDP 25,000 was provided by HLA through its CAN mechanism (Collaborative Approaches and Network Fund)
5. Including CORDAID, Christian Aid, The Johanniter International, IOM, UMCOR, Good Neighbors and HLA Philippines
6. Recorded as a 6.7 magnitude earthquake, with the epicenter located in Surigao Strait at at 9.80° N and 125.35° E or 16 km offshore northwest of Surigao City at a shallow depth of 10 km
7. See [www.local2global.info](http://www.local2global.info) for upcoming case studies from among other Palestine; Myanmar, Kenya and Sudan.
8. LPRR is a DEPP/Difid funded multi-agency research and practise development initiative led by Christian Aid.
9. ODI HPN 72, London 2012 South & all: Local to global protection in Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe (<https://odihpn.org/resources/local-to-global-protection-in-myanmar-burma-sudan-south-sudan-and-zimbabwe/>), ODI HPG, London 2016, Christina Bennet & all: Time to let go Page 5 (<https://odihpn.org/resources/local-to-global-protection-in-myanmar-burma-sudan-south-sudan-and-zimbabwe/>)
10. Imogen Wall and Kerren Hedlund, “Localisation and Locally-led Crisis Response: A Literature Review”, L2GP, May, 2016. <https://www.local2global.info/research/localisation-and-locally-led-crisis-response>
11. Similar approaches for supporting survivor and community-led responses are also being developed by the DEPP funded Linking Preparedness Response & Resilience Project (LPRR) led by Christian Aid and presented at the March, 2018 DEPP/START “Preparing for Shock” conference in Genevé: <https://disasterpreparedness.ngo/learning/preparing-shock-day-1-accountability-deficit-roi-impossible-dilemmas/> (visited on March 28, 2018)
12. Available on request from L2GP. E-mail: [info@local2global.info](mailto:info@local2global.info)
13. Available on request from L2GP: “Rising from the tragedies of flash-flood & earthquake: an application of Survivor-led Response (SLR) approach in community-based disaster response to Manobo tribe and other disadvantaged communities in Agusan del Sur, Butuan, and Surigao del Norte”, by Violeta M. Gloria & Freidrich Castro (May, 2017)
14. Ibid
15. Sometimes referred to as “bouncing back better” although this rather anodyne bit of aid-speak fails to capture the often slow, difficult and demanding process of families rebuilding the livelihoods, homes, social and psychological well-being..
16. See [www.charter4change.org](http://www.charter4change.org) for information about the C4C initiative
17. At the time of writing, ECOWEB is the NGO lead for the “Victims of Disaster and Calamities sector” of the Government’s National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC-VDC)
18. L2GP is attempting to follow this issue in order to better understand what are the factors that encourage agencies to start supporting community-led emergency programming.
19. As it for instance was noted in the minutes from a March, 2018 DEPP/START “Preparing for Shock” conference in Genevé: “Community-led emergency response showed some very telling examples of the great impact and wins we can have when NGOs support and enable community-led emergency response, making it more effective and context-specific – resulting in communities helping themselves and the wider response.” See <https://disasterpreparedness.ngo/learning/preparing-shock-day-1-accountability-deficit-roi-impossible-dilemmas/> (visited on March 28, 2018)