A Learning and Capacity Development Conference

Summary Report

Prepared by Humentum
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**WITH THANKS TO...**

This conference was organized in partnership with ActionAid International. Humentum extends our deepest thanks to our other conference partners and supporters, who were instrumental in making this event happen: Gateway Academy, CIVICUS, MS TCDC, Humanitarian Leadership Academy, and Knowledge Point.

In addition, our very special thanks to all those who presented and attended, sharing their time, experience and wisdom to build our collective capacity.

Introduction

The Grand Bargain, agreed upon at the World Humanitarian Summit, calls on aid organizations to “aim to give at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national.” This changing narrative around the role of local organizations is significant, but is only part of a solution that empowers locally led programming.

The Capacity 4 Humanity conference was created as a space to explore South-South learning and capacity building, an essential element to the solution. Its objective was to provide a space for capacity builders and thought leaders who focus on learning in East Africa to convene, collaborate, and learn from each other.

As a result, more than 60 practitioners from 16 local and international organizations convened in Arusha, Tanzania for a two-day program of speakers and sessions with a focus on South-to-South learning and capacity building. Adriano Campolina, CEO of ActionAid, set the tone of the event by challenging the group to rethink about the way we build capacity, knowing that change is coming and that it is constant. The sessions celebrated innovative work, shared best practices, and facilitated dialogue on topics such as organizational learning culture, the language of capacity building, and the role that failure plays in the work of the sector. The conversations that began in the session rooms continued during breaks, ideas from one session wove into another, and relationships were built.

Over the course of the two days, a number of key themes emerged, including the role of power dynamics and local knowledge in learning and capacity building and how to increase effectiveness and impact. Conference participants engaged with these key themes to uncover key challenges in each area, identifying tangible enabling actions that must exist for those needs to be met.
Conference Highlights

The Importance of Capacity Building at the Local Level

Action Aid International CEO Adriano Campolina set the tone for the conference with his keynote address, declaring a need for transformative capacity building. He called for change in the way we recognize power and build capacity. In a world where change is the expected rather than the unexpected, he asserted that we need to re-examine how and why we build capacity. For Adriano, the why is clear. Building capacity should never be just about enabling a local population to execute a successful project. It should be about building resilience by enabling a community to fight oppression, map power, create alliances, understand contexts, and adapt to change. Meeting these goals will require a shift from linear thinking to agile, non-linear approaches to change, where disruptions are expected. Rather than event based capacity building, this will require building deep levels of trust, long-term relationships, and connections between policy-makers and local populations. We need to move from being primarily deliverers of content to creators of learning environments.
**Why Do Capacity Building Initiatives Fail?**

*Failure is not learning when something goes wrong.*

--Faye Ekong, Action Against Hunger USA

In a panel discussion moderated by Humentum’s Sam Musoke, African Management Initiative’s Joan Kamau, Action Against Hunger USA’s Faye Ekong, and Nuru International’s Pauline Wambeti tackled the question of why so much of the work that is done to build capacity fails to deliver intended results. To begin with, our definition of failure often varies. Failure can be internal, when we don’t learn from our mistakes, or external, when we fail to remove fear through increased capacity, leaving an individual or community fearful of the future. The reasons why initiatives often fail are just as varied, but often occur when we forget to see training as part of a broader learning journey that must begin at the end with a well-defined outcome, include elements of support from line-managers and organizational leadership, and meet individual learner needs in a comprehensive way.

**Key Themes**

Throughout the conference, the topics discussed ranged from the technical to the strategic, often focusing on specific ways in which to increase effectiveness and impact when building capacity, both within an organization and the wider community. Participants learned what their peers in international NGOs, local NGOs, and consortia are doing to create cultures of learning, promote inclusivity, extend reach, and ensure impact.

Highlights and best practices include:

- All learning must be need based, and learners must understand why the training is relevant in the big picture
- Involve line-managers
✓ Extend learning before and after formal training event
✓ Build a culture where employees can make mistakes and take risks
✓ Extend learning before and after formal training event
✓ Embed systems to share learning
✓ Find ways to adapt what you have to local needs
✓ Celebrate success!

From keynote to closing, one pervasive theme emerged, weaving throughout both formal sessions and informal discussions. Of the utmost importance was the role that local communities play in learning and development, and its resultant relationship with power. Questions that were raised throughout the event included:

- Why do we build capacity and fail to transfer power?
- How do we shift the power from the North to the South? How do we create a better exchange of ideas and learning?
- How do we ensure that the voices of the community are heard in decision-making?

“In the old model when we talked about ‘local level buy-in’ we meant local level ‘obedience’. How do we change that/What structural changes are needed?”

--quote from No Magic Bullet for Shifting Power to Local Capacity: It Starts with Internal Changes

**Bringing It All Together**

In the closing session, participants were given one last opportunity to explore the role that power and local knowledge does and should play in transformative capacity building. The challenges and enabling actions that were identified by the practitioners in that final session and throughout the conference are outlined below.

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<tr>
<th>Key Challenges</th>
<th>Enabling Actions</th>
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| Existing power structures within development must be shifted. | • Acknowledge the problem  
• Shift from capacity building (deliverers of content) to capacity cooperation (creators of learning environments that facilitate dialogue)  
• Develop the structures needed to facilitate a shift in power, including positions, systems and processes  
• Actively work to build trust at all levels |
| Current standard practices mean that most capacity building and knowledge transfer are top-down approaches not inclusive of local knowledge. | • Create safe spaces for local communities to participate, consulting with those communities to determine what a safe space might look like (rather than assuming) • Advocate for local knowledge inclusion when interventions are being designed |

| Accessing and leveraging local knowledge is a complex, time-intensive process that requires systems to capture, validate, share, and mainstream the knowledge that already exists. | • Be a champion and promoter of peer learning where it already exists • Create spaces for sharing (e.g. story-telling, etc.) • Empower local communities to capture, share, and validate what they know • Ensure local representation and participation in existing platforms • Practice listening • Map existing local knowledge (what local entities know, have, and how it can be used) • Document existing local knowledge |

| How can we use capacity building initiatives to change behavior? | • Continually be thinking about the exit strategy, to transition from dependence to sustainability • Equip local leaders with leadership skills in a contextualized way |

“We are not doing it for the community. They are doing it for themselves. They are investing in themselves.”

--Pauline Wambeti, Nuru International

The first Capacity 4 Humanity conference ended with consensus on the need to create more spaces dedicated to exploring issues related to learning and capacity building. It was recommended that Humentum leverage its role as convener to facilitate collaboration through the creation of knowledge sharing spaces for South-South learning and network building, and provide support where possible in building local partnerships.

A conversation on critical issues—shifting power dynamics, locally led programming, and the power of coming together—has begun by those that are most impacted by the status quo. As the pace of change continues to increase these conversations will become ever more important to the sustainability of the sector.
Addendum: Conference Program

As keynote speaker Adriano Campolina mentioned in his opening remarks, there is not only a need to create a dialogue between those engaged in capacity building work, but to celebrate the different perspectives that each brings. The sessions presented throughout the Capacity 4 Humanity conference created the space for just such a dialogue.

Keynote: The Importance of Capacity Building at the Local Level
Adriano Campolina, ActionAid International

Raising Standards in Humanitarian Responses by Building Core Skills
Sophie Nyokabi, RedRUK

A Capacity Building Journey: Gateway Academy Case Study
Thomas Sinclair, Gateway Academy; Julias Alego, FSD Africa; Martin Mbaya, Strathmore Business School; Valerie Ndekana, Letshego

Creating a Virtuous Cycle: How Organisational Learning Will Make a Stronger, Happier Staff
Meg Ahern, USAID LEARN

Valuing Local Perspectives: Lessons Learned from Participatory Reflection and Review Processes
Stanley Wobusobozi, ActionAid Uganda

Humanitarian Learning and Assessment: Pathways Towards Professionalization and Career Mobility
Elizabeth Myendo, Humanitarian Leadership Academy; Victoria Fontan, Bioforce Institute

How Do We Create an Organizational Learning Culture? Fostering an Environment Conducive to Learning Transfer
Faye Ekong, Action Against Hunger USA
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Presenter/Authors</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet, Discuss, and Learn</td>
<td>Ross Coxon, Humentum</td>
<td>Facilitated discussion; no PowerPoint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainable Humanitarian Capacity Building: Is It Possible?</td>
<td>Charity Lukaya, Save the Children</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving Organisational Accountability for Increased Funding, Reach and Impact: A Case Study</td>
<td>Fr. Stephen Murage, Caritas Isiolo; Ronald Ratemo, Caritas Isiolo</td>
<td>Please contact us for a copy of this presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing Mobile Learning Without a Large Budget</td>
<td>Simon Skårhøj, DanChurchAid; Christoffer Bengt Jørgensen, DanChurchAid</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity Development in Fragile Contexts: Challenges and Opportunities</td>
<td>Robert Ndiritu, World Vision Somalia</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>How a Collaboratively Developed and Locally Driven Learning Platform Can Help You</td>
<td>Kristy Amacker, Gateway Academy; Valerie Ndekana, Letshego</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Why Do Capacity Building Initiatives Fail?</td>
<td>Joan Kamau, African Management Initiative; Faye Ekong, Action Against Hunger USA; Pauline Wambeti, Nuru International Kenya; moderated by Sam Musoke, Humentum.</td>
<td>Moderated discussion; no PowerPoint</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Design a Training of Trainers Certification That Works</td>
<td>Corrie Mauldin, Trees for the Future; Michael Muthui, Trees for the Future</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Strengthening Community Capacity for Effective Advocacy: A Strategy Development Framework</td>
<td>Robert Musoke, PATH Uganda; Bernard Byagageire, PATH Uganda; Jennifer Gaberu, PATH Uganda</td>
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<td>Ensuring Citizen-led Accountability of the Sustainable Development Goals</td>
<td>Israel Ilunde, ActionAid International Tanzania; Janeth Wilson, Rural Women Forum Chair - JUWACHA; Redimna Ginwas, ActionAid International Tanzania; Karen Jorgensen, ActionAid International Denmark</td>
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<td>Making Sense of the Language: Capacity Development and Learning</td>
<td>Elke Haas, CIVICUS</td>
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<td>How Can NGOs Contribute to the SDGs?</td>
<td>Rosemary Olive Mbone Enie, SHE Tanzania; Ole Ntimama Tubulu, MATE Tanzania</td>
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<td>No Magic Bullet for Shifting Power to Local Capacity: It Starts with Internal Changes</td>
<td>Ennie Chipembere, ActionAid International; Rachel Gathagu, ActionAid International</td>
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<td>Instituting Behaviour Change in Local Communities</td>
<td>Pauline Wambeti, Nuru International Kenya</td>
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<td>Organisational Capacity Building: Best Practices from the Humanitarian Capacity Development Programme</td>
<td>Laura Donkin, CAFOD; Luckson Mashiri, CAFOD; Br. David Nyamuroda, Caritas Harare</td>
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<td>How Effective Leadership and Governance Influences Organisational Performance and Sustainability</td>
<td>Onyango Cynthia Adhiambo, Pact Kenya</td>
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