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SOMALIA CASE STUDY:
TWINNING PROGRAM
BY SOMALI NGO CONSORTIUM

Lead Authors

Nouradin H. Nour and Mark Johnson

Contributors

Ariana Marnicio, Melody Wei, Oona Mitchell, Elisabeth Ashley Haugen

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TWINNING PROGRAM

The "Twinning Program" by the Somali NGO Consortium (SNC) serves as an emblematic example of localized development initiatives making tangible progress in regions fraught with challenges. Funded by Oxfam and implemented by the Somali NGO Consortium, the program embarked on a two-year mission aimed at enhancing the capabilities and resilience of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through a novel approach to capacity building.

"The modality was to pair, for example, the NGO Care International to three local NGOs. Yeah, capacity strengthening, capacity sharing, capacity building and experience sharing maybe for one year."

Interview with SNC Representative

The Twinning Program stands as an innovative endeavor aimed at fostering equitable power dynamics, capacity building, and knowledge exchange among local, national, and international humanitarian actors in Somalia. This program is focused on amplifying the roles and capacities of Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) and addressing the pervasive gender inequities within the humanitarian sector. Furthermore, it seeks to mitigate the challenges faced by national Non-Governmental Organizations (NNGOs) in accessing vital resources and representation in the Somali Humanitarian Fund (SHF), thus creating a more inclusive platform for international stakeholders to gain insights into the local and national civil society landscape across the country.

BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The inception of the Twinning Program is rooted in a critical assessment of the humanitarian aid system's current operational models, emphasizing the need for a "localization" of aid to ensure more effective and equitable crisis responses. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, along with initiatives like The Grand Bargain and the Charter4Change, underscored this necessity, with both the SNC and Oxfam Somalia championing the movement towards a more locally led humanitarian effort in Somalia and Somaliland. The program aims to catalyze a strategic and tailored capacity-building effort that enhances the leadership capabilities and funding access of local and national NGOs, particularly emphasizing the empowerment of Women's Rights Organizations within the humanitarian sector.

The core objective of the Twinning Program was to foster stronger collaborations and knowledge exchange between international NGOs and local Somali NGOs. By 'twinning'—or pairing—one international NGO, such as Care International, with three local NGOs, the program aimed to leverage the wealth of experience and resources available within these global organizations to bolster the operational capacities of local entities. This modality was not merely focused on traditional training; it sought to implement a more dynamic form of capacity strengthening and sharing, moving beyond the conventional paradigms that had dominated developmental assistance for decades.

STRATEGIC INFLUENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Twinning Program articulates its strategy through three primary components over two years: Capacity Development, Gender Leadership, and Advocacy on Localization. These facets are designed to operate synergistically, influencing six core areas crucial for the empowerment and operational efficacy of NNGOs, including their membership in the SHF, participation in humanitarian clusters, and enhanced access to future funding. Additionally, the program focuses on improving NNGOs' management of emergency responses and development projects, fostering knowledge exchange between NNGOs and INGOs, and building networks to facilitate encounters with key stakeholders like INGOs and OCHA.

International organizations are encouraged to engage with the Twinning Program for several compelling reasons, including the opportunity to fulfill their localization commitments, contribute to the power shift towards local actors in the humanitarian sector, and share their expertise to strengthen partnerships. This engagement is envisioned to be a mutual learning process, where international actors can also gain from the rich, contextual insights of local and national organizations, thereby enhancing their operational approaches in Somalia and beyond.

PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

The Twinning Program operates without financial resource sharing, focusing instead on pairing organizations based on complementary needs and expertise. The SNC facilitates the creation of detailed capacity-building plans between twins, which may encompass mentoring, coaching, and other forms of knowledge transfer. This model aims to yield significant outcomes, such as improved gender equality capacities among local and national NGOs and more coordinated, gender-responsive advocacy efforts. These efforts are intended to pilot a sustainable framework for ongoing capacity enhancement that promotes trust, solidarity, and more effective aid delivery.

The program has already achieved notable milestones, including the establishment of a steering committee, conducting the first NGO mapping/survey in Somalia/Somaliland, and engaging in pre-assessment activities to gauge NNGOs' perspectives on aid localization and the Twinning Program itself. Looking ahead, planned activities include the selection of organizations for twinning, finalization of capacity development plans, and the creation of platforms for WROs and women's leadership, among others. These endeavors are supported by a call to the international community for guidance, participation, and funding to ensure the Twinning Program's continued success and scalability beyond its pilot phase.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

Over its two-year lifespan, the program facilitated a series of engagements that included reviewing and enhancing policies, gender and resource management practices, and other crucial operational aspects of local NGOs. These interventions were designed not just to impart knowledge but to create a sustainable framework within which these organizations could continue to grow and evolve. The emphasis on capacity strengthening rather than mere capacity building was a response to a growing sentiment among local NGOs about the perpetual state of 'becoming' without ever 'graduating' to a state of self-sufficiency and operational maturity.

"Due to unforeseen challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and funding constraints, the Twinning Program was unable to secure an extension. However, we adapted and continued our efforts in a new direction. This initiative was designed to foster collaboration between international and local NGOs, exemplified by pairing organizations like Care International with three local NGOs for mutual capacity strengthening, sharing, and building. Our approach emphasized not just training, but a broader exchange of experience over a year to identify effective practices. This shift was vital as local NGOs, having been engaged in capacity-building efforts for over two decades, expressed a need for a transition towards 'capacity strengthening'—a step beyond training, towards achieving a level of operational independence and maturity."

Interview with SNC Representative

However, the ambitious goals of the Twinning Program were met with significant challenges. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent funding shortfalls hindered the possibility of extending the project beyond its initial timeline. Moreover, the expectation of a larger commitment from the participant NGOs—only three international NGOs paired with a dozen local counterparts—revealed gaps in engagement and resource allocation that have potentially limited the program's impact.

Another gap lies in the program's capacity-building component. While the Twinning Program seeks to enhance the operational capabilities of local and national NGOs through knowledge and skills transfer from International NGOs (INGOs), the effectiveness of this transfer is contingent upon the depth and quality of the partnerships formed. The nuanced understanding of local contexts, the sustainability of capacity enhancements beyond the life of the program, and the ability of local NGOs to independently navigate future challenges are critical considerations. There's a risk that capacity-building efforts could become overly reliant on continued INGO support, rather than fostering true self-sufficiency among local actors.

The advocacy component of the Twinning Program, aimed at shifting power dynamics and increasing the representation of local NGOs in funding mechanisms and decision-making forums, underscores another potential gap. The complexity of humanitarian funding structures, the entrenched interests of existing stakeholders, and the diversity of actors within the humanitarian ecosystem may dilute the impact of advocacy efforts. Achieving significant shifts in power dynamics requires not only targeted advocacy but also broader systemic changes within the humanitarian funding and governance models.

Furthermore, the program's ambitious goals encounter challenges related to measuring impact and success. The localization of humanitarian aid is a multifaceted and dynamic process and capturing the nuanced impacts of initiatives like the Twinning Program, particularly in terms of long-term sustainability and systemic change, may require innovative approaches to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Ensuring that the lessons learned, and the knowledge generated through the program are effectively integrated into future initiatives and the wider humanitarian sector remains a critical challenge.

SUCCESS AND LEGACY

Despite these hurdles, the Twinning Program was deemed a success by its organizers and participants. The issuing of certificates and the formal review process underscored the tangible achievements made in terms of capacity enhancement and policy development among the local NGOs.

This success story, however, comes with a note of caution about the sustainability of such initiatives in the face of unpredictable challenges like financial instability. Furthermore, the program's legacy, characterized by its innovative approach to NGO partnership and capacity enhancement, continues to inspire similar initiatives. The nuanced understanding of capacity building—as a journey towards operational independence rather than a perpetual state of dependency—offers valuable insights for future development projects in Somalia and beyond.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Partnering or twinning international organizations with local organizations is a useful approach to holistic capacity strengthening and sharing among humanitarian actors. The strength of this capacity sharing effort is directly related to the formation of robust and committed partnerships.
- The twinning program sought to develop international/local partnerships without financial resource sharing, a rare approach in the sector as a whole. This approach has the potential to create longer-lasting relationships outside of funding cycles but is also vulnerable to issues of financial sustainability.
- Capacity development efforts of local actors should be paired with advocacy efforts to shift power dynamics. This advocacy is complex as it involves both local and global system change.

