



Virtual Speaker Session

Impactful Giving in Emergencies

Thursday, 15th June 2023

Featuring guest speaker *Laura Hughston, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, CARE International*

Summary:

This virtual session featured guest speaker, Laura Hughston, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at CARE International who gave an engaging talk and presentation on the topic 'Impactful Giving in Emergencies'.

The session gathered regional institutional and individual philanthropic actors to explore how funders can deploy funding and resources to alleviate immediate need, whilst still remaining strategic and value aligned. The session also delved into the complexities of giving in emergency settings and how it can continue to be impactful, with the long-term goal of developing resilience, rebuilding communities, and allowing human dignity to thrive. Laura shared with attendees moving anecdotes and first-hand insights from her decade-long experience working in the development sphere and also discussed the importance of transparency and accountability as a key component for giving done right. The session concluded with an interactive and engaging Q&A session, which allowed attendees to reflect upon the content discussed.

Key Takeaways:

How can giving be strategic during emergencies or humanitarian crises?

- **Trust and accountability** are extremely important when responding reactively during emergencies or humanitarian crises and are a part of international standards now. It takes an active process to achieve trust and accountability within the donor-grantee partnership. Funders can start by being transparent about and communicating to their grantees who they are, what their intentions are, their activities and values, and how they plan to intervene in the setting. This transparency allows for interventions to be received more positively and allows for it to be respectful of human dignity and community led.
- Donors must strive to hear directly from recipients about how the aid is benefiting them and what can be improved. The initial relationship between a donor and grantee may be polite and perhaps a bit guarded but once the trust is built, it is more open and feedback and can be honest and even critical. This is where the value is.
- It is important for donors to give their time to be involved on the ground, but it is also important for communities to be involved. Inviting participation from communities allows for diversity of perspective and builds conscious and active citizens, which is key for enabling sustainable impact. It empowers citizens to play a foundational role in their community.
- **Understanding local needs** and capitalising on available local expertise that already exist can help to strengthen local capacity, infrastructure, and civil society in a way that is sustainable as it will enable the work to continue even after funding stops. Local communities possess knowledge of their culture and environment, to a much higher degree than any external agency. This means that they will know what initiatives might face resistance and be unsuccessful.

- It is important that funders identify values-aligned local partners for their collaborative efforts – building on local organisations that have the same views and investing in existing infrastructure. This will also allow donors to stay true to their philanthropic mission and vision.
- **Building resilience in a crisis:** It can be tempting for funders to just respond to immediate needs when responding in a humanitarian crisis setting such as distributing tents, shelter, food – which are indeed vital. However, emergencies also offer an opportunity to rebuild better by building local community and household resilience to future crises. When systems are disrupted, they offer the opportunity to rebuild – not just infrastructure but also social structures and social norms and build a more inclusive society. For example, making infrastructure that is more accessible and inclusive.
- Research shows that often in times of crises, even severe ones, aid, and humanitarian agencies are the last point of call for people. The first is family, neighbours, local groups, and informal groups (set up by local churches, mosques, places of worship or community centres) – because this is the first point of contact for people, and they are trusted the most. As philanthropists it is important to understand which voices are trusted in the community and work besides them to best serve needful communities.
- Social cohesion is dissipated when people are displaced, as they lose their livelihoods which in turn creates communities that are reliant on aid. Therefore, it is important to rebuild infrastructure to enable livelihoods and restore human dignity (amongst displaced populations). Affected communities do want to receive generosity from outside, but also want to feel that they can contribute. Humanitarian aid coupled with livelihood development, produces better outcomes for communities – families have the liberty to choose where their funds are allocated, whether that be more towards education or more towards healthcare etc. Sometimes cash is preferred over in-kind help because it gives people the freedom to spend it in a way that best meets their needs, supports their human dignity, and is culturally important to them.
- Gender roles and social norms can be exacerbated in a crisis but can also be leveraged to change due to the disruption. Funders can support people in mobilising for their own communities – to develop, monitor, and deliver their own plans, in turn building capacity among their partners.
- Philanthropists can also help by being aware of elite capture: paying attention to the voices not being heard versus just those that happen to be the loudest, and then devising strategies accordingly.

Q&A

How often do you recommend that donors check in with grantees to ensure they are up to speed with changing needs on the ground?

- It is important to ask the grantee how often, and in what format they would prefer to communicate. They may already have effective reporting mechanisms in place. However, it also depends on the situation and how fast it is evolving. If it is fast evolving, the donor could ask the grantee to keep them apprised on major updates and pending approvals. Sometimes phone conversations are more effective than written reports because reports can be time consuming and cumbersome on the grantees, things can sometimes get lost in translation as reports involve more parties and conversations can better account for changing needs.

How feasible is it to create one consistent reporting approach that can be used as a standard in emergencies?

- It is very ambitious to achieve this on an international level, but it may be possible at a local response level by identifying what indicators are important and why, and allowing each community to decide their indicators, and why they represent success.

What are the most effective feedback mechanisms for use of aid in crises?



- It is best to consult grantees about what their preferred way of communicating feedback is. It is also important to check in on a grantee's preference for confidential feedback – this is a key way to build trust as well. It is also vital to ensure that feedback is responded to and acted upon so that benefactrices feel as though they are really being heard.

How can we ensure a gender balance, and when would it be useful to mention gender impact in reporting?

- It is always useful to mention and ask for a gender component in reporting from the very beginning. Gender norms can be disrupted in crisis settings but often they come back with more intensities. As such, crises are opportunities to challenge gender norms and promote more inclusivity and equitability.

What are your thoughts of setting aside a percentage of philanthropic funds to be used for emergencies (non-strategically)?

- It is a good idea to have certain reserve/flexible funding to use reactively or in response due to the frequency of crises – but even this reactive giving should be done in a way that can help rebuild sustainably and is in alignment with your overall strategy as a donor.

This session was well attended by a variety of institutional and individual donors from across the region. There was a high level of engagement and interest in the topic, particularly related to reporting and feedback mechanisms during times of crises. The attendees learned about how it can be possible to move from an emotional response to a more strategic one that builds the foundation for future strategic interventions in communities. This can be achieved if donors are able to find partners that are mission aligned, cultivate those relationships, and build their capacities to be able to deliver long lasting change even after the funding stops, because they are rooted in the community.

The Circle network is a closed community of individual and institutional philanthropic donors. If you are interested in learning more, please visit circlemena.org. To express interest to join the network, kindly email Amreen Vadsaria, Programme Associate on the Governance in Philanthropy Programme directly on avadsaria@pearlinitiative.org.