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Participation of Local Actors in Localizing Humanitarianism: A Case Study of the Covid-19 Response Project by Manos Unidas International and CARITAS Makeni in Bombali District, Sierra Leone.

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this work to almighty Allah and my late grandmother who was the first person that has always believed in me.

Acknowledgement

I want to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Thea Hilhorst and my second reader, Rodrigo Mena for their continuous guidance throughout this challenging period of my studies, without you I wouldn't have gone this far, not forgetting my mentor Georgina Gomez who challenged me to be better. I also, want to show huge gratitude to my fiancé Juliet Bangura, formerly of ISS who introduced me to this program and for your constant words of encouragement during this journey, and to my parents who have always wanted me to do my master's degree.

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List of Acronyms

IHOs	-International Humanitarian Organizations
OECD -	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
NEAR -	Network for Empowered Aid Response
PIANGO-	Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
IASC-	International Accounting Standards Committee
HPG -	Humanitarian Policy Group
ICVA-	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
GMI -	The Global Mentoring Initiative
UN OCHA-	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
OXFAM-	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
NGO-	Non-Governmental Organization
CSOs-	Civil Society Organizations

Abstract

This study was done to investigate the participation of local actors in the localization of humanitarianism. It was designed as a case Study of the Covid-19 Response Project by Manos Unidas International and CARITAS Makeni in Bombali District, Sierra Leone. The objectives of the study were to examine the practices for ensuring local actor-participation and proper power relations in the Unidas and Caritas Makeni's partnership; the implications of local actor-participation and balanced power relations in the Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response; the role of power and the other factors influencing the implementation of local actor-participation in Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response and how local actor-participation can be better enforced in strengthening localization of humanitarianism.

The participants of the study were selected using simple random sampling from five organizations that had been identified using critical case sampling. Data collection was done using the qualitative interview method based on a semi-structured interview guide, after which it was analysed using the thematic analysis method. For purposes of developing a background for the research, some information was taken from secondary sources of data such as journals articles, reports, and other relevant documents.

The findings indicate that Manos Unidas should engage affected populations more and also work together with parish priests and other local players. Project flexibility should be upheld at all times because this is necessary for adjustment where necessary. The project rightfully allowed for adjustments around budgeting to accommodate the needs of the community members especially those affected by Covid-19. As part of the unique findings, local participation has immense benefits but it is also hindered by many factors of a social, political, and economic nature.

The study findings can be used to create policies for guiding the partnerships between IHOs and local actors and to enhance the localization of humanitarianism. The findings may be used by students, scholars, and other researchers as a background for their own research. It is recommended in this study that future research should examine the possibilities and hindrances to smooth relations, effective partnerships, and smooth collaborations between local actors and international Humanitarian Organizations.

Relevance to Development Studies

The topic of localization of humanitarianism is relevant to Development Studies because it emphasizes the necessity of adjusting humanitarian operations to the unique requirements and circumstances of the impacted communities. Localization acknowledges that development is a complicated process that varies depending on the context, and that effective interventions towards improving people's life quality (development) including aid should take social structures, cultural norms, and local culture into consideration. For instance, localized humanitarianism acknowledges the role that culture plays in influencing development. Development programs must be successful if local cultures, traditions, and social norms are understood and respected.

Keywords

International Humanitarian Organizations, localization, humanitarianism, participation

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the Research Topic

Conventionally, International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs) were the main actors frequently involved in humanitarian efforts. Over the past few decades, the global humanitarian sector has expanded dramatically, leading to a large rise in the quantity and complexity of inter-organizational networks pertaining to humanitarian programming and policy (Collinson, 2011). At all scales across humanitarianism system, networks play a critical role in guiding and coordinating the policies and initiatives of humanitarian actors. Local humanitarian responders are a significant actor group within such networks. Such local humanitarian responders often arise in crisis contexts or fragile nations to respond to national disasters using funding from international humanitarian organizations. The responders include civil society groups as well as faith-based organizations (Plan International, 2018). Local and national actors are the main players in managing the response in humanitarian disasters. Before, during, and after crises, they remain with the communities.

They frequently are the first to react to crises, which is crucial for delivering life-saving aid swiftly. Humanitarian action that is locally directed is frequently more timely, affordable, and effective (OECD, 2017). This is since local actors have the skills, contacts, and insight of local politics and cultures to produce results on the ground. Additionally, because of their proximity to the afflicted communities, local actors frequently have easier access to them (Khan & Kontinen, 2022; Frennesson et al., 2022). This is especially important in conflict zones where international actors may have difficulty entering (European Commission, 2023). Further reiterating the integration of local responders in larger humanitarian responses, (Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020) posit that the management of the humanitarian response to a catastrophe requires the involvement of both local, national, and international players. Nepal (2017) notes that such a management approach will guarantee accountability to the impacted populations and that protection and aid are appropriate for the targeted population.

Despite potential benefits of the involvement of local human humanitarian responders in crisis-response, when the global response to crisis begins, local and national actors frequently receive little recognition (Bennett et al., 2016; Jideofor, 2021). This is because the international humanitarian system was created by and for foreign actors, multilateral organizations, and IHOs (OECD, 2017). Due to the potential and proven benefits of local respondents, localization of humanitarianism by empowering and involving local humanitarian

responders has been increasingly urged in the last decade. The alliance of Southern Humanitarians, NEAR (2019) define localization as: “a process of recognizing, respecting, and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses.” It attempts to increase local responders' resources and crisis response capabilities while fostering long-term sustainability. This approach of response acknowledges the value of local expertise and cultural awareness in delivering efficient and culturally appropriate aid (European Commission, 2023). In this sense, localization strives to increase the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of humanitarian efforts by empowering local actors.

The call for localization of humanitarianism, however, notes that empowering local humanitarian respondents should be more than just donating funds to them (OECD, 2017; HPG, 2020). Rather, it should involve fair partnership where local humanitarian respondents are involved in program design, leadership, and budget planning of the humanitarian programs (Barbelet et al., 2021). European Commission (2023) proposes that equitable partnerships with local or national actors as the preferred mode of delivery of humanitarian response unless there are documented or context-specific reasons for not working with local actors. The concern for fair partnership in localization of humanitarianism emanates from implications of inherent power disparities between donors, local humanitarian organizations, local communities, and affected persons (Daun, 2020). Bennett (2016) suggests letting go of power and control as an important element of localizing humanitarian response. She suggests that giving up authority and control by the formal Western-inspired system is necessary for a more localized humanitarian approach. This calls for a shift in perspective and the creation of a more varied model that accepts greater local autonomy and transfers authority and resources to entities and actors currently operating outside the formal system. It bids major, multi-mandate IHOs and UN agencies to make the difficult decision to modify the way the sector now operates and its organizational structure.

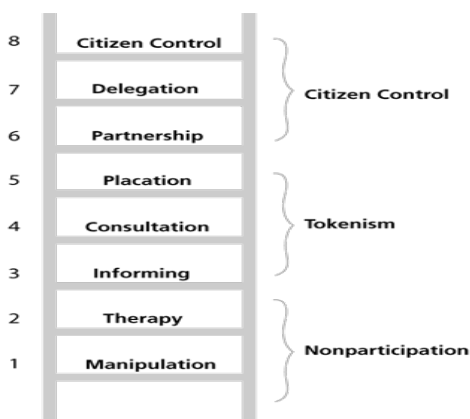
To address power disparities between donors and local actors, localization promotes equitable partnerships with local actors, calls for local or national actors to participate throughout the humanitarian response cycle, and strengthens the participation and leadership of local actors in humanitarian coordination (European Commission, 2023). Consequently, frameworks for implementing and evaluating localization efforts focus on several main components with specific indicators. Some of the significant components based on the frameworks reviewed by this study include equitable and complementary partnerships between

local, national, and international actors, leadership by national actors, coordination/complementarity as well as policy influence and advocacy (The Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, 2019; The Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023).

All these components of localization reflect the participatory mechanism of accountability and encourage the meaningful participation of local actors in designing and implementing human responses that are instigated by international donors.

In the 1990s going into the 2000s, the concept of participation principally referred to the inclusion of the affected populations in humanitarian projects because they were the key stakeholders (IASC 2023). At the centre of aid is the predominant principle of humanity which is the necessity of relieving the suffering of the affected populations. The humanity principle has a close connection to accountability and transparency (Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020). There is no humanitarian organization that can realistically claim to adhere to the principles of humanity without practicing accountability and participation.

The participation aspect of accountability is an important element for maintaining equal and meaningful partnerships in localization as it addresses the negative implications of power relations between international and national actors. Participation as an accountability mechanism reflects the practice of involving stakeholders in decision-making (Agyemang et al., 2009). Applying participation to localization, its simplest form would embroil informing local actors and consulting with them, but the decision-making still belongs to the project planners and donors. Based on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, participation happens in levels. In his writings about citizen involvement in planning processes, Sherry Arnstein described a “ladder of citizen participation” that showed participation ranging from high to low (Arnstein, 1969) as shown in the figure below.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

Figure 1.1 Forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Higher forms of participation may involve encouraging local actors to negotiate and bargain over decisions with donors or even hold veto power over decisions (De Renzio & Mulley, 2006). The indicators of localization frameworks suggest that to attain effective localization of response, mutual accountability through participation has to be established (The Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, 2019: The Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023).

Additionally, the indicators imply that the participation should be conducted in a manner that increases the local actors' voice, power, and capacity to question donors (The Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, 2019: The Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023). Therefore, the achievement of such indicators of localization components reflects the extent to which local or national actors participate in humanitarian response and consequently the effectiveness of localizing response.

While the prescriptions of localization appear to be simple on paper and its prospective benefits appealing, the benefits can only be actualized with the effective participation of local and national actors in humanitarian response. It is against this background that this research will examine the participation of local and national actors in partnerships between local responders and donors as well as the factors influencing this participation. In this study, the term participation refers to the involvement of local and national actors in decision-making for projects whenever they are partnering with donors.

1.2 Overview of Case Study

Several parties were involved in the project meant to support those people in Sierra Leone that had been affected by Covid-19. These organizations are discussed below:

The first organization was Manos Unidas. Manos Unidas was the International Humanitarian Organization sponsoring the project. Founded in 1960, this organization has partnered with Caritas Makeni in development for many years. It is composed of volunteers, and it is the Spanish Catholic Church Organisation that supports, promotes and develops the Third World.

The second organization was Caritas Makeni which was founded in 1979. It is a relief and development-based NGO that operates in the Diocese of Makeni in the Northern province of Sierra Leone.

The project also featured catholic parishes which are definite communities of Christians established within the catholic church. In addition to these organizations, there were several families which were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. These families made up the households that were targeted by the project.

Relationship Between Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni

Manos Unidas has been one of Caritas Makeni's key partners in development and all the support the organization has provided over the years has been essential for the success of the success of Caritas Makeni. Caritas Makeni operates as the local actor through which Manos Unidas reaches the affected communities. Catholic parishes also partner with Caritas Makeni and Manos Unidas since these two organizations depend on the parish priests to mobilize their church members and bring the support to them.

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit Sierra Leone in March 2020, CARITAS Makeni has been positive in complementing government and local responders' efforts to address the implications of the crisis. Through a partnership, between Catholic Church parishes and CARITAS Makeni, Manos Unidas has funded an emergency food security humanitarian response in the northern province of Sierra Leone. The goal of the project was to contribute to the food security and resilience of vulnerable individuals and quarantined households in the fight against COVID-19. The project had two key activities; *to distribute food items and provide psychosocial support to quarantined homes*. The project targeted vulnerable individuals both Catholics and non-Catholics who were reached through the efforts of the parishes. In discussion with the Parish Priests and the Caritas Makeni team, beneficiaries were not only selected from parish communities but also from the rest of the community. To curb the food insecurity situation, parishes were provided with Rice, Salt, Onions, and Maggie to the 25 families in each of the 27 parishes. Program beneficiaries included women, children, those with disabilities, elderly people and quarantined individuals who are without access to sufficient food.

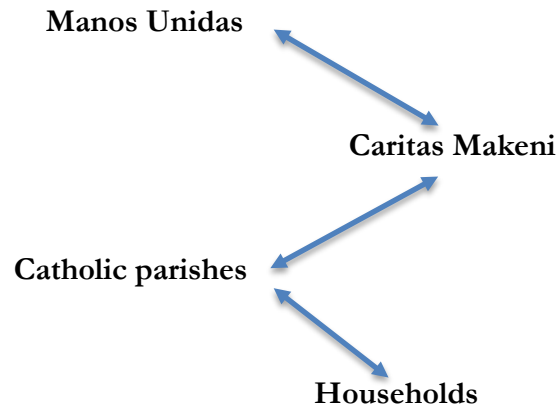


Figure1.2: Accountability chain for the case study

Relationship between Caritas Makeni and Local Catholic church parishes

Caritas is the helping hand of the Catholic church parishes. It assists the church parishes through reaching the poor people and those who are excluded and vulnerable regardless of their races and religions, to create a global community that is founded on justice and fraternal love. Caritas reacts to calamities, works for the causes of poverty and conflict, and advances integral human development—all motivated by the ideals of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching. In an effort to aid local churches in helping persons affected by the coronavirus pandemic, Caritas Internationalis establishes a new "Covid-19 Response Fund." The levels at which Caritas is structured are parish, diocesan, national, regional, and worldwide. A coalition of 165 national Caritas organizations, Caritas Internationalis operates in more than 200 nations and territories worldwide. Every Caritas is an autonomous national organization that is founded by the national Catholic bishops' conference and reports to them. Each national Caritas has territorial structures at the diocesan and parish levels that work with and support communities to promoting integral human development, such as humanitarian assistance in a crisis. At the diocese and parish levels, Caritas has territorial entities in each national area that collaborate with local communities to support integrated human development initiatives including providing humanitarian aid during times of need.

1.3 Research Problem

The formal humanitarian system, according to HPG and ICVA (2016), has not been able to effectively interact with regional and local actors despite local responders actively engaging in humanitarian response. Local actors are frequently sidelined or excluded from humanitarian response despite their capacity and expertise, and there is a propensity to dismiss traditional knowledge and practices or on-the-ground experiences (Maina et al, 2018:

Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). The diminished importance of local actors is a result of unequal power relations between local and international entities (Humanitarian Advisory Group & Pujiono Centre, 2019). International actors set the agenda and operate from a business model based on a desire to be critically and actively involved in the reaction if they have control over the funds (Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). Due to financial inequity, local actors have frequently participated in humanitarian responses as implementers rather than decision-makers, making it difficult for them to speak out. The study of Ebrahim (2003) found that local actors have very little say in decision-making, and real project goals are established by IHOs and funders well before any engagement takes place. This type of involvement is what Najam (1996) referred to as an illusion ritual, serving fundamentally as a self-esteem booster for both local actors and donors. In tying the participation and accountability issues together, he claims that the illusion of participation translates into the sham of accountability since local actors cannot withhold funding, unlike donors, and they cannot impose conditions, unlike governments. It is unlikely that participation of local actors on humanitarian response partnerships will result in downward accountability in the absence of a mechanism for correcting unequal power relations.

Another inherent issue in humanitarian networks in localization efforts is shifting accountability (Jideofor, 2021). According to a Human Policy Group 2021 assessment, international humanitarian actors' localization approaches tend to hold onto greater power while delegating accountability to national and local actors, with a focus on cost savings and gradual change. There is need for national and local actors to wield power and lead humanitarian action, even though the transition process may be more uncomfortable for international actors (Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). The study by Harris & Tuladhar's (2019) proposes that localization depends on context and is perceived differently around the world. Therefore, it is particularly important to examine localization efforts in specific contexts because of the relative cultural and political factors across different countries. While participatory issues have been studied in the context of various partnerships in the localization of humanitarian approaches, no adequate research has been conducted in Sierra Leone. To fill in this research gap, I will examine the participation of local actors in partnerships with international donors for the Covid-19 response.

1.4 Research questions

The main research question to be answered in this study is:

How was the participation of CARITAS Makeni and Catholic Churches as local actors conducted and influenced in their partnership with Manos Unidas International for Covid-19 responsiveness?

Sub-questions

1. What are the practices for ensuring local actor-participation and proper power relations in the Unidas and Caritas Makeni's partnership?
2. What are the implications of local actor-participation and balanced power relations in the Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response?
3. What is the role of power and what other factors influencing the implementation of local actor-participation in Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response?
4. How can local actor-participation be better enforced in strengthening localization of humanitarianism?

1.5 Significance of the study

An academic significance of this study is that it will allow for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the topic of localization of humanitarianism in the context of Sierra Leone. Since localization in humanitarianism is still a young field, there are some information gaps that need to be filled. Particularly, research of localization of humanitarianism in Sierra Leone is minimal. The current study will focus on power relation influences on participation, an area that has received less attention in the case of Sierra Leone. By filling in this gap, the research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of challenges facing localization in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the thesis will provide novel knowledge, viewpoints, or insights to the current body of literature on the localization of humanitarianism in Sierra Leone by conducting through collection of data, and analysis of findings and drawing conclusions.

Localization emphasizes putting affected communities at the center of humanitarian effort, honoring their dignity, and appreciating their contributions. As a social significance, it is hoped that this study would draw attention to the issues facing local actor's participation of humanitarian response partnerships. This will ensure that the views and needs of the impacted communities are heard and prioritized. Additionally, the thesis will analyze the chosen localized intervention, identify areas for improvement, and suggest tactics to increase the efficacy and efficiency of localized humanitarian action. It is intended that the thesis would

contribute to the overall effectiveness of localization of humanitarian response by providing evidence-based conclusions.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The Context of Local Humanitarian Response in Sierra Leone

In the Sierra Leonean context, key responders to humanitarian needs include civil society organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations (Macarthy et al., 2017). These organizations have in the past been part of the initiatives that address humanitarian emergencies that arose because of the Covid-19 crisis which substantially increased the vulnerability of many people in the country. In all these cases, local humanitarian responders demonstrated different response approaches.

Local humanitarian responders were involved in empowerment programs (Cooper, 2018; Alokpa, 2015) building cohesion in communities, engaging in promoting community transformation, establishing partnerships with the government and other local institutions, and facilitating network development with other local organizations and community groups (Kamara et al., 2022). Community-based organizations and civil society groups also provide assets and capabilities to marginalized groups (Kanyako, 2016). They also enhance leadership within the local communities. Faith-based organizations are known to work in conjunction with civil society groups to achieve different sets of empowerment results through interventions by which they provide sensitization, relief supplies, advocacy, and the building of knowledge (Macarthy et al., 2017). Many faith-based organizations such as churches helped people by providing relief supplies and teaching them how to stay safe during the Covid-19 crisis.

Kamara et al., (2022) note that for most residents in Sierra Leone especially the poor and vulnerable, these actions were necessary for the establishment of community confidence to raise demands and demand accountability.

Prior research (Cooper, 2018; Alokpa, 2015) indicates that the contribution of CSOs to the development of society varies. During the Covid-19 Crisis, CSOs lobbied the government on matters related to employment and the establishment of coalitions with organized labor. They also placed pressure on the public sector to step up its governance and accountability and develop human capital for boosting entrepreneurial and business opportunities (Kamara et al. 2022). Coupled with the mismanagement of the public sector in Sierra Leone, the Covid-19 crisis created a lack of economic opportunities forcing many into basic entrepreneurial activities as a tactic for survival (Conteh, 2020). Consequently, CSOs and faith-

based organizations have emerged as crucial players in supporting affected people such as women and the youth to establish small businesses (Fasuluku, 2021; Macarthy et al., 2017). Community engagement for the purpose of community growth, development, and empowerment was reported by many previous studies (e.g., Kamara et al. 2022; Macarthy et al., 2017) as having been at the top of the agenda of CSOs. For most of the CSOs and faith-based organizations, engagement with affected local community members happens through support extended to the youth, by training them and creating job placements for them.

2.2 Localization of humanitarianism

Local humanitarian responders have been recognized as crucial agents in the development of society as seen from their operations and impact during crises (Conteh, 2020; Cooper, 2018). Their contribution to society is great as they play critical roles in the provision of socio-economic empowerment, and humanitarian services and more significantly restraining the misuse of state power by the government (Kanyako, 2016; Alokpa, 2015).

As OECD (2017), proposes humanitarian responses can be said to be localized when a local humanitarian responder participates in all phases of a program, including needs assessments, program design and execution, and final review and evaluation, the response. The international humanitarian system has for a long time been the object of criticism for the marginalization of groups that are from crisis-affected areas, commonly called “local” humanitarian actors. They have also suffered exclusion from humanitarian decision-making and harmonization mechanisms, been sub-contractors or vendors whenever they are in partnership with international organizations (Plan International, 2018) and their capabilities have often been questioned.

As stated by Barbelet et al., (2021) the notion that governments are entrusted with the central responsibility for the people they govern during crises is spelled out in the General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) and several international initiatives and frameworks, all of which emphasize the significance of local and national action in humanitarian contexts. According to Erdilmen & Sosthenes (2020), greater engagement of local humanitarian responders brings diverse experiences, approaches, and skills. However, in a contrary argument, a report by the HPG (2020) states that whereas constant recommendations emphasize the need for a change in humanitarian response, there is no clarity on what localization really means. In support, Fabre & Gupta, (2017) opine that this incomplete conceptualization makes it hard to comprehend how localization works in practice, who its main actors are,

and their mode of engagement with international actors because the global humanitarian system was created by and for transnational actors.

Although there is still no consensus on the true meaning of “localization” in practice, and from a general standpoint, it refers to a loosely defined agenda of more systematically including local humanitarian actors in the transnational humanitarian system (Barbelet et al., 2021). It also points to reforms to incorporate local leadership in humanitarian response and raise the level of international investment and regard for the role played by local actors, with a focus on increasing the scope, efficacy, and accountability of humanitarian response. McCarthy et al. (2017) state that localization is a vital aspect of the efforts of donors to function in a more effective manner across the development-humanitarian link. Many of the national and local actors delivering humanitarian assistance also have a close link to development (ICVA, 2021). Boosting their readiness and enhancing their capacity for response and recovery from crises does not just make humanitarian response more efficient but it can also protect development gains.

Although the localization of humanitarian response has been discussed positively in the literature, a study by Plan International (2018) argues that whilst it is a must that the localization of aid must take place, it is not possible to place all humanitarian action exclusively in the hands of local actors because the international humanitarian system continually saves lives and alleviates suffering. Nevertheless, the author recognizes that there must be a change in how ‘the international’ engages. In agreement, a study by OCHA (2021) reiterates that as highlighted in the UN Secretary-General’s report for the World Humanitarian Summit, it is important for the humanitarian sector to ‘strengthen, and not replace’ local systems, by incorporating the activities of different humanitarian actors.

As a way of improving localization, the Grand Bargain focuses on increasing and supporting investment in the institutional capacities of humanitarian responders at the local and national levels (HPG, 2020). According to Barbelet et al. (2021), this includes capacities for coordination and response, and preparedness especially within delicate contexts and in places where there is a vulnerability caused by disasters, armed conflicts, constant outbreaks, and climate change effects.

Chapter 3 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptualization of participation as a mechanism of accountability in humanitarianism

Due to highly publicized scandals in recent times, there has been an increased focus on the need for IHOs to focus on participation as an element of accountability. In turn, scholars have conducted numerous studies on the mechanisms that IHOs can use to ensure effective participation of local responders in humanitarian response (Young et al., 1996; Gibelman & Gelman, 2001). This has led to the emergence of several frameworks that can be used to measure the participation as a dimension of accountability. Ebrahim (2003) explains that as a measure of accountability, participation is a process characterized by ongoing routines and used to see if IHOs can account for their decisions and actions. Gardner & Lewis (1996) explain that there are different types of participation. The first level of participation entails availing information about a particular project to the public through avenues such as formal dialogue, surveys, and hearings. This type of participation encourages engaging members of the community but the authority to make decisions remains with the project planners (IHOs). The second level of participation entails involving community members in actual project activities through providing labour or funds to be used. The third level of participation is where community members are allowed to influence the decisions made relating to the project. The community members can exact more control over how the development initiatives and local resources are utilized. The last level of participation involves activities of the community members that are independent of the IHO-sponsored projects.

The first two levels of participation are what Najam (1996) refer to as ‘sham ritual’. These types of participation lead to sham accountability where IHOs are not actually held accountable for their actions. They view participation as a general practice, but community members are not meaningfully involved in implementing the projects meant to impact their lives. Level three and four highlights more radical types of participation with the community having greater involvement and hence can hold IHOs accountable through downward accountability.

The participation framework offers an excellent empirical or theoretical foundation for the current study highlighting how it fits within the wider context of related literature. The propositions and concepts explored by ‘participation as an accountability mechanism’ connect the present research questions and objectives. Examining the levels of participation by

community members and local organizations in the partnership between CARITAS Makeni and Catholic Churches and Manos Unidas International in Bombali District, Sierra Leone. The evaluation of participation will reveal whether there is actual collaboration between the IHOs and local actors. Ensuring successful collaboration can be achieved through participatory appraisal to ascertain relations of authority and power (Ebrahim, 2003). In a collaborative partnership, there should be greater participation with transparency and sharing of power; allowing local actors to take part in project decision-making. Participatory evaluation can also help guarantee downward accountability. This is where systematic involvement of the local community allows them to evaluate the initiatives proposed by the IHOs.

3.2 Participation as Presented in the Global Mentoring Initiative Localization Framework

3.2.1 Participation dimension of localization efforts

The Participation element of the localization framework questions whether international and local organizations take the opinions of affected people into account during design and implementation of programmes (The Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, 2019; The Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023). As a principle of the Grand Bargain, it seeks to include recipients of aid whenever decisions affecting these recipients are being made (IASC, 2023). The revolution aims at supporting long-lasting and sustainable change in practice, supporting the nexus between effective participation and the quality and efficiency of humanitarian response, and boosting the evidence that participation is taking place at the agency level via the Grand Bargain Annual Reporting (OCHA, 2016). Aid organizations have a commitment to improving governance and leadership mechanisms at the national humanitarian level and sector mechanisms to create accountability to and engagement with those affected (HPG, 2020). They also seek to have common standards and a harmonized approach for engaging the community and having them participate by emphasizing on the inclusion of those who suffer the highest vulnerability, reinforced by a common platform upon which data is shared and analyzed to improve transparency, decision-making, accountability and minimize duplication (Plan International, 2018). Aid organizations have committed themselves to considering feedback and input from affected communities.

3.2.2 Importance and advantages of national actors' participation in localized humanitarian response

- **National Authorities**

National governments serve as the first responders and the key duty bearers when providing protection in cases where those affected by a crisis fall within their territorial borders (OECD, 2017). Most national governments contribute meaningfully in terms of finances and other ways, such as the opening of their labor markets and social welfare systems to the displaced, or direct input in re-constructing communities after a natural disaster (Nepal, 2017). In most cases, national government representatives are major stakeholders because they play a major role in facilitating NGO access, connecting with local populations and their representatives, and sharing of important data about the affected populations (ICVA, 2021).

- **Service Providers/ NGOs.**

Humanitarian action spearheaded by local NGOs and service providers in crisis-affected areas, can be quicker and more suitable, saving more lives and reducing the misery of victims (HPG, 2020). Since they are situated inside their communities, NGOs and other service providers can respond to the many small-scale crises earlier than any other institution (Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). It is challenging and even impossible for international humanitarian workers to get to those communities that are affected. Consequently, international organizations are opting to use local NGOs to do needs assessments, give out aid, and interact with the affected populations (Frennesson et al. 2022). In some cases, this enhances the acceptance of aid from local authorities.

Partnerships between international organizations and local NGOs are cost-effective because they can increase the value of the response and help in building national capacity (Fabre & Gupta, 2017). Direct support to a local NGO may also increase national capacity and responsibility by recognizing and respecting local leadership and decision-making. International humanitarian actors tend to be more accountable to their donors than the beneficiaries (Daun, 2020). However, when support is given by local NGOs that are properly rooted in the community, the affected communities are normally more vigilant as they ask for higher quality services and goods, and that increases accountability (Ebrahim, 2003).

- **Affected Communities**

Localization considers the local community as an important entity that needs support and recognition because local community members are the decision-makers, leaders, and implementers of the solutions that impact the country (Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020). Engagement with organizations made up of members of the affected community can be an appropriate mechanism for addressing this.

3.2.3 National actors leading in coordination mechanisms of localized humanitarian response

As a principle of localization, the leadership element requires national actors to define and lead in humanitarian partnerships. This element questions whether local and national organizations lead on decision making in humanitarian response and whether international actors respect and work with local actors. The progress indicators of localization's leadership element include international actors supporting and strengthening national leadership, local and national actors leading response and dominating decision-making as well as international actors working with and respect in-country leadership structures and mechanisms (The Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, 2019; The Global Mentoring Initiative, 2023).

Warleigh (2001) explains that IHO should serve as catalysts by empowering local actors to take part in decision-making within partnerships. This can be achieved by providing skills and resources, fostering a supportive environment, and advocating for their involvement. An IHO should create a platform and opportunities for local actors to provide their voice and influence policies and initiatives. A framework based on this assertion can have been various specific ways in which that can be achieved, and which can be used as guidelines by IHOs when collaborating with local partners:

- *Build capacity:* IHOs should invest in capacity building of local actors by offering them the resources, skills, and knowledge needed for effective cooperation. This can be done through workshops, training programs, and mentoring initiatives.
- *Educate and raise awareness:* IHOs should educate local actors about programs, policies, and projects that they plan to implement and help them understand potential opportunities and impacts of these initiatives. They should also raise awareness among local actors on matters relating to responsibilities, rights, and significance of engaging in decision-making.
- *Share information:* IHOs should make sure that local actors are able to access timely and accurate information related to the process of decision-making. They should give them timely updates on regulations, laws, and policies as well as implications of the proposed changes. This helps empower local actors and enhance their ability and willingness to engage in the decision-making process.
- *Representation and networking:* IHOs act as intercessors, linking local actors to other relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. This can be facilitated through organizing

forums, conferences, and public consultations which provide avenues for local actors to network, collaborate, and exchange opinions with key actors.

3.2.4 Equitable and complementary partnerships between local responders and IHO actors

The localization framework by The Global Mentoring Initiative (2023) proposes that it is an IHO's duty to make sure that local humanitarian responders' profit from a fair relationship, regardless of whether support is provided directly or is guaranteed through pooled money, networks, or another partner. Once a local humanitarian responder's capacity has been determined to be adequate, the relationship should be built on the same principles as one would with an international organization. In humanitarian action, localization refers to the process of recognizing and assigning leadership and decision-making to national actors. For instance, using national procurement processes to prepare for disasters or respond to crises falls under this category. Developing a long-term relationship with a local humanitarian responder frequently requires careful maintenance. The GMI framework proposal that instead of the IHO, the local humanitarian responder should oversee needs assessment, program design, budget planning, and other aspects of the program cycle. Regular meetings between the local humanitarian responder and its donors should be held to foster trust and adapt programs and support as needed.

3.3 Theoretical Foundations of the Research

Due to the variety of actors involved in the localization of human response, the network theory's view of participation in inter-organizational humanitarianism is more relevant. Network theory investigates the connections and interactions between system actors. The theory acknowledges that coordinated and integrated actions are necessary for an effective humanitarian response (Cachia & Holgado Ramos, 2020).

Within networks of mutual dependency actor relationships are founded on loyalty, reciprocity, and trust. Additionally, the network's participants' ability to make strategic decisions is spread fairly (Powell, 1990). However, in networks of direction, strategic decision-making may continue to be centralized under the control of one or a small number of network participants. According to Sacchetti and Sugden (2003), networks of direction severely obscure the ability of individuals excluded from decision-making to actively engage in the formulation of broad policies and objectives. Collinson (2016) urges that of humanitarian networks to achieve effective outcomes, the concept of networks of direction must be replaced with that of mutual dependency to ensure that control is not concentrated at the top of a hierarchical

structure inside the network. This proposition is in congruence with the prerequisites for the agenda of localizing humanitarian response. The importance of strong partnerships and collaborations between local players, international organizations, governments, and other stakeholders is emphasized in the context of localization by network theory.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design mainly because it emphasizes the experiences, opinions, and views of the members of the Manos Unidas and the local humanitarian institutions. Qualitative research makes use of data that is descriptive in nature (Majid, 2017). The relevance of the qualitative research design for this study is that it helps in answering questions about meanings, perspectives, and experiences from the point of view of the respondents about the challenges and outcomes of accountability in the partnership between Manos Unidas, Caritas Makeni, and local Catholic churches. The advantage of using the qualitative design in this study includes its ability to elicit deeper insights and explore qualitative factors such as perceptions, meanings, feelings, and behaviors (Mohajan, 2018). Since this study was based on a small sample of 10 people, the qualitative research design will be appropriate because it fits studies with small samples.

4.2 Sampling

From an entire population of donor organizations and local humanitarian responders, the study focuses on a sample of five organizations. Manos Unidas represents the IHO community whereas Caritas Makeni and Catholic church parishes represent the local humanitarian responders/actors. These organizations were chosen through critical case sampling. Critical case sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher to select the participants and it involves participants who have relevant information about the topic of research (Etikan et al., 2016; Taherdoost, 2016). In addition, critical case sampling was applied in the selection of individuals in these organizations were involved in the “Food support for vulnerable people in the northern province of Sierra Leone.” The process led to a final sample of 24 individuals: 6 employees of Manos Unidas, 6 employees of Caritas Makeni, 6 Catholic Church Priests, and 6 program beneficiaries. For each of these groups, the six individuals were selected using simple random sampling. Simple random sampling was appropriate for this study because it gave every member of the population an equal chance of being selected to form the sample. All Manos Uniodas and Caritas Makeni employees as well as the affected community members had equal chances of being chosen. This was an important strategy for eliminating researcher bias in the selection of participants.

4.3 Data Collection Tools

Data for the proposed study were collected using semi-structured interviews whereby interviewees were invited to meetings in which they were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews make use of more open-ended questions (Adams, 2015) that are designed to allow the interviewer more flexibility to include more peripheral discussions and not only pre-set questions (Majid et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews were suitable for this study because they encompass the merits of both structured and unstructured styles of interviewing. The interviews gave room for objective explorations of relevant subjects in a spontaneous manner, and due to the conversational tones used, participants are expected to feel more comfortable expounding on their responses. As stated by Adhabi & Anozie, (2017), interviews are also suitable for those respondents who may have a challenge with reading and writing. It was also possible for the interviewer to judge the non-verbal cues and communication that respondents use and that enhanced understanding adds to the understanding and quality of the responses made verbally. The interviews were done in a face-to-face manner because the interviewer met physically with the interviewees in specified venues. Each interviewee was given a maximum of 30 minutes to answer the questions. A video camera was used to record the interview proceedings. The researcher also made short notes that would be used to help in transcription of the recorded data.

4.5 Data Analysis

Dedic & Stanier (2017) define data analysis as the process of inspecting, cleansing, and transforming data with the aim of deriving useful and meaningful experiences from it. In qualitative research, data analysis involves organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data collected to capture patterns and themes that would help answer the research questions. For the current study, the thematic analysis was used to find meaning in the data collected and answer the main research questions. As explained by Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data that entails reading through the data collected and searching for patterns and meaning. Thematic analysis enables the investigator to uncover rich insights and understand the nuances of the data collected. It is an iterative and flexible approach that can easily be tailored to specific research objectives and contexts. By systematically identifying and exploring patterns, the investigator generates important knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The major steps involved in conducting a thematic analysis are as follows:

- *First step:* This step involves the researcher reading the transcribed data severally to familiarize herself/himself with the information provided by the respondents.
- *Second step:* The second step involves textual analysis and specifically noting and annotation of comments on the text.
- *Third step:* This step involves developing emergent themes by grouping comments. There is also a comparison of emerging connections and patterns through a critical examination of the transcribed data. Here the researcher combines the original script with his/her interpretations from the analysis.
- *Fourth step:* In this step, the researcher searches for a connection between emergent themes with the aim of discovering connections that were not exposed in the previous step.

For this study, thematic analysis was used to better understand the issue of the effectiveness of the partnership between CARITAS Makeni and Catholic Churches as local actors and Manos Unidas International for COVID-19 responsiveness in Bombali District, Sierra Leone.

Generation of themes for Thematic Analysis

The process of generating themes was guided by the six-step process as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The first step towards theme generation was for the researcher to familiarize himself with the data.

Stage 1: Familiarisation with the Data

Familiarisation with the data started with the interest of the researcher in familiarizing himself with the data. In this phase, the researcher was able to determine the number and types of themes that could emerge from the data. This phase was important because it guided subsequent steps that would be undertaken (Dawadi, 2020). As a start, the interviews were transcribed fully in order to understand how the interviewees reacted to the issues raised in the study. The researcher transferred all the transcripts into NVivo 10 for purposes of the analysis. After that, repeated cautious reading of the transcripts was done to avoid the influence of the prior knowledge and experience of the author in the field. When reading the transcripts, the researcher highlighted all the interesting information that was highlighted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher went through the data in such a manner so that he could become totally immersed in the entire dataset and collect the first points of interest.

Stage Two: Generating Initial Codes

The initial step (familiarization with the data) allowed the value of the initial findings to come out. However, the researcher considered the significance of re-reading the transcripts prior to the creation of the codes (Nowell et al. 2017). Therefore, the researcher read the transcripts cautiously and made codes from all the data. The very efficient NVivo coding feature made it possible for multiple codes to be used through the selection of phrases or paragraphs that were of interest (Dawadi, 2020). After carefully reading through the transcripts many times, the coding was done. Several codes were generated with some having only one phrase and others having one or more sentences.

Stage Three: Searching for Themes

In keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion, this step began with a list of the codes found inside the dataset. Finding trends and connections throughout the entire data set was the main goal at this point. The codes were examined with the idea of combining several codes to create a comprehensive theme. This stage's emphasis was on analyzing the overarching themes rather than codes (Nowell et al. 2017). In order to establish potential themes related to the study questions, it was important to conceptualize the codes as the building blocks and connect comparable or multiple codes.

To make the process easier, based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestions, a list of codes was made on a different piece of paper after which they were organised into theme-piles reflecting on the link between codes and themes. Since the study was explorative it was necessary to go back and re-read every transcript before the codes were clustered based on the themes (Dawadi, 2020). The transcripts were therefore re-read so that various codes were combined to form potential themes, collecting all the related coded data extracts in the identified themes. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) themes should be predominant in most or in all data items. To make a cluster of all codes, the research created a thematic map that had a total of 10 overarching themes. The researcher produced a thematic map with ten overarching topics in order to cluster all of the codes.

Stage Four: Reviewing Themes

During the review of themes, all the master themes, main themes, and sub-themes were deliberately refined and presented in a more systematic manner. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend checking themes for coherence consistency and distinctions between themes. At this stage, there were two levels. At the first level, every coded extract related to each initial theme was obtained from the NVivo file and pasted into a Microsoft Word document to enable cross-referencing of coded extracts with the themes and perform the recovery,

comparison and organization of coded extracts and themes in a meaningful manner (Dawadi, 2020). So, in order to determine whether they could form a logical pattern, the researcher went over all of the gathered excerpts for each theme again. The collected extracts, along with all of the codes and themes, were examined to determine whether they could form a cohesive pattern that would adequately yield the contours of the coded data. A similar procedure was used on a second level, but it was applied to the entire set of data (Knowell et al. 2017). The validity of the specific themes in connection to the data set was put into consideration. All the transcripts were read again to make sure that the themes worked in connection with the whole data set. Some new codes were generated but they added to major value. A thematic map was developed to show the themes generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the review process, most themes and subthemes were merged with other key themes or discarded all together.

Stage Five: Defining and Naming Themes

This stage started with an aim to further refine and define the themes and identify the importance of each theme and determine the aspect of the data that is captured in each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As argued by Braun and Clarke, it is not possible for a theme to be too wide and too complicated. Therefore, the researcher had to go back to the collated data extracts for every theme and organized these themes into a comprehensive and consistent account (Dawadi, 2020). The researcher paid careful attention to identify the story carried by each theme and how it fitted into the general story that he wanted to tell concerning the data in connection to the research questions and to reduce any excess overlap between themes. A refining of the specifics of each theme were done with caution. The themes were then refined when the researcher read through all the codes, extracts, subthemes, and key themes (Knowell et al. 2017). Each theme was then assigned a final name together with its definition to tell a story concerning the data. It became clear at this point that several lower-level themes would complicate the thematic map and add little to the tale the data carried, therefore those themes were combined with higher order themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Sanjari et al. (2014) researchers often face ethical challenges in every step of conducting a study. In the case of a qualitative methodology such as the one selected for this study, the interaction between the investigator and respondents offers numerous ethical challenges.

The researcher made a formal application to the institution before the data could be collected. Due to the involvement of human participants, the interviewees were protected from both physical and psychological harm and the researcher observed the recommended research ethics. As recommended by Hürlimann, (2019), the participants were also informed of their rights, such as privacy, confidentiality, and withdrawal from the study whenever they felt like.

The first ethical consideration in this regard was for the researcher to introduce himself/herself to the prospective respondents and inform them of the aims of the research as well as the intended purposes of the findings. This information was crucial in asking the participants for consent to participate in the study. The informed consent should be written and provided to the respondents to sign signifying their approval (Wynn & Israel, 2018). Another ethical consideration was confidentiality and anonymity. Since the researcher wanted participants to give accurate information, he assured them that the information they were going to give cannot be traced back to them and in so doing lead to harm in their workplaces. As recommended by Corti et al. (2000), to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher used pseudonyms when drafting the research and stored all data in a safe place away from the reach of unauthorized people.

Chapter 5 Findings and Discussions

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented and discussed. The discussion will be based on the four research questions of the study. However, prior to this, a discussion about the organizations involved in the project is provided. After this, this chapter will discuss the practices for ensuring local actor participation in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's partnership, the implications of local actor participation in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response, the factors that influenced the implementation of local actor participation in Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response and improvement of local actor participation in strengthening localization of humanitarianism. The discussion under each one of these themes begins with the description of the interview results in which some of the quotes of the responses given by the interviewees are incorporated. The presentation of the interview results under each theme is followed by an analysis of the same results considering what is found in established literature.

5.2 Organisations Featured in the Project

Manos Unidas

This is a development NGO that is composed of volunteers. It was founded in 1960 and it has been Caritas Makeni's key partner in development and all the support it has been providing over the years has been fundamental for the success of the organization. Manos Unidas is the Spanish Catholic Church Organisation involved in supporting, promoting, and developing the Third World. At the same time, it operates as a Catholic and secular Non-Governmental Development Organisation (NGDO), that is made up of volunteers. Manos Unidas has the responsibility of fighting against nutritional deficiency, famine, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, and underdevelopment and it works to eliminate the structural causes that produce them such as injustices, unequal distribution of goods and opportunities for people and communities, ignorance, prejudice, absence of solidarity, indifference, and the crisis of human and Christian values. Manos Unidas, under the inspiration of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church, undertakes two lines of work which include raising awareness and disapproving the presence of hunger and underdevelopment, their causal factors finding possible solutions. The organization also obtains economic means for financing programs, plans and elaborate development projects that are designed to deal with these needs.

Caritas Makeni

Caritas Makeni was established in 1979 by Bishop Azzolini. It is a relief and development based National Non-governmental Organization that operates in the Diocese of Makeni in the Northern province of Sierra Leone. The goal of Caritas Makeni is to support the efforts of people in Sierra Leone who are disadvantaged and less privileged to boost their development, regardless of their race, gender, tribe, or creed. The organization works with child soldiers and other young people who were affected by the war in Sierra Leone by providing trauma counselling, implementing peace-building programs in the community, and helping the youth to develop and improve skills that are necessary for providing sustainable livelihoods. Caritas Makeni works with poor people by offering them advantages or opportunities required for them to become active and positive citizens. The agency believes that supporting vulnerable individuals in times of crisis also embodies the social teachings of the church such as solidarity, participation, common good, subsidiarity, and preferential options of the poor.

Catholic Parishes

In Sierra Leone a parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful founded on a stable base in a specific Church. The pastoral role of the parish is given to a pastor as the shepherd of that congregation under the oversight of the diocesan bishop. In the Catholic Church, a parish is a stable community of believers in a specific church that is pastored by a parish priest under the watch of the diocesan bishop. Several parishes (26 in number) were targeted in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni project. The names of eleven of the parishes are provided below:

S/no	Name of Parish	Location	District
1	Our Lady of Fatima Cathedral	Makeni	Bombali
2	St. Francis Xavier	Makeni	
3	St. Guido Conforti	Makeni	
4	Holy Spirit	Masuba-Makeni	
5	Christ the King	Binkolo	
6	St. Andrew	Teko Barracks - Makeni	
7	Our Lady of Sierra Leone	Kamabai	
8	St. Paul	Kamalo	Karene
9	St. Peter Claver	Lunsar	Port Loko
10	Our Lady of Lourdes	Port Loko	
11	Our Lady Queen of Peace	Masiaka	

Households

The households were composed of families where people had been affected by Covid-19. Several households were targeted in the project. With the feedback received from the various parishes that have conducted counseling sessions, 76 people in all the homes were reached. From this number, 21 were teenage girls, 15 were teenage boys, 28 were adult female and 12 were adult male including a person with a disability. The Emergency project supported by Manos Unidas targeted 25 families that are termed as poor and vulnerable.

5.3 Local actor participation in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's partnership

Data for this study was analyzed thematically and for this question, respondents cited different practices that ensure there is participation. The data was split into two key themes as discussed below. Engagement of local actors (the affected populations, parish priests, and Caritas Makeni) emerged as an important practice for making sure that local actor participation is achieved. This theme produced three subthemes namely, engagement of Caritas Makeni, engagement of the parish priests, and engagement of local beneficiaries.

5.3.1 Engagement of CARITAS Makeni

Involvement in adjustment due to budget constraints

All 6 employees from Caritas Makeni said that Caritas Makeni was fully involved in the process of adjusting the project.

“Yes, we adjusted to the requirements of the project as communicated by Manos Unidas. For example, there were concerns that some of the affected households would be left out of the project. This we addressed by expanding the budget to accommodate more people” (Carita Makeni employee 2).

There were negotiations on the situation, and the views of Caritas Makeni employees were considered in the budget estimations.

“Caritas Makeni fully participated in the design and implementation of the budget. For instance, we suggested certain changes to the program of supporting the affected. We wanted the support they were receiving to be taken to them and not for them to come to collect it. That was done as we had suggested.” (Manos Unidas employee 4).

“We asked Caritas Makeni employees to air our concerns to the budget-making committee and they did so. For instance, one of our propositions was to have as many people as

possible being assisted in the project. To our delight, they secured an expansion of the budget to accommodate more beneficiaries” (Beneficiary 3).

“However, at times, it was not possible for some of our suggestions to be implemented and we understood why they could not be accommodated in the projects” (Beneficiary 5).

In these quotes, the Manos Unidas employee and the beneficiary confirm that engagement was done when Caritas Makeni employees got involved in budget-making.

“Yes, when we faced budget constraints, but we adjusted to meet the challenges. Many people showed up during the distribution than the registration” (Caritas employee 3).

The quotes above show that the views of Caritas Makeni employees were considered, and the budget was adjusted appropriately based on the changing needs of the affected populations. The flexibility of the program for beneficiaries is a theme that relates strongly with the localization strategy of the engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting. This localization strategy as outlined in the GMI framework underscores the involvement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting. In Manos Unidas projects local actors are given a voice. The localization strategy of local actor participation has support in established studies as well. An example is Warleigh (2001) who states that international humanitarian organizations should work at empowering local actors to take part in decision-making within partnerships. As stated by GMI (2023) local actor participation where the affected people are fully engaged in a project has the advantage of project success because the locals tend to ‘own’ it and when that happens, they work hard to see it succeed. Local actors can give a project a local face thereby making it more acceptable to the local people. Furthermore, Erdilmen & Sosthenes (2020), suggest that greater engagement of local humanitarian responders brings diverse experiences, approaches, and skills. However, this participation strategy may create disagreements due to the many divergent views and opinions brought on board for implementation. For example, in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni project for the victims of Covid-19, Manos Unidas wanted a leaner budget but Caritas Makeni, echoing the suggestions of the affected people asked for a larger budget that would accommodate all the targeted households. Deliberating on how to streamline the budget created disagreements between the two organizations. The parish priests also had their concerns such as the need to go and look for those affected by Covid-19 who had relocated from their homes and give them support from their new residences. This sounded expensive and time-consuming leading to disagreements but eventually, the strategy suggested by the parish priests was adopted.

IHOs can use the findings in this section to understand the dynamics and benefits of strengthening localization by involving local actors in budget-making, decision-making, and financial planning. Given the positive findings, such IHOs can increase their engagement with local actors in making project budgets.

Participation in the evaluation of the project

All the employees of Caritas Makeni (n=6) plus those of Manos Unidas (n=6) confirmed that Caritas Makeni took part in monitoring the implementation of the project.

“We were very busy looking at the records and helping to release the supplies of food” (Caritas Makeni employee 1).

“We gave the responsibility of monitoring the implementation activities of the project to Caritas Makeni” (Manos Unidas employee 4).

The quotes above show that Caritas Makeni employees were instrumental in monitoring the implementation of the project.

The evaluation process involved weighing the strengths and weaknesses of the project at different stages and suggesting amendments and where necessary. Caritas Makeni employees performed this duty diligently as stated in the quotes below.

“Our partners in Caritas Makeni worked very hard to make the evaluation results available on time. We used that to make appropriate changes for better performance” (Manos Unidas employee 6).

“The progress of the project was well assessed under the leadership of Caritas Makeni. We only made our suggestions for the evaluation report” (Parish priest 4)

There is a strong relationship between the theme “project evaluation” and the localization strategy of the engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting. The localization strategy in the GMI framework suggests that the engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting is necessary and this was achieved in the Unidas project because Caritas Makeni employees gave their opinions on how best the project should be done during the assessment exercise. Based on the GMI framework regular meetings between the local humanitarian responder and its donors should be held. This is a common practice in Manos Unidas projects.

The localization strategy of local actor participation has been supported by past researchers. This study echoes the findings of a study by Warleigh (2001) who suggested that IHO should serve as catalysts for empowering local actors to participate in decision-making within partnerships. A congruent study by Fabre & Gupta (2017) suggests that this can be

achieved through the creation of a platform and chances where local actors can provide their voice and influence policies and initiatives. Project inclusivity where local actors are allowed to take part in decision making and policy development makes the implementation process more effective. The input of local actors may increase the acceptability of the project to the affected populations so that its level of success is enhanced. By local actors having a voice in the decisions of the project, Erdilmen & Sosthenes (2020), suggests that greater engagement of local humanitarian responders brings diverse experiences, approaches, and skills. As stated by Macarthy et al. (2017) state that localization is an aspect of the efforts of donors to operate in a more effective manner across the development-humanitarian link. However, this participation strategy has weaknesses as well. For the IHO, involving local actors in policy development and decision-making has the effect of slowing down the implementation of the project and it may also increase the overhead costs of running the project.

However, from these results, donors will understand the value of having local actors take part in the evaluation process to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the project at various stages and suggest changes where necessary. This would be an important strategy for localization.

5.3.2 Engagement of the Parish Priests

Involvement in the selection of beneficiaries

All 6 Catholic priests stated that engagement was done with the parishes because Manus Unidas employees had thorough consultations with Parish priests over the selection and registration of participants. By registering the less privileged enough engagement was done with the priests as captured in the quotes below.

“We were asked to set a criterion to select the less privileged people within our communities during Covid-19. Engagement was done with community stakeholders and an assessment was done” (Priest 3).

“Yes, the parishes did the assessment together with Caritas Makeni to determine the less privileged people” (Parish priest 1)

“The parish was fully involved in every phase of the project even before Covid-19. The engagement happened with the parish priest and other local actors before the implementation, and we took the lead in the communities” (Parish Priest 2).

Other local actors involved also spoke about the engagement of parish priests in the implementation of the project. For example, in the quotes below, beneficiaries and Caritas Makeni employees also confirmed that.

“The bigger chunk of the process of selecting the beneficiaries was under the control of the parish priests and they did a commendable job on that” (Caritas Makeni employee 1).

“As a beneficiary, I had the confidence that the parish priests would select only the genuine beneficiaries so that no genuine cases would be left out and that is what happened” (Beneficiary 6).

In these quotes, the respondents stated there was full involvement of the parish priests in the whole process including the selection of the right beneficiaries.

In the Global Mentoring Initiative (GMI) (2023) framework, the theme of engagement of local actors relates to the localization strategy of the participation of affected people. Under this strategy, the framework suggests that affected people should be actively involved in the assessment of needs, and have a say in how assistance is prioritised, the nature and quality of the assistance and the identification of beneficiaries. Manos Unidas values the participation of local actors as part of its protocols because it leads to project success, hence the involvement of parish priests in the project.

The findings that parish priests were involved in the project are congruent with established findings such as Macarthy et al., (2017) who state that faith-based organizations normally work in collaboration with civil society groups to empower people by providing them with sensitization, relief supplies, advocacy, and capacity building. However, in a contrary study, Plan International (2018) argues that although localization of community support is important not all of it can be put in the hands of local actors.

The involvement of parish priests in the project to support communities affected by COVID-19 may be understood on the background of the network theory. Based on this theory, there is a need for coordinated and integrated actions for effective humanitarian response (Cachia & Holgado Ramos, 2020). A consistent study by Barbelet et al. (2021) found that the IHO also has the advantage of relinquishing part of the burden of running the project and since local humanitarian responders understand the local populations better, they can easily win their acceptance, support, and collaboration as opposed to the IHO dealing with local beneficiaries directly.

The results show that the involvement of parish priests in selecting beneficiaries helped to strengthen localization. Therefore, from these findings, IHOs in Sierra Leone can learn why it is important to have local actors select beneficiaries in any project that is based on localization.

Participating in the distribution of food and non-food items

All 6 parish priests confirmed their participation in transporting and distributing food and other items to the beneficiaries.

“We were very much involved in the transportation and distribution of the items needed by those affected by COVID-19” (Parish Priest 4).

“The parish priests were fully involved in every phase of the project including the bishop of the parish of Makeni” (Caritas employee, 1).

These quotes are an indicator of the involvement of parish priests in food distribution, a task that was very important for the delivery of the project.

“The parish was fully involved in every phase of the project even before Covid-19. We were specifically concerned about the support reaching the affected people and we made sure it was done” (Parish priest 5).

Involving Parish priests in food distribution was a strategy that could have been borrowed from past practices and localization frameworks such as the GMI. The GMI framework suggests that local actors must be facilitated by IHOs by providing them with skills and resources, fostering a supportive environment, and advocating for their involvement. The localization strategy of involving local actors in humanitarianism is supported in past literature. In pushing this argument, Fasuluku, (2021) argues that CSOs and local faith-based organizations have emerged as crucial players in supporting affected people such as women and the youth to recover from disasters. The local actor participation strategy has the advantage of bringing skills and valuable opinions from local actors to the project. Furthermore, local actors also understand the national laws, and working conditions better than the IHO and they can advise the IHO on how best to run projects locally.

However, an inconsistent study by Plan International (2018) shows that this localization strategy has the disadvantage of making the IHO spend extra resources to facilitate local humanitarian responders they are working with. A congruent study by the OECD (2017) also indicates that a lack of understanding and weak collaboration between the IHO and the local actors may create delays and even abandonment of the project. These challenges were also evident in Manos Unidas’ project.

Food distribution having been done effectively by parish priests was a sign that local actors should be given a chance by IHOs to give out the support that affected communities need. These results provide prove to IHOs in Sierra Leone that they can advance localization by having local actors distribute food, non-food items and other needed support to those in need.

5.3.3 Engagement of Program Beneficiaries

Involvement in needs assessment

All the project beneficiaries (n=6) stated that they were allowed to be part of the needs assessment process. The quotes below are an indication that the beneficiaries were satisfied with the way they were allowed to take part in the project.

“As a community member, the local actors are always with us, and they usually work for the interest of the people. They help in the implementation of humanitarian projects and involve the people in every activity” (Beneficiary 2)

“The involvement of the affected populations in the implementation of the project at the community level was a welcoming approach” (Beneficiary 6).

As evident in the quotes below, the beneficiaries may not have expected to be involved in any part of project implementation and therefore, their being involved was something they received with joy.

“I was very happy to have my voice heard in this project because in other similar projects, the beneficiaries only wait to receive the support and nothing else” (Beneficiary 1).

“I took part in assessing the level of need in the community and that made me feel really great because I felt that my contribution added to the success of the project” (Beneficiary 5).

The findings show that local actor participation in the localization strategy was successful. This study echoes the findings of Fabre & Gupta (2017) who state that IHOs should promote local actor participation by creating platforms and opportunities where beneficiaries can add their voices and influence policies and initiatives. That would add to the success of the project since appropriate strategies will be applied in meeting the needs of the population. In another consistent study, Kamara et al. (2022) found that community engagement for purposes of community growth, empowerment, and development is a priority for organizations involved in supporting communities. The principle of Grand Bargain seeks to include recipients of aid whenever decisions affecting these recipients are being made (IASC, 2023). The GMI framework forms a strong basis for the local actor participation strategy employed in this project.

From the results in this section, IHOs all over Sierra Leone will understand the need for having beneficiaries take part in projects that are designed to benefit them because this is an important way of strengthening localisation.

Involvement in the identification and registration of Covid-19 survivors

All 6 beneficiaries spoke about their role in identifying and registering genuine COVID-19 survivors. The beneficiaries played a role in ensuring that only the right people benefited from the project. As shown in the quotes below, they helped weed out impostors.

“We were tasked with helping to identify the real candidates who needed help and we did exactly that” (Beneficiary 2).

“It was feared that people who did not deserve to be supported would sneak their names into the list and ruin the project. We helped identify such impostors and exposed them” (Beneficiary 5).

The task of identifying those affected could not have been successful without the input of the community members themselves. Therefore, their involvement could not have been avoided. From the point of view of the beneficiaries, the task of identifying those who deserved to be supported was not meant for outsiders because it was difficult, and it required people who knew much about the village.

“I knew it was not going to be possible for people who don’t stay in our village to know who was really qualified for the support and who did not. That is why I volunteered to identify and register the Covid-19 survivors” (Beneficiary 1).

“Registration of the beneficiaries was not an easy task, but we worked as a team to ensure that it was done within the estimated time” (Beneficiary 4).

Their involvement in the registration of the affected people helped to weed out impostors and establish a genuine list of beneficiaries.

Past studies also support the involvement of local actors in humanitarian project implementation. For example, IASC (2023) reports that the participation revolution element of the localization framework as a principle of the Grand Bargain seeks to include recipients of aid whenever decisions affecting these recipients are being made. The participation of beneficiaries in the project gets its credence from the GMI framework which suggests that local actors should be given duties such as needs assessment, program design, budget planning, and other aspects of the program cycle.

Only local people knew who had been affected by Covid-19 and who rightfully needed support. The findings provide evidence that IHOs in Sierra Leone should involve local people in choosing beneficiaries because they know one another and can help to identify those who are truly in need of help.

Summary

Involving Caritas Makeni employees, parish priests and beneficiaries and including their views in the implementation of the project contributed a lot to the success of the project.

Participation was made possible through engagement and project flexibility. A flexible program allowed for the adjustment of the budget so that the needs of more affected people could be accommodated. However, not all the views of local players were taken into account especially when it became costly to implement them.

5.4 Implications of local actor participation in the Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized Covid-19 response

The analysis of the data set revealed that the participation of local actors had implications for the response to Covid-19 by Unidas and Caritas Makeni such as supplying food effectively, raising awareness, and reducing the level of stigmatization for Covid-19 survivors.

5.4.1 Successful Registration of Beneficiaries

Most of the respondents (n=21) talked positively about the outcome of the registration exercise. They lauded the involvement of parish priests for having worked hard to ensure registration of beneficiaries succeeded. From the point of view of the beneficiaries, registration was done well and within the planned time.

“We did not experience major challenges during the registration process, and we knew that the priests did due diligence on the matter” (Beneficiary 6).

“The process of registration took a shorter time than I expected, and we enjoyed it. The guidance of the priests was a valuable aspect that helped us work faster” (Beneficiary 4).

In these quotes, the respondents testify of the effectiveness of the registration process and how quickly it was accomplished.

The participation of priests in the process of registration of beneficiaries led to success because the priests have knowledge about the local people they serve in the parishes. They are also skilled in dealing with local populations because they are spiritual leaders. Both the parish priests and Caritas Makeni employees confirmed that priests had valuable and necessary knowledge about the people living in the targeted communities.

“The Catholic parish priests have valuable knowledge about the local people, and they also have mobilization skills which they applied in registering the beneficiaries” (Caritas Makeni employee 5).

“Since we have been involved in similar projects in the past, we as priests who work among the local people have experience that we gladly lend to this project hence the success it realized” (Parish Priest 3).

The effective participation of beneficiaries and priests in the registration of affected people was a sign that local actor participation is a workable localization strategy. Previous studies provide proof of the effectiveness of this strategy for humanitarian localization. For instance, the European Commission (2023) recommends equitable partnerships with local or national actors as an efficient mode of delivery of humanitarian response. The GMI framework also lends credence to the involvement of local actors in humanitarian projects. It suggests that instead of the IHO, the local humanitarian responder should oversee needs assessment, program design, budget planning, and other aspects of the program cycle such as registration of beneficiaries as is the case in this project.

5.4.2 Effective food distribution

Most of the respondents (n=15) stated that the process of food distribution was done effectively. Both Caritas Makeni and Manos Unidas employees attested to this fact.

“We managed to contribute to the food security and resilience of vulnerable individuals and quarantined households in the fight against COVID-19” (Caritas Makeni employee 4)

“Looking at the feedback received from the parishes, it was vividly clear that the overall goal and outcomes set out for food distribution were attained” (Manos Unidas employee 3).

From the perspective of the beneficiaries, proper food distribution was an indicator of the success of the project which was partly credited to the involvement of local actors.

The beneficiaries also supported this observation as they noted that not many complaints were raised about the implementation of the project.

“There were not many complaints from the beneficiaries about food distribution. The exercise was done excellently and in record time and all of us received the support we needed” (Beneficiary 3).

Although food distribution went on smoothly, so many people wanted to be supported leading to shortages that necessitated budget adjustments. In such situations, slight delays in food deliver were experienced. However, as evidenced in the quotes below, a solution was devised in good time.

“We were told to wait for some time because the food ended before we got our share. However, that was not much of a problem to us” (Beneficiary 5).

“Although the food got exhausted due to the overwhelming needs of the people, we organized for fresh supplies and the people received them without much delay” (Caritas Makeni employee 2).

The involvement of local actors led to satisfactory food distribution. The localization strategy is premised on the GMI framework which supports the involvement of local actors in project implementation (GMI 2023). Established studies also provide evidence of the effectiveness of local actor participation as a humanitarian localization strategy. According to OECD, (2017) the call for the localization of humanitarianism, notes that the empowerment of local humanitarian responders should not be a mere donation of funds to them. Rather, it should involve fair partnership where local humanitarian respondents are involved in program design, leadership, budget planning of the humanitarian programs, and implementation.

5.4.3 Provision of Valuable Psychosocial Support

All 6 beneficiaries said that they had benefitted greatly from the psychosocial support provided.

“We had serious issues to do with stigma but through the support given, we managed to recover from psychological problems” (Beneficiary 5).

“I lost my husband to COVID-19 and that hit me hard. I had not recovered after several months but the counseling I received has helped me to heal faster” (Beneficiary 6).

Manos Unidas also commended the outcome of the project as shown in the quotes below. The donor praised the success of the process of providing psychosocial support to victims of Covid-19.

“The targeted number of people reached was phenomenal. Caritas Makeni are in constant touch with the Parish Priests so as to follow up on the psychosocial counseling that was done” (Manos Unidas employee 6)

“Covid-19 had a very bad impact on the survivors but the psychosocial support they received played a big role in helping them to regain normalcy” (Manos Unidas employee 4).

Having participated in counseling the COVID-19 victims, the priests also spoke about the joy they received for having successfully helped the less privileged.

“The task of counseling those who were affected did not leave me with any regrets because it was so fulfilling” (Parish Priest 2).

The participation of beneficiaries, priests, and the employees of Caritas Makeni led to the effective delivery of psycho-social support to COVID-19 victims. Local actor participation in this project has a basis in the GMI framework which proposes greater involvement

of local actors in project implementation. Manos Unidas has practiced local actor participation in many projects with success. The implications of this localization strategy have also been discussed in established studies. A consistent study by Macarthy et al. (2017) found that localization is a crucial aspect of the work of donors to function in a more effective way across the development-humanitarian link. Another congruent study by Erdilmen & Sosthenes (2020), suggests that greater engagement of local humanitarian responders brings diverse experiences, approaches, and skills which are all important for desirable outcomes.

IHOs in Sierra Leone will use these results as a basis for policy development in matters of involvement of local actors. The successful project outcomes discussed in this section should motivate IHOs to engage local actors and beneficiaries more in their projects.

Summary

The registration, distribution of food and provision of psychosocial support created opportunities for them to put their knowledge and skills to work and invest their time in the project. They helped to identify the needy, designed the distribution strategy and evaluation forms, and determined the needs of the people. It also led to some positive outcomes such as increased awareness about Covid-19 and a lower level of stigmatization for Covid-19 victims. Local actors also assisted the affected people to maintain hope and integrate fully into the community.

5.5 Factors that influenced the participation of local actors in Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized COVID-19 response.

The analysis of the data set produced a theme which was named “influencing factors.”

The implementation of local actor participation in Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized COVID-19 response came under the influence of social, economic, and political factors. The theme was divided into three key subthemes namely, social factors, economic factors, and political factors.

5.5.1 Social factors

Many of the respondents (n=9) discussed the social factors that influenced the participation of local actors in the project. From the point of view of the beneficiaries, some of the prominent factors featured in the responses included the size of the communities and the involvement of more women than men in the project.

“Yes, some communities are big, but others are small, and the size actually influences the involvement of local actors. More women were involved in the implementation of the project than men (Beneficiary 3).

“There were many women than men benefiting from the project, and we suspected that this affected the project in a way because men were also affected” (Parish Priest 6).

In these two quotes, more women took part in the project than men. From the perspective of the beneficiaries, this happened probably because women were more affected by Covid-19 than men. The respondents did not discuss the impact of more women than men taking part but according to the parish priests, the lesser number of men compared to women may have affected the project negatively since they also suffered from Covid-19.

The size of the community was an important determining factor for the number of local actors involved. Larger communities had more local actors taking part than smaller communities.

The Manos Unidas employees also noted that the respect given to cultural norms and values also contributed to the success of the participation of local actors in the project.

“People who take up responsibility in their various communities and were also recommended by community stakeholders were involved in the process. Cultural norms and values were respected and followed but they had an influence on the involvement of local actors in all the communities” (Manos Unidas employee 4).

The quote above indicates that by community stakeholders recommending people to take different responsibilities in the project, the participation of local actors was also enhanced.

Some of the respondents (n=5) identified certain factors that were limiting to the project. When asked to explain further, the respondents mentioned limitations such as difficulties in reaching some community members due to a change of location and bad road network, a very long chain of command and bias in the selection of beneficiaries. Manos Unidas personnel also had communication challenges with local actors.

“Change of environment by community members and some communities were hard to reach by local actors but transportation support was given to them” (Beneficiary 6).

As shown in the quote above, some affected community members could not be reached because they had changed their environment. The change of location meant that local actors spent a lot of time and resources trying to trace the affected people so that they could give them the support they had for them.

“Yes, the chain of command was too long with the involvement of many people before the support could reach the people in their respective communities” (Caritas employee 2).

“There were challenges in the communication aspect, it was too difficult to communicate directly with the local actor throughout the implementation period” (Manos Unidas 3).

As expressed in the above quotes, Caritas Makeni employees observed that a long chain of command probably meant that support intended for the suffering people was delayed since permission had to be granted at every step of project implementation. Added to the communication challenges, the delay was compounded.

Social factors in this project relate to the localization strategy of the engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting. The localization strategy in the GMI framework recommends the engagement of affected people in humanitarian policy development and standard setting. However, as shown in the findings, that may be hindered by social factors. The presence of more women than men is a good indicator of success because from the onset the project targeted women and the disabled. Therefore, the localization strategy worked because in the assessment period, women gave their opinions on how best the project should be conducted. Furthermore, larger communities contributed more representatives than smaller communities. In past studies, social factors were found to influence the participation of local actors in humanitarian projects one way or the other. A consistent study by Gardner & Lewis (1996) emphasizes the effect of social factors such as communication on project implementation. In another study, Kamara et al. (2022) discuss the need for observing social factors such as the level of vulnerability of women as a factor that should shape humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, a study by Zibani (2016) discusses the triple burden that women face due to the triple role they play in the society. Women are engaged in domestic work, adult care, childbearing, rearing, taking care of the sick, and health-related work. The triple burden of women may have exposed more women than men to Covid-19 necessitating their involvement in the project as the prime target.

The study findings in this section have implications for research and practice. Scholars and researchers may use them to enrich their own studies in the future. Local actors and IHOs will also find them useful for project policy development, decision-making, and implementation of their humanitarian projects.

5.5.2 Economic factors

Most of the respondents (n=8) stated that there were economic factors that affected the implementation of local actor participation in the project by either hindering or facilitating

that participation. From the perspective of the donor and the parish priests, the prioritization of food and non-food items, the hiring of motorbikes, and the provision of vehicles to transport these products was very important.

“During the distribution of the food and non-food items, we hired some motorbikes to transport items to hard-to-reach communities” (Manos Unidas employee 4).

“Yes, there were economic factors that facilitated the participation of local actors such as the provision of vehicles which helped us to reach many communities and many people benefited from the project” (Priest 2).

However, as stated by Caritas Makeni employees, other economic factors such as financial constraints became a limiting factor to project effectiveness.

“The budget was limited to some extent because not everyone who wanted assistance could be accommodated” (Carita Makeni employee 4).

“Due to financial constraints, we supported only those who were registered because so many people needed our help” (Priest 1)

The quotes above identify the provision of transport means to ferry food and non-food items to the affected and hard-to-reach people as an important economic factor that motivated local actors to participate in the project. Vehicles and motorbikes made the work of local actors easier because they facilitated their movement from one place to another.

The IHO provided vehicles and motorbikes for transportation hence making the work of local actors more manageable. The IHO also focused on supporting the affected with food and non-food items but due to financial constraints it was not possible to extend its budget. The influence of economic factors on project implementation is based on the GMI framework which supports financial investment as a way of facilitating local actors. This study replicates the findings of GMI (2023) which suggests that economic factors have the power to promote or hinder a humanitarian project. The author states that the availability of funds favors local actor participation and vice versa. This idea is corroborated in a consistent study by Gardner & Lewis (1996) who describe a level of participation where community members are involved in actual project activities by providing labor or funds to be used.

These findings will be useful to IHOs for understanding the potential that economic factors have to influence their projects. Researchers and other scholars will also draw insight from them about the possibility and way politics can influence their humanitarian assistance projects.

5.5.3 Political factors

Some respondents (n=6) identified political factors as well that influenced the participation of local actors in the implementation of the project. One important factor discussed was the role played by the political wing in governance.

According to the parish priests the political wing was effective in playing the role of governance and facilitating humanitarian support. “Yes, the political wings govern the people and also give room to humanitarian organizations. It is the responsibility of the state to handle the welfare issues of the people in any crisis or emergency. The project complemented the efforts of government” (Priest 1).

The respondent quoted above recognized the governance role played by politicians. The political wing gave room for the program to be undertaken.

From the viewpoint of the beneficiaries and Manos Unidas employees, the project received the support of the political wing, and no sabotage was witnessed.

“There was no political interference, but every community head was involved in the process and their contribution was positive” (Manos Unidas employee 5).

Political heads and community stakeholders contributed to successfully implement the project during COVID-19” (Beneficiary 3).

The respondent quoted above lauded the role played by community heads which contributed to the success of the project.

Although politics was not used to influence the project, the IHO had to meet all its obligations to the government such as obtaining permission and making notifications to be allowed to implement the project.

“We were compelled to obey the law of the land to avoid having the project politicized to the detriment of the affected populations” (Manos Unidas employee 2).

The findings of the study in this section show that the participation of local actors was helped by the absence of political interference. The study found that the political wing gave its support to the project and politicians did not interfere with its implementation and that contributed to its effectiveness. The study implies that humanitarian support projects are subject to factors of political nature and that IHOs and the local actors involved should consider such influence and its contribution to project success or failure. From this study, IHOs and local actors will gain knowledge on how their projects are either hindered or promoted by political factors.

The results of this study echo the those of a past study by OXFAM (2016) which suggests that the participation of local actors and humanitarian responders is never 100 percent effective because it is often hindered by certain factors such as political interference. A congruent study by Khan & Kontinen (2022) cited political interference in humanitarian efforts as a factor that hinders local participation. However, in the present study, political interference was not found to be a strong hindrance to the localization of humanitarianism.

These findings may supply background information for researchers and other people studying similar topics. Information about political influence can help to strengthen decision-making, planning, and implementation of projects leading to more successful localization efforts and humanitarian response. An understanding of the potential of political support or meddling can be used to strategize for localization efforts.

Summary

As seen from the responses, local actor participation came under the influence of social factors such as the size of the communities and the involvement of more women than men in the project. Where the community was large, the participation of local actors increased because the number of affected people who need support was large. A smaller community required lesser participation of local actors. Economic factors including the prioritization of food and non-food items, the hiring of motorbikes and provision of vehicles to transport these products all of which call for increased involvement of local actors came into play because of the volume and complexity of logistical activities involved. Finally, support promoted the participation of local actors.

5.6 Improvement of Local Actor Participation in the Localization of humanitarianism

Although Manos Unidas and Caritas Makeni have been generally successful in their localization efforts as seen from the project, there remains room for improvement on the current practices in the Sierra Leone context. Improvement can be achieved by working on the challenges encountered in the project and the partnership between Caritas Makeni and Manos Unidas so that future projects can run smoothly without major setbacks. Several themes were generated from the data set analysis. These themes embroiled elements of greater engagement of local actors and increased investment in the institutional capacities of local actors.

5.6.1 Motivating Local Actors

Most of the respondents believed local actors such as parish priests and Caritas Makeni needed to be motivated more for them to maximize their participation in projects funded by Manos Unidas. They discussed the lack of motivation that local actors suffer as a key reason why some efforts made towards the localization of humanitarianism encounter serious challenges Sierra Leone. Among other factors, communication challenges, and lack of adequate engagement with some stakeholders in the community were cited. This was also captured in the quote below.

“Timely communication and proper engagement with community stakeholders in the project were huge contributions to the success of the project. Empowerment of local actors by giving them appropriate information affords them the needed motivation for full participation. Future projects should have communication done in an even better way and stakeholders engaged fully” (Caritas employee 2).

The respondents also discussed the issue of sensitization and education. This would also be a motivator for local actors because through it, local communities can get knowledge and awareness about the activities of local actors and that would make them receive and support the activities of local actors.

“Thorough sensitization and education of people on local actor-participation. Proper and meaningful engagement and medical facilities for local actors in their various communities” (Beneficiary 1).

“Education is important because not many local responders understand what they are supposed to do in such projects. Educating them on their role can improve partnership and project outcomes (Beneficiary 2).

The quotes provide support for sensitizing people and educating them on what local actors do and their importance. Such sensitization helps local actors themselves as well as the community they are serving.

“If not for the seminars we attended, I would not be taking part in this project because initially I thought it would be a very daunting task” (Parish Priest 6).

Local actors must be motivated for them to perform. As evidenced in the responses, the priests, Caritas employees, and beneficiaries talked about sensitization, proper communication, and education. These practices are underscored by the GMI framework which suggests stronger inclusion of local actors in projects. The localization strategy followed in motivation is the local actor participation strategy which has also been supported in established studies

such as Warleigh (2001) who discusses the empowerment of local actors by IHOs. In a congruent study, Gardner & Lewis (1996) recommend IHOs availing information about a particular project to the public through avenues such as formal dialogue to encourage them to participate. Effective communication and education can become an impetus for local actors to gain interest in a project.

From these results, students, researchers, and policymakers in the humanitarian field will gain knowledge on how to reinforce localization in Sierra Leone through motivation. IHOs will also benefit from the same knowledge so that they can better motivate and partner with local actors.

Summary

The study shows that improvement in local actor participation was achieved through motivation and forging stronger partnerships between IHOs and local actors. Motivation happens through education and sensitization as well as by communicating effectively with all stakeholders. Communication done in good time helps to strengthen the partnership. It is also an important ingredient of transparency and accountability.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

The findings in this study revealed various factors that promote the participation of local actors in the partnership between Caritas Makeni and Manos Unidas. There is a need for engagement with affected populations, parish priests, and other local actors. The flexibility that allows the project to be adjusted was also discussed as an important practice that enhances local actor participation. The project should allow for adjustments around budgeting and to accommodate the needs of the community especially those affected by the disaster.

The involvement of parish priests in registration of beneficiaries and distribution of food and the evaluation and counselling that was done by Caritas Makeni employees among other tasks were necessary for giving them an opportunity to contribute to the project. In turn, their involvement led to different benefits and positive outcomes. The study identified benefits such as enhanced awareness, lower stigmatization for Covid-19 survivors, and the provision of assistance to the affected people to maintain their faith and hope and integrate properly in the rest of the community.

The implementation of local actor participation in Unidas and Caritas Makeni's localized COVID-19 response came under the influence of factors of a social, economic, and political nature. Social factors include the size of the community and the participation of more women than men. More women than men contributed to increased local actor participation because it was an indicator that one of the goals of the project (women were among the targets) had been met.

Economically, the provision of transport for local actors to deliver food and non-food items promoted project effectiveness. However, the lack of enough funds became a limiting factor to the implementation of the project. The absence of political interference boosted the participation of local actors since it created a peaceful environment for work.

Improvement of local actor participation can be achieved through stronger engagement where local actors get more motivation and enhance their partnership with the funding organization. The study also shows that it is necessary to have increased investment in the institutional capacities of local actors especially in the areas of capacities for response and coordination of local actors. In the present study, there was a need for more investment in local actors to make them more effective in attending to the needs of the people affected by Covid-19.

6.2 Reflections on key Findings and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future research

Most of the findings of this study were expected. Prior to the data collection and analysis process, I expected to find from the study that local participation is important and has benefits, but it can either be promoted or hindered by certain social, economic, and political factors. The findings of this study may be used to inform policy development to guide the partnerships between IHOs and local actors and to improve the localization of humanitarianism. The findings may be used by students, scholars, and other researchers as a background for their own research. International humanitarian organizations as well as local actors will find these research results useful for their operations and collaboration with local actors. Similarly, local actors can use these findings to understand how best they can improve their participation in humanitarian projects funded by international organizations.

While conducting this study, especially during data collection, questions about the methods of selecting local actors who have integrity and a genuine desire to take part in projects that benefit people who are affected came up. Therefore, future research should investigate the factors considered by IHOs in choosing local actors to work with and the qualities that make local actors suitable for effective localization of humanitarianism. Methods for full engagement of local actors and collaboration between these actors and IHOs raised unanswered questions during data collection. Past studies such as Barbelet et al., (2021) suggest that the relationship between local actors and IHOs should involve fair partnership so that local humanitarian responders are given roles in program design, budget planning and leadership of the humanitarian programs. However, in the Sierra Leonean context, giving such roles to local actors has not been found to be practical. Therefore, future research should delve into the possibilities and impediments of having smooth relations, workable partnerships, and effective collaborations between local actors and international Humanitarian Organizations.

6.3 Reflections on Limitations of the Methodology and Recommendations

The method used for this study is qualitative with a sample of only 24 people. Although the small sample was appropriate for the study, its findings cannot be fully generalized to the broader context since that may result in distortion and reduced credibility. The small sample implies that the results may not create an accurate representation of the perspectives of the

local actors and IHO. Due to that, care must be taken when generalizing the results to the wider context.

The use of critical case sampling to choose the five organizations and to form the sample of 10 respondents may have introduced bias in the study. Therefore, the study may have been affected by researcher bias and reflexivity. Data collection through interviews led to the collection of large quantities of data which were cumbersome during analysis. Interviewing also necessitated the hiring of an experienced interviewer but in view of limited resources, that did not happen. Consequently, this may have in a way negatively affected the quality of the data collected. Scarcity of skilled data analysts, finances may have impacted negatively on the quality of the findings.

As a remedy to these limitations, this study recommends that future studies on the same topic be conducted using the mixed methodology which can allow for a larger sample so that the findings are generalizable to a broader context. To avoid researcher bias, the development of the sample should be done using simple random sampling so that everyone in the population gets an opportunity to be selected to form the sample.

6.4 Concluding Comments

The limitations discussed notwithstanding, this study was conducted and completed well and without serious problems. The limitations did not have adverse effects on the quality of the study and its findings and therefore, the outcome of the research is credible and reliable. To take full advantage of the findings of this research, the recommendations made should be acted upon. Suggestions for future research should be implemented accordingly because the outcome of such future studies will help to complement the findings of this research which I find a bit difficult whilst conducting the study at the initial point.

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