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Reinforce local responders' capacities to implement integrated programs to ensure complementarity of humanitarian and development actions

Reforzar las capacidades locales para implementar programas integrados que garanticen la complementariedad entre lo humanitario y el desarrollo

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KEYWORDS

WeWorld-GVC; Community protection approach; Aid Volunteers; EU.

ABSTRACT The article provides an account of WeWorld-GVC organic program to reinforce local responders' capacities to act in the increasingly complex crisis. An action-research process, started in 2013 and involving different organizations in Lebanon, Libya and Central America, has been instrumental to the design of a Community Protection Approach (CPA): a people-centered system of analysis, programming and monitoring of causal factors of people's needs and problems to enact humanitarian and development interventions in an integrated protection strategy. However, a methodology for programming is irrelevant if not inscribed in a structural and organic strategy to work with the —limited— capacities of local actors and responders. To this intent, WWGVC triggered since 2017 two organic capacity building programs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and in the Latina America and the Caribbean (LAC), funded by the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

PALABRAS CLAVE

WeWorld-GVC; Enfoque de protección comunitaria; Voluntariado; UE.

RESUMEN El artículo presenta el programa de WeWorld-GVC para el refuerzo de las capacidades locales ante las cada vez más complejas crisis. En 2013 comenzó

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un proceso de investigación-acción que involucró a diferentes organizaciones en El Líbano, Libia y Centroamérica y que fue fundamental para el diseño de un Enfoque de Protección Comunitaria (CPA por sus siglas en inglés): un sistema centrado en las personas y dirigido al análisis, la programación y el monitoreo de los factores causales de las necesidades y problemas de las personas, que permite implementar intervenciones humanitarias y de desarrollo desde una estrategia de protección integrada. En todo caso, cualquier metodología de programación resulta irrelevante si no está inscrita en una estrategia estructural y orgánica que trabaje con las —limitadas— capacidades de los actores locales. Con este propósito, WWGVC puso en marcha en 2017 dos programas de fortalecimiento de capacidades en Medio Oriente y África del Norte y en América Latina y el Caribe (ALC), financiados por la iniciativa del Voluntariado Europeo.

MOTS CLÉS

WeWorld-GVC; Approche communautaire de la protection; Volontariat; UE.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article présente le programme WeWorld-GVC pour le renforcement des capacités locales face à des crises de plus en plus complexes. En 2013, un processus de recherche-action impliquant différentes organisations au Liban, en Libye et en Amérique centrale a été lancé et a joué un rôle fondamental dans la conception d'une approche communautaire de la protection (ACP): un système centré sur la population qui vise à analyser, programmer et surveiller les facteurs causals des besoins et des problèmes des populations, permettant la mise en œuvre d'interventions humanitaires et de développement à partir d'une stratégie intégrée en matière de protection. En tout état de cause, toute méthodologie de programmation n'est pas pertinente si elle ne s'inscrit pas dans une stratégie structurelle et organique qui travaille avec les capacités —limitées— des acteurs locaux. A cette fin, le WWGVC a lancé en 2017 deux programmes de renforcement des capacités au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord et en Amérique latine et dans les Caraïbes (ALC), financés par l'Initiative européenne du volontariat.

WeWorld GVC has been working on ensuring that communities and local actors are equipped to respond to the needs and problems of the population. Since 2013 in particular, the organization has been identifying pressing needs common to the countries in which it is providing humanitarian and development assistance. Local responders, in the front line in the provision of support to the population, are increasingly short in capacities to respond to the complexities of crisis. In addition, WeWorld GVC itself, commonly to the aid international community, had to substantially revisit

its standard approaches to ensure more consistency between short-term life-saving interventions and long-term actions to reduce chronic vulnerability and poverty.

In the wake of this conjuncture, WeWorld GVC has decided to run an extensive exercise to design a model of support to local responders while, at the same time, studying a model to guarantee integrated programming that would actively empower communities and local actors. The results led to the design of an approach purposely enabling more effective and lasting strategies to reduce aid dependence, by placing self-reliance of the affected population at its core. In parallel it brought to the decision to expand the network of local responders through a south-south model, thanks to the support of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. This European program aims at strengthening the capacities and resilience of vulnerable communities in southern countries through the deployment of European volunteers and capacity building activities, reinforcing the capacities of local organizations to respond to humanitarian crises. WeWorld GVC has a strong experience since the pilot phase of the program, having deployed almost 150 volunteers and implementing several capacity building activities in Linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and resilience building. In this perspective, WeWorld GVC has been developing and sharing tools and methods in order to improve the capacity of the organizations in protecting the most vulnerable populations based on Community Protection Approach (CPA).

The CPA is a community¹ engagement and empowerment instrument to design Integrated Protection Programs (IPP) and provides operational tools to facilitate complementarity of diverse foreign aid and national instruments to find sustainable solutions for the needs of a given population. The CPA is designed to ensure right-based analysis and humanitarian standards for people in need, while setting the basis for a transitional strategy to provide a more integrated approach able to respond holistically, comprehensively and impartially to protection-sensitive needs in the areas of intervention.

It embeds standard activities of project and programme management, to allow the implementation of humanitarian and/or development projects. The objective is to provide a system of work for local and international organization that can respond to the administrative and procedural requests of donors, overcoming the limitations of projects' cycle in reinforcing local capacities and empower population. The CPA therefore runs in complementarity to projects and program cycles in each given context.

The design of approaches to perform people-centered risk-informed analysis of the structural drivers of needs and vulnerability is a relentless interest of the international

¹ Community represents a group of people that may be exposed to similar physical, psychological, and/or social impacts from multiple coercive factors and/or share the same resources, often, but not exclusively, related by place.

aid community (DG-ECHO, 2016; OECD, 2019; VOICE, 2018). An interest driven by the necessity to find more suitable approaches to meet needs and address vulnerabilities in a durable and sustainable manner in increasingly complex scenarios.

In this context WeWorld GVC decided to apply a participatory action-research process to design the CPA. The starting point saw an intensive exchange and peer-review exercise with local and international partners in the occupied Palestinian territories. This initial collaborative design based on program operations had been then scaled up, to ensure a more rigorous and scientific design, able to respond to the—limited—capacities of local actors. In January 2018, a dedicated Task Force had been established to start engaging actively partners in different countries in Middle East and Latin America. The active engagement included a constant action—partners and organization implementing tools and instruments in the field—and research—experts analyzing the ongoing feedback and review instruments for re-application in the field. The research process involved an extensive work of comparative analysis with existing international standards and existing approaches, and constant feedback and peer-review exercises in Tunisia, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

The approach

The CPA, in its nature, is designed to evolve and be modified according to the results on the field application. It has been subject to an academic validation by the University of Pavia as an instrument to ensure and foster complementarity, coordination and coherence between humanitarian and development actions. As an approach to support analysis, the CPA is as well flexible and adaptable to the conditions of each context, due to the understanding that the nature of each actor and situation differs and is complex. It therefore requires a method that reinforces capacities and molds to the condition of each actors implementing it.

WeWorld GVC identified that it is a common interest of all intervening actors to address root causes of vulnerabilities and risks, while responding to the most immediate needs, yet the reality of programming presents a wide range of structural limitations. Some of these limitations are linked to the mandate and nature of the organization, while others are result of the mechanisms of aid and the growing complexity of the contexts of interventions. A multi-sector, multi-level and integrated programmatic approach, combining the added value of each mechanism of aid at disposal, is however the essential standpoint to spearhead an effective change in responding to needs and vulnerabilities (ALNAP, 2018; Niland, Polastro, Donini & Lee, 2015; OECD, 2019).

Any approach to analysis, to be relevant, must be able to inform strategies of collaboration, coherence and complementarity to enact the comparative advantage of the best placed actor to meet needs and address risks of the population. It must be adaptable to routine programming, provide results to use rationally resources to

gain efficiencies (OECD, 2019), prioritize prevention and early recovery, promote durable solution while ensuring humanitarian needs to be met. All these objectives must however be achieved ensuring at all times the protection of individuals and communities (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2013)².

In order to then design a meaningful approach that can effectively support local responders in their daily operations, WeWorld GVC conducted an estimated total of 55 different consultations process between 2014 and April 2019, which included:

- 】 24 consultation processes internal to GVC.
- 】 10 consultation processes with Donors.
- 】 16 consultation processes with GVC Partners.
- 】 3 formal or institutional analysis external to GVC.
- 】 2 consultation processes with Academic Experts.

The consultation led to a set of study questions framing the results of the analysis of lessons learned and limitations, and guided the revision of CPA instruments and methodological approach:

- 】 What is the prevalence of threats, vulnerabilities and capacities in determining the coercive environment for a given population?
- 】 How can we undertake risk and vulnerability analysis given project and time constraints?
- 】 How can we elaborate regular, contextualized and easy-to-use monitoring of the multi-sector needs and problems of a given population?
- 】 What are the composition and dynamics of the population in designing an engagement and empowerment process that places the people at the center of the vulnerability and risk analysis?
- 】 How can we detect sensitive protection problems in complex contexts?
- 】 What combination of complementary actions by different actors can address the causal factors behind a given population's needs and problems?

2 "People-centred analysis, integrated programming and monitoring: results of an action-research to design an approach grounded on protection", F. Michele and J. Ibarguen, *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 2019 (under publication).

The participatory action-research guided by the proposed study questions led to definition of a set of principles governing the CPA³:

- 】 **Territorial Approach:** with the CPA approach “territory” becomes a dynamic entity made of formal and informal interactions. The CPA promotes a systemic method that understands root causes, maps and supports diversity of response capacities and reduces risks, and related needs, faced by population groups in the territory.
- 】 **Empowerment at the center:** the system of identification, planning and monitoring is built upon the objective of reducing aid dependency and increase the agency of the population. It provides effective guidance and instruments to ensure a continuous process of empowerment to reduce aid dependency, while providing assistance.
- 】 **Centrality of Protection:** protection is not only mainstreamed but used as the framework of analysis. It supports organizations in streamlining a protection risk analysis in standard phases of projects and programs and ensure the proper identification of the real drivers of vulnerabilities and social problems of a population. It additionally provides analysis and plans abiding with International Humanitarian Law, International Human Right Law and Refugee Law.
- 】 **Self-reliance and localized approach of the humanitarian and development Nexus:** It offers context specific multi-sector planning and analyses. The outputs are designed to facilitate the inclusion of affected population into national and/or external aid strategies. The analyses and plans are multi-sectors and multi-year to foster coordination and complementarity and reinforce the role of the affected population into decision-making mechanisms.
- 】 **Structured but modular:** it is a systematized approach in terms of steps and tools, supported by tailored guidance. It is however modular and offers the possibility to adapt one or multiple parts or methods to the context and the level of access to the population.

The CPA is able to produce several output representation modalities that are useful for analysis. The field design and testing looked specifically into ensuring that the outputs could contribute to the following:

- 】 **Effectively support the population in engaging actors in their own local strategies to address problems and needs.**

3 *CPA Handbook – Overview*, WWGVC, 2019, p. 18.

- 】 Provide data, in line with international standards, for INGOs, NGOs, CBOs and UN Agencies that are sector-specific for identification and monitoring.
- 】 Provide automatic evidence-based maps, situation analyses, situation reports and status updates.
- 】 Provide actors, including donors, with continuous situation and progress analyses. In particular, yearly monitoring of effects of planning, programs and strategies on a population, in order to apply corrections and ensure their relevancy.

The outputs are therefore multi-level and can be made available on an online web-based platform designed and optimized for multi-actor access. The platform can work with low internet connection and it is fully customizable to the needs, organogram and access level of each organization, and compliant with protection standards in data and information sharing. The Platform in particular had been specifically designed to be managed by non-specialize staff.

Organic capacity building of local actors

The current global debate to rethink the ways the international community is addressing needs and risks of affected population, identifying appropriate processes of capacity building is essential. It requires a constructive dialogue between field operators, policy makers, and donors to generate iterative learning on the basis of practice.

The involvement of affected population in interventions targeting their needs is deemed vital to success, together with increased and clearer cooperation among different actors. However, the organizations are generally confronted with several challenges requiring more capacity-building, specific resources, and flexibility in programming. Without rethinking how to address these challenges, the involvement of affected population and do what is needed to provide more comprehensive response will be a far cry from what is required.

Design a methodology for programming is therefore irrelevant, if it is not inscribed in a structural and organic strategy to work with the —limited— capacities of local actors and responders. To this intent, WWGVC triggered since 2017 two organic capacity building programs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and in the Latina America and the Caribbean (LAC), funded by the EU Aid Volunteers initiative. The support of EU Aid Volunteers deployed in these regions has been crucial: junior and senior volunteers have been supporting the processes with their professional skills, enhancing the cooperation with relevant humanitarian partners and local entities.

The goals of the organic capacity building process are:

- 】 Develop organizations' capacity in protecting the most vulnerable population in disaster affected and disaster prone countries.
- 】 Strengthening the local capacity, knowledge and skills on protection in disaster affected regions.

This process of capacity building involved several local organizations and a wider range of experts and local actors involved in peer-review processes.

At first WWGVC run a multi-country survey involving 52 local and international actors in MENA and LAC regions expressed their views on the status of involvement of affected population and the current limitations to effectively engage the population in the interventions targeting their needs. They manifested as well their opinion in outlining essential aspects and limitations to provide more comprehensive response to humanitarian and development needs of affected population. Finally, they expressed the specific capacity building needs they would need to effectively engage population and provide more comprehensive responses.

This initial exercise helped in tailoring the two years' process, including identifying the best approach of capacity building, and it was the basis to the elaboration of specific material to support local responders. The organic process was a combination of the following aspects:

1. Technical trainings
 - 】 One-off intensive training courses.
 - 】 Technical expertise and advice.
 - 】 Workshops or joined-up exercises facilitation.
2. Support and Observe
 - 】 Mentoring.
 - 】 Coaching.
 - 】 Signposting information and resources.
3. Capitalize and Disseminate
 - 】 Harvesting experiences.
 - 】 Peer Review.

The results of the organic processes led to the realization that WWGVC needs to apply an adaptive approach that must be applied to any tool and instrument of capacity building. The adaptive approach is essential to achieve effective reinforcement of local responders' capacities. Within the WWGVC current capacity building processes, this resulted in:

1. An iterative e-learning platform, specifically designed to exchange lessons and joint discussion south-south.
2. Guidelines pedagogically designed not to teach a subject (in WWGVC case, the CPA), but to pick and deepen specific aspects relevant to each single actor. This specifically entails
 - ▮ Precise guidance on how to contextualize tools and instruments.
 - ▮ Precise guidance and material on how to trickle down capacity building and training to staff and other partners.
3. A web-based management Platform, specifically designed to practically implement and simplify the aspects of capacity building (management, monitoring, analysis and programming) to mentor and coach, and create a positive cycle of peer-review of the instruments.

Conclusions⁴

The current protracted and complex nature of humanitarian crisis, resulting from prolonged conflicts, climate change consequences and recurrent cycles of population forced displacement has highlighted the necessity of re-think the aid mechanisms. In its report for the World Humanitarian Summit⁵, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon highlighted the struggle of local organizations to be seen as primary agents of response. This problematic is reflected in the Agenda for Humanity, which highlights in the *Core Responsibility Five: Invest in Humanity* the priority of investing in local capacities.

Reinforcing local capacities however needs structural change and a coordinated effort between donors and INGOs to deliver results. INGOs must prioritize and design specific methodologies and programs that starts from the limitations of local responders, involve them in the definition of the instruments and in the application of results. The WeWorld GVC experience shows that an INGO can assume a strong role in supporting localization, when it prioritizes it as part of the identity of its work and it is supported by dedicated financial mechanisms put forward by donors.

⁴ Some of the results of the process described in this article are available in www.cpainiative.org

⁵ *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility. Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit*, 31-01-2016, A/70/709.