



Towards **G**reater **E**ffectiveness and **T**imeliness
in **H**umanitarian **E**mergency **R**esponse



THE STATE OF LOCALISATION

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON EIGHT COUNTRY ASSESSMENTS

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This report is a compilation of findings from the other eight reports in *The State of Localisation Series*.

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This publication is an edited and shortened version of the research report.

DISCLAIMER

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ACRONYMS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
C4C	Charter for Change
CCONATH/D	Cadre de Concertation des ONGs Nationales Humanitaires et de Développement (South Kivu, DRC)
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EHF	Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund
ELNHA	Empowerment of Local and National Humanitarian Actors, Oxfam project
FOGG	Informal Friends of Gender Group for the Grand Bargain
FONHAD	Forum des Organisations Nationales des Actions Humanitaires pour le Développement (North Kivu, DRC)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GMI	Global Mentoring Initiative
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HCTT	Humanitarian Country Task Team
HUCOCA	Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis, Oxfam
IASC OPAG	Interagency Standing Committee's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group
ICR	Internal Cost Recovery
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex Persons
NAHAB	National Alliance of Humanitarian Agencies in Bangladesh
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIRAPAD	Network on Information, Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster
OD	Organisational Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OPAG	Interagency Standing Committee's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group
PoP	Principles of Partnership
PSEAH	Prevention of Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment



RRRC	Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (Bangladesh)
RONDH	Réseau des organisations nationales de développement et humanitaire - DRC
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SHF	Somalia Humanitarian Fund
STP	Shifting the Power project
ToGETHER	Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response Programme
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UN OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	UN Office for Project Services
WFP	World Food Programme
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit
WLO	Women-led Organisations
WRO	Women's Rights Organisations



INTRODUCTION

1.1 A COMPARATIVE LOOK

This report synthesises findings and insights from an assessment of ‘the state of localisation’ in eight countries, namely Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Somalia. The research was carried out by the Global Mentoring Initiative (GMI) and a team of researchers based in the participating countries of the Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response (ToGETHER) programme. It was commissioned by the ToGETHER Consortium of Caritas Germany, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, Malteser International and Welthungerhilfe. The analysis aims at informing the programme’s efforts to advance localisation in the respective countries. Furthermore, it is intended as a contribution to a wider translation into practice of the commitments that international agencies have made to support and reinforce, rather than replace, national and local crisis responders.

The guiding questions were:

- Which understandings of localisation of humanitarian aid exist among humanitarian actors?
- Which localisation initiatives and programmes took place or are taking place in the respective countries? Which initiatives and programs provide good practice?
- Where are in-country actors making good progress and what are the most significant challenges in the key areas of the localisation process - namely partnerships, financing, capacity development, coordination and complementarity, and gender?
- What institutional, policy and political dynamics influence these developments?

The questions invited a broad canvas or system perspective on the state of localisation. This provides an opportunity as it takes the localisation conversation beyond the bilateral relationships of an international relief actor and its partner(s). It also considers contextual constraining and enabling factors.

NGOs and CSOs were a primary focus of the inquiry. Their experience, perspectives and requests are deliberately given more attention in the reports, as those of international relief agencies have dominated the conversations and documents for decades.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The assessments were designed in June 2020, then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. All research work, except for some interviews in the eastern DRC, had to be carried out online between July and December 2020.

Sources and methods

The main sources for the country assessments are document reviews and semi-structured interviews with key informants. An initial document review was conducted to provide a basis for the interactive part of the exercise. A large number of relevant documents was found including studies prior to 2016 that would not have been framed under ‘localisation’. New documents were published while the interviews were being conducted.

A total of 252 key informants were interviewed individually and/or engaged in small group



conversations, with a fair balance between national/local agency staff and international ones, and 72 people, all national actors, responded to a survey. Given the primary orientation of the ToGETHER programme, most people interviewed were from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Civil Society Organisations (CSO).

1.3 THE SYNTHESIS REPORT

This synthesis report provides a comparative look at the results of the eight country surveys that have been conducted and reveals similar patterns of interaction between international and national/local actors. The analysis indicates that the operational practices of the international relief sector are shaped more by its internal sector ways of working than by contextual specificities, which is not so easy to see for those engaged in operational practices in specific contexts. While the political dynamics that shape that interaction can be more context-specific, the institutional and policy ones are more shaped by how the international relief sector functions today. This report first summarises the key findings for the core themes of localisation that the research looked into: meaning of localisation, partnerships, finance, capacities, coordination, and gender.

Lack of awareness and knowledge about localisation

Among national and local actors, many have not heard about the Grand Bargain and certain commitments, like localisation, that have direct implications for them. The lack of awareness is probably greater among governmental actors. There is a smaller or larger number of national/local CSO directors who are well acquainted with the [Grand Bargain](#), the [Charter for Change \(C4C\)](#) and sometimes also the 2007 [Principles of Partnership](#). Among international agencies, donors, UN and INGOs alike, who are the primary signatories of the Grand Bargain and/or the C4C, the Grand Bargain commitment to increase cash programming seems to have been the most embraced. The point of the 25 percent of funding going to national and local actors is best known, other indicators or objectives mentioned in the Grand Bargain, such as multi-year investment in institutional capacities of national actors, reducing their administrative burden and overall reducing transaction costs, are not.

The varying degrees of knowledge are closely related to the activism of national/local CSO leaders. Some of these were personally present at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, where they lobbied to get more practical recognition of national and local actors. That has helped push localisation onto the collective agenda in e.g. Somalia and Bangladesh, whereas it is not, still, in for example Colombia or the DRC. Among UN agencies, OCHA and the Global Protection Cluster are most visibly engaged. The country level visits of the Grand Bargain localisation workstream facilitation group raised some level of awareness and expectation.

Few spaces to discuss localisation

For the first 3.5 years after the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, there have been informal conversations about localisation among international agencies and among national/local CSOs in the various countries. But localisation has not been a systematic agenda item. Only since late 2019 there are more focused 'working groups' or 'task forces' on 'localisation' and/or 'partnership' beginning to emerge.

The nature of in-country conversations about localisation varies from country to country. In



some places, there is little active interest from international agencies (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo), in another the conversation is very tense (e.g. Bangladesh), elsewhere there is quite strong convergence between national and international actors to more intentionally advance or deepen localisation (e.g. Indonesia).

Various, sometimes half-explicit, understandings of the term localisation

Funding: For many, localisation is about 25 percent of global humanitarian funding going to local and national responders ‘as directly as possible.’

Capacity building vs. transformation: Among those with more explicit and articulated views, two major understandings could be detected. Broadly speaking, they lean towards different ends of a spectrum. One perspective sees localisation happening if and when national and local actors are able to approach or match the capabilities of international agencies. The second perspective sees localisation as a transformation of the prevailing dynamics between international and national/local relief actors, with a fairer sharing of resources and power, equitable partnership and, over time, a role change between national/local actors and international ones.

In practice, it will have elements of both:

LOCALISATION IS	LOCALISATION IS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the capacities to meet international standards • a technical issue • to improve the cost-effectiveness of the international relief sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the power to define what capabilities are relevant, to evaluate and judge, to control resources • a political issue • an agenda for the transformation of the political economy of the international relief sector

Crisis management through the collaborative efforts of local stakeholders: Another practical translation of ‘localisation’ heard in e.g. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo is that of a local level, integrated, multi-stakeholder, and bottom-up approach to crisis management. In Indonesia and Bangladesh, this corresponds to a specific government policy of decentralising national disaster management, with active roles also for government, and hence the local authorities. In the DRC, a ‘local’ (provincial) focus gained more strength when the Humanitarian Pooled Fund and its decision-making was decentralised.

Community leadership in crisis management: Finally, there is also an awareness that localisation should involve affected communities and communities at risk.

The need for localisation is the result of prior internationalisation

In most countries, we can identify key moments that triggered internationalisation: Ethiopian Somali refugees in Somalia in the 1980s; the influx of Rwandan refugees into eastern DRC in 1994; the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in Indonesia; the 2005 earthquake in north-east Pakistan; Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, and the larger-scale Rohingya refugee influx into Bangladesh in the autumn of 2017. In Colombia, with one of the longest running conflicts in the world, agencies like United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have been present for decades. It was the UN reform in 2005-2006, with the introduction of a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and



cluster system, that consolidated control and decision-making more strongly in the hands of international agencies.

If a few decades ago the build-up of an international aid agency presence was still somewhat slow and modest, in the past 20 years the sector has expanded so much that now the deployment of INGOs can happen much faster and on a much larger scale. At the same time, most of the countries reviewed as a consequence of large scale disasters/crises began to build and/or expand their own structures and resources for stronger disaster prevention and response on national and local level (disaster management authorities, disaster management plans). This has created a conflict between internationalisation and localisation.

In principle, four different operating modes for INGOs are feasible:

COMPREHENSIVE	The mainstay of the humanitarian sector and the result of a large-scale international mobilisation.
CONSTRAINED	An approach found where humanitarian space is limited by encroaching political interests, which can manifest themselves as legal, procedural but also security challenges. This creates complex, ambiguous, and challenging settings.
COLLABORATIVE	The international response works hand in hand with national and local actors. Domestic response capacities for coordination, management and delivery are of major importance.
CONSULTATIVE	Found in countries where there is considerable domestic capacity to respond to disasters. The international actors are called upon to fill specific gaps and niches in domestic capacity and are incorporated into the architecture of domestic response.

The ‘comprehensive’ response can be justified in times of major and fast onset crisis. The problem lies in how it plays out, and for how long. Rather than also supporting a strong ‘surge’ of national and local actors, the latter tend to be replaced and severely undermined as international agencies build up their own surge capacity at their expense. A permanent structural domination and subordination between international and national/local actors is the result. In this case, localisation is the process of reducing and reversing a prior phase of intense ‘internationalisation’ where international actors, in view of the then insufficient local capacities and structures, have taken over much of the decision-making, as this becomes less justified and counterproductive because the local situation has fundamentally changed. The shift from a ‘comprehensive’ response to a ‘collaborative’ and ‘consultative’ interaction, however, would inevitably deprive INGOs of a substantial part of their organisational capacities, funds, influence, and ultimately power.

Emerging spaces for focused discussion

Localisation is a periodic topic of discussion in some local or national networks of local/national agencies. Examples are the National Humanitarian Network and the Balochistan Development Network in Pakistan, the National Alliance of Humanitarian Agencies in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh CSO NGO Coordination Process and the Cox’s Bazar CSO and NGO Forum in Bangladesh, the Consortium of Christian Development Agencies in Ethiopia, and Forum des Organisations Nationales des Actions Humanitaires pour le Développement (FONHAD) in North Kivu and Cadre de Concertation des ONGs Nationales Humanitaires



et de Développement (CCONATH/D) in South Kivu in the DRC. The Somalia NGO Consortium, which includes both Somali and international NGOs, has a working group on localisation. That does not mean that a majority of local and/or national agencies are involved in that conversation. Typically, there will be a smaller group actively engaged and driving them.

In none of the eight countries did the C4C signatory INGOs come together with the endorsing national and local actors to have a sustained conversation about how these commitments are put into practice. The wish is for more country-level dialogue around the C4C to start as of 2021.

Emerging working groups or task forces, with so far only international agencies or already a multi-stakeholder participation, were identified in Myanmar, Bangladesh (an international agency-controlled task force for the Rohingya response, and a multi-stakeholder working group for the rest of the country), and Somalia. The still ‘emerging status’ is partially explained by the COVID-19 pandemic becoming a top priority for most of 2020.

Since the World Humanitarian Summit, the localisation agenda has been carefully controlled by international agencies. It often took years of persistent lobbying and advocacy work for national/local CSOs to get a seat in e.g. the Humanitarian Country Teams and in strategic international spaces such as the Interagency Standing Committee’s Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) and its subgroup on localisation, and even in the Grand Bargain Workstream on Localisation.

1. Common understanding and frameworks

For Somalia, a multi-stakeholder Somalia Task Force on Localisation was constituted after a ‘Somalia Localisation Framework’ was developed on the initiative of some INGOs. It has some real strengths:

- The Framework contains a fairly clear vision of a progress statement: “Local and national humanitarian actors are increasingly empowered to take a great role in the leadership, coordination and delivery of effective humanitarian preparedness and response in Somalia.”
- The Framework takes a comprehensive, country-level, perspective.
- It also sets out core principles, notably ‘improved humanitarian assistance’, ‘local ownership of the agenda’, ‘respect and trust’, ‘mutual accountability’, ‘complementarity’ and ‘quid pro quo’: The basis of the Grand Bargain is that each actor will play their part and make the necessary changes to achieve a stronger and more effective humanitarian system’.
- It has a detailed action plan around four priority areas of funding, partnership, capacity strengthening and local voices.

In Bangladesh, the Dhaka-based ‘Localisation Technical Working Group’ has found practical value in the framework elaborated by the Humanitarian Advisory Group which is based on the Seven Dimensions Framework (Jirauni Osborne 2019). Together with the Network on Information, Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster (NIRAPAD) network of Bangladeshi CSOs, it tested this framework to assess the quality of localisation in the collective response to the 2019 floods in north-east Bangladesh. This is being taken as a baseline, just as GMI’s original framework provided a baseline for the Start Fund of the Start Network, and has been used by e.g. the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) and by UNICEF internally to assess its relationships with national and local partners. Some frameworks are therefore available that can be used for different purposes such as:



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- to assess the quality of bilateral relationships between international and national/local agencies
- to assess the collective response to a particular crisis, or
- to outline a broader vision for structural change, over time, in the roles and responsibilities of international and national/local relief actors.

There are other frameworks that are generally not known but eminently relevant: In 2019, the Global Protection Cluster produced one related to the presence and meaningful participation of national and local actors in coordination structures (clusters/sectors) (Nolan & Dozin 2019). GMI works with various other frameworks, useful to also review and plan change in power dynamics, and/or to highlight the critical influence of mindsets (GMI 2020). In Nigeria there is now an operational framework, endorsed by the government, towards a humanitarian response that is locally driven and oriented towards development. The framework sets out a rationale and guiding principles, formulates outcomes and roles, responsibilities, and priorities for key actors (No author 2019).

2. No constructive climate for discussion on localisation

There is no uniform tone of discussion between international and national/local actors. The multi-country assessments allowed the identification of several factors that affect the conversations:

- power imbalances
- an “us and them” attitude
- rising frustration with no significant change achieved as yet
- lack of interpersonal skills among discussion participants.

Thus, sustained discussions may also require a team of skilled national and international facilitators.



THE CONTEXT

Under ‘initiatives and programmes’ we can consider (i) localisation-relevant research, (ii) projects, programmes or longer-term structural set-ups, (iii) funding mechanisms and (iv) the spaces for sustained dialogue and planning to turn policy into practice. The spaces have been discussed before, the funding mechanisms will be looked at in section 3.2. This section focuses on localisation-relevant research and projects, programmes, or longer-term structural set-ups.

2.1 LOCALISATION RELEVANT RESEARCH

Some of the entities that have commissioned and/or conducted relevant research are the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (e.g. the series on ‘capacity and complementarity’, but also work on financing), Oxfam (e.g. comprehensive national humanitarian capacity assessments in Somalia and Bangladesh, research on women in humanitarian action in Bangladesh, also research on financing), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (e.g. research on financing commissioned for Ethiopia and Colombia), Christian Aid and the Accelerating Localisation Consortium (e.g. in Myanmar), the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) (e.g. in Bangladesh, Indonesia), ActionAid (e.g. women in humanitarian action in Indonesia), the research project on CSO financial viability by LINK, Peace Direct and the Foundation Center (included DRC and Colombia), Save the Children Sweden (e.g. Myanmar), Save the Children Denmark (e.g. Horn of Africa including Somalia), X-Border Consortium (e.g. Bangladesh), Saferworld (e.g. DRC and Myanmar). The Norwegian Refugee Council is active on multi-year financing and commissioned relevant work also on humanitarian principles in Colombia.

Over the past 20 years, more collaboration and partnerships have emerged between research institutes/think tanks/academia in aid-providing and aid-receiving countries, particularly around development issues (see e.g. Migot-Adholla & Warner 2005). National research capabilities on humanitarian/refugee issues in aid recipient countries, including with recurrent and protracted crises, are less invested in, however. Even if several international research groups have established networks of connection with individual national researchers in different countries, there is no similar level of institutional research partnerships as for issues associated with ‘development’. Also missing or very limited is South-South research collaboration on humanitarian issues. In many mixed research teams of internationals and nationals, national members often lead on data collection, while internationals play a bigger role in the research design, data analysis, presentation, and dissemination. The country studies noted research capabilities in e.g. Ethiopia, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (with Congolese researchers being part of a network and collaborative programme with European academic centres), Myanmar, and Bangladesh (e.g. the NIRAPAD platform of Bangladeshi CSOs). There are, reportedly, only a few experienced Somali (and Kenyan Somali) researchers who therefore are in high demand. The localisation-relevant research identified was overwhelmingly commissioned by international agencies. There are exceptions, for example the NEAR Network commissioned research for Somalia and the Christian Relief and Development Agencies platform for Ethiopia.

There is huge convergence across recommendations given. The issues and the obstacles to more transformative change are well documented. But, while there is a large amount of research, there is no research synthesis to build upon. Thus, many of the research projects



take the risk of being redundant and quite a few of the national and local actors interviewed for this survey expressed research fatigue.

2.2 LOCALISATION-RELEVANT INITIATIVES

Identifying 'localisation-relevant initiatives' is not that straightforward. De facto, the assessment looked at initiatives or approaches that treat national and local actors as equitable partners and/or seek to provide organisational development support beyond narrower 'capacity building'.¹

Various medium-term projects to contribute to localisation have been conducted by INGOs but are not enough for larger and sustained impact. Some more sustained initiatives are being undertaken by coalitions of national CSOs.

The Start Network is an important reference. In 2017, it commissioned a baseline study on how well its Start Fund was doing on localisation (Van Brabant & Patel 2017), which was complemented by an assessment, in 2018, of the contributions of its multi-project 'Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) to advancing localisation in practice. Particularly relevant was the three year (mid 2015-mid 2018), multi-country 'Shifting the Power' project of ActionAid, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tearfund and Concern that involved national and local actors also from Ethiopia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the DRC. It invited participating local and national actors to assess their organisational capabilities for humanitarian action and, from there, develop their own organisational development plan. It also encouraged and at times helped national and local actors become members of the Start Network, which then enabled them to be direct recipients from Start Fund grants (rather than through an INGO member agency). Among others, several local Caritas organisations, with help from CAFOD, succeeded. Shifting the Power worked with existing national or sub-national NGO networks, like the National Humanitarian Network in Pakistan, and in the DRC the Forum des ONG Humanitaires et Développement (FONAHD) in Nord Kivu, the Cadre de Consultation des Organisations Nationales (CCONAT) in South Kivu, and the Réseau des organisations nationales de développement et humanitaire (RONDH) in Kinshasa. In Bangladesh, the Shifting the Power project led to the creation of a new platform of NGOs/CSOs, the National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh (NAHAB). In the DRC, its support helped local and national CSOs join clusters in the UN coordination system. In Pakistan, the six INGOs driving the Shifting the Power project articulated for themselves a 'Charter of Commitment' that puts strong emphasis on medium- to long-term partnerships that are more equitable. Not all INGO members of the Start Network are equally invested in advancing localisation though.

The Start Network is now in the process of creating national or regional 'Hubs' in India, Guatemala, the DRC, Pakistan and for the Pacific. In Bangladesh, the decentralisation process started earlier, in 2016, when DFID (old UK Department for International Development, now FCDO) provided a grant for emergency response managed directly by Start Fund Bangladesh. A core area of competency of the Start Fund is immediate emergency response, with very fast funding for rapid reaction. Given its head start, Start Bangladesh now counts 27 national/local agencies as members among its total of 47. Start Bangladesh's analysis of costs has revealed that Bangladeshi CSOs operate with lower overall management costs.

¹ For this reason, this research does not highlight the Emergency Capacity Building project of various INGOs in Indonesia, or the Trócaire and Cordaid SCORE project in the DRC, both of which were/are more classical technical 'capacity building' projects (as acknowledged by one of the focal points for the SCORE project).



The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is a coalition of 15 NGOs in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Localisation is a strategic priority and, for some years now, the DRA has its own localisation working group. The Alliance set a collective target that, by the end of 2021, 35 percent of its expenditure in its joint responses in different countries shall be managed by national/local partners. There is diversity within the DRA, with some members with a long history of partnering, sometimes signatories to the C4C, while the default mode of others is direct implementation.

Oxfam's Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) project, initially running for three years (2016-2018) and then extended until March 2021, takes place in Bangladesh and Uganda. Its three core terms 'Strength', 'Voice', and 'Space' indicate what it wants to offer local and national CSO participants: stronger organisational capabilities, a stronger ability to influence the in-country humanitarian agenda; but also the space to be present and meaningfully participate in national and international architectures, as a step towards effective leadership by national and local actors. A distinctive feature of the project is the offer of both capacity support and potential access to funding. ELNHA combines a Humanitarian Capacity Development Fund with a Humanitarian Response Grant Facility. Funding is not guaranteed and depends on a quality proposal. The Start Fund and Hubs also have this advantage of offering access to finance directly if the local/national agency can pass the due diligence assessment to be a full member.

Some longer-term, structural initiatives are undertaken by national/local CSOs: In Bangladesh, NAHAB's approach to localisation takes as starting point the 'local' actors in the geographical sense of the word, i.e. the community, governmental and non-governmental entities in districts. This leads to a process of district level hazard mapping, planning and collective coordination and capacity sharing for fast and effective response. The district level capacities are then connected to and assisted by a national level architecture with additional capacities. So far, the focus remains on Bangladeshi agency.

A relevant development in Somalia is the Nexus Consortium. Founded in 2019 by nine Somali NGOs and supported by Oxfam (Netherlands), it has already received various amounts of financial support from some bilateral donors (e.g. Australia, Switzerland, Netherlands). The members want to strengthen their internal complementarities, learn more through peer-learning, advocate for and work with a 'nexus' perspective employing a community-driven approach. Not unlike certain developments in Bangladesh, they want to connect more actively with public and private sector actors in each socio-geographical or administrative area and support more community owned and community driven solutions to humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding needs.

In the DRC, a few individuals from Congolese agencies that are endorsers of the C4C, have developed a 2021-2023 strategic plan for the C4C in their country.²

The above picture, however, does not fully capture all practices on the ground. There are more INGOs who work in long-term, strategic, and more equitable partnerships, also in and through crisis situations and who are institutionally geared up to do so. The issue is that they do not frame and publicise this under the heading of 'localisation', as they have been working this way from well before the World Humanitarian Summit. Many of them are not actively engaged in international and country-level conversations and debates about localisation.

² In Jordan, the drive of a few individual Jordanian leaders led to the creation of JONAF, the first Jordanian National NGOs Forum focused (also) on relief and humanitarian action. JONAF has become the main Jordanian NGO/CSO platform to engage on localisation in the country.



Localisation conversations, research and initiatives, at international and country level, are influenced by a small number of INGOs, several though not all faith-based.

Across various countries, some faith-based INGOs appear time and again as actively engaged on the localisation agenda, notably, Tearfund, Trócaire, CAFOD and ChristianAid. Also, some ‘secular’ NGOs are very active, among them Oxfam, ActionAid and – to a degree – CARE. Most of these were behind the series of ‘Missed Opportunities’ studies in the years before the World Humanitarian Summit that documented how, time and again, the international response to a major crisis failed to establish genuine partnerships with national and local agencies. Several were also the drivers of the Shifting the Power project of the Start Network. Overall, there is a strong Anglo-Saxon presence.

The Caritas network as a whole is strongly involved in the localisation agenda. All local Caritas agencies are independent local entities under the authority of their respective bishops. National and local Caritas agencies are significant social welfare and humanitarian actors in e.g. Colombia, the DRC and Bangladesh, and in e.g. Kachin State in northern Myanmar, with a strong Christian population. Several local Caritas branches are full members of the Start Network and its emerging Hubs and can directly access the Start Fund. Caritas Internationalis therefore is a confederation of some 165 national Caritas organisations. In 2019, Caritas articulated its position on localisation and partnerships (Caritas Internationalis 2019).

The ACT Alliance, a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations, also provides a platform of collaboration among INGOs and with national/local members. Prior to the World Humanitarian Summit, the ACT Alliance articulated a number of commitments. Those included reforming its Rapid Response Fund to make it accessible only to national/local members, and to reduce its administrative and procedural complexity (ACT Alliance 2016). The Principles of Partnership are to be strengthened through national and regional ACT Forums, and, by May 2018, the Alliance wanted to see a significant increase in humanitarian funding to southern members, for preparedness and response.

A topic that does not feature – yet – in the global or national conversations about localisation is the role of faith-based organisations. There is a slow increase in literature on this (See e.g. de Wolf & Wilkinson 2019; Gingerich et al. 2017; Wilkinson et al 2020; Mohamed-Saleem 2020).

For secular INGOs, a difficult issue for their positioning on localisation can be that of their forming national entities in aid-recipient countries, that then are part of a global family, alliance, federation, or confederation. ‘Home-grown’ national and local organisations, which are not and do not want to be part of a particular global NGO family, strongly oppose this trend. They see it as a strategy to capture the 25 percent of global humanitarian funding intended to go to ‘national and local’ actors. They observe that such entities have a huge competitive advantage as they can easily and quickly obtain resources and expertise from a global network they are part of. They object to such ‘national’ NGOs, part of a global NGO family, then engaging in domestic fundraising from the general public, private sector companies and wealthy individuals or families, which present a strategic opportunity for home-grown NGOs and CSOs to reduce their dependency on foreign aid. While the purpose of the Grand Bargain was to create a level playing field for national and local actors, this trend actually increases the competition for those national/local actors which are not part of a global alliance.

Overall, the impact of the existing localisation projects remains limited as they are still the exception and not the international relief sector’s dominant mode of operation.



For years international aid donors have been investing in the strengthening of civil society. USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, and the European Commission are among those who supported multi-year programmes to this effect in many countries, not from relief funds, but more from budgets for development or democracy, human rights and/or governance. The broad goal of these aid investments is to strengthen independent civil society organisations that, individually but also collectively, contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law and justice in their own societies. Such investments continue in countries where major relief operations are taking also place over a longer duration. Myanmar is one example. At the same time, the dominant way of operating of international relief agencies is to avail of national and local NGOs, CSOs and CBOs (community-based organisations) for the delivery of their projects and programmes. The collective impact of a large-scale presence of international relief actors over several years is likely to halt the development of a vibrant civil society in the country and turn local organisations into project-focused service deliverers, competing with each other for contracts rather than collaborating. Bangladeshi CSOs, again, have been the most vocal in contesting this and in demanding to be treated as a ‘civil society’ that has developed over decades and plays a structural role in its own society that goes beyond service delivery. Somali NGOs have credited Oxfam (Netherlands) in particular for sustained investment in their development as ‘civil society’ over many years.

As yet, this issue has not received attention in the localisation conversation. It means that the collective impact of humanitarian funding, used in a manner that keeps national and local CSOs in a subordinate role, undermines the strengthening of civil society, which is the intention behind the simultaneous funding of development/human rights/rule of law/governance initiatives. Interrupting and weakening the development of a strong national civil society is an unwanted side effect of the work of international relief agencies which has to be taken care of.



PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN THE FOCUS AREAS OF PARTNERSHIPS, FINANCING, CAPACITIES, COORDINATION AND GENDER: WHAT ARE IMPORTANT DRIVERS OR CONSTRAINTS?

The seven dimensions framework intentionally puts the quality of relationships first, because it influences all other dimensions. If the quality of a relationship is bad, constructive interactions in other dimensions are less likely to happen.

3.1 THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF THE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

The widely used term ‘partnership’ is misleading.

In English, the term ‘partnership’ covers a wide range of personal and business relationships, usually with both partners acting on equal terms. In this respect, the usual reference of international agencies to national and local actors as ‘partners’ is misleading.

The research conducted indicates that, overwhelmingly and across all countries, national and local actors which are termed to be ‘partners’ find themselves to be sub-contractors or at best ‘implementing partners’ of international agencies. They implement agendas, strategies, programmes and projects, conceptualised and designed by the latter. They typically have not co-created these interventions and are not ‘decision-making partners’. Only in a minority of instances do international agencies work in more genuine, equitable, partnerships. Often they are then referred to as ‘strategic partnerships’, of a longer term and with an intent to be more equitable.

At the same time, the Principles of Partnership, which the Global Humanitarian Forum defined already in 2007, are hardly known and referred to.

Distrust between national/local and international actors is widespread across all countries.

A prevailing atmosphere of distrust between international and national/local actors was brought up in all country studies. Overall, delivery and risk management are the key attention points of international relief agencies.

There is a widespread negative narrative among international relief actors about national and local ones that can be heard globally. It holds that, generally and almost intrinsically, national and local agencies represent a high risk of fraud and corruption, have limited capacities and are rarely able to meet international standards, find it more difficult to adhere to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, and may be little more than an enterprise to provide income for the founders and their families.

The negative narrative is then further confirmed and aggravated by assessments that show a tendency to ‘deficit thinking’ rather than ‘appreciative inquiry’: focusing on the glass half empty rather than the glass half full, i.e. the potential that is there. To achieve a change of attitude, self-awareness, self-management, interpersonal and cross-cultural competencies are key ingredients.



Prevailing practices in ‘partner selection’ reveal and reproduce the structural inequality.

With respect to current agency practices, the research identified serious shortcomings in what is called ‘partner selection’ across the countries. Key features are:

- The selection is based on a unilateral ‘capacity assessment’ using a very limited concept of ‘capacities’: As we shall see later, the emphasis tends to be on the capacities to meet the requirements of the international relief sector, not the capacities to operate effectively in what may be a complex and dangerous context.³
- Moreover, short-cuts to partnering occur: Sometimes international agencies cannot or do not want to make the effort of broader inquiry but rather look to the national and local agencies that other international ones are already working with and funding. Or they consider those that the management of a country-based pooled fund has assessed and declared ‘eligible’ for grants of that fund (e.g. Somalia) . The result is a competition over a limited choice of potential partners while others never get the chance to present themselves as suitable options.
- Looking for look-alikes: International relief actors, though they work in so many different societies, seem most comfortable working with national/local actors that resemble them – they prefer an organisational set-up very similar to that of international agencies.
- Corruption in partner/sub-contractor selection: Instances reportedly occur where staff of an international agency conducting a ‘capacity assessment’ of a national/local organisation to determine whether they are fit for collaboration demand a bribe for a positive assessment (e.g. in Somalia). Or national/local actors who respond to a call-for-proposals may be asked to pay the staff of the international agency a bribe to be offered the contract, even if they have the track record and qualifications (e.g in DRC).

Local and national organisations risk being treated as cheap labour.

International donors, UN agencies and INGOs regularly set limits on the numbers of staff a national/local sub-contractor or implementing partner can have for a joint project, their salaries and the equipment (office and transport equipment) covered by the budget. Some only pay direct project costs to local actors though international agencies get a flexible management fee (Internal Cost Recovery) to cover their core costs. Some allow national/local partners to write in some core costs, but typically heavily earmarked rather than flexible.

Risk is more transferred than shared. Donors pass on risk to UN agencies, INGOs and private contractors, who in turn may pass it on to national and local agencies. This can be particularly problematic if at the same time these agencies do not get the financial resources to have the equipment, the quantity, and the quality of people to manage those risks adequately. One such possible risk is that national and local actors face community criticism for decisions taken by the international partner.

The lack of harmonisation and coherence on dealing with national/local actors creates unnecessary burdens on them.

Although the UN is supposed to ‘work-as-one’, national and local actors perceive and experience different partnering practices between different UN agencies. International agencies do not harmonise their engagement with the same local or national actor.

³ The Somalia research found that some INGOs do inquire into how a Somali NGO is more broadly perceived, including in the communities where it may be most strongly connected to.



3

National and local actors demand more equitable partnerships.

There is a demand for more equitable partnerships coming from local/national agencies. However, the prevailing practices of international agencies do not accommodate a change in the quality of relationships.

There are exceptions from the rule.

Though a minority, there are also several international agencies which work differently. They often have a strong 'development' mandate and practice as well, and a long institutional practice of partnering. Some have made a conscious choice not to directly implement, not even in an acute emergency response. They typically have articulated partnership policies and partnership principles. They may have dedicated partnership advisers and hold periodic reviews with their partners, to assess not only the joint work but also the quality of relationship. Staff are assessed also on their partnering competencies. In Pakistan, several INGOs that came together as a consortium for the Start Networks' Shifting the Power project, jointly signed up to a detailed 'Partnership Framework and Guidelines'. Such competencies and ways of working can also be found among a number of specialised international peace NGOs, which know that peace cannot be imported and delivered from outside, and for whom supporting 'local and national capacities for peace' therefore is a strategic objective.

Inequalities and problematic collaborative relationships can also occur between national NGOs and local NGOs and CBOs.

Localisation, justifiably, puts a strong spotlight on the relationship between international and national/local responders. There is, however, a second dynamic, between larger national NGOs and usually smaller local ones and community-based organisations. The research shows that it cannot be assumed that national NGOs would not replicate patterns of dominance and subordination, employing local actors as mere recipients of instructions (Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar).

3.2 FINANCE: ACCESS, QUANTITY, AND QUALITY

Grand main message is of a growing humanitarian financing gap: global humanitarian needs are rising faster than available funding to respond to them. Various commitments of the Grand Bargain therefore, together, are intended to render global humanitarian action more cost-effective. Among the specific recommendations related to local and national actors are:

- *“Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.*
- *Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders, such as UN-led country-based pooled funds (CBPF), IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund and NGO-led and other pooled funds.*
- *Increase and support multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination capacities.”* (Grand Bargain 2016:5)

A strong focus on the quality of finance is necessary.

Quality of finance includes e.g. all real operational costs are covered, including core support, flexible funding, longer-term funding or more predictable income, regularity of cash flow etc., all of which contribute to more financial stability, allow building up reserves and investment in organisational development.



National and local organisations do not get much help to overcome the capacity trap.

The ‘capacity trap’ consists of a vicious circle: since you do not currently meet international minimum standards, you cannot access international funding, because of which you cannot gain more experience let alone invest in your organisational development, which means you will not be able to access international funding in future either. The multi-country study on CSO financial viability (Renoir & Guttentag 2018) shows that staff commitment, social capital in their operating context, and even modest amounts of unrestricted finance, have been major contributing factors to breaking out of the capacity trap. And a stroke of luck that, at some point, an international agency is willing to give an organisation its first funding from such source.

Donor requirements of co-funding and payment for results practices de facto exclude the large majority of national/local organisations: Several donors have a practice of funding a maximum percentage of a budget, the rest having to come from other sources. That can be an obstacle for national/local actors to access direct funding and force them to go through an intermediary. Donor practices that require the implementing agency to fund everything upfront, and then only receive payment for results, effectively exclude virtually all national and local actors, as most do not have the reserves required for this.

Internal cost recovery is becoming a point of attention but also of controversy: There is still much funding practice in which UN agencies, INGOs and private contractors receive a management fee for internal cost recovery (ICR) from humanitarian donors, while national/local organisations do not get such a fee when part of that money is sub-granted to them.

The Grand Bargain calls for a reduction in transaction costs. If national and local actors also get a management fee, on top of that of the international intermediaries, the transaction costs increase. Direct funding of national actors would reduce that.

For international agencies, however, the management fee is an important source of flexible income to finance their (at times large) international headquarters. Some INGO country offices even never see part of a management fee if a grant was negotiated by headquarters – it stays there. Even sharing a management fee therefore directly impacts the business model of many international agencies.

Pooled funds provide better access for national/local agencies, but their volume makes only for a small percentage of humanitarian aid.

There are or were OCHA-managed pooled funds in e.g. Colombia, Somalia, the DRC, Ethiopia and Pakistan. Myanmar is quite exceptional in that there are various pooled funds, including, for example, the Joint Peace Fund managed by the UN Office Project Services (UNOPS). While the assessments did not intend to conduct a focused study for each, different observations can be made that show a mixed picture. The percentage of funds allocated by the Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF) directly to Somali NGOs for the past few years has been hovering around 45-50 percent. That seems to confirm the assumption made in the Grand Bargain that pooled funds are more accessible for national/local actors. However, Somali actors, active on localisation, all pointed out that the SHF with an annual budget of USD 35-50 million represents a fraction of total annual humanitarian expenditure in Somalia, which approaches USD 1 billion.

- In Ethiopia, for a decade most Ethiopian CSOs could not access the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund (EHF) because it required applicants to have an international currency bank account. The restrictive civil society legislation, in vogue from mid-2009 to mid-2019 did



not enable that for the vast majority. By the autumn of 2020, only a small handful of Ethiopian CSOs (one a nationalised INGO) are eligible.

- The Colombia Humanitarian Fund closed in 2018 and OCHA left the country. By then it had allocated 31 percent of its funds to Colombian agencies, 65 percent to INGOs and 5 percent to UN agencies. But it is no longer available in late 2020, when the situation is deteriorating again, with increased levels of insecurity.
- In the DRC, it has been the decentralisation of budgets and decision-making of the pooled fund to sub-national levels that has opened more opportunities for Congolese CSOs, especially more local ones, which were not necessarily connected and known in Kinshasa.
- In Bangladesh, CSOs actively engaged in the Rohingya situation in Cox's Bazar, for some years now, have been requesting the establishment of a local-level pooled fund, but no such fund has materialised in the past three years.

As we can see, the instrument 'pooled fund' can have a positive impact, but it is still too limited in volume and needs a supportive political and legal environment in order to generate significant changes.⁴

The country assessments provided examples of NGO-managed rapid response funds, either managed globally e.g. those of the ACT Alliance and Caritas Internationalis, or at country level such as the Concern Worldwide's RAPID fund in Pakistan. For some years now, the Start Network's Start Fund has acted as a fund managed not only by an NGO but by a network of NGOs. That has been the case also for Start Fund Bangladesh, and presumably will be the same for other 'Hubs' that the Start Network is developing.

In Somalia, some bilateral donors are funding the Nexus Consortium of Somali NGOs but, for now, wanted the funds to still go through an INGO. Oxfam has taken on the role but limits itself to the integrity of the finance management – decisions on what to use the money for rest with the Somali consortium. In due course, the Nexus consortium may get direct funding.

Also, in Bangladesh, the Manusher Jonno Foundation has been managing a de facto pooled fund since 2006, while in Myanmar the Local Resources Centre has been doing the same for many years. Both grew from an INGO or were established with INGO support, but for years now have been operating as national organisations. There are other Myanmar NGOs which manage grants schemes funded by international donors.

International donors do not have the staff to manage a multitude of grants and need another entity to which they can provide a large envelope and which will then manage its further sub-granting. The additional benefit for them is that risk is transferred to the fund manager. The examples show that not only INGOs, but also national ones can play that role with integrity and effectiveness.

The same donors that do not want to provide direct funding for relief work may do so for development or rights/governance work.

When it comes to funding for crisis management, international donors show a marked reluctance to directly fund national and local actors. Most do not have legal restrictions. Practical

⁴ More detailed studies were conducted in Colombia, Ethiopia and Ukraine by Owl RE, a research and evaluation consultancy, on behalf of the IFRC. A synthesis report was published at the end of 2019: 'Country Level Financing Solutions for Local Actors' which offers a detailed diagnosis. Featherstone & Mowjee 2020, confirms many of the findings of this report, including on e.g. the quality of funding, the issue of the management fee, but also on negative narratives and the comparative disadvantage for WRO and WLOs.



considerations are that they prefer to give out big grants rather than multiple smaller ones and have more leverage to reclaim money gone missing. Persistent doubts and negative views about national/local CSOs for not having the administrative and finance management systems, logistical capacities or not being able to meet the technical standards (set by well-resourced international agencies) are added to that.

However, the managers of pooled funds are able to fund national and local actors, and other research focused on financing to local and national actors (e.g. in Colombia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh) always brought up examples of bilateral and multilateral donors providing direct funding to national/local NGOs/CSOs, for development and poverty reduction, civil society strengthening, human rights protection and/or climate adaptation work (Austin et al. 2019). Such funding could be of significant size and longer duration.

There is little multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of national and local responders.

In practice the international relief sector hardly invests in the development of individual and collective crisis management capacities of national and local actors. Yet this is one of the localisation practice objectives in the Grand Bargain. Philanthropic foundations, which are more active in rights-promotion and poverty reduction than crisis-response, have realised that real investment in organisational development brings returns in terms of improved impacts (No author 2020a & 2020b).

Some donor representatives, and international agency staff, argue that the development of individual and collective organisational capabilities in other countries is not part of their mandate. Their mandate is to save lives and alleviate suffering, and hence their focus should be on people in need, not on local/national organisations. In addition, as one donor representative remarked, is it appropriate to invest in local/national organisations when most humanitarian responses are underfunded?

This argument reflects the persistent short-term view of an international relief sector in a world where most crises are recurrent or protracted. It ignores that the operating costs of international agencies, UN, INGOs and private contractors alike, are high – higher than those of local and national actors.

The risk of fraud and corruption exists in all countries and organisations.

Some of the countries researched have a reputation for being a high risk of fraud and corruption, DRC, and Somalia among them. National and local actors do not deny the reality, including among their own ranks. But part of this reality is also the fact that corruption, fraud and sexual abuse have likewise occurred in international agencies, with the notable difference that these instances are largely kept out of the media so as not to undermine public support for aid in the donor countries. It is not appropriate to view NGOs/CSOs in general as a ‘risk’. In order to be perceived as a fair and just process, risk assessment has to acknowledge the full picture rather than perpetrating unilateral mistrust and suspicion vis-à-vis local actors.

International aid agencies compete with national/local for domestic funding sources.

Across the countries, many national and local NGOs and CSOs are highly dependent on foreign aid.

Only in Indonesia did the country assessments note a significant amount of public funding accessible to Indonesian CSOs, in response to the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake-cum-tsunami. Indonesian actors are now considering setting up more structural mechanisms for public



donations in future. In Pakistan, public donations constitute an important or even primary source of income, e.g. to the Alkhidmat Foundation. Much of this is related to faith-based charitable giving. In some countries, such as Colombia and Bangladesh, national/local NGOs and CSOs also access national government funding.

Supporting national and local agencies to develop complementary and alternative sources of income should be a strategic objective for international agencies working from a 'solidarity' perspective. Precisely when the potential emerges to generate more domestic income from the new middle classes and wealthy entrepreneurs who want to show a corporate social responsibility or more fundamentally 'contribute to society', international agencies establish themselves as competitors, with the advantage of years of experience and expertise in fundraising.

3.3 CAPACITIES

The most common approach to capacity assessments does not adequately reflect the reality of local NGOs/CSOs.

As a rule, international agencies decide which capacities are relevant without paying enough attention to the overall situation in the relevant countries. Other research (Barbelet 2019 & Wake & Bryant 2018) and the conducted country assessments confirm that being fit-for-the-international system is deemed to be more important than being fit-for-context. The key components of this are the ability to meet the compliance requirements and internationally set technical or thematic standards. While a set of internationally agreed standards is, in principle, desirable, the current one fails to include the realities of local NGOs/CSOs. For example, the adherence to formalities is considered to be more important than the values and actual practice of a certain organisation.

This has serious consequences for local actors, as 'capacity assessments' may be the main modality to choose 'partners'. This actually means that national/local actors are assessed on their potential to serve as subcontractors or, at best, implementers, of international agency programmes and projects. The primary entry point of the international actor is money and its possible sub-granting, and the nature of the collaboration fundamentally transactional. In recent years, reportedly 'capacity assessments' are sometimes turning even into 'risk assessments'. The starting point from which the local/national actors is approached is one of 'risk'. As capacity assessments are a one-way process, there is no feedback mechanism which could enable the 'assessed' organisations to provide corrective input.

This constitutes a power relationship which is even more imbalanced in those instances where the international feedback agency does not provide any or reasonably detailed feedback on the results of its assessment. Thus, the local NGOs/CSOs are even deprived of meaningful input on how to 'improve'.

Prevailing capacity strengthening approaches are not always on target and have limited lasting impact.

Lasting impact requires more than investment in individual skills and procedural preparedness: International relief agencies are looking for, or want to particularly strengthen, the 'humanitarian capacities' of individual national/local agencies. The SHAPE framework used by the Shifting the Power project has such a focus (Start Network no date). This is relevant, as the ability to prepare for and respond rapidly but also competently and at scale to sudden-onset crisis, is a particular capability. Particular skills and procedures may be required such as needs assessments, rapid but correct procurement of appropriate items, logistics, cash programming, post-distribution monitoring etc. Also well-established INGOs that do mostly



development work, know that their country offices may not have the expertise to respond to a major crisis and will fly in teams of relief experts. The country assessments indicate three attention points, however:

- Many local/national organisations do not want to turn into specialist relief agencies as their context requires multi-mandate capabilities (e.g. Colombia, DRC, Myanmar, Somalia).
- Very rapid response may require prepositioned stocks and cash-at-hand for which most of them do not get the resources.
- They cannot retain the emergency response competencies if they don't encounter situations regularly in which they must be applied. Either experienced staff will leave, or skills levels will diminish for lack of practice.

Prevailing approaches also pay little attention to collective in-country crisis-management capacities. If project-thinking is the prevailing mindset, then strategic deficits are likely.⁵ Only two examples were identified across the eight country studies that sought to assess the collective in-country capacities for crisis response. One was Oxfam's Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis (HUCOCA), conducted twice, with intervals, in Somalia and Bangladesh. The other was conducted by the Asia Disaster Preparedness Centre in Pakistan and Myanmar, as part of the ASEAN cooperation on disaster management. Yet it is precisely such comprehensive and strategic perspective on a country's crisis-management 'infrastructure' that will provide a clearer vision of what successful localisation actually means in the given context.

Capacity strengthening happens paradoxically simultaneously with capacity undermining practices. The most obvious form of undermining capacities is the hiring away, for better salaries and benefits, of the best local staff. Less obvious but no less impactful forms of keeping national/local actors weak, denying them a flexible management fee, imposing a ceiling on their staff salaries and limiting the operational assets such as computers, printers, motorcycles etc. in the sub-grant they receive.

As a result, a lot of the capacity development support given has little lasting impact:

- Capacity development which is disconnected from the question of financial viability of the national/local organisation is unlikely to have longer-term benefits. The national/local organisation cannot practice what it has learned and/or retain the people trained.
- Most trainers offer technical or thematic expertise, but the international relief sector has very few 'organisational development' (OD) experts, unlike the development sector.⁶
- Supply-driven training or OD support is not sufficiently effective. Training has to be demand-led and fit-for-purpose. Local/national organisations appreciate that they can learn from international agencies but not the prevailing learning arrangement. They are quite clear on what they see as better approaches:
 - More of an organisational mentoring and accompaniment approach by the same resource person(s) who have the competency to work with a holistic system per-

⁵ The main conclusion of a review, commissioned by four bilateral donors of several years of peacebuilding projects, was the presence of a strategic deficit. Most projects make claims about how they contribute to a larger goal of more fundamental change. But that does not happen automatically. The cumulative impact of a multitude of projects, by itself, is not more than the sum of its parts. (See Smith 2004).

⁶ Frontline Aids, a UK NGO with long-standing strategic partnerships with many national CSOs in all other continents, has a team of OD experts - not 'trainers' - and its contributions to partners' OD have been effective. This is also changing their global alliance (around the same goal, not as one brand) which is now evolving to more distributed leadership but also a collaborative 'Partnership Council' for which a global plan of action provides the common reference.



spective on the organisation, in a context, and to meet it where it is at now.⁷

- Access to finance to provide the organisation with financial stability and allow it to attract and retain talented and experienced people.
- More peer-learning.

The ineffectiveness of the mainstream approaches means a poor return on investment. This is aggravated in other ways:

- The multiplication of capacity assessments and capacity strengthening inputs by different international aid agencies creates burdens but no added value. Readiness to accept the assessment of another Alliance member would improve the situation for local NGOs/CSOs and save costs.⁸
- Uncoordinated and hence repeated training inputs are provided to the same organisation, even if it has already received training on the subject concerned.
- There is no intentional investment in national/local institutional centres that could offer relevant capacity support as part of the national/sub-national crisis-management infrastructure. Such resource centres can serve governmental and non-governmental actors and provide support that is more tailored to the context in the local language(s).

3.4 COORDINATION

The degree of national or international coordination leadership influences the potential for localisation.

In some countries, the government itself has a strong coordination structure, from the national to the local level. Examples are Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. In some countries the intent may be to have strong local coordination practices, in a decentralised political system (Indonesia) or a federal structure (Ethiopia). But in practice, key decisions tend to remain centralised. Contributing factors to weaker local governmental capacities are lack of financial and dedicated human resources, and lack of experience and expertise, sometimes also as a result of mandatory rotation of civil servants (Gita Srikanthini et al. 2018). In Somalia, particularly the regions under the authority of the Federal Government of Somalia, a large and long-term process of state-building is under way, and neither the Federal nor the local emerging authorities have currently the experience and resources to exercise a significant coordination responsibility (Almansa 2020).

Where there is a strong, parallel, or primary international coordination structure, the question is whether government officials co-lead key decision platforms and clusters or not, and whether they can do so effectively, as facilitating coordination is also a particular competency. In Bangladesh, for example, we see the government co-leading the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team which has a remit over the whole country except the Rohingya refugee situation in Cox's Bazar.

International, usually UN led, coordination structures are still not very enabling to non-governmental national and local actors. In various countries, national and local CSOs have only

⁷ OD is shaped more as organisational action-learning than in terms of training workshops. This encourages a reflective practice, critical for an organisational learning culture. It also resolves a regular problem with training inputs: the resource person/trainer is no longer available when trainees try to apply it but run into a situation where they are not certain what to do. CAFOD's approach to capacity development over the years has evolved from inviting partners to conduct a self-assessment against a provided framework and then develop their own OD plan to now also more active peer learning across countries.

⁸ For some years now, the Start Network has been exploring the possibility of 'due diligence passporting', i.e. the acceptance by other international agencies of a due diligence assessment conducted by another, respected, one.



been allowed one or a few seats in the Humanitarian Country Team after many years and sometimes persistent lobbying (e.g. Somalia, Myanmar, Bangladesh Humanitarian Country Task Team). Even if they have seats, the number for national NGOs is less than for INGOs.

A presence does not automatically mean ‘meaningful participation’, in the sense of being listened to as seriously as big UN agencies or sometimes donors, and therefore being able to contribute to or influence decisions. Challenges for national and local actors to contribute and influence effectively were already known and confirmed by the country studies: The predominance of a Western language (spoken fast and in different accents) that many nationals do not master that well, the ‘insider-speak’ full of acronyms and internal international relief sector references that many nationals are not familiar with, the inadequate resourcing of national agencies who therefore cannot afford to dedicate much staff time to so many coordination meetings, and even the risk that if they do and send capable staff these people will be talent-spotted by international agencies and recruited away. A positive development then is the Dhaka-based Localisation Technical Working Group in Bangladesh which operates mainly in Bangla and publishes meeting minutes and reports in Bangla and in English.

Women’s rights and women-led organisations are often even more under-resourced than the majority of national and local CSOs, and their key people may be even less familiar with the universe of international relief agencies.

There is a mix of incentives and disincentives to make national/local actors want to be part of an international coordination structure.

Incentives for national/local NGOs/CSOs to be part of the coordination structure led by internationals are:

- It gives the national/local organisation greater visibility, which increases the chances of being seen as a potential partner by international agencies.
- Participation in the cluster system is a required condition to be eligible for funding from a humanitarian pooled fund, usually managed by OCHA.

But there are also disincentives. Reasons heard during the country researches were that:

- International actors in any case dominate the conversations and decisions.
- Men dominate the conversations and decisions (for women-led organisations).
- National/local participants are only used as sources of contextual information by international actors but do not get any benefit out of it (e.g. Colombia).
- And/or that these formal coordination mechanisms take far too much time to take decisions (e.g. Myanmar).

Various national/local actors are also critical of the sectoral set-up and fragmentation of the international system, as they have a much stronger sense of the importance of contextual dynamics. The absence of an equally strong socio-geographical coordination e.g. around a city, a district, a province, a camp or the area of a particular identity group, from their point of view is not helpful.

Dynamics similar to those between national authorities and UN-led coordination take place among non-governmental organisations. It is rare to have NGO Forums that are made up of both INGOs and national/local ones. The Somalia NGO Consortium is an exception. Country-level INGO forums serve less to foster operational coordination among them, than to provide spaces to convey their needs and interests towards the UN and the national authorities and to develop common positions for public advocacy or more discreet lobbying



and advice (e.g. Myanmar, DRC, Colombia). National and local CSOs can find the same unwelcoming factors and disincentives in mixed NGO spaces, as mentioned above for UN-led spaces.

The question is then whether national and local CSOs have effective networks and forums of their own. Pakistan, with its National Humanitarian Network, is probably the most comprehensively structured. Strong CSO networks also exist in Myanmar, Indonesia, and Bangladesh but not, for example, in the Somali areas under the Federal Government of Somalia.

The obvious drawback of multiple coordination forums and structures is that they increase the overall cost of coordination with still a risk that they are not coordinated among each other.

3.5 GENDER AND LOCALISATION

In practice, this subject has been largely equated with support for and meaningful participation of non-governmental women's rights organisations (WRO) and/or women-led organisations (WLO) (Informal Friends of Gender Group for the Grand Bargain 2016; Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream 2020). But other national women-focused actors need to be considered. There are not only individual WRO and/or WLO organisations but also existing networks.

Relevant national government entities have roles to play and national strategies for gender equality are important references.

The meaning of 'women-led localisation' must be clarified.

'Gender and localisation' as topic provides a complementary perspective to the observation that women and girls are differently and often worse affected by various types of crises, and that relief and recovery programmes have to be gender-sensitive and gender-responsive.

Notwithstanding the professed support for women, accessing international aid funding remains even harder for WRO and WLO than for male-led ones.

A focused review commissioned by Oxfam identified three structural obstacles for WROs and WLOs in Bangladesh and South Sudan: harmful societal gender norms, funding challenges, and disconnection from the larger humanitarian system (Jayasinghe et al. 2020). The eight country assessments confirm these also elsewhere (see van Brabant & Patel 2019).

Across countries, WRO/WLO find it harder to access international funding and quality finance than male-led ones. Not surprisingly, the core recommendations of the recent Grand Bargain Workstream on Localisation guidance on gender-responsive localisation all focus on better access to quality finance.

Women leaders interviewed for these country assessments felt a dilemma. On the one hand they want to obtain support based on merit and in that sense be treated equal to other organisations, on the other hand they also acknowledged that more affirmative action may be necessary, in the form of funding earmarked for WRO/WLO, to overcome biases and give them the opportunity to structurally strengthen their organisations.

A fine balance has to be found between international aid sector promotion of gender equity and gender equality and avoiding to push agendas on WROs and WLOs.

As Ababneh brought up in his 2020 study on the continued framing of women's issues as different from those of men:



- WROs/WLOs are expected by international aid actors to play an active role in the prevention and countering of violent extremism. This expectation derives from the assumption that women can help prevent close family members from becoming radicalised to the point of turning violent, and/or help to deradicalise them subsequently. Women's groups have expressed discomfort about being nudged or pushed in that direction. They can already find themselves caught between governmental and non-state armed groups, and do not need additional pressure from international aid actors. On occasion, women's groups therefore have chosen not to register and not to seek foreign aid to stay below the radar.
- WROs/WLOs are expected by international aid actors to become more inclusive and include LGBTQI+ people and address their issues. The situation of LGBTQI+ people merits attention, as they may not feel genuinely included by any type of other agency, in the expectation they can access support and services like anybody else. On the other hand, WLOs/WROs feel that they do not have the experience and competencies on this, and/or that it may increase the societal criticism and pushback they already encounter when advancing equal rights for women.
- WROs/WLOs have expressed discomfort with the heavy focus by international agencies on gender-based violence (GBV), particularly survivor support. WROs/WLOs in various countries have repeatedly made the case that they want and need to work also on prevention yet get funding largely for survivor support.
- The systematic focus on women's rights, needs and agency can result in a neglect of joint struggles of men and women against class, caste and other forms of systemic social inequality, discrimination, and exclusion (see e.g. Ababneh 2020).

Some national and local women's rights activists and organisations welcome the active support and promotion of international agencies. But others feel this can go too far, take over from the organically grown women's movement, and turn into intrusive social engineering by Western actors pursuing their own agendas (see e.g. Woodroffe & Aznar Herranz 2019). Then it becomes another expression of the alleged superiority of the liberal West, reproducing a neo-colonial attitude (see e.g. Aguilar 2011).



4

THE OVERALL PICTURE EMERGING

There are good practices of international agencies supporting and reinforcing national/local actors, co-designing interventions and sharing risks and successes. But the mainstream, prevailing practice is one of seeing and using national/local actors as means for the implementation of agendas and designs of international actors.

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that the prevailing reality of the international relief sector remains one of availing of or bypassing national and local actors, rather than supporting and strengthening them.

Of all the country situations reviewed, Bangladesh stands out for its sustained advocacy, and public campaigning, for international relief actors to better deliver on their commitments and promises. Several factors contribute to this: Bangladeshi CSOs have been active for a long time on the issues of aid effectiveness and were also present and advocating at the World Humanitarian Summit. A deep shock was experienced in the autumn of 2017, when they were confronted with a massive ‘comprehensive response’ by the international relief sector to the latest influx of Rohingya refugees. This went against the then prevailing trend in Bangladesh, and everything they had been advocating for. “This set back localisation in Bangladesh by ten years.” is how one Bangladeshi national summarised it. They are also well organised and several of them have some financial autonomy. It is the collective and sustained advocacy that has put localisation already much more prominently on the agenda than this is the case in other countries, except Somalia.



WHAT POLITICAL, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS DRIVE THESE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES?

The national government is a critical shaper of the internationalisation-localisation dynamics.

Simplifying, we can say that the primary actor groups in any crisis management are the national government, national and local non-governmental actors, and the international actors. The key shaper of the dynamics between them is the national government. By default or design, national governments make political choices. They can invite a comprehensive response from international actors, because politically they want a problem to be an ‘international’ rather than ‘national’ one and/or because they want the financial support. That has been the case e.g. in Somalia, the DRC and around the 2017 Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh. International presence on the ground to exercise oversight is frequently an explicit or implicit condition of donors. For different political reasons, national governments can also significantly restrict the presence on the ground and direct operational space of international aid agencies, as they do not want international interference. Governments may intentionally internationalise certain crises, while restricting international presence and observation around others.

National government making the political choices is a necessary but not sufficient condition to call this ‘national leadership’ in terms of what localisation success would look like. We can identify a form of ‘administrative leadership’ when government officials insist on vetting and approving (or not) all specific programme and project proposals. For these eight country studies, that was particularly noticeable for NGO programmes in Bangladesh, which all require prior approval of the NGO Affairs Bureau. Substantive governmental leadership implies that government institutions have significant expertise, financial resources, and procedures to be a major player themselves in a crisis response, with national non-governmental actors and possibly international assistance actors in complementary and supporting roles. Ethiopia, Bangladesh (outside Cox’s Bazar) and Indonesia are illustrative cases. International aid agencies, not only UN but also INGOs are then working in complement to and support of national and local public authorities, who act as primary duty bearers. Only this would count as full ‘localisation’.

National governments also determine the space for their own civil society. They do this formally through legal, administrative, and fiscal measures. Beyond that they can also exercise political influence – or pressure. The formal frameworks for civil society in e.g. the DRC, Indonesia, Myanmar, Colombia and Bangladesh are fairly enabling. In Somalia, an NGO Act or NGO Law has been under consideration for some years now, but Somali NGOs still operate in an unregulated environment. In Ethiopia, however, for the decade between the spring of 2009 and the spring of 2019, the civil society legislation was extremely constraining. A new civil society act has now reopened the space. In Pakistan, the space for civil society has been shrinking significantly since 2013. The requirement to re-register and restrictions on foreign funding are typical components of policies to reduce civil society space. Beyond legal and administrative measures, civil society actors are also vulnerable to political pressure, threats of violence and actual violence. Instances of this occur e.g. in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Colombia. A civil society kept weak domestically, can’t but leave space and control to international agencies.



Available aid levels have significant influence on the dynamics of internationalisation and localisation.

The narrative of the international relief sector holds that it acts and spends based on humanitarian need. This might be considered not to be the case in every humanitarian need arising. International media and political attention are major drivers, particularly for all those who are heavily dependent on institutional funding. There is no big international presence in ‘forgotten crises’.⁹ When international funding declines and international relief agencies start to scale down and leave, the wish to ‘hand over’ to local actors suddenly appears. That is localisation by default. At the same time, humanitarian crises that never made it into the international media, or disappeared from them, and the much more significant role that national and local actors may play in them, receive much less media reporting.

Prevailing short-termism is an obstacle to localisation.

The international relief sector’s mindset and ways of operating are strongly influenced by the scenario of an acute emergency response. In decades-long crises such as the DRC, Somalia and Colombia, much humanitarian/relief funding remains short-term, granted for rarely more than 12 months. A significant rapid deployment capacity in the world remains entirely justified, the problem is the inability and unwillingness to radically change approach when a situation has stabilised. The renewed appetite for ‘nexus’ approaches¹⁰ could introduce longer-term perspectives, unless more development funding is handled with short-term perspectives, to fill the humanitarian financing gaps.

Some donor practices hinder the implementation of their commitment to localisation and donors could do much more than they do now.

Donor administrations dealing with humanitarian aid are subject to the general bureaucratic pressure to spend. Annual budgets have to be spent to be able to make a claim to at least the same budget next year, and to avoid criticism from the media. In emergencies, the pressure to spend can be even greater. That has negative consequences. Too much money is allocated in the early stages when absorption capacity is still being built up and not enough for the longer-term support. Among international aid agencies exists an equivalent concern that can leave managers more preoccupied with the ‘burn rate’ than e.g. conflict-sensitive ways of operating or sustainable impacts.

Donor administrations also need third party fund managers, entities to which they can give large grants and which in turn then will assess, contract, monitor and ensure reporting from a variety of implementers to whom they sub-grant. The added benefit for the donor is that risk is outsourced to the fund-manager.

Donor administrations, possibly under pressure from their national media and a section of the population critical of taxpayers’ money going to others in the world, have also become excessively concerned about ‘risk’. The primary concerns are financial and misconduct scandals, which will be picked on and magnified in the media. Other risks, e.g. undermining the development of a vibrant civil society in an aid-recipient country, or the need to repeatedly finance an expensive international mobilisation to the same crisis area, are not recognised or do not appear on the risk matrix.

Relief aid donors can be operating with a narrow understanding of value-for-money. It is seen in short-term project terms, as (promised) results delivered on time. Policy changes that lead to a reduction in longer-term programme funding in favour of more project funding reinforce

⁹ Which is why Norwegian Refugee Council periodically publishes an overview of the world’s most neglected displacement crises.

¹⁰ Extensively discussed and researched in the 1990s as ‘linking relief, rehabilitation and development’.



this negative trend (INGO interviewee Somalia).

Some bilateral aid donors, more often from risk considerations than legal barriers, cannot easily support national/local actors directly. That means they cannot achieve their commitments to the Grand Bargain directly, only via international intermediaries.

The international relief sector is generally reluctant to critically examine how it uses its power.

Regarding the conversation about localisation, this research revealed that power inequalities are a key issue for national/local actors but not for most international ones. The influence of power inequalities has been highlighted several times by researchers at the ODI and others but is not accepted as a necessary agenda point (Bennett 2016; Slim 2020). ‘Power’ stands out for its absence from the agenda in most of the conversation spaces that international actors chair or have most influence over. Yet, control over money gives much power: to decide which capacities are relevant and to judge national and local actors unilaterally accordingly, to choose ‘partners’ and determine the terms of collaboration, to be transparent about budgets or not and what financial resources the national/local actor will get, even what salaries its staff can be paid and how many computers or motorcycles it can buy, to decide who is invited into working groups, task forces and coordination spaces, even on localisation, to decide which tone of critique is acceptable and which not etc. Most research and evaluations are also shaped and led by international actors and disseminated among them.

Institutional and individual interests can work against localisation.

While some INGOs have a long tradition of working with strategic partners and are institutionally equipped for that, this has largely been acquired through developmental, human rights or peace work. Being fit-for-partnering requires different staff competencies and organisational ways of working. Yet some historically ‘development INGOs’ are increasing their ability to respond to crises. Partially, that is because of the increase in natural disasters and political volatility in the world. But this is also driven by a slow decline in development aid and a clear expansion of humanitarian aid. For some corporate NGOs, the strategic priority is also greater market share and stronger brand recognition (Bennett 2016).

Ways of working that involve more supporting and reinforcing of national/local actors and less indirect implementation ‘through’ (rather than ‘with’) such, can affect the income streams for international agencies (INGOs and UN alike). Sharing or renouncing the management fee is only a first instance where the issue crops up. Even if there is philosophical sympathy for it, it may not be easy for Boards and Directors of organisations to choose for a future in which the organisation is smaller because it works more in support of partners, even if that turns out to be more cost-effective and impactful in the medium-term. The normal reflex is to see success minimally as maintaining annual turnover and ideally with an increased annual turnover.

Individual interests of international and national staff of international agencies can also put a brake on advancing localisation. There are careers to be made in the international relief sector and exotic adventures to be had. More done by national and local actors means less job opportunities for international staff (except perhaps those willing and able to work as trusted advisers and mentors or service providers on demand of the national agency).¹¹ Also national staff, currently enjoying better pay, benefits and career opportunities in international agencies, are not all keen to implement localisation.¹²

¹¹ For an ethnographic perspective on international staff, see e.g. Farah, R. 2020

¹² This was pointed out more as an issue in Bangladesh, while in Colombia local/national actors see their compatriots working for international agencies as still ‘one of them’, an ally.



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