

WHY SUPPORTING AND REINFORCING NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTORS:

SIX CUMULATIVE REASONS (GMI & COAST TRUST March 2023)



1. **Right to choice:** National governments are the duty holders. Protecting and delivering on people's rights is ultimately best done through forms of participatory governance. People have a right to agency and to choice. We are guests in someone else's country, not the masters.
2. **Fitness for context:** National actors can better ensure that the action is fit-for-context.
3. **Cost-effectiveness:** Certainly in the medium- and longer-term, this will be more cost-effective. Stronger 'local resilience' means the strategic objective means stronger, collective, capabilities of diverse national and local actors to handle their challenges. The international aid system in its current functioning is counterproductive: it is more expensive directly but also through its incentives for competition rather than cooperation; there is much wastage; and it can have a bigger carbon footprint. The 'financing gap' is not best addressed by pouring ever more money into international actors operating in the system as it is.
4. **Overwhelm:** Globally, we are in a situation of overwhelm. There are more and ever more overlapping crises, which are recurrent or have become chronic. The capabilities of everyone willing and able to contribute, in this case a large number of national and local actors, are needed.
5. **Neo-colonial aid system:** The political economy of the international aid system is too 'colonial'. There is an oligopoly of a small number of first receivers (a few UN agencies, a few INGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement) which gives them disproportionate power. The current international aid system creates a structural situation of domination of international actors and subordination of national/local ones. Control over money and information, and closeness to the decision-makers, are important sources of that power. This structural inequality is justified and sustained by a sense of superiority among international actors: A moral, managerial, technical and quality superiority. It manifests itself in international actors choosing which national actor can collaborate with them rather than seeing which national actor they must support; in attitudes that national actors have the problems and international actors the solutions; and that it is the natural right and obligation of international actors to exercise oversight over national ones. Generalising, and therefore prejudicial (and potentially racist), negative narratives about national actors further feed into a starting point of distrust in the relationship with them.
6. **Solidarity and justice:** Such structural inequalities and negative attitudes are not compatible with claims of solidarity. Nor are they ethical and just. The implicit message is that it is OK maintain initial power inequalities and to keep those with less power in junior and subordinate roles, too often financially underpaid yet fearful of losing their international patronage. That is the opposite of 'inclusion'.