

Covid-19 and ‘Localisation’

Survey results: Charter4Change signatories

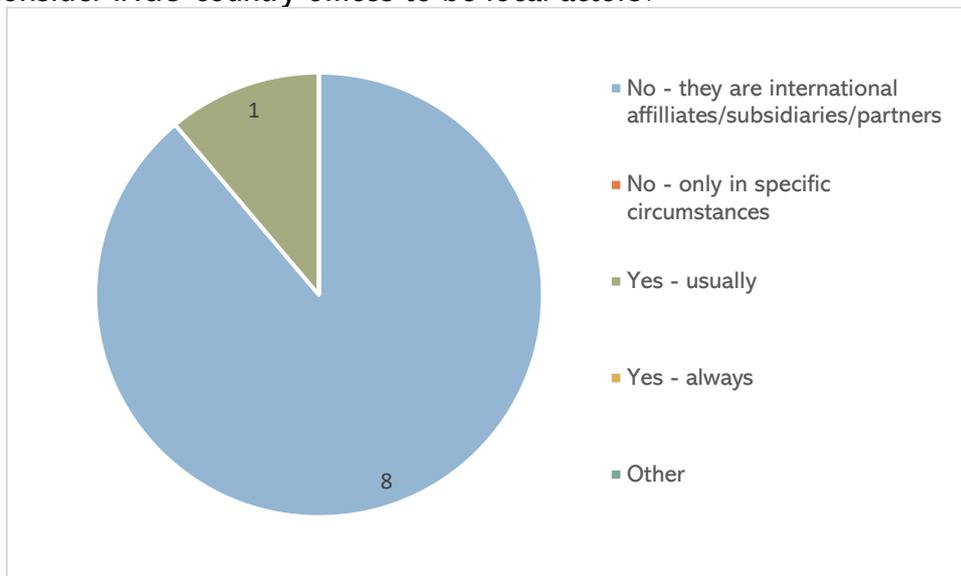
Background: The research aimed to capture the experiences and perspectives of Charter4Change endorsers and signatories on how Covid-19 has impacted humanitarian response. It also explored whether it has acted as a catalyst for enabling more locally-led humanitarian action.

The research project was informed by 20 in-depth interviews with Charter4Change endorsers - local and national NGOs (LNGOs)- in South Sudan, Uganda and Bangladesh. This was complemented by a more systemic overview through the survey disseminated to Charter4Change signatories. This document provides a summary of the collated survey results. Anonymised comments are also shared, as this may provide valuable insights and opportunities for lesson-sharing. Where relevant, brief comments in blue offer insights from the interviews, as a point of comparison.

1. Information about organisation

Total respondents: 9 INGO headquarter offices (anonymised)

2. Do you consider INGO country-offices to be local actors?



3. Localisation: How important are each of the following for enabling locally-led humanitarian action?

How important are each of the following for enabling locally-led humanitarian action?	Not important	Not very important	Neutral	Important	Very Important
Increasing the % of humanitarian funding passed from INGOs to local/national NGO partners		1	1	3	4
Increasing direct funding from donors to local/national NGOs (without intermediaries)		1		3	5
Entering into longer-term strategic partnerships with local/national NGOs (instead of project-based partnerships)				3	6
Stronger leadership roles for local/national NGOs in partnerships with INGOs:				3	6
Local actors having a greater influence in multi-stakeholder humanitarian coordination networks (such as Humanitarian Country Teams, Cluster/Sector working groups, etc.)				1	8

Supporting comments:

- The participant who rated this first two statements as 'not very important' supported this with the comment: *Many times, local partners will not have the possibility to use all funds for a humanitarian project depending on the external circumstances. I therefore don't think the importance lies in getting a larger share of the funding in the projects, but instead improving the general donor practice and engagement on localisation, where the voice and opportunity of local actors are of high importance to create policy changes, which I think is the most important change that can happen for localisation*
- *This presumes that locally led humanitarian action is exclusively the remit of nationally registered organisations. I think it is very important to hold the tension of locally led response between communities (as crisis affected populations) self-determining their own responses to emergencies, and the role of a national or district level provider. I am worried that on occasions we are just "exporting the vices and bad habits" of INGOs to NNGOs. Crisis affected populations need to be at the core.*

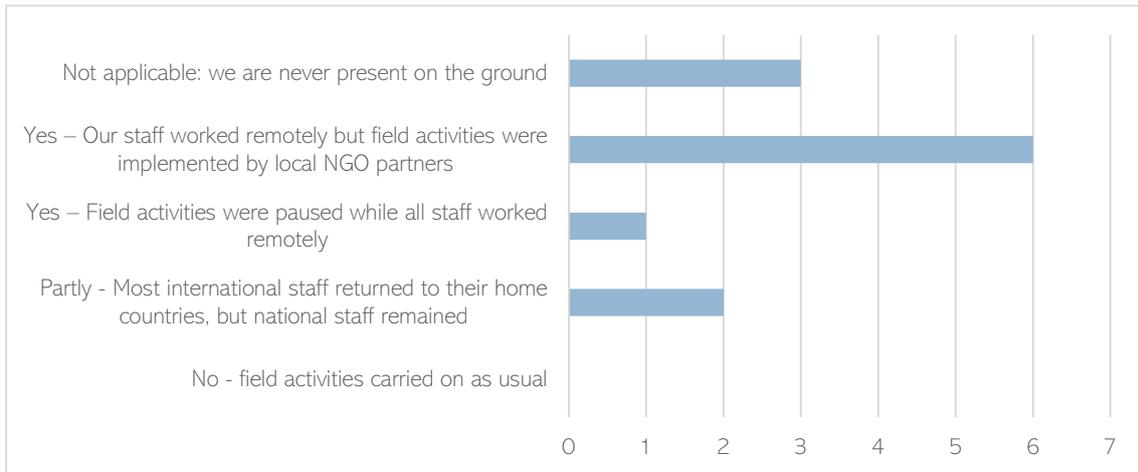
Other:

- ✓ This question was informed by the need to take stock of what respondent's regard as priorities for advancing the localisation agenda/locally-led humanitarian action, focusing specifically on the relationship between INGOs and LNNGOs. This is relevant considering the widespread differences in regards to interpretations of how localisation should manifest in practice.
- ✓ In the interviews, LNNGOs identified the key priorities as more equitable access to funding, more equitable partnerships in regards to decision-making (to combat sub-contracting dynamics) and more direct interaction with donors. Participants also highlighted the importance of respecting local networks and structures.

4. INGO partnership role

Our role as INGOs/INGO country offices in partnerships with LNNGOs should be to:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Provide capacity-strengthening support				3	6
Monitor activities implemented by local/national NGOs		3	3	2	1
Implement activities/response on the ground	5	3	1		
Have primary ownership over the design of programmatic activities	6	2	1		
Have primary ownership over budgeting decisions	5	2	2		
Facilitate more direct engagement between our donors and local NGO partners				6	3
Invest in capacity-strengthening of local/national NGO partners			1	3	5

5. Covid-19: Access & Mobility Did the Covid-19 pandemic impact your presence on the ground?



Supporting comments:

- Multiple answers based on the fact it varied from country to country
- We don't implement on the ground, but it impacted our ability to monitor, and provide capacity strengthening and other support that we would usually do face to face.
- X, with few exceptions, only employs locally hired staff in our countries (though the few international staff we have did need to fly home). In general, the local staff has been working from home during the pandemic while the local partners have done their best to continue working in the field to their best ability, though sometimes it has not been possible due to the pandemic..

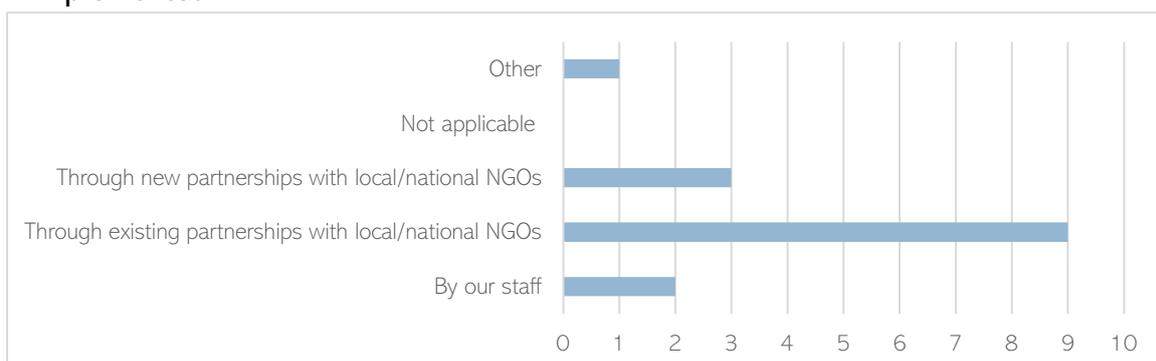
Interviews:

- ✓ This mirrors the reality presented by interviews participants; LNNGOs remained on the ground whereas international partners generally withdrew to a remote capacity. System-wide mobility trends resulted in increased reliance on LNNGOs for responding both to Covid-19 and other humanitarian crises.

6. Has your organisation been involved in Covid-19 related response?

This question was mainly relevant for the analysis of subsequent questions. All respondents embedded Covid-19 response in existing programmatic activities and/or in addition to existing activities. Seven did both. Only one respondent was involved in multi-stakeholder Covid-19 coordination mechanisms. One respondent also mentioned the need to adjust funding to cater for the nexus between development and humanitarian funding in order to continue to be effective.

7. If you answered yes to the previous question, how was Covid-19 response implemented?



8. Covid-19 Partnership Model: What has been your most common partnership model with local/national NGOs during Covid-19?

Most respondent marked a combination of "We collaborate on decision-making processes and project design with local/national NGO partners" and "Our local partner defines the programme design and strategy, complemented by support from us".

Is this different from your usual partnership model? How?

- *Not different, but please note the multiple answers is related to the context we find ourselves in in that country.*
- *In some country offices, there was a significant shift and it did fast track the localisation agenda but not necessarily the shift of funds and decision making to local actors. Hence I have also noticed local mobilization of resources triggered by the COVID response.*
- *This is not different to our usual partnership model. This has meant that our partners have been able to adapt and respond effectively whatever their context.*
- *No, the way we have been working with the partners have been similar to how we usually work, which would be a combination of the two options I have marked.*

Interviews:

- ✓ This presents a significant discrepancy to the partnership experiences shared in the interviews. LNNGOs frequently noted that a 'sub-contracting' dynamic is prevalent between LNNGOs and INGO partners. This manifests through poor quality project-based funding, and poor involvement in decision-making. This was noted across all three countries. However, interviewees also highlighted that some partnerships are indeed very supportive and regarded very positively. Consequently, it is likely that survey respondents represent the more equitable partnerships mentioned.
- ✓ Furthermore, survey results indicate that Covid-19 did not alter usual partnership practices. However, interview participants frequently stated that it offered them an opportunity to become more involved in decision-making and designing programmatic activities.

9. Funding During Covid-19: did you receive funds via any of the following?

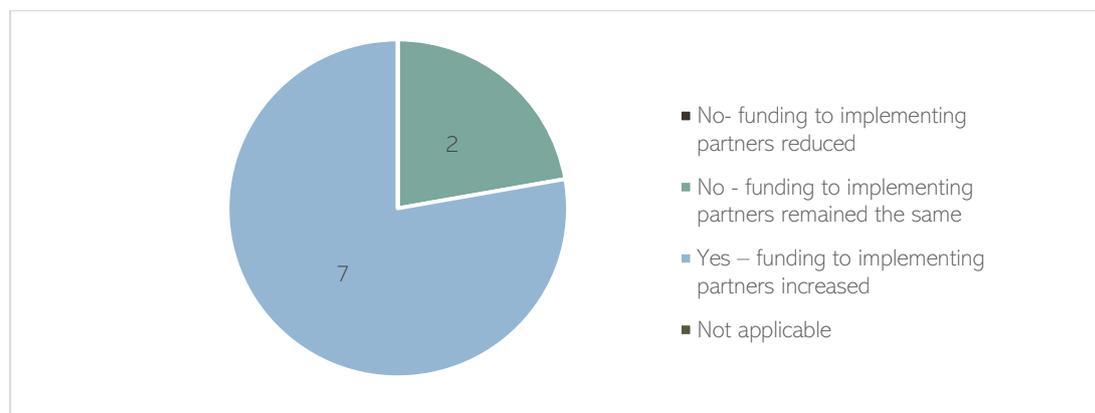
Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)	2
Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF)	2
Dedicated Covid-19 pooled funds	4
None of the above	4
N/A	0

The answers varied quite significantly on this front. Four respondents did not receive any. Two only received dedicated Covid-19 pooled funds, whereas the remaining three received a combination. The discrepancies suggest that no pattern can be noted. However, when comparing this to the LNNGO experience, it is evident that was easier for INGOs to obtain pooled funding than LNNGOs. This was echoed through systemic trends, as evidenced through the Global Humanitarian Response Fund for Covid-19 progress reports¹ and the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2021². The first-level funding prioritisation to UN agencies and INGOs above LNNGOs mirror pre-Covid trends.

¹ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHRP_ProgressReport_22FEB.pdf

² <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2021/>

10. Funding: Have you channelled a larger portion (percentage and/or amount) of funds to implementing partners (national/local actors) on the ground during Covid-19?



Supporting comments:

- Please note the funding to partners increased as we did response simultaneously in multiple countries at once. So it was more a case that we had a wider pool of partners to fund.
- We were able to provide additional funding to local partners through appeals and fund-raising that was in addition to our normal funding support.
- I would say they remained the same. Partners have however been a bit slow in adapting their budget work to working in the pandemic, which means that there has often been funding that has not been used for transportation costs and monitoring costs, since much of that work has been cancelled.

Interviews:

- ✓ The 20 LNNGOs unanimously stated that funding to LNNGOs decreased during this period. Furthermore, very few had access to the pooled funding mechanisms mentioned in Q8. In practice, this meant LNNGOs predominantly remained reliant on international partners for funding. This dependency is seen as compromising the sustainability of humanitarian (and development) interventions. During Covid-19, smaller LNNGOs were further marginalised as a result of priority given to larger organisations, and a fund-diversion to health partners. As a result, many LNNGOs have been subject to closures and lay-off of staff, despite being the primary responders on the ground.

11. Localisation Commitments

Please use the scale below to specify how COVID-19 has impacted your efforts to:	Significantly slowed progress	Slowed progress	No impact	Increased rate of progress	Significantly increased rate of progress
Strengthen partnerships with local actors			4	4	1
Emphasise the importance of national actors to humanitarian donors				6	3
Ensure equality in programmatic decision-making between INGOs and local partners			8	1	
Provide organisational support and capacity building		2	5	1	1
Promote the role of local actors to the media and public			3	4	2

Supporting comments:

- *The reliance on local partners has increased the rate of progress towards localisation. It will be important that this is not temporary and that as soon as the pandemic "ends" INGOs don't snap back to previous modes of operation. I think that real change in decision-making and power has only slightly changed though. Capacity strengthening and organisational support has slowed progress because of an inability to provide the support that we normally would in-country and face-to-face. We've been creative, and tried new methods, some that have been very effective, but others just don't work as well online!*
- *In our country programs, there have been many country offices reporting that planned capacity building sessions with partners have had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. I have therefore put a 2 at this question, as this has meant that important capacity building sessions have either had to be cancelled completely or moved to 2021*

12. Covid-19's impact on locally-led response

Please use the scale to provide your perspective on the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Covid-19 has increased the recognition and visibility of national/local NGOs in humanitarian response			1	5	3
Covid-19 has evidenced that local NGOs are able to deliver effective and efficient humanitarian response			1	5	3
The Covid-19 context (access and mobility restrictions for international partners) has increased the leadership roles of local/national NGO partners in programme design and delivery			3	5	1
Local actors have had greater influence in multi-stakeholder humanitarian coordination networks (such as Humanitarian Country Teams, Cluster/Sector working groups, etc.)			8	1	
Multi-stakeholder dialogue between donors, INGOs and local actors has increased		1	2	6	

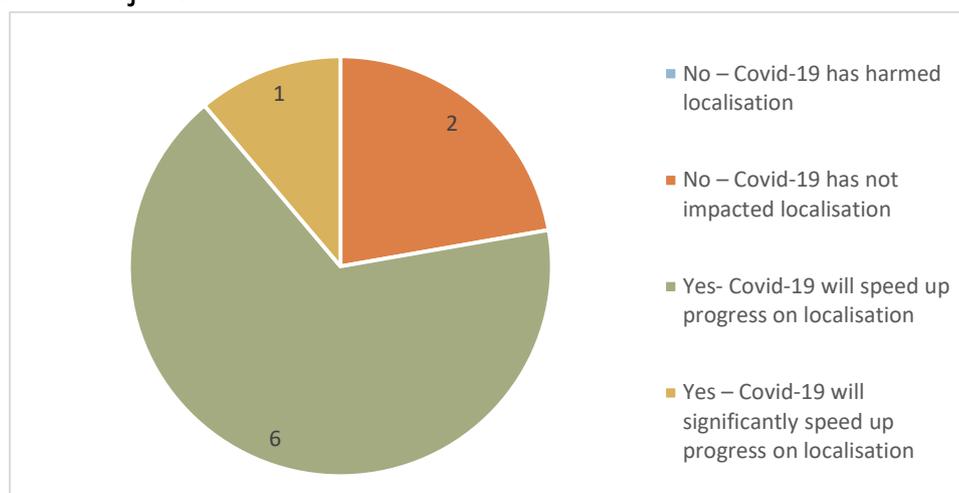
Supporting comments:

- *I desperately wanted COVID to be a catalyst for localisation, but in the panic international donors reverted to type. While we wanted to show case more the work of local actors, it been hard to see the concrete evidence of influence and leadership. We need to gather more specific data rather than anecdotal case studies*
- *Sadly, we have seen little development in the general sector moving more positively towards localisation despite the clear added value local actors have had during the pandemic*

Interviews:

- ✓ The statement regarding influence in multi-stakeholder networks represents a complex issue. From the interviews, it is evident that in certain contexts, LNNGOs want more influence and better representation in these forums. However, in other contexts, priority is on the virtue of leveraging local networks, and the importance of international actors supporting/respecting these. More generally, it was noted that multi-stakeholder dialogue in different formats is regarded positively, as it enables more complementary action.

13. The 2017 'Shifting The Power' paper titled 'Localisation of Aid: are INGOs Walking the Talk?'³ states "there is always the possibility that a major shock will catalyze transformative change" (p.14) for shifting power to local actors. Do you think Covid-19 may be this 'major shock'?



Supporting comments:

- *[yes] So I ticked a reluctant yes Covid speeding up progress - mainly because the conversation is more intense and potentially more meaningful but the evidence is erratic, and fluctuates from country to country.*
- *[yes] If INGO's continue to invest in partnership with local actors*
- *Yes, it has been a catalyst for pushing the conversation and has provided critical proof of why localised aid is more effective, efficient and sustainable.*
- *[yes] I hope it will significantly speed up progress on localisation but it will require more permanent changes in the way that INGOs and international mechanisms work for the change to be embedded and permanent.*
- *[no] I would say that it is still business as usual on this. The sector has not changed that much regarding localisation: there are still major structural barriers and attitudes against it, mostly in the donor sector, that is continuing to be there despite the pandemic. I would therefore say that this major shock has not been enough to change the general discourse on localisation in the sector.*

Interviews:

- ✓ The positive impact of Covid-19 is increased visibility and recognition of LNINGO comparative advantages and capacity to lead. It catalysed attention to LNINGO voices and experiences, and pushed the localisation dialogue between stakeholders along the aid-chain. Additionally, it has evidenced the virtue of collective agency amongst LNINGOs and highlighted the importance of local networks. It has also evidenced alternative resource mobilisation mechanisms. However, structural barriers, especially access to direct funding, was highlighted by all LNINGO participants across the three contexts. Covid-19 has exposed -at an unparalleled scale- that the structural flaws compromise the sustainability of humanitarian response.

³ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WTT_FINAL.pdf

14. Final reflection: Please share any thoughts/comments on the impact of Covid-19 on the role and priorities of INGOs/INGO country offices in humanitarian assistance going forward

- *Covid 19 highlighted gaps in the humanitarian system. Historically, the humanitarian system is organized largely around international actors and around big and dramatic disasters. The humanitarian system is built in reverse. We start with big problems and solutions are designed at the global level instead of the other way around. We should start with the small problems at the village level. Address the problems before they escalate. More and more, I feel our role as INGOs need to change dramatically. It will not be about direct implementation anymore and not even about capacity building unless there are some new technical expertise needed. Our role is more about raising funds and highlighting issues in the global arena more from the standpoint of advocacy and lobbying. In Covid 19, I also notice how INGOs have gadgets and technology allowing us to pivot to remote work easily. This is not true for local actors. Maybe this in an area where we can support quickly. We can also throw in some risk management for them such as access to medical insurance, etc.*
- *There is a need to allow National and local NGOs to be different from humanitarian sector from mere addressing needs, including giving more emphasis on processes of engagement and empowerment of survivors to lead their response, holistically (and not sector based) address the root causes and with accompaniment support of NNGO and INGOs. we should move to area-based coordination systems at local and country level in order to be more inclusive and work across the nexus*
- *For our organization there hasn't been much change as we were already working directly with local actors. While there was a hope that this would make a difference in local actors participation and voice in the humanitarian structures, I don't think it has really had the impact we had hoped for as things seem to be business as usual when it comes to funding streams and power of decision making with programming and coordination.*
- *The pandemic has made it clear that multi-mandated organizations need to have humanitarian capacity and contingency in as many country offices as possible in order to stay relevant when the context changes as much as it has during the pandemic. Based on that, more countries within X have decided to move towards having humanitarian contingency plans and capacity during this and upcoming years. This would not have been possible without the contextual impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.*
- *INGOs/INGO country offices should take up more and more a role as a facilitator for local/national NGOs based on what LNNGOs express what kind of facilitation they are looking for. As long as funding is provided by or through INGOs, they should also have a role in programmatic discussions, budgetary decisions and M&E of the projects they fund. In order to actually achieve an equal influence of local and national NGOs at the international level, I think it would make sense for LNNGOs to approach their international partners with very concrete proposals on what form and extent of support they expect or demand.*

Isabelle Persson, Utrecht University

If you wish to discuss the research further, please do not hesitate to get in touch via:

isabellecpersson@gmail.com