

‘Time to put a fire here’ - 2022 Communique from Charter4Change

From 7 to 9th December 2021, the Charter4Change (C4C) coalition convened its 2021 Global Annual Meeting¹. Over the past year, in the context of the on-going Covid19 pandemic and wider conversations about decolonising aid, the C4C movement has gained significant momentum. This was reflected in the Meeting’s discussions, where representatives from smaller, grassroots NGOs alongside national NGOs and international NGOs shared ideas exploring the barriers to transformative change, and practical steps required to overcome these. In several contexts, C4C country-level working-groups are working on decentralised dialogue and action on localisation to engage civil society beyond the policy discussions in capital cities. As one participant from South Sudan phrased it in the closing session - “we are going to put a fire here” inspired by collaboration through Charter4Change.

This Communique highlights the following four issues as key priorities for 2022:

- 1. The biggest scope for transformative change and innovative local leadership happens at the country-level. C4C members, and other international agencies committed to localisation, must support this.** Prior to the Annual Meeting, C4C members have convened country-level dialogues in Nigeria, South Sudan, Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Philippines, Bangladesh, Uganda, and DR Congo; including both INGO signatories’ own national/local NGO partners and a wider range of local NGOs keen to champion localisation. C4C members advocate for a stronger focus on country-level processes enabling a leadership role by national NGOs in shaping the agenda of localisation efforts in their contexts, rather than just being driven by priorities of international agencies. The Grand Bargain initiative to convene National Reference Groups at the country-level is identified as an important opportunity to realise this ambition. The importance of inclusion is key; especially in terms of smaller, grassroots NGOs and community-based organisations at the sub-national level. INGO signatories, and other international agencies, are encouraged to engage with and support these processes through participation by their staff with decision-making authority, and through engaging with their own national/local NGO partners to surface their priorities and foster collaboration with others in the process.
- 2. International agencies – including C4C signatories – must establish more systematic means to hold their staff, programmes and partnerships accountable for localisation at both country and global levels; and donors should align their approach to incentivising this.** At the Annual Meeting, INGOs shared examples of how they are defining and pursuing transformative changes within their own organisations as intermediaries. Despite some good initiatives by INGO signatories, localisation ‘gains’ remain ad-hoc, unsystematic and flawed by lack of institutionalised accountability and commitment to change. A lack of timely reporting on funding to local actors in emergency responses, and the practice of some INGOs registering their country offices as ‘local’ further obstruct progress. C4C members committed to share learning and align efforts towards promoting more effective approaches. A strong interest was also expressed to engage more with other INGOs on these efforts, including larger INGOs known primarily for direct implementation such as IRC, NRC, SAVE and others that have also started on journeys to review their partnership practices. The Grand Bargain Caucus on Intermediaries was identified as one entry-point over the coming year for dialogue with donors and peer agencies to identify how donors incentivise

¹ Recordings of the C4C Annual Meeting sessions and a report summarising detailed follow-up actions will be made available on the C4C website

accountability and transformative change on issues like overheads costs and support for partnerships and consortia that promote local leadership.

- 3. A collaborative approach to overcome the due diligence and accountability barriers to local humanitarian action is needed.** The Annual Meeting highlighted how the current approach to compliance, quality and accountability has become – in the words of Jan Egeland – an ‘industry’ in and of itself that excludes and penalises local NGOs. The dominant paradigm of humanitarian funding and partnerships involves delegating risks to local NGOs – often working literally at risk of their lives – rather than centring an understanding of the risks they face and supporting them to manage these. To effectively deliver on a collaborative approach to overcome due diligence barriers, C4C members advocate for a shift by INGOs, donors and quality and accountability stakeholders, such as CHS, towards fostering longer-term partnerships and context-specific, proportionate approaches that recognise and build on the risks and strengths of local NGOs. National NGOs also recognise that they must do their part in addressing legitimate questions about quality and accountability. The C4C Charter of Accountability was shared as a framework developed by a group of national NGOs to inform dialogue between C4C endorsers and C4C signatories about partnership-based approaches to accountability.
- 4. Momentum on addressing climate change and the environment in humanitarian action must factor in, resource and build on the expertise of national/local NGOs.** C4C members – national NGOs and INGOs – are playing leadership roles in both global and national efforts on climate change and the environment. At the Annual Meeting, learning was shared and challenges discussed related to the [Climate and Environment Charter](#) for Humanitarian Organisations and the [Eight Principles for Locally-Led Adaptation](#). C4C members emphasise the need for local and national NGOs to access funding from humanitarian, climate and development funding instruments and to ensure locally led adaptation actions through a bottom-up approach. The relevance of the eight commitments in the C4C Charter for better partnerships between INGOs and national NGOs for climate and environment programming was affirmed. C4C members express an interest to collaborate more in exchange of good practices, as well as learning about how to overcome challenges, in INGO – national NGO partnerships on the climate and environment in crisis settings.