

Session Title: Accelerating localization connecting with and leveraging locally-led networks and platforms: moving from commitment to action'

HNPW 2023 Session, 28 April 2023

This brief highlights the key discussions from the session convened by Charter4Change and the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream during the Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Week (HNPW) in Geneva. The session was aimed at understanding how national and local civil society networks can connect and dialogue with UN/INGO and donor coordination processes towards strengthening accountability for local leadership and quality partnerships.

Five priority issues emerging from this session:

1. Ad-hoc efforts on localisation by coordination and decision-making structures and processes fail to deliver the desired results. Instead, UN/INGO and donor coordination structures should be intentional about the changes they commit to, monitor and evaluate progress against these.
2. UN/INGO coordination structures, including Humanitarian Country Teams, inter-cluster coordination groups, clusters and sector-working groups, should establish clear Localisation Roadmaps (or 'strategies' or 'frameworks') with measurable objectives, indicators and milestones to track progress and catalyse accountability for commitments on equitable partnership, funding to local actors, capacity-strengthening and participation in decision-making.
3. Donors and donor coordination groups in all contexts should build on the nascent good practices emerging in contexts like Myanmar and South Sudan; where donors (including through the in-country donor coordination group) are connecting with the HCT in a structured dialogue to shape and monitor progress on the HCT Localisation Framework. Donors should also ensure that national NGOs benefit from overheads support and flexible, multi-year funding so they can maintain the staff to participate in coordination and decision-making spaces effectively. Donors should also establish clear country plans for how they will promote localisation through both their policy influence and through the partnerships and funding streams that they oversee. Through the donor coordination group at country level, they should establish a structured approach to direct dialogue with national NGOs involving at least one annual 'deep dive' meeting to surface the strategic opportunities and challenges
4. National NGOs should build on the good practices in context like Lebanon where they have established a national NGO forum to organise themselves and agree shared priorities and representation into dialogue with the HCT and donor coordination group. Continuity of participation in coordination processes, consultation and dialogue within

national NGO networks to develop shared analysis and positioning, are key to effective influence.

5. Research institutions and INGOs committed to localisation can act as allies to national NGO networks and platforms, but current experience varies in this regard. For example INGOs and INGO Forums could provide multi-year funds and accompaniment support to national NGO networks in engaging with HCTs and donor coordination groups, and insist on equal representation into these spaces. Research institutions can support on producing baselines and regular monitoring and analysis to help generate an evidence base to inform the dialogue with HCTs, donors and donor coordination groups.

Summary of contributions:

Ms. Nadine Saba, CEO Akkar Network for Development in Lebanon highlighted the importance of establishing clear objectives and indicators for localisation at an inter-agency level. In Lebanon, there has been work to develop a Humanitarian Country Team Localisation Roadmap, which remains unfinished. From the NGO side, they are keen to see this agreed and action in order to be able to track progress and bring about accountability for localisation.

Ms. Gloria Soma, Executive Director of Titi Foundation in South Sudan highlighted that there have been some gains in national NGO participation in her context; notably through some national NGO seats in clusters and on the Humanitarian Country Team. However, there is a need to go beyond a 'seat at the table' to actually being able to influence the decisions that are made. Often it feels like national NGOs are brought in to 'rubber stamp' decisions that have already been made by international agencies, rather than genuinely contributing to leadership and decision-making. Resourcing of national NGOs' representatives to take on leadership roles in inter-agency processes also needs more support. The levels of investment provided to UN agencies and INGOs to resources have not yet been extended to national NGOs.

Dr. Nur Incetahtaci Gunal a board member of SANAD, a refugee-led organisation, and a member of Turkish Refugee Council emphasized how short-term project cycles and inadequate overheads cost support means that national NGOs struggle to maintain the staff and ability to organize themselves to participate and meaningfully engage in dialogue with either UN or donor coordination and decision-making processes. In the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey, it was local community groups and NGOs, including Refugee led organizations, that stayed and continued to help their communities when international agencies withdrew and suspended their work. It was local organizations, rooted in the affected communities, who knew where people with disabilities, the elderly and others facing additional challenges were located and how best to support them in a timely fashion. Humanitarian coordination and decision-making is failing as long as it fails to find practical, creative ways to overcome the current disconnects with these NGOs, groups and networks.

Ms. Marina Skuric Prodanovic, Chief of System-wide Approaches and Practices Section, Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), highlighted the importance of adopting a contextualized approach to localisation, and building towards greater national NGO participation and leadership in coordination and decision-making processes. In some contexts, significant progress has been made. with regard to significant membership and regular participation by national NGOs in the HCT and other levels of coordination (e.g. Syria/Gaziantep) . Guidance issued by the IASC over recent years to strengthen participation and leadership by national and local actors in IASC humanitarian coordination structures is starting to generate some results, although more is needed. The question we need to be asking is not why local actors should co-lead coordination, but rather why they are not? We need to let go – power-sharing is critical.

Mr. Eric Brogger Rasmussen, Ambassador at the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nation’s Office in Geneva, highlighted the steps that the Government of Denmark has taken to prioritise localization in its policies and practices; notably through provision of overheads costs to local partners, strengthening requirements of INGOs that it funds in terms of equitable partnership and support to local leadership in crisis response. Noting that power sharing is critical and “its not just about being at the table but being loud at the table”. He highlighted that transformative change is taking time because it is about changing organizational cultures that have long histories, and this means that all actors – donors, international agencies and national NGOs – need to maintain the momentum to drive through change.

Mr. Henrik Herber, Program Specialist, Swedish Embassy, South Sudan, suggested that the core challenge is that the humanitarian system is framed to address short-term needs through short-term approaches, and localisation requires longer-term investment. Risk aversion represents an on-going challenge that needs to be navigated if efforts on localisation are to make progress. Current humanitarian funding modalities force local NGOs into short-term projectized and single sector approaches. There is strong interest from HCT, donor group and NGO Forum in South Sudan to make progress, and he agrees with Nadine’s call for a ‘common framework’. In South Sudan there is a need to bring together different levels of effort into one common framework, also including peace- and development-oriented actors across the HDP nexus, and using this to leverage a change in mindsets to break through some of the barriers.

John Ede, President/CEO/HC of Ohaha Family Foundation, highlighted the need to be intentional about equitable partnership engaging local actors in policy and key decision making. Also, he captured the need to support ‘specific’ capacity sharing and strengthening of local organization, encourage equal representation in HCT, promote long term programming, shifting power to local actors, forge culture change, improve on accountability and progress reporting. He echoed the need for donors’ willingness to take risks, allocate resources specifically for local

actors' participation in policy and decision making processes, encourage funding to cover overhead costs, and develop a common framework for local actors in participation and advancing local leadership.

Clare Atwine, Secretariat Coordinator at the Charter4Change Secretariat / CEFORD Uganda, highlighted the need for equal representation / inclusion of local actors in key decision making spaces. Called for support towards existing coordination spaces & localisation initiatives from country to global level instead of creating parallel spaces. She emphasised the need for increased documentation of best practices on localisation and sharing that for learning and accountability. She called for the need to have performance indicators for Country level directors of signatories of the various localisation initiatives to measure their progress on implementing the commitments their organization have signed on to.

Audience members in the room and online raised questions and comments regarding:

- Importance of INGO Forums and INGO Country Directors acting as allies to national NGO Forums or network.
- Research institutions are increasingly conducting baselines and analysis on localisation trends at country level. Both national NGO forums, HCTs and donor coordination groups could be connecting with and using these in a more structured manner to evidence their dialogue on localisation.
- Policy discussion on localisation often only involves those agencies that are already committed (eg partnership based agencies). Need to leverage donor engagement to press for other large INGOs and UN agencies to participate too.
- Especially within UN agencies and donor embassies, engagement is often dependent on one or two committed staff, which results in efforts falling apart when they rotate to another context. Need for donor embassies to establish localisation country strategies to build ownership and continuity not dependent on individual staff only.
- Measurement of localisation within UN/NGO coordination processes has so far centred mainly on basic metrics of how many national NGOs participate in clusters, including in co-lead roles. Need to deepen measurement of more meaningful metrics like how UN/NGO coordination processes are: resulting in decisions that reflect national NGO leadership or input; catalysing shifts towards accountability for equitable partnerships within each sector; and enabling a scale up of capacity strengthening, local to local capacity sharing and two way local/international capacity exchange.