



Charter4Change 2024 Communique

This Communique outlines four priority calls to action for the Charter4Change (C4C) movement and other stakeholders who are committed to promoting locally-led humanitarian action. It is drawn from discussions at the C4C Global Annual Meeting in December 2023, which was attended by over 300 representatives from smaller grassroots NGOs, national NGOs, international NGOs, donors, and allies.

We are at a critical juncture. The past year saw several major donors taking steps towards adopting new bilateral policies and practices to promote better quality partnerships and local humanitarian actors, yet the pace of change remains slow and inadequate, and international agencies' accountability for their localization efforts is weak to non-existent.

To deliver meaningful, practical, and transformative change, Charter4Change highlights the following four priorities for 2024:

1. More than six months into the new phase of the Grand Bargain, C4C is calling for greater clarity from humanitarian leaders on how Grand Bargain localization commitments and Caucus outcomes will be translated into time-bound, practical actions by their agencies, and on how global and country-level processes will engage all signatories in overcoming barriers and accelerating progress.

During the C4C Global Meeting policy session, Grand Bargain Ambassador Manuel Bessler shared plans to establish a dialogue with local actors to identify ways forward on localisation, which is welcome. However, C4C members expressed concern over the lack of clarity about how other Grand Bargain signatories will be engaged, especially after the Localization Workstream was disbanded (against the wishes of its civil society members).

Looking forward, we urgently need the Grand Bargain to establish a structured dialogue on localisation that engages all Grand Bargain signatories, not just local actors. Otherwise, we risk creating a space where local actors speak to local actors and the Ambassador, but the international institutions currently holding decision-making power and resources are not engaged. More donors need to contribute to the momentum and use their influence to leverage change, as the US and Denmark have recently done by co-hosting high-level policy discussions linked to changes in their bilateral policies and practices.

Throughout the C4C Global Meeting, we heard how some donor governments – notably the US, but also Denmark and ECHO – are starting to take serious steps towards implementing ambitious localisation policies and practices. Some C4C INGO signatories also shared innovative new approaches to shifting power and resources to their local partners; for example, through establishing more systematic mutual accountability processes, and targets that are tracked towards shifting leadership of programming and direct access to funding to their local partners (the 'prime switch' model for programmes and consortia).

The challenge remains, as ever, to encourage all agencies to take these steps. In the coming year, we call on all INGOs, UN agencies, and institutional donors to translate the Grand Bargain localisation commitments and the relevant Caucus outcomes (notably on the role of intermediaries and funding for localisation) into their objectives, milestones, and indicators, with accountability exercised to catalyse change.



2. We urgently need to strengthen and promote locally led solutions to address the impact of the climate crisis, which is already intensifying humanitarian needs.

Over the last two years, Charter4Change has convened dedicated spaces to discuss how to better link localisation to climate action. It has been long recognised that the climate crisis is magnifying risks to human security and undermining peace and development, but climate solutions are still heavily dominated by top-down approaches that undermine local efforts.

Many donors' channel vast finance through multilateral development institutions, such as the World Bank, the European Development Bank, the Africa Development Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. Donors exercise considerable policy influence over these development banks and promote multi-stakeholder partnerships across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus through them. Some development banks provide support to humanitarian response through government social protection systems, multi-donor trust funds, or programmes with national governments, which national NGOs receive direct or indirect funding from. For many INGOs and national NGOs, these institutions are often top-down, slow, and inflexible as a donor, which can be particularly challenging in dynamic, risky humanitarian contexts.

Most global climate finance is failing to reach fragile and conflict states, which are among the most vulnerable to the climate crisis. The risk management approach of these mechanisms, for example, the Green Climate Fund (GCF), is not conducive to working in humanitarian contexts, as donors are unwilling to accept and mitigate heightened programmatic and financial risks. In addition, the accredited organizations that are able to access the GCF are mostly national governments and international organizations.

In 2009, COP15 set a goal of providing \$100bn in new, additional, predictable, and accessible climate finance annually by 2020. This has never been achieved, and most funding that was delivered was diverted from humanitarian and development aid. Donors must commit to making climate finance truly new and additional. Experiences at the local level must be evidenced and used to influence national, regional, and global policymaking.

C4C is calling on donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs to make sure climate finance reaches the local and national civil society actors who are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Those who are most affected by the climate crisis need space, power, resources, and capacities to contribute to decisions that impact them.

Donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs must increase flexible and long-term funding for locally led capacity strengthening and two-way capacity sharing.

During the C4C Annual Meeting, many discussions reiterated the importance of capacity strengthening for local and national actors, which must be based on their needs and vision, systematic technical support, and flexible and multi-year funding. Locally led capacity strengthening continues to be highlighted as a priority by local actors and is key to delivering locally-led aid.



The current practice of capacity strengthening, whereby an organisation assesses the respective contributions and value of another, is largely limited to international organisations evaluating local organizations for funding and partnerships. Capacity strengthening between international and local actors should be a two-way process that leverages the expertise and knowledge of local actors. International actors should also take the opportunity to learn from local actors, including technical skills, operational experience, and an in-depth understanding of political, social, and cultural contexts.

Capacity-strengthening initiatives like consortia models and sharing ICR must be scaled up and strengthened. C4C is calling on donors and international NGOs to support long-term approaches to capacity strengthening and increase multi-year, predictable, and flexible funding to local actors. This could include targeting networks of local actors, early warning systems, contingency plans, government institutions, and regional entities. Donors and international NGOs should explore innovative capacity-strengthening approaches, such as shadowing and mentoring that allow peer-to-peer learning and secondments, including in donor institutions.

We need to work together to improve the recruitment, retention, and well-being of staff in national NGOs, including tackling unethical recruitment practices and supporting smaller organizations to fill capacity gaps, which is key to quality partnerships.

Charter4Change's fourth commitment calls on INGOs to 'stop undermining' the capacity of national NGOs, particularly through unethical recruitment in crisis response. The C4C Annual Meeting practice session explored the impact of recruitment and staff movements on national NGOs, who often 'lose' staff to INGOs and larger NNGOs, despite providing the initial platform that developed skills and knowledge in the humanitarian system. Building on recent research by the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), we discussed how INGOs and large national NGOs recruit staff from smaller NGOs, especially during scale-up in a rapid onset crisis. These practices can vary from intentional poaching to ethical recruitment, but they all damage the capacities and capabilities of national NGOs.

"We always find ourselves starting afresh"
National NGO participant

This is a widespread issue, particularly where responses are scaling up. According to HAG's research, 86% of respondents said that staff left to join an international or larger organisation in the last two years, and 30% of respondents said this happened multiple times. One of our panelists lost 118 staff to the UN, INGOs, or donors within two years. We need a fresh approach after several global commitments and guidelines have failed to bring about the necessary change.

It is a complex, context-specific problem, and there is 'no one size fits all' solution. Ethical recruitment guidelines are important, but they are not enough on their own, and it cannot be solved at the global level. There needs to be a more comprehensive approach, which prioritizes human resources management and policies. C4C is calling on donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs to work with national NGOs to find solutions, such as committing to salary benchmarking, embedding respectful recruitment in localisation strategies, and increasing flexible and long-term funding to local actors.