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The image on the cover is the Word Cloud drawn from 123 responses to the question: "What do you think are the most important principles/values/rules/ethics that guide humanitarian response to conflict-affected people?"

## LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

BAY	Borno, Adamawa & Yobe
C4C	Charter for Change
CBO	Community Based Organizations
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
FBO	Faith Based Organizations
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGOs	International Non- Governmental Organizations
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNGOs	Local Non- Governmental Organizations
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NE	North East
NNGOs	National Non- Governmental Organizations
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
PBA	Partnership Brokers Association
PLCs	Partnership Learning Conversations



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are indebted to the many voices that are captured in this report, and to the 123 contributions to the additional data gathered through a survey. We warmly thank everyone for giving generously of their time and for being so open to sharing their insights and perspectives with us. We also thank all the in-country research teams for their continuing enthusiasm and energy, and the PBA advisers for their on-going support, which enabled us to carry out the research and helped us in preparing all the reports.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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*The delivery of principled humanitarian aid is a challenging endeavour and requires continuous attention. The perception amongst our informants is that this is not reliably the case: local actors perceive international actors as unprincipled; and international actors perceive local actors as unprincipled. This is partly because there is no common understanding of what principled humanitarian aid means in practice in the contexts covered in this research.*

*The research finds that the way partnerships are shaped influences the principled delivery of aid. It suggests a need for new and stronger models of humanitarian partnership that are more equitable, and which take collective responsibility for principled delivery of humanitarian aid. An approach that is based on more transformative partnering, and that includes a wider range of actors as partners (as opposed to beneficiaries or stakeholders) in the delivery of principled humanitarian aid.*

Over a period of 4 months (Aug-Nov 2020) two research teams - based in Nigeria and South Sudan - engaged with local actors operating in the humanitarian delivery space in the states of North Eastern Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe State) and South Sudan (Unity and Upper Nile states). These local actors were associated with youth groups, women groups, Government, International NGOs, National NGOs, Local NGOs, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations. Two country reports present voices of local actors, with a range of opinions and insights, and present country-specific findings and recommendations. This overall report draws on these two country reports, and presents issues that were common and distinct across the two. The research serves to generate further conversation and enquiry.

## Some key findings and observations include:

### Local actors in context

- The differences in contexts (history, nature of conflict, role of the state, community values, and private sector engagement) impact how principles play out in humanitarian assistance and how local actors are perceived.
- The term 'local actor' is perceived locally as including a broad range of actors, both traditional (government, INGO, NGO) and non-traditional (community leaders, security agencies, private sector, diaspora). Beyond listing organisations, we found that our informants describe local actors relevant for humanitarian aid delivery based on the following attributes: residency/proximity, contribution to solutions and deep understanding of the context, norms, and culture. These attributes were seen as especially significant to facilitating community acceptance as a prerequisite for access, security/safety, and timely and relevant service provision. It extends beyond the typical arrangement of local NGOs as service deliverers. This points to an opportunity to consider a much wider definition of 'local actor' and to redefine the roles of 'local actors' accordingly.
- Discussions concerning the role of 'local actors' in humanitarian aid delivery should consider the views of the relevant government, given their strategic role in providing humanitarian aid and social protection.
- Local or national NGOs that operate as 'partners' to international actors - so-called 'elite' organisations - are forming networks and driving the localization debate. There may be potential for these organisations and networks to model new forms of engagement with a wider diversity of 'local actors' who play a critical role in enabling humanitarian access to conflict-affected communities. This is given further consideration in the discussion of new forms of humanitarian partnerships (section 4.3).

### Principled humanitarian delivery

- Informants did not demonstrate a lack of understanding or respect for the humanitarian principles but drew attention to the challenges of applying them in conflict situations (challenges also faced by international actors). The delivery of principled humanitarian aid is not just the product of humanitarian principles. It is also about the process of engaging, the attitudes of staff, and their core values as individuals. Other factors such as organisational culture, partnership practice, and community engagement strategies all influence humanitarian operations.
- The lack of opportunity to exchange and share experiences on how to contextualise the principles and to translate them into operational strategies was identified as a significant gap. Interviewees indicated that they would value such discussions, including exploring what it would take in terms of resources and risks. This would support progress towards taking COLLECTIVE responsibility for the application of the humanitarian principles.
- The principled delivery of aid is perceived by local actors as going hand in hand with principled collaboration - yet there are significant disparities in the treatment of international and local staff (with regard to safety, health insurance, ransom-payment in kidnappings, remunerations, etc.). This leads to disproportionate allocations of responsibility, risk, and cost to local actors, most especially frontline workers.
- Efforts to operationalize humanitarian principles rest on community acceptance and community engagement. This secures access to the most affected populations. Failure to secure community acceptance in areas of insecurity or fragility could threaten trust and cost lives.
- Such acceptance was seen as more likely when field workers were able to reconcile the humanitarian principles with the values of communities. Finding such connections is a process that takes time, and requires genuine appreciation of, and respect for, such value-systems - yet is rarely evidenced in the design of projects or contracts, leaving the burden on local actors.
- A highly emotive issue was that of double standards - the perception that international agencies do not consistently uphold the humanitarian principles in their own activities - both in their field operations as well as in their collaborations with local organisations.



## Humanitarian partnerships

- Partnerships are largely transactional, despite rhetoric to the contrary, experienced as a 'take it or leave it' proposition, and therefore hugely unbalanced. This finding is not new but was a concern of local actors working in the conflicts in Nigeria and South Sudan and felt to be an impediment to principled humanitarian assistance. They called for partnerships in which humanitarian and partnership principles are discussed, commonly understood and agreed, and that operate in combination to secure principled humanitarian assistance.
- The predominant perception of local actors as 'a partner to an international actor', delivering services for the most part, has influenced perceptions about the scope of collaboration between humanitarian actors. The stereotypical 'INGO-NGO' interactions tend to limit collaboration to transactional relationships and offer little prospect for radically improving humanitarian aid delivery through more transformative partnerships.
- According to local actors - who deal with numerous stakeholders every day - the multi-sector, multi-layered reality needs to be embraced also by international actors. International actors are seen as having the luxury of focusing on the efficiency of aid delivery and make little or no effort to nurture relationships with stakeholders (like government) into partnerships. This, they believe, would increase the impact of humanitarian aid.
- Although many informants pointed to such differences between local and international actors, they also recognised that the different strengths and weaknesses were precisely the reason why collaboration is essential.

## Linking Humanitarian Principles and Partnerships

- Many local actor informants saw the humanitarian principles as a way of putting the affected communities at the centre. The rights and needs of affected communities become the common purpose of all humanitarian action, with both international and local actors respecting humanitarian principles. What is needed is a collective responsibility, requiring collective action and mutual accountability to ensure adequate coverage and timely, effective humanitarian response.
- Informants wanted to see more balanced partnerships, with mutually agreed partnership principles, in order to realise their transformational potential and improve principled humanitarian and development assistance.
- In practical terms, they pointed to the need and opportunity for conversations and 'space' for working out how to contextualise the humanitarian principles with all those involved and affected in an area of conflict. Conversations on the basis of mutual respect, openness, and a shared commitment to affected populations (humanity) could potentially strengthen both the partnerships as well as the delivery of principled aid to conflict affected communities.



# 2

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES



The research goal was *'to explore the perspectives of LNGOs [local non-governmental organisations] in the delivery of principled humanitarian aid in conflict contexts, and how partnership between international and local actors is affected in the process'* with the following objectives:

- To provide a deeper insight and understanding of how local actors understand and operationalize the humanitarian principles in conflict settings.
- To provide an in-depth analysis of which practices and challenges are commonly faced by local actors, in relation to the (1) current modes of partnership with INGOs, including risk-transfer from international to local actors and (2) delivery of principled humanitarian aid.
- Review the current partnership experiences between INGO-local actors from the perspective of local actors and how they contribute/hinder local actors' in delivering principled aid
- Provide recommendations to how / what could be adapted in current partnership practices to support effective and efficient delivery of principled humanitarian aid in conflict contexts.

The Charter for Change signatories! Caritas Norway, DanChurchAid (DCA), Kindernoethilfe (KNH), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) in collaboration with the DRA (Dutch Relief Alliance) commissioned this research as part of an effort to respond to a gap in the humanitarian discourse; namely, that local voices are not being heard (enough) and not being taken into account (enough) by those seeking to improve the effectiveness of international humanitarian aid delivery. The research undertaken sought to respond to this gap by canvassing, reflecting upon, and reporting perspectives of local actors involved in humanitarian aid delivery in conflict areas of two countries - Nigeria and South Sudan.

The research also included a consideration of the meaning of 'local'. The specific concern was with better understanding the utility and relevance of the humanitarian principles for the day-to-day work of 'local actors' involved in delivering humanitarian assistance in areas of conflict in NE Nigeria and in South Sudan. The term 'local actors' is used to refer to organisations and individuals actively involved in humanitarian aid delivery, as well as stakeholders and beneficiaries.



# 3

## RESEARCH APPROACH

An important limitation to the present research is that it was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that direct person-to-person interactions were very limited (in Nigeria) or precluded altogether (in South Sudan). This, together with the already-poor communications in the conflict areas of Nigeria and South Sudan, made the logistics very challenging.

Over the 5 months (from Inception to Completion), the in-country research teams interacted with local actors in numerous formal and less formal ways (interviews, workshops, telephone/Skype calls). In total we captured 227 voices from South Sudan and Nigeria - through a global survey (105), in-depth interviews (65), partnership learning conversations (6), and focus groups or contribution workshops. See Annex 2 for more details.

### 3.1 Approach, methods, limitations

The geographic focus of the research was on three areas of **South Sudan** (Unity State, Upper Nile State and Juba, the capital) and four areas of **Nigeria** (the three BAY States – Borno, Adamawa and Yobe - and Abuja, the capital).

The research approach was highly interactive and participative. This centred on two self-organising research teams in each country, led by a Principal Investigator (PI) from each country. The PIs were responsible for all aspects of the in-country research and analyses, and for maintaining a project resource bank (with notes, interview transcripts, secondary data, reports and other information). The PIs, together with the Project Manager and other members of the team, convened regularly for iterative sense-making sessions. These were important to support the team in adopting this new way of working: open-ended and highly collaborative.

The Project Manager provided support to the PIs and facilitated the overall progress and shaping of the research. An international reference group drawn from PBA Associates with interest and experience in partnering practice and/or humanitarian challenges provided additional inputs and perspectives throughout, particularly around enabling the Nigerian and South Sudanese voices to come through. The two in-country teams prepared their respective country reports which are the basis for this final report.

The research sought to capture **insights from local actors** on their experience of humanitarian aid delivery and humanitarian partnering. The motivation was to enable, to the maximum extent possible, the views of those operating in the conflict zones to emerge – and to thereby help humanitarian practitioners and resource providers better understand the role of ‘local actors’ principled humanitarian aid delivery.

The in-country teams were on-boarded through two e-workshops. All research tools were then co-created by the two teams and Project Manager (such as the semi-structured interview framework; the excel-based data-analysis tool; the online survey; the format/ agendas for the workshops).

A Cross-country reference group brought an external perspective from the two countries.

The bulk of the time and resources were dedicated to carrying out **in-depth interviews** with individuals active in humanitarian aid delivery at the local level in NE Nigeria and South Sudan. Two **e-contribution workshops** helped to iterate the research process in collaboration with local actors, sharing and reflecting on the interim findings to deepen the analysis. The workshops also proved to be a valued space for dialogue on the topic among local actors. The ambition was to draw out insights and build on the information generated by an **on-line survey** and a brief review of documents.

The teams set out to interview a wide variety of **local actors** (local government, civil society, private sector), but despite our efforts, the majority of respondents were ‘insiders’ rather than ‘outsiders’ (i.e. staff from L/NNGOs engaged with international actors in service delivery). This is an important limitation of the research.

Our research team had to deal with **many challenges** in conducting this research, including serious health problems of a key team member. Another severe limitation was poor internet connectivity in some of the conflict areas, especially Yobe state in Nigeria and in South Sudan. Convincing respondents to join an interview or workshop was hard work. An overview of constraints and limitations, and how we managed these, is presented in Annex 2.



# 4

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

*“ I think the right actors are the local actors. The people who can resolve the problems amicably are the local actors. Because they understand the language, norms, culture, behaviour, they also understand the environment. I should be the right person to solve issues with my tribesmen, because I can know what they are thinking because I understand the language. I can understand their behaviour and the triggers of their anger. If the local actors are empowered, they can do a better job than the INGOs whose rules are not flexible for the benefits of the beneficiaries”.*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

*“If I had a conflict in my own house, for example, and my father or my relatives intervened, I would be ready to listen to them because I know them and I understand them. If a stranger came in, I would not maybe take them seriously, because they don't understand me and I don't understand them.*

*That is the same thing with humanitarian aid, particularly in conflict/complex situations. So the LNGOs are better to be accepted by the community because they identify with them. Secondly, most of the people that work with the LNGOs are locals. That makes them more acceptable because they will readily hear from them.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

Observations drawn from the research team, which in itself constitutes a ‘local voice’, are presented here along with an analysis of perspectives offered by informants in relation to three themes that emerged from the research, albeit in different ways in Nigeria and South Sudan.



### 4.1 Perspectives on ‘Local Actors’

The **operational contexts** within which local actors operate are very different across the two countries of concern, and this inevitably influences how the identity and role of ‘local actors’ is perceived.

In Nigeria, there is a strong government presence, both at federal and state levels. In 2019, a new Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development was established, to provide government leadership in humanitarian assistance and increase the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the government is seeking actively to develop so called ‘local content’, particularly at State level, in line with the international localisation agenda. In contrast, South Sudan has been dependent on international aid for decades, and from its very beginning as an independent nation. The national government has relied on international humanitarian actors and funding, acknowledging the enormous gap between in-country capacity and the needs of its people. To date, the national government’s role has been confined largely to administrative matters, such as registrations and permits.

The conflict areas are also different across the two countries. In South Sudan, conflict varies in intensity but includes the whole country, whereas in Nigeria it is largely localised (to the north east). As a consequence, the potential of conflict to cripple the state is far stronger in South Sudan than in Nigeria. This has a strong bearing on how humanitarian aid is delivered on the ground, and the role played by local actors.

In South Sudan, local NGOs constitute the most important 'local actors' and rely on collaborations with international NGOs, or, less frequently, on direct donor support. Funding cycles are typically short and focused on service provision for international actors, with little focus on organisational development. Competition for resources and profile amongst both national and local NGOs is rife, driven by a desire to become a 'preferred partner' of an INGO and access funding. In contrast, in Nigeria many national and local NGOs had a long-standing presence and role outside the humanitarian arena, and entered the humanitarian space in response to the acute and critical humanitarian needs. The predominant mode of local NGOs there is more akin to the development sector.

Communities in South Sudan have strong values of sharing, linked to their history, culture, and strategies to survive (famine or war). These values are not always consistent with the 'rules of engagement' of international aid agencies articulated as humanitarian principles, which drive processes such as beneficiary selection (which can undermine existing community-based survival mechanisms for sharing and support). Both community leaders and local aid workers are having to navigate this interface between local and international.

*“Local humanitarian actors are all persons, agencies, government and community members who reside within the humanitarian action area and understand the nature of the crisis and the norms of the people involved, and who at all times can access the people within the crisis-ridden community to seek to contribute to the solutions to the crisis.”*

(NIGERIA voice)

Another difference in context relates to the role of the private sector. In Nigeria, there is a history and experience of collaboration with the private sector in humanitarian response, particularly with the oil industry. Although the oil industry also plays an important role in South Sudan, there is no significant interaction with civil society. More generally, the private sector tends to engage primarily with the government.

These differences in contexts (history, nature of conflict, role of the state, community values, and private sector engagement) impact how principles play out and how local actors are perceived. Humanitarian principles need to be contextualised before they can be operationalised. In other words, those involved in dealing with a humanitarian situation - whether local or external - need to take account of the local context (comprising cultures, history, ideas, relationships, politics, religion, family, transactions that prevail in the area of interest) when designing and delivering humanitarian assistance. Southern Sudanese NGOs are positioned as the service-deliverers of international organisations, whereas their Nigerian equivalents are deeply rooted in long-term civil society engagement, with only short-term forays into the humanitarian arena when the need arises.

*“Our voices as local actors in South Sudan always remain low. You should ask why? Are the laws in South Sudan, like NGO Acts, encouraging the participation of the home-grown humanitarian actors? So, there is a need to change the narrative and allow the local actors participation in the clusters.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

### **Who is a 'local actor'?**

The terms 'local actor' and 'partner' are used in humanitarian situations to refer narrowly to the parties directly involved in a contracted engagement between international organisations and national or local organisations. The term 'Local NGO (LNGO)' and 'National NGO (NNGO)' are often used interchangeably and seen as constituting a single 'local' stakeholder group<sup>2</sup>. In the localization discourse, including within the Grand Bargain framework, the term 'local actor' is hotly debated over the issue of whether national or subnational offices of international agencies should be treated as 'local actors'.

2. See for example the Pathways to Localisation report: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/pathways-localisation-partnership-based-humanitarian-action>. Also in this report the 'local/national actors' are defined as one stakeholder group (next to 'international actors' and 'donors') - which does not do justice to the diversity of local and national actors engaged.

The term was also hotly debated during the course of the present research, both within the research team and among informants. For many, the term 'local' was seen as referring to a broader range of individuals, organisations, and institutions, which, depending on the specific situation, could include religious groups, local and national government, business, media, universities and schools, security agencies, and others playing 'gatekeeping' roles. However, the most important attribute of 'local' was felt to be geographical roots (i.e. not just location but historical connection). Humanitarian assistance needs to be addressed not in isolation, but in relation to regenerating local economies, resolving conflicts, improving governance, and rebuilding social structures.

A prevailing view among informants was that their expectations of government were not being met and - especially in South Sudan - not likely to be met in the foreseeable future. In terms of the present situation, survey findings show that in South Sudan, local government was seen as being more important than national government, which has largely been absent. In Nigeria, the opposite was found (though informants also pointed to the emergence of increasingly active state and sub-state government). In both countries, the expectation was that the government would exercise leadership (as linked to its responsibility for the welfare of its citizens), and engage more effectively with the diversity of international and local actors involved to help bring about a more coordinated and locally appropriate humanitarian response. However, few saw that there was any real prospect of this happening soon.

*“Those in government are suspicious/jealous of the resources civil society has. The aid structure is not helping the government to play a role, it is in the way— and this is not what people like to see.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

The actual and potential role of government was seen as important as it was this that has shaped the context or framework of humanitarian aid delivery, and that this will be the case also in the future. In Nigeria, the call is for the government to exercise its regulatory role in a way that takes better account of local interests - i.e., by recognising the importance of cross-state working for both access and efficiency reasons. In South Sudan, where the international community has dominated crisis response and welfare provisioning, the call is for the government to set longer term priorities that protect traditional livelihoods and social structures, which are being overrun by foreign aid.

In sum, the government needs to be given consideration in discussions as to 'local actors' and their roles in improving humanitarian aid delivery, especially as there is little systematic or strategic engagement.

The Nigeria team concluded by consolidating the various views they heard to formulate a set of core **ATTRIBUTES** of a local actor: **residency/proximity + contribute to solutions + deep understanding of the context** (dynamic in the communities, language). These attributes were seen as especially significant to facilitating **community acceptance as a prerequisite for access, security/safety, and timely and relevant service provision**.

The South Sudan team found that the most important and commonly held attribute of a local actor was that they had emerged from the grassroots, and so understood **local context, norms, and culture**. Such understanding was seen as critical to gaining acceptance of beneficiary communities and requiring continuous investment in dialogue and relationship-building.

The important point here is that in both Nigeria and South Sudan, the need and opportunity for a broader definition of 'local actor', extending beyond the NGO-service delivery arrangement to include government, represents an opportunity to redefine the roles of 'local actors'.

*“In Yobe, the coordination, especially sector level, is weak and disconnected from the Sector Coordination Groups in Borno. On Coordination: there is no clear expectation from INGO/Government to determine what issues to address at any coordination forum from the field.”*

(NIGERIA voice)

The analysis of the two different country contexts suggests there is an emerging and evolving understanding of who is a local humanitarian actor and of the attributes and characteristics of a local actor. The research from both countries thus starts to paint a clearer picture on what we mean by local. This offers an opportunity for the international humanitarian system to rethink their current model and approach to ‘localization’, including having a far broader definition of who/what is a ‘local actor’ and having tools and approaches that help assess these populations when conceiving localized humanitarian aid delivery assistance and funding proposals.

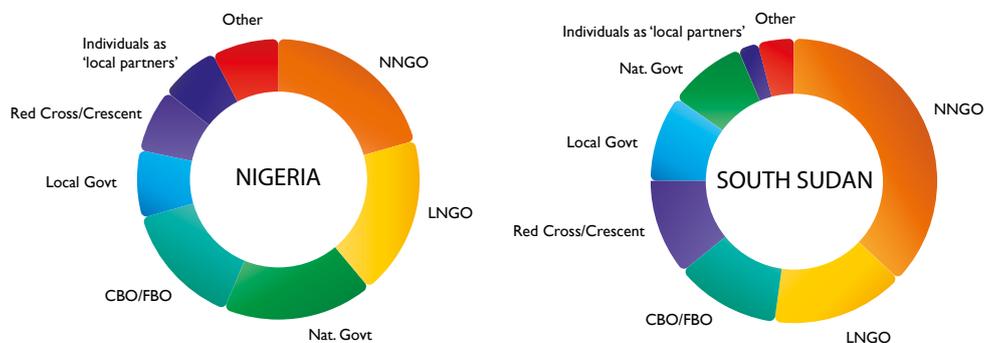
*“Peace building should also be seen as a key responsibility of all, including aid agencies, but that can only happen if the government regulates the humanitarian inputs. For example, what good is aid if it does not consider and understand traditional livelihoods and peace building and conflict mitigation?”*  
(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

### Roles of local actors

Informants noted that in both countries, most local actors (LNGOs, NNGOs) were not working exclusively on humanitarian projects, but also seeking to address other social and economic development problems and conflict resolution issues faced by their communities. From their perspective, humanitarian principles should not be regarded as superior or exclusive of what ensures survival and the prospect of development and conflict resolution.

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify which local/national actor is most important in delivering humanitarian assistance. In both countries, national NGOs were seen as most important, with local NGOs in second place, and CBOs/faith-based organisations coming third. In Nigeria, these findings were not upheld by interviewees, who placed the greatest emphasis on local home-grown entities/individuals.

Survey respondents were asked to identify the most important actors in the delivery of humanitarian aid. In both South Sudan and Nigeria, national NGOs and local NGO/CBO (i.e. registered at the sub-national level) are seen as the most important. The biggest difference between the two countries is in the perception of the role of national government and the larger role of local NGOs and individuals in Nigeria. Interview informants corroborated this pattern, which is illustrated in the pie-charts presented below. This situation indicates that the quality and extent of collaboration between international and national NGOs and local NGOs/CBOs is key to the effective and impactful delivery of humanitarian aid.



Within this landscape of diverse ‘local actors’ in both South Sudan and Nigeria, the current reality is that there exists an “elite” group of local and national NGOs who are more experienced in working in the international humanitarian sector. They are more familiar with the humanitarian narrative and contracting procedures. They have capacities and capabilities needed for service delivery, and they have leaders more fluent in the English language. They have interacted with the humanitarian principles and standards.

In both countries, the research confirmed that it was these ‘elite’ organisations which are forming networks and driving the localization debate with international actors. The potential of these networks for more purposeful engagement with more diverse ‘local actors’, including government and business, is given further consideration in the discussion of new forms of humanitarian partnerships.

## 4.2 Principled delivery of humanitarian assistance

*“Each organization has its own principles. But there are also the universal principles that people also follow when delivering services. One of the principles we use is impartiality. We follow the code of conduct principle of ‘do no harm’. The moral part of it is to do no harm to the beneficiaries. You need to be accountable always to the people you are delivering aid to”.*

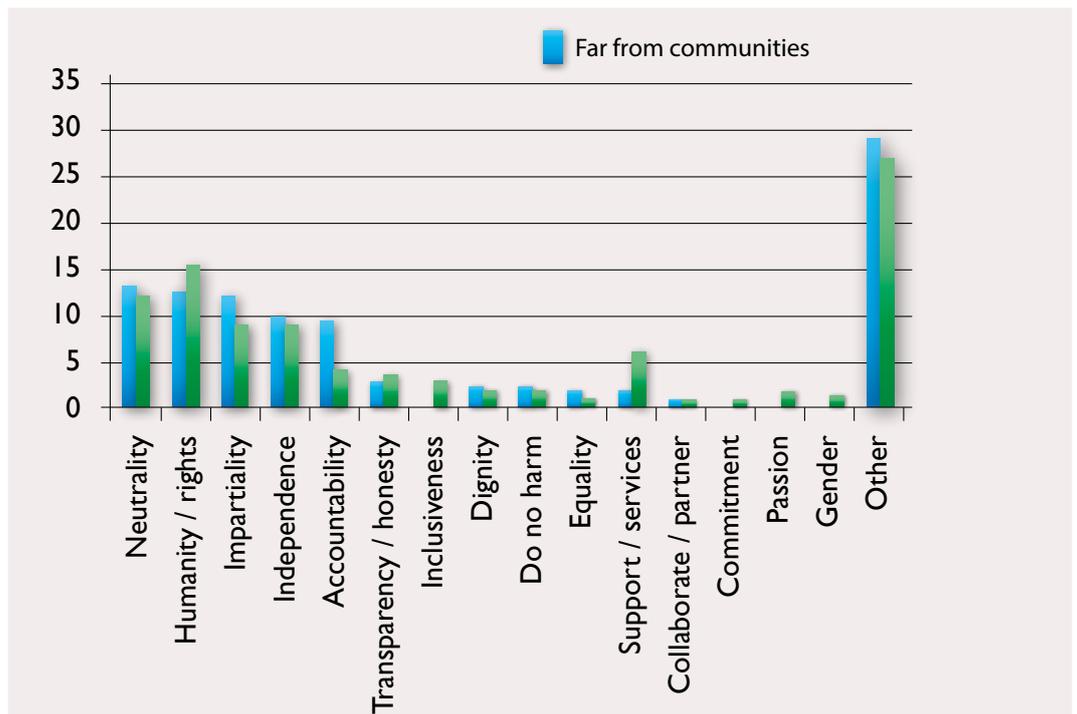
(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

### Local actors’ understanding of humanitarian principles.

Our research began with an open enquiry as to the principles or values local actors considered important in guiding their humanitarian response to conflict-affected people. We listened to their voices and their words, consciously avoiding imposing “the” international humanitarian principles on them.

Overall impressions of what we heard through the survey are captured in the word clouds on the covers of this and the two country reports. Neutrality, accountability, transparency, do no harm, respect, dignity, and fairness were also emphasized by interviewees.

In more detail, we compared the principles cited by survey respondents according to their place of work: in or close to communities, versus those operating far from communities (in regional or national offices, for instance).



### Principles cited as important in guiding humanitarian response

The green bars present the humanitarian principles that mattered to 56 survey respondents operating ‘in’ and ‘close to’ communities. The blue bars show the results from 70 respondents operating ‘far from communities’. What we see is both groups cite the 4 international humanitarian principles as the most important. However, a variety of other values also matter, especially for those operating in close proximity to communities.



When asked if the four international humanitarian principles are considered relevant to their day-to-day work, the proportion of respondents that said yes was as follows: Humanity: 100%; Impartiality: 96%; Neutrality: 89%; and Independence: 85%.

Interviewees in Nigeria revealed differences between national and local NGOs regarding understanding of the international principles. While NNGOs saw value in having refresher courses on humanitarian principles, LNGOs wanted to also have a review and re-emphasis of what the humanitarian principles stand for.

The principle of Neutrality<sup>3</sup> featured prominently in both the survey responses and interviews (of both Nigeria and South Sudan). This is at odds with the commonly held view that local actors cannot be neutral because of their close ties to beneficiary communities, and that they need to respond to the priorities assigned by community leaders and other ‘gatekeepers’. A consequence of this view is that it is considered inappropriate to work with, or fund, local actors in humanitarian aid in conflict contexts. Yet the findings of this research suggest the contrary: Neutrality is a key operating principle for local actors.

We then delved further, through both the survey and interviews, to explore **how** the four humanitarian principles are operationalized in the conflict areas of Nigeria and South Sudan. In Nigeria, for example, interpretations of the principle of ‘neutrality’ included the following:

- Neutral in the selection of beneficiaries for humanitarian aid intervention but will not support armed opposition groups
- Neutral in associating themselves with religion and politics
- Neutral in selection of target areas for humanitarian intervention
- Neutral in developing vulnerability criteria for humanitarian intervention and adhering to the criteria
- Neutral by not supporting armed opposition

These were similar in South Sudan – many respondents mentioned neutrality as a key behaviour:

*“Without being neutral you cannot be able to operate anywhere. So it is an effective conflict management method”.*

Although ‘humanity’ as a value can equate to the ‘humanitarian imperative’ principle, interviewees noted that its use by local actors relates more to the values that tie us together as human beings. The value speaks to the sense of collective responsibility in supporting individuals and communities in need.

Many local actor informants saw the humanitarian principles as a way of putting the affected communities at the centre, with respect to:

- ...identifying the priority needs of people (76%)
- ...guiding the delivery when working with partners (65%)
- ...negotiating access to conflict-affected populations (40%) and
- ...giving voice to affected populations (40%)

It is, perhaps, surprising to see that the principles are not felt to be especially important in negotiating access to affected populations. Yet, access to affected populations is a critical determinant of humanitarian success. This suggests that other values play a more important role in securing acceptance and access.

Overall, this research found good awareness and understanding of the humanitarian principles amongst local actors, and the intention of efforts to promote and implement them. No-one negated the importance and need for more principled humanitarian aid. Rather, discussion centred around interpretation of the principles and how to make them operational. This finding is consistent with other research on how local actors adopt and interpret humanitarian principles differently in different contexts<sup>4</sup>.

3. Many (multi-mandate) organisations do not claim to be neutral but adhere to the Code of Conduct (10 codes, without neutrality as a rights-based approach will advocate for rights when these are denied.

4. Challenges to principled humanitarian action: perspectives from 4 countries, NRC 2016

*“I focus on the relation with the communities - win the trust, be seen to be fair, transparent about what you came for”.*  
(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

## Local actors' application of humanitarian principles

Digging deeper to understand better the practical significance of the humanitarian principles, it became apparent that for local actors, humanitarian principles are closely aligned with their core organisational mission, values, and operations. Furthermore, the line between humanitarian and other (local) principles can be very fine, as noted by interviewees in South Sudan. The delivery of principled humanitarian aid is not the product of only humanitarian principles. It is also about the process of engaging, the attitudes of workers, and their core values as individuals. This is also how local actors look at other stakeholders, including international NGOs, discussed below.

Several informants spoke of specific **strategies** to translate principles into practical action. Such strategies include building community trust; upholding with respect the values and norms that matter to the community; engaging with community 'gatekeepers' as a key to community acceptance. In Nigeria, informants described how pre-existing strategies (used in developmental work) were leveraged to provide acceptance and access in the conflict. It was upon such strategies that the humanitarian principles were then articulated.

Findings from both Nigeria and South Sudan point especially to 2 strategies (community acceptance and community engagement), which local actors use to deliver principled humanitarian assistance in conflict areas. These are an essential starting point, tailored to the specific community, to the mix of other stakeholders influencing the local actors, and to the dynamics of that particular context.

### A COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE STRATEGIES

A key challenge and focus of efforts to transpose humanitarian principles into operational forms was related to the need for community acceptance, and in consequence, access to the most affected populations. Failure to secure community acceptance in areas of insecurity or fragility threatens losing community trust and could cost lives.

Community acceptance requires that trust is gained. Interviewees cited the importance of being respectful, open, transparent and accountable. Some interviewees stressed that trust requires the participation of the community in the humanitarian response (including as employees), and the provision of feed-back mechanisms.

Community acceptance was also seen as enabling beneficiary selection and the targeting of aid. Such acceptance was achieved when field workers reconciled the humanitarian principles with the values and priorities of communities - often regarded as very different value systems. For example, in South Sudan, local actors sometimes used approaches based on a common cultural understanding of the communities - such as the principle of oneness (unity) - to gain access to the conflict areas. Interviewees noted that when they referred to "peace and unity", the communities would more readily welcome them. Such an approach also makes the local actors acceptable to different stakeholders in the conflict - not to be accused of being biased or to have hidden interests in the conflict.

*“With regards to food aid, national staff are seen suspiciously by the local community, that they may not be even-handed, not giving all the aid out, or perhaps biased in the distribution or withholding supplies, giving to their relatives. Best way to handle this is openness with the community, sharing with them the reports that get sent to the INGO partner and which provides the funding. Having a community leader inspect the stores is also a good practice toward trust-building.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)



Additional strategies are used when operating across different communities affiliated to the different parties of a conflict. The most important strategy to gain acceptance is to hire staff from each community group. They are then able to dialogue with the community, explain the humanitarian program, support beneficiary selection, and provide security information. As an example, when asked about the most important drivers that guide negotiations for access, one respondent said:

*“Transparency. Community engagement with openness. What is most effective, for us? It is our diversity, that is the area of our strength in negotiating access. We deliberately ensure that we employ staff that cut across different religions, tribes and cultures. A staff with strength and inclination towards a particular community is put in the forefront for discussion and community engagement, this creates a door for acceptability and thereby allows us to present the values we stand for, values that govern our operations such as transparency, neutrality, and impartiality. People are surprised with the level of our community acceptance and of the way we employ staff irrespective of religious or culture.”*

(NIGERIA voice)

In many cases, informants explained the significant pressures on, and complexity of, their role in negotiating community acceptance: instructions from above, expectations from below, pressures to provide aid on certain conditions, trust issues from all sides, fear of the insurgents, but also fear for the ones providing funds.

The pressures are greatest on frontline staff that are typically the ones who must negotiate to secure community acceptance. In doing so, they draw on a mix of personal, community, and organizational values and ethics within their operational service-delivery framework.

Ultimately, in interpreting humanitarian principles, staff have to make **personal choices** to manage a situation and gain acceptance by the community in order to do their job and deliver aid to those that need it. In this regard, several informants underscored that it is the **field workers who need to be regarded as partners**, not their organisations. It is the field workers that are crucial for working out how to improve humanitarian aid delivery.

## **B COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

The second strategy used by most local actors we spoke to, to operationalize the humanitarian principles, is engagement with communities. This is critical to gaining their acceptance and therefore essential for humanitarian operations. Local actors engage with many in the community (most especially gatekeepers), as well as with other stakeholders such as local authorities, INGOs and donors.

In engaging with communities, local actors also have to grapple with dilemmas. One voiced on numerous occasions concerns over the targeting of aid to people most in need within those communities. The criteria used for targeting are typically predefined (e.g. by the international funder) and this means that there is less space for community engagement in identifying how the most vulnerable community members can be reached. In South Sudan, communities find such criteria unworkable and unfair; singling out a person, household, or village for support in an environment where everyone is suffering and in need is not right. It has thus transpired that those targeted with aid in times of crisis are then cut off from the communal structures of social safety nets.

Targeting has also created tensions when selection criteria single out a specific group, which may not be in line with community priorities (e.g. targeting women was mentioned in discussions in both Nigeria and South Sudan).

*“We have too many selfish people who always hijack the process of delivering aid. If you say you want to deliver aid, everybody will claim to be a beneficiary but even among the affected persons there are others who are prone to problems. The ethical procedure is confidentiality in case we see emerging issues in the community. We maintain confidentiality in order to continue getting support from our information sources.”*

(NIGERIA voice)

Another dilemma for local actors seeking the engagement of communities is handling delays in project delivery. Such delays are typically the result of decisions/actions taken higher up the aid chain (e.g. in disbursing funding), yet reflect badly on the local actor.

### Experience of a faith-based organisation operating in Adamawa

*“You know, you can’t just wake up one day and go into a community and just pick anybody because this person has a master’s degree in political science, and then you work with him. No! You know it’s possible that someone that has not gone to school has a better understanding of the particular community. So, we work with the community to gain entry. When we gain entry, that is when our work will kick off. . . . And then, when we go into the community, we try to know those in need. Even those don’t actually bring themselves out, because of their shame, or what have you. An integrated community can actually direct you to a particular person in the community.*

*When you ask who the best people are to handle a particular situation, they are the local NGO because they know the nooks and crannies of that particular community, and then they have people that feed us information, and then they call us when they need assistance, and then we go there and render the services.*

*You know that the services will not be enough for everybody in the community. The local partners are in the best position to do that unlike people who come in from outside. They will have the funds, . . . but you will have to go through a rigorous process of applying, filling in forms. By then so many things must have gone wrong in the particular community. So that is the problem we have.*

*You need to know the culture of the people because that will help you. Because you are here to assist them does not mean that you should breach some of their norms. It is highly prohibited. Then, even as a front-line worker, you are supposed to work with the community, most especially the community leaders, and then those insiders you have in the community that hint you about things that happen in that community.”*

### International actors perceived as not principled enough

As mentioned earlier, interviews with local actors showed the very fine line that divides international humanitarian principles from the core values of the individuals, organisations, and communities. Many do not separate such principles out. In contrast, local actors perceive that international actors TALK about principles but do not ACT according to them consistently - including in the way local actors are treated by international organisations.



*“Going by the principle of humanity, why is it that ransoms are not paid (by the international community) when local actors are held hostage by NSAG (non-state armed groups)? This is a gross deviation from the principle of humanity”*  
(NIGERIA voice)

In Nigeria, local voices reported that INGOs do not consistently adhere to the humanitarian principles. For example, **impartiality** is not always evidenced in budget allocations or in the allocations of the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund; **independence** is not respected when government influences INGOs’ choices of beneficiaries.

Another highly emotive issue was the double standards seen in the operations and collaborations of international agencies. Many examples were offered to illustrate such double standards.

Front-line staff from both international and local organisations are the ones who are expected to apply the humanitarian principles when negotiating community acceptance and access. Yet they are often also those who experience at first hand the hypocrisy and double-standards of differing treatment of local staff as compared to international staff in day to day operations, including issues of safety, kidnappings, transport and remuneration. Disparities in the allocation of risks and costs are perceived to run counter to the practice of impartiality and to responsible collaboration.

At this point, it is important to note differences between South Sudan and Nigeria. In South Sudan, most informants understood the need for more principled action as an opportunity for rebuilding trust between individuals, communities, and organisations:

*“We just have to keep trying to be fair”.*

In Nigeria, in contrast, there was a strong call for more effort on the part of both local and international actors to uphold and apply the humanitarian principles in every aspect of their own operations, not just in the targeted conflict areas.

Although many of the challenges faced by local and international actors appear not to be very different, there are important distinctions in what is at stake for each of them. Local actors and local staff cannot easily leave their locality, and they have fewer resources and options to deal with operational difficulties and security risks. International actors have some advantages (in access to funding and to mechanisms where decisions are made on strategy, coordination) but also face disadvantages (less local presence and understanding, more security risk-averse). International organizations find it increasingly difficult to enter crisis-affected areas, often labelled as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘high-risk environments’. In consequence, risk is transferred to local or community organizations without appropriate safeguards or compensation. This impacts negatively on the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid delivery.

Whereas many informants pointed out these differences, they also argued that the different strengths and weaknesses were exactly the reason why collaboration between the local and the international was essential. Emphasizing the importance of one over the other was fruitless, as the need and opportunity lies in improving the collaboration between the local and international for the benefit of both and for the benefit of communities and populations in need.

For many informants, the issue was not so much familiarity with the humanitarian principles (which both INGO and NGOs often lacked), but rather the lack of opportunity to exchange and share experiences on how to translate the principles into actionable strategies in their specific (conflict) situations. They called for opportunities and a ‘safe space’ for relevant discussions to take place.

In sum, what the research points to is that although both local and international actors aspire to work with humanitarian principles, both perceive one another as unprincipled, or inconsistent in applying the principles. Perhaps what is needed are more principled partnerships.

*“You find that they give you limited funding to implement the project. This leaves you unable to meet the requirement to recruit more people. Sometimes we have no options but to remain in survival mode.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

*“When INGOs see that a LNGO is thriving very well in a given project and they are also implementing the same project, they come and take that staff heading that particular sector to their organisation.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

*“INGOs refuse NNGO staff to have insurance cover. When local actors ask them for health insurance the INGO staff play it down. The partnerships should address this concern.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)



### 4.3 Partnering

Most local actor informants viewed their collaborations with international actors as transactional and unbalanced relationships. They pointed to stark differentials in treatment/terms, payment, recognition, and voice. They complained about a lack of dialogue, trust, influence, co-creation, etc. From their point of view, the relationships with international organisations can be characterised primarily as one-way instructions and the predetermined solutions offered on a take-it or leave-it basis. In the interviews and other interactions with local actors, they pushed back against this practice. The dominating view was that local actors need to have more independence, authority, and autonomy, and should be engaged as partners in preparing needs assessments, co-designing, and delivering programs, including budgets and subsequent financial and risk management. Collaborations are seen today as being mostly transactional with a focus on bringing about the most efficient service-delivery. The need and opportunity is to refocus them as more transformative co-creating partnerships in which costs, risks, and benefits are shared and equity rather than efficiency is emphasised, also with the target communities and populations in need.<sup>5</sup>

When asked about the most important principles/values/rules/ethics guiding collaborations in delivering humanitarian assistance, respondents prioritised them as follows:

1. Trust and respect
2. Transparency/open communication
3. Equality
4. Results-orientated approach
5. Mutual accountability
6. Complementarity

These attributes are not mutually exclusive; Openness engenders trust, equality engenders mutual accountability, complementarity engenders respect. However, the findings underscore the need felt for principled partnerships that transcend the typical contracted relations.

The experience and attitude to partnering are not the same in South Sudan and Nigeria. In South Sudan, delivery of aid has been outsourced to LNGOs, who have been acting as deliverers of aid for decades. Thus, informants tended to define themselves in relation to this role.

*“Our role is to try and make sure that the conflict affected people are able to get the basic services they may need for their daily lives- be it water, food, health etc. we don’t do it from our own resources but those that we get from donors and well-wishers”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

5. Partnerships: pre-conditions, principles and practice. GMI, Koenraad van Brabant, 1 October 2019

In contrast, Nigerian local actors have had a much broader developmental background and experience that has taken them beyond the humanitarian agenda. Also, in Nigeria the business sector (especially oil industry) has long played a role in nurturing and participating in collaborative arrangements with civil society and government, which has included identifying and filling gaps in conflict-affected communities to meet humanitarian needs.

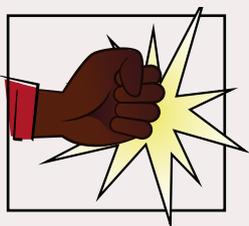
Yet despite the differences in NGO experience and self-definition in Nigeria and South Sudan, informants from both countries complained about the lack of voice in planning, conceiving policies, programmes, and projects, as well as in their delivery. In both countries, the prevailing form of humanitarian aid delivery pushes NGOs into a service delivery role and keeping them in that role.

*“We see many international organisations ‘policing only’. No mutual agreement”*

Expanding collaborations beyond the humanitarian international - local NGO service delivery arrangements to engage with government, business, media, and other actors was expressed by many as something much needed to shift the focus from efficiency to equity. Greater emphasis on equity was a response to the realities of the insufficiency of aid available. With not enough aid to go around, many argued, the need is to focus more on the decision-making processes that determine who constitutes a population in need and how that population can best be served. The triage that inevitably takes place requires a sharing of responsibility in decision-making to ensure that the wider development, peace-making, and reconciliation processes are not affected detrimentally.

According to local actors - who must deal with multiple stakeholders everyday the multi-sector, multi-layered, and multi-tasking reality needs to be embraced also by international actors who are seen as having the luxury of focusing narrowly on efficiency of aid delivery, making little or no effort to turn stakeholders (like government) into partners in order to increase the developmental impact of humanitarian aid. The difference in perspective was well illustrated in one of the partnership learning conversations, in which staff from an INGO and local NGO were asked to select a visual illustration of their partnership. The locals selected the image on the right, whereas the INGO staff selected the one in the left:

**Two views on a partnership**



The image of the fist was chosen to illustrate more common, transactional partnerships in which INGOs are “policing” the local partner.

Although transactional collaborations were seen to dominate by informants, there were also examples of moves to more principled partnerships, in which risks, costs, and benefits are shared rather than being transferred to the weakest party. This makes the point that more transformative partnerships are not just a theoretical concept with no practical manifestation. On the contrary, they already exist, but these need to be nurtured by enabling those involved to focus on the value of the long-term (not just financial arrangements), more open communication, building trust, and ensuring mutual benefit. Such partnerships are seen more as the exception than the norm but are certainly seen as opportunities for building alternatives to the dominant transactional model.

Local actors provided numerous examples of how existing - contract-dominated - partnerships with international organisations generated additional pressures for them, which then impact on their ability to deliver principled aid. Most notable was the

*“Our comparative advantage should be monetized when it comes to partnership arrangement between the local and International agencies. The knowledge of the local context, that of the Local language and the local terrain, is a comparative advantage of the LINGOs and should be prioritize as equally a big capacity”*

(NIGERIA voice)

impact of such pressures on local actors' ability to pursue community acceptance and community engagement strategies. Partnerships that are themselves principled, were seen as enablers for principled humanitarian assistance: by supporting a more inclusive project design (through more equitable decision-making); by giving more space for flexible approaches to the context (requiring trust and respect amongst the partners); by enabling (collective) problem-solving to overcome complex challenges; by creating stronger mutuality (accountability, a sharing of risks etc.); and giving more recognition to non-monetary resources contributed by partners (which are the starting point of humanitarian assistance). All these examples point towards a common foundation of establishing collective responsibility for the delivery of principled aid, that is beyond mere service contracts.

According to informants, moving from transactional collaborations to more transformational partnerships with the aim of improving humanitarian aid delivery requires effort being made to expand partnering arrangements to include a greater variety of actors, especially government. Staying within what some called the INGO-NNGO 'bubble' of transactional bilateral collaborations is unlikely to transform current practice into something that is more effective and impactful.

Resourcing partnership arrangements was also identified as in need of rethinking. This is because all those involved resource the partnership, even though money is provided by donors. It is important to take into account and value also non-financial contributions, such as 'intelligence' concerning communities and populations in need. Of course, financial flows and financial management must also be part of the mix of more effective partnering, but this needs to be considered in relation to a broader definition of resourcing.

*“When there are delays from partners, the beneficiaries will think that you are the one delaying the services. So you will have mistrust issues with the beneficiaries, which is difficult to explain that you are not the problem”.*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

#### **4.4 Linking Principles and Partnerships**

Many local actor informants saw the humanitarian principles as a way of putting the affected communities and populations in need at the centre. The rights and needs of affected communities become the common purpose of all humanitarian action, with both international and local actors respecting humanitarian principles. From the perspective of local actors, a whole range of actors play a role, and it requires a diversity of actors collaborating in a less competitive environment and with local leadership and coordination. What is needed is a collective responsibility, requiring collective action and mutual accountability to ensure adequate coverage and timely, effective humanitarian response.

Informants did not demonstrate a lack of understanding or respect for the humanitarian principles (see for example, the Word Cloud), but rather drew attention to the challenge of their practical application in humanitarian situations in relation to organizational culture, partnership practice, and community engagement strategies. In practical terms, they pointed to the need and opportunity for conversations and 'space' for working out how to contextualise the humanitarian principles with all those involved and affected in an area of conflict. Many asked how is it that such dialogue on context-specific application/ interpretation is so rare at the field level?

Partnerships and more effective partnering were seen as the means or pathway for moving away from the current situation dominated by a transactional, service delivery arrangement seeking greater efficiency towards an arrangement emphasising partners and the equity of relationships.

*“This is a very interesting topic, partnerships. It is a topic that is not being discussed. It is like you’ve opened a can of butterflies and they are escaping and flying out all over. Through the various interactions [KII, FGD, e-Contribution workshop] we went deeper and brought out a lot of things. There haven’t been platforms on partnerships - besides localization. So, I think we need this opportunity to put it out there. We need to have a frame - it will help considering the way we work, it is easier for us to adopt a framework, a partnerships framework and put it to use. This research can feed into that”*

(NIGERIA voice)

Many informants argued that stronger partnering arrangements offered a better chance of making the humanitarian principles an operational reality, as partnering requires contributions from all involved and affected. The opportunity is for a win-win for all donors, INGOs, UN and other international actors who can invest in partnering in order to strengthen the humanitarian principles and maximise the effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery<sup>6</sup>.

*“The success of ethics and humanitarian principles to guide aid delivery requires a lot of personal dedication. It demands even more from the partners to respect each other as a good way to respect the people we serve. Human beings are by nature not infallible, they fail, and require checks and balances. Partnerships are that checks and balance.”*

(SOUTH SUDAN voice)

Survey respondents were asked to identify the priority changes that would enable more locally led and locally-designed humanitarian response. The replies confirm an appetite and a need for stronger collaboration, reducing competition and increasing collective impact.



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The top 4 identified for international actors were:	The top 4 for national/local actors were:
1 Promote and support stronger collaboration between local actors (reducing competition)	1 More effective collaboration and coordination between local actors (reducing competition)
2 Build on and make use of existing local capacity	2 Local actors develop joint humanitarian impact strategies and seek contributions from other actors
3 Provide direct funding for programs designed and managed by local and national NGOs	3 Stronger leadership by local and national government
4 Invest in, and actively support, effective collaboration where each partners’ contribution, role, and potential is recognized	4 Adopt strong financial risk management and accountability systems

6. Corehumanitarianstandards.org The sector has developed standards, commitments and guidance for humanitarian actors to translate these principles into practice. The Core Humanitarian Standards and Indicators include the need for coordination and collective action to ensure adequate coverage and timely, effective humanitarian responses = Commitment #6.

# 5

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The research has provided considerable food for thought on this important topic. There is plenty of scope to take the research further and to expand and build on it. We hope the recommendations provide valuable ideas for further discussion, research, and strategy development work for both local as well as international actors.

### **5.1 Recommendations on ‘Local Actors’ and their role in realising the delivery of principled aid**

#### **Recommendation #1: Facilitate the engagement of a broader range of actors to advance principled humanitarian assistance**

As a first step, this requires stakeholder analyses to identify the diversity of local actors who could engage in principled humanitarian aid delivery. This could be augmented by a broad (sector-wide) assessment of roles and capacities to understand the added value and potential contribution of each stakeholder in accessing affected communities and meeting the needs identified. This would include those who have traditional humanitarian roles and responsibilities, those who are international but engage at the local level, those who may not have official recognition or roles in humanitarian aid delivery but engage spontaneously, including community groups and leaders, faith-based groups, private sector actors and so on. Findings from such analyses could then be incorporated into the design of partnerships, projects and funding allocations.

#### **Recommendation #2: Specific effort is required to break out of the current INGO/UN Agency-L/NNGO ‘bubble’**

This follows from Recommendation #1 and is needed to design responses that are both efficient and equitable. The opportunity lies in engaging those who have a stake not just in humanitarian aid delivery, but also in peacebuilding, economic reform, and the rule of law, which are all important for those living in conflict contexts. This would lift the focus from project-level concerns (where competition is rife and damaging, as shown in in South Sudan) to wider societal considerations. It may be that NNGOs have a unique role to play in being well positioned to bridge across the various domains.

#### **Recommendation #3: Engage local government and local business in the humanitarian effort.**

Both are stakeholders with a stake in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need and in avoiding and resolving humanitarian crises. Their engagement is only partly about providing money. More important, as shown by this research, is their contribution of essential non-monetary inputs to helping address humanitarian crises.

**Recommendation #4: Develop a vision and strategy for a future of principled humanitarian assistance and partnerships at country level.**

Both countries observe a lack of overall strategy/vision that reflects the specific roles of local, national, and international actors. Both countries comment on the current short-term, project-focused nature of humanitarian aid, and call for a more contextual and strategic approach - to program scoping and design, to operationalizing principles, and to evaluating the effectiveness of the aid beyond projects. Nigeria makes practical suggestions for a situational analysis of humanitarian action in the North-East **beyond** project-related M&E and suggests the initiation of state-level monitoring (beyond projects or organisations). South Sudan calls for local humanitarian actors - including NNGOs, CBOs, FBO, women's associations, youth groups, and local community leadership - to contribute to a home-grown initiative to localize humanitarian interventions, framed by the government on the basis of its legal obligations and moral demands and guided with responsibility of its citizens. These emerging views on the future of the sector are important and can energise and localise the debate about the future of aid.

## **5.2 Recommendations on Operationalizing Humanitarian Principles**

**Recommendation #5: Create spaces for dialogue to explore how the international humanitarian principles can be operationalised in each context, and how partnerships can take collective responsibility for realising them.**

This research found no evidence that international/national/local actors questioned the relevance of the humanitarian principles; the concern - expressed by all - was rather on **how** to apply them. This means grappling with dilemmas about **who decides** who is in most need of humanitarian assistance, especially if needs outstrip what is available. On **what basis** do they decide? And **in whose** interest? Local actors can help to create tangible, relevant connections between community ethics and values and the principles and drivers of international actors. Analyses from both countries call for honest discussion on what constitutes a locally relevant principled approach in each specific context. This requires mutual trust, respect, and transparent and open communication. These are basic components of principled partnerships which are felt to be lacking currently; Local actors in both Nigeria and South Sudan were very clear in voicing their concerns that their experience of relations with international actors are typically "unprincipled".

**Recommendation #6: Provide the resources needed for the application of principled humanitarian assistance**

Practical application of the humanitarian principles requires resourcing. It also requires open conversation about the risks involved and how these are to be shared equitably (another basic component of principled partnerships). The resourcing of principled humanitarian delivery was expressed most strongly with regard to the security of (local) humanitarian workers and the targeting of humanitarian aid. It would be helpful to consider developing common practice standards - for local, national, and international partners - with regard to safety, insurance, evacuations, ransom-payment in kidnappings, remunerations etc. This would establish a proportionate allocation of resources, risks, and costs between the partners, and would thus go a long way in addressing the perceived 'double standards' currently being experienced.

## **5.3 Recommendations on Principled Partnerships**

A partnership is principled in that those involved and affected: negotiate and agree on rules of engagement; recognize that they cannot achieve their individual goals acting alone or in isolation; and acknowledge that all partners bring resources (not just money) to the partnership that are essential for it to achieve the goal that is shared by all.

**Recommendation #7: Reframe the existing service provider relationship between international and local actors.**

The need is to break out of the kind of relationship that dominates today, in which the INGO/UN Agency (acting as donor) dictates the terms and conditions of the relationship and invariably shifts risks and costs onto the LNGO. Instead, and especially in seeking contextual relevance, L/NNGOs need to be engaged as partners who have a say in deciding who is in most need and how to reach them. This would create space for co-designing solutions appropriate to the context, and to move towards sharing power, not necessarily shifting power as many humanitarian and development activists advocate<sup>7</sup>.

**Recommendation #8: Recognize explicitly the essential contributions each partner makes to realizing principled humanitarian aid delivery.**

All resources, whether monetary or otherwise, contribute to the achievement of humanitarian goals. All partners are therefore donors as they bring something that is essential to success. Appreciating this will help to break away from the contract-dominated relations in which local actors, from both countries, feel stuck. The South Sudan report calls for direct funding to national organisations as another way of breaking out of the current dynamic and to avoid bureaucracy and delay of humanitarian aid delivery.

To support concrete progress in this regard, consider supporting the development of a protocol or standard for valuing monetary and non-monetary contributions in humanitarian partnerships. This should seek engagement by local national and international actors, to ensure that such a tool doesn't become an additional imposition on local actors but is rather a co-created resource that could become a model for others humanitarian groups to consider.

**Recommendation #9: Provide unconditional cash grants to local actors currently outside the INGO-NNGO bubble, in order to build their capacity and capability as partners in the humanitarian effort.**

All the LNGOs consulted in this research complained that project funding was largely restricted to service delivery. This cultivates a service delivery mind-set that is not conducive to exploring solutions to access conflict affected communities that may lie beyond the project agreed. Unconditional cash grants should be seen as a way of leveraging non-financial contributions in a partnership so as to maximize benefits for the partnership as a whole. The grants can be small, but the key thing is that they are 'unconditional'.

#### **5.4 Recommendations on Strengthening Principled Humanitarian Aid Delivery Through Principled Partnerships**

Principled partnerships provide the space to take collective responsibility for principled humanitarian aid delivery. This study points to the mutual reinforcement of these sets of principles. Partnering is an approach for operationalizing humanitarian principles in conflict contexts, by creating conditions where all humanitarian actors can engage in interpreting and contextualising the principles and take collective responsibility for principled humanitarian action.

**Recommendation #10: Shift towards principled, contextually relevant humanitarian partnerships sharing responsibility for principled delivery of assistance**

Start to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to collaboration, towards embracing a broad range of engagement models and frameworks that can be selected to fit a specific context. Such models can span the range from transactional (service-orientated) to transformational (aiming at systemic change) collaborations. Both humanitarian and partnering principles need to be incorporated into partnering modalities, along with partnership-strengthening measures.

The South Sudan report calls for new and stronger models of partnerships between NNGOs and INGOs that have the most potential to support a locally grown humanitarian

7. For more on partnerships as a means or pathway for sharing rather than shifting power, see Power Shifts when Power is shared by Rafal Serafin and Ros Tennyson [https://www.workingwithdonors.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Power-Shifts-When-Power-is-Shared\\_FINAL-final\\_2.pdf](https://www.workingwithdonors.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Power-Shifts-When-Power-is-Shared_FINAL-final_2.pdf)

endeavour. The Nigeria report recommends multilayer and multilevel partnerships based on equity and common purpose, breaking out of “the straightjacket of partnering practice that is overly transactional, too inflexible and context insensitive” and thus does not support principled assistance.

Both countries point to a need for a change in attitudes away from the current double standards and perceptions of ‘superiority’ amongst international actors, towards an appreciation of the diversity of actors required to secure effective and principled assistance. Such change needs to span organisational and personal attitudes. This will help rebalance the current emphasis on accountability to donors, due diligence, and risk aversion with an appreciation of the need for trust, flexibility, and space to take contextually appropriate decisions to be able to navigate the complex humanitarian terrain.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Specific Stakeholders

The research points to several areas where further thought, exploration, experimentation, and change might support improved delivery of principled humanitarian aid. In addition to the above, we therefore also offer the following recommendations:

### TO NNGOS

- As key influencers of the localisation debates, engage and support a wider diversity of ‘local actors’ who play a critical role in enabling humanitarian access to conflict-affected communities. This would broaden the fabric of ‘local actors’, model new forms of engagement, and support the development of a local humanitarian sector.
- Engage with government at various levels - on the basis of their legal and moral obligations - to develop policies and frameworks that promote local funding of humanitarian action and strengthen the engagement of a wider range of local actors.

### TO INGOS

- Extend the range of actors considered to be ‘local’ to include community groups, stakeholder groups, local businesses, and other non-traditional actors. Consider their role, added value, contributions, and how best to engage with them - both individually (in a project) as well as collectively (promoting leadership).
- Systematically undertake stakeholder and context analyses to reflect the diversity of local actors in a specific context. This could be a starting point for developing fit-for-purpose partnerships to deliver principled aid.

### TO CHARTER4CHANGE (C4C)

- Share and discuss the reports’ contents and next steps with its members and DRA.
- As a follow-up to this research:
  - Convene platforms on principled aid and partnerships in South Sudan and Nigeria. The debates at global level should be informed by dialogues between local actors.
  - Explore further with C4C-DRA and partners in Nigeria and South Sudan how principled partnerships can facilitate principled delivery of aid with partners. Co-create and pilot new approaches and share good practices.
- Incorporate the concept of ‘equity’ as a foundational and critical guiding principle for the establishment and management of partnership-led humanitarian action. Incorporating the equity principles may bring power differentials into focus as a starting point for sharing risks, resources, and power more equitably. (Note that equity is not part of the humanitarian Principles of Partnership endorsed by C4C.)

### TO DONORS

- Provide unconditional cash grants to LNGOs, CSOs, and informal groups involved or affected in a humanitarian situation in order to build their capacity and capability as partners in the humanitarian effort, and to leverage non-financial contributions of local actors in a partnership so as to maximize benefits for the partnership as a whole.
- Develop a protocol or standard for valuing monetary and non-monetary contributions in a humanitarian delivery partnership that could become a model, benchmark, and point of reference for others.

## 5.6 Recommendations for Further Research

Important questions beyond the scope of this brief research warrant further attention, namely:

- The difference between INGO and LNGO/CBO in terms of how they navigate complex contexts and deal with dilemmas related to delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- We have heard how ‘outsiders’ are less informed and rely on local intelligence and contacts; ‘insiders’ are more informed but may have less access to all communities in different localities of the conflict terrain in the area.
- If this is the case, could partnerships between actors across ethnic or political divides be part of a new solution (rather than the current reliance on international ‘outsiders’)? Could the principle of humanity bind these actors effectively and meaningfully? Who would support such a shift?
- Discussions within the research team and interactions with informants drew attention to several other issues concerning the application of humanitarian principles in conflict situations: Do the humanitarian principles apply more during periods of conflict flare-ups than to simmering unrest? To what extent are they specific to humanitarian aid (not development or conflict resolution)? And why are peace building and conflict-sensitive approaches not applied with greater intent by humanitarian actors?
- Study the effectiveness of humanitarian aid when delivered primarily by international actors versus local actors (this was specifically voiced in the Nigeria research).



**ANNEX 1**  
Research teams, roles,  
and responsibilities.

**ANNEX 2**  
Methods and  
Constraints

**ANNEX 3**  
Calendar of research  
activities completed

**ANNEX 4**  
Description of Conflict  
Areas

**ANNEX**



## **ANNEX I: Research teams, roles and responsibilities.**

The research was a collaborative effort, a partnership that included:

### **South Sudan:**

Jok Madut Jok  
John Mayom Akech  
August Ting Mayai  
Nhial Titmamer  
Nyathon Mai

Principal Investigator (PI)  
Field investigator  
Overseas the data management and analysis  
Assisting with convening and writing the report  
Joined the team during the reporting phase

### **Nigeria:**

Mr. Olukayode Soremekun  
Mr. Mubarak Yusuf  
Ms. Maryam Aje  
Mr. Jafia Stephens  
Mr. Sunday Jegede

Principal investigator  
Borno State/ Humanitarian focal point  
Yobe State  
Adamawa State  
General Focus / Secretariat

### **Global:**

Tilleke Kiewied  
PBA Expert group

Research coordination and oversight  
Lola Gostelow, Rafal Serafin, Bulbul Baksi, Joanne Burke  
and Lilliane Bitong Ambassa - bringing expertise, fresh  
perspective, critical questions and practical support to  
the research team(s)

Cross-Country Reference Group including the DRA Localisation focal points for South  
Sudan and Nigeria (Kingsley Okpabi and Joseph Kenndy  
Odhiambo) and C4C representative (Fie Lauritzen)  
engaged at key moments to support the teams and  
support cross country fertilization.

## ANNEX 2: Methods & Constraints

The search for perspectives, insights and ideas meant that the bulk of time and resources available project was dedicated to carrying out **in-depth interviews** with individuals active in humanitarian aid delivery at the local level in NE Nigeria and South Sudan. This involved individual discussions as the basis, enriched by a variety of group conversations.

**Below the toolbox of methods and which of those have been used.**

Methods/Tools	Purpose	To be used with...	How many?	Realised?
<b>Individual Interviews</b>	Data on experience of the interviewees, with scope for delayering their immediate experience and gleaning their insights; secure leads on stories; collect ideas on what needs to change, why and how.	Diverse range of actors	10 in each state + 8-10 in capital	Nigeria: 40 South Sudan: 23
<b>Dialogues with Networks / groups</b>	Understand the experience of (organised) groups; exchange ideas based on what we have learnt from interviews; harvest multiple perspectives; story leads; collect ideas on what needs to change and why	NGO and other relevant Networks	1-2 in each country	Nigeria 3 South Sudan -
<b>Partnership Learning Story / Case Study</b>	Understand the challenges and enablers of partnerships among national/local and international players in the conflict context (2-hour conversations in small groups); capture their recommendations	INGO-NGO partners	1-2 in each country	Nigeria 2 South Sudan 1
<b>Personal stories</b>	Based on leads from the interviews and/or Dialogues – to glean wisdom/ breakthrough ideas from exceptional individuals	Individuals	1-2 in each country	Nigeria 1
<b>(e)Contribution workshop / e-FGD</b>	Engage local actors to reflect on the themes, dilemmas and contradictions that have emerged to validate and interpret findings	Group	1 in each state; 1 per country; 1 cross	1 per country, including state level participants
<b>Global Survey</b>	Closed questions and statement to harvest opinions, understandings from wide group local to global	Target countries & beyond		50 South Sudan, 55 Nigeria 18 beyond

Our research team had to deal with **many challenges** in conducting this research. **An overview of constraints and how we managed in the table below.**

	Constraint	Approach
<b>Covid!</b>	No/little direct person-person contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak communication networks (esp. Adamawa and South Sudan)</li> <li>• Impacted further by rains, Wi-Fi, etc.</li> <li>• Impacted further by people's apprehension</li> </ul>	Predicted, but still... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone, zoom, WhatsApp.</li> <li>• E-Workshops, with Adamawa in office of international organisation with strong connection</li> <li>• Snowball approach, using contacts</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging informants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declining invites/ postponing interviews/ no-shows</li> <li>• Trust deficit overall, may have influenced engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not giving up</li> <li>• Engage others, referencing, "snowball"</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythms in the countries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacted on teamwork, joint sense-making, cross fertilisation</li> <li>• Challenge of writing report with one leg missing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catch-up calls, Sharing consistently</li> <li>• Extension requested and granted</li> <li>• Getting on with it - the advantage of the regular interaction and sense-making</li> </ul>
<b>South Sudan team challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PI serious (health, personal) challenges, unpredictable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More responsibilities assigned to research assistant</li> </ul>
<b>Time constraint</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few hours for the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBA expert team support - bringing diverse expertise (design methods, analysis survey, structure report, facilitation, etc.)</li> </ul>

Despite constraints, and acknowledging the hard work of the country teams, we were able to reach the following respondents.

**Table - overview of respondents**

Number of individuals participating in the research between July – October 2020			
	Nigeria	South Sudan	Total
<b>Key informant interviews</b>	36 (22% female)	29 (17% female)	65
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abuja = 1</li> <li>• Yobe = 11</li> <li>• Borno = 12</li> <li>• Adamawa = 12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juba = 11</li> <li>• Unity state = 10</li> <li>• Upper Nile = 8</li> </ul>	
<b>Workshops (FGD &amp; e-Contribution workshop)</b>	36 (4 workshops) (41% female)	14 (1 workshop)(14% female)	50 (some were part of KII as well, some new)
<b>Partnership Learning Conversation</b>	4 (25% female)	2 (50% female)	6
<b>Storytelling</b>	1		1
<b>Survey</b>	55	50	105/ 123 (incl. 18 from other countries)
	1 non-Nigerian interviewee	2 non-SSD interviewee	

## ANNEX 3: Calendar of research activities completed

We approached the research as a partnership, a collaborative effort, open-ended but with milestones for collective sense-making shaping the way forward.

### Global

- PI-team interaction: Throughout the research project the global coordinator and 2 PIs interact as required. Initially weekly meetings to align the work
- On-boarding workshop(s) with the 2 country research teams to create common understanding on the topic, concepts, and remote partnering skills: 19.08.20 & 21.08.20
- Sense-making sessions with the full PBA research team: 23.09.20 (initial findings, survey, KII approach); 02.10.20 (post KII testing, data analysis approach)
- Cross-country reference group: 2 zoom-sessions 26.10.20 & 20.11.20 with the reference group to bring fresh perspectives, leverage their contacts, and increase engagement
- Dropbox
- Co-created overall report

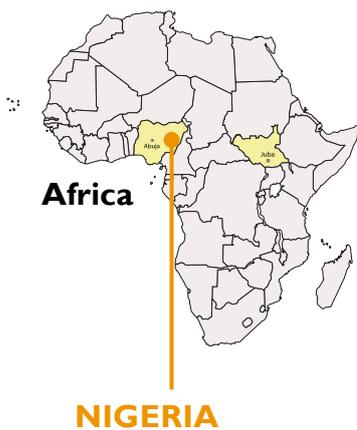
### Country

- Set-up and manage teams - August
- KIIs testing and adapting - September - October
- Co-created workshop inputs with research teams (FGD, Contribution workshop) - October - November
- Co-created country reports - November

## ANNEX 4: Description of Conflict Areas

### Nigeria

The Boko Haram insurgency has been going on in the northeast of Nigeria for more than 11 years. Whole local government areas have been taken over, run as independent non-Nigerian controlled territories and subsequently retrieved by the Nigerian government; communities have been overrun and tens of thousands of people killed; schools and churches attacked and people kidnapped; more than 2 million people displaced; IDP camps dot the northeast conflict impacted areas, particularly the BAY (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe) states (see map); Christians were particularly targeted earlier in the insurgency.



This resulted in the increase in foreign and local organizations<sup>8</sup> and entities coming to assist in providing humanitarian aid and support services. It is often reported that local organizations, though critical to efficient and effective humanitarian aid delivery, are yet to fully acquire capacity to play the leading role that they should. This is not to absolve the lacklustre role of international donors and INGOs in the drive to actively involve local organizations in the humanitarian response.

8. Operational Framework for Local and International NGOs in Nigeria

Despite challenges, aid workers have already reached over 3 million people with life-saving assistance in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states since the beginning of the year 2020. Over 90 humanitarian organizations have provided aid to 4.5 million people, including nearly 2 million people who are reached monthly with food assistance and over 4 million people who received out-patient or medical health services. Assistance has also included early recovery and livelihood interventions to strengthen resilience and re-building.

As of this year, 2020, more than 800 international and 3,000 national staff are dedicated to the humanitarian response, mainly in Borno State<sup>9</sup>. A continued priority is to continue to deploy the most qualified and efficient people to run and scale up humanitarian operations. This represents a continuous challenge in a world facing unprecedented humanitarian crises. Several interdependent and collective actions have been put in place that have increased the level and quality of the humanitarian response. Some of these include strengthened collaboration at inter-agency and multi-sectoral levels, strengthened local area coordination, and joint interventions to boost self-reliance of affected people.

As a response to these alarming statistics, there has been further significant influx of international agencies into the country as humanitarian actors from around the world are supporting the efforts of the Nigerian government to provide life-saving humanitarian interventions.

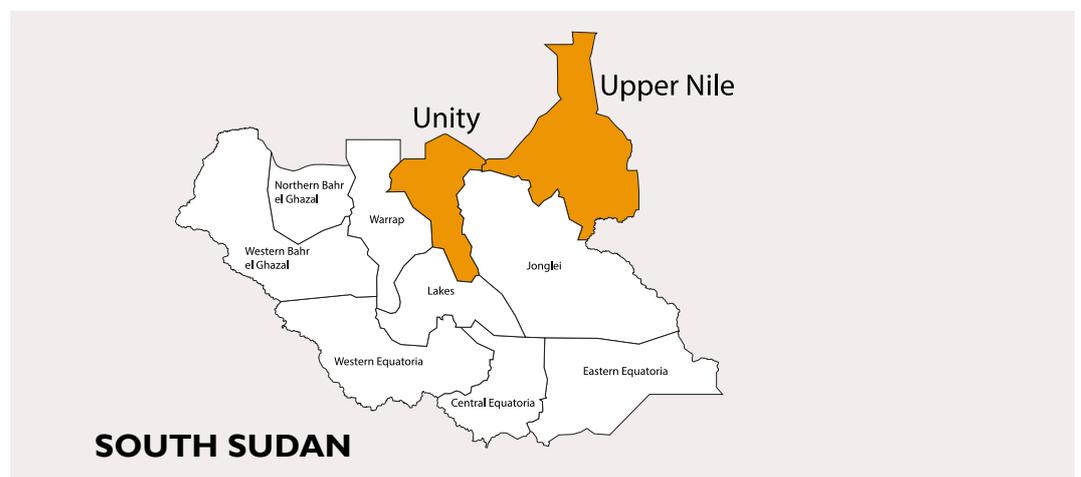
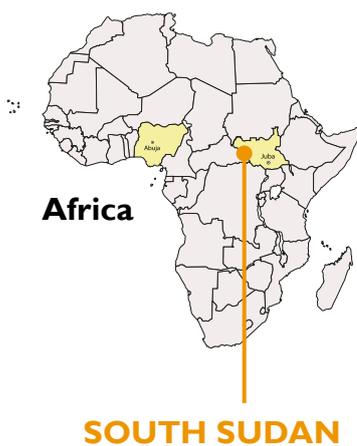
The initial surge, and thus leadership, of the humanitarian support and action by international agencies/donors/INGOs was due to the gap in funding and Nigeria’s lack of capacity in managing large scale humanitarian support including missing in action in the critical area of coordination.

As stated in the “Operational Framework for local and international NGOs” (2019) recently issued by the Nigerian Government, the consequences of foreign-led initial humanitarian action in the NE evolved over time – **challenges of ownership; of sustainability; of ineffectiveness.**

A key government response to the issues was the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development in 2019 to manage/ resolve the stated challenges and coordinate the humanitarian space in NE Nigeria. This is firmly in line with the global humanitarian movement towards localization, which was initiated in 2016 and which is targeted at getting local actors to lead humanitarian action with the support of multi- and bilateral agencies as well as donors and INGOs.

### South Sudan

South Sudan after two decades of civil war gained her independence in July 2011 when 98% of the population voted for succession. However just after barely three years, the new country plunged into civil war that created humanitarian crises. Since the civil war started, 1.8 million South Sudanese have been internally displaced, over 2 million are living as refugees in the neighbouring countries and fifty percent of the people are facing severe food insecure according to OCHA Report (2015).



9. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/12092017\\_northeast\\_nigeria\\_humanitarian\\_overview.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/12092017_northeast_nigeria_humanitarian_overview.pdf)

Due to the conflict, much of what happens by way of basic service delivery comes through humanitarian interventions, making South Sudan a country that is dependent on aid to do basic welfare efforts. There are 400 national NGOs and 122 international NGOs and 12 UN agencies and a peacekeeping mission. This has created an environment where there is no local framing, guidance, and philosophy of humanitarian aid, as the government has officially relinquished the responsibility for welfare and has relegated it to charitable organizations. This means there is no home-grown philosophy of aid and there is no indication as to when this will change. Local NGOs are only able to exist and operate due to partnerships with international NGOs or direct donor support from the global north. This means the conception of aid - in planning, programming, budgeting, and expected outcomes are all done by outsiders; almost all of it in short funding cycles that have long term projections. This sets up an environment where humanitarian aid consolidates power-relations fraught with prejudice and inequality.

The sheer size of the operations is not only a testament to the scale of humanitarian and developmental challenges facing South Sudan, but also employs thousands of South Sudanese and foreign nationals, prompting some critics to refer to the humanitarian aid as an 'industry'. Critics use this label to suggest that aid, well-intentioned and necessary as it is, has become a money-making machine to the point where its core value, that of humanity and assistance to vulnerable people, is being questioned. If this indictment may have an element of truth in it, what is undeniable is the need for both emergency humanitarian and development aid, given that South Sudan was born of protracted wars, as these wars have left behind massive challenges that have made it nearly impossible for the country to transition without outside help. The situation in the nascent nation has required calls for the national leaders to join hands with donors, INGOS, and UN agencies to work in partnership for recovery and resilience (PFRR).



**SOUTH SUDAN**  
voices



**NIGERIA**  
voices