LOCALISATION BEST PRACTICE
Increasing the effectiveness of global humanitarian response

Localisation
The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit saw the launch of the Grand Bargain – an agreement between major donors and humanitarian agencies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. One of the commitments to achieve this is localisation which aims to increase locally-led humanitarian responses and invest in local capacities in order to do so. Localisation is all the more urgent as humanitarian needs continue to outgrow the capacities and resources of the existing international humanitarian system.

Localisation priorities of the Dutch Relief Alliance
The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) supports the shift to locally-driven humanitarian responses via the following objectives to be achieved by 2021:

- **Increased funding** for local actors. 35% of DRA funding should go as directly as possible to local actors;
- **More efficient funding**: minimising transaction costs whilst maintaining accountability;
- Allocating 5-8% of DRA budgets to **capacity strengthening** of local humanitarian actors;
- **Amplifying local voices:** enhancing local responders' ability to participate in humanitarian decision-making via international bodies;
- Improved **partnerships** with local actors in conflict-affected settings.

The DRA is aware that localising the global humanitarian system comes with major obstacles. Yet, by combining our efforts and sharing best practices, we believe we can learn, improve and move forward in the spirit of complementarity. The localisation best practice examples in this publication aim to contribute to this.

SOMALIA JOINT RESPONSE (SJR): INVESTING IN THE LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL NGOs

Lisa Scharinger,
Somalia JR Field Coordinator

'The highest humanitarian decision-making forum in Somalia is the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). In this UN dominated consortium, even international NGOs have little more than an observing role. Candlelight is one of just two Somali NGOs appointed to the HCT in 2019. The Somalia Joint Response funds and supports its membership and work on this forum.

'This membership is exceptionally important. Local NGOs are now, for the first time, directly represented on the highest humanitarian decision-making levels in Somalia. And Candlelight feeds back HCT information to local NGOs, creating more operational space for Somali civil society.

'Candlelight maintains that INGOs should be more principled in their localisation efforts. In the relatively stable part of northern Somalia, INGOs, including DRA members, largely implement and coordinate humanitarian responses themselves. They compete with LNGOs for funding. Only in the highly insecure and conflict-affected South, do they step back and transfer implementing responsibilities and funds to local partners.

'For the first time, local NGOs are directly represented on the highest humanitarian decision-making levels in Somalia.'

'Many LNGOs, in the north and south, are eager and capable to take the lead in humanitarian responses. As well as to manage direct international funding for this. In fact, some of them, like Candlelight, run larger operations and have better outreach than many INGOs. Localisation is not only about transferring responsibilities and direct funding, but also about acknowledging that most of the work is already carried out by local actors.

'While many LNGOs are still talked down upon by international agencies, the Somalia JR uses part of its budget to strengthen the monitoring and accountability capabilities and finance systems of local partners. We support them in shedding off any inferiority complex and in increasing their access to direct international funding.'

NIGERIA JOINT RESPONSE (NJR): INCREASING SECURITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF LOCAL RESPONDERS

Atif Sohail,
Nigeria JR Field Coordinator

'To operate effectively in a fragile security context, local partners need to be able to organise their own security. Yet, even though they are the frontline responders, operating in areas that international organisations often cannot reach, they severely lack the safety and security protocols, coordination mechanisms, dedicated security staff, and technical equipment that INGOs have at their disposal. NJRs capacity building fund – which our Nigerian partners could use unconditionally – was used to partly fill that gap. By purchasing satellite phones and generators, they seriously increased the connectivity and security of teams operating in deep field locations.

'The NJR consortium also created a pool of Nigerian security experts who provided security training to local partners. It does not replace dedicated security focal persons, which none of the local NGOs have, but it is a first and critical step.

'We invested around € 55,000 in a mentorship scheme. A pool of Nigerian and international experts team up with our Nigerian humanitarian partners for 2 to 4 months, increasing capacities in HR, finance, accounting, supply chain management or other organisational skills, depending on our partners' needs and demands. This is new in the Nigerian humanitarian community.

> 'To operate effectively in a fragile security context, local partners need to be able to organise their own security.'

'Of the six communities where the NJR operates, four are led by Nigerian NGOs. And recently, one local partner has joined the ranks of the NJR making them the sixth DRA partner, next to the five existing Dutch humanitarian agencies.

'Besides the fact that 34% of the NJR budget goes directly to local partners, the examples above show how the DRA equips Nigerian civil society actors to take more control over humanitarian responses in their country.'

SOUTH SUDAN JOINT RESPONSE (SSJR): CREATING A JOINT AND LOCALLY-LED ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Anne Nieuwenhuis,
South Sudan JR Coordinator

'Accountability and complaints mechanisms are a key instrument to boost community participation. Currently, local and international partners each have their own mechanisms. Which is common but very inefficient. After assessments in all the Joint Response locations, we set up a joint mechanism: the Joint Response Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) system.

'This overarching system is based on the best practice of our local partner Centre for Emergency and Development Support (CEDS). CEDS has a fulltime Accountability Officer, whose sole task is to engage with communities and gather feedback, suggestions and complaints. Usually, this critical work is being done on the side. CEDS has a dedicated accountability focal point, who knows the communities they work in.

'Having one centralised and locally managed accountability mechanism is nothing short of innovative.'

'We took this as a leading example. In every JR location, there is now a local and dedicated Accountability Officer, recruited and hosted by national NGOs; funded directly by the SSJR. The SSJR provides training for these officers while CEDS manages overall coordination.

'Communities are continuously informed and engaged by people they already know and can relate to. Their feedback is shared with all relevant SSJR members. This impacts all JR activities, from making sure seed distribution is better aligned with the planting season to choosing the best location for child-friendly spaces.

'Having one centralised and locally managed accountability mechanism – with a fulltime focal point and an accountability committee in every Joint Response location – is nothing short of innovative. It improves our accountability to affected populations and increases learning and implementing capacities.

'And it costs a fraction of the overall SSJR budget. With relatively little funding, we can continue to boost community engagement and localisation efforts.'

AFGHANISTAN JOINT RESPONSE: INTERNATIONAL PEER VISITS

Abdur Rauf,
Afghanistan JR Field Coordinator

'International and local NGOs rarely take the time to better understand and learn from one another - especially during humanitarian crises. Yet, better learning means better and more efficient responses. This is why the AJR set up a series of peer visits, once in 2018 and three times in 2019. Each time, five international partners visited five national partners and vice versa.
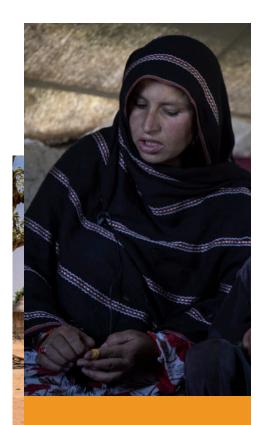
'Most importantly, these visits increased the confidence of local NGOs. They got better acquainted with international humanitarian standards. The visits also allowed local representatives to share their organisational needs, allowing internationals to support them more effectively – for example, in quality implementation, security, ICT, and financial sustainability: the things you need to grow as an organisation.
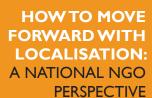
'The internationals gained a deeper understanding of the local context, of acceptance and access strategies.'

'The internationals gained a deeper understanding of the local context, of acceptance and access strategies. They learned more about how to use local resources in the project implementation.

'For the first time local and international experts and aid workers with different backgrounds – in shelter, WASH, livelihood, food assistance, protection mainstreaming – exchanged insights and learnings. This quickly improved the overall response. It increased beneficiary inclusion. It became clear, for example, that feedback and complaint mechanisms did not take into account high illiteracy rates among the crisis-affected populations. Together, we adapted them and trained first responders in all the Joint Response activities.

'In the end, locals and internationals get a truer picture of each other's strengths and weaknesses. They complement and strengthen one another better and can respond more effectively.'
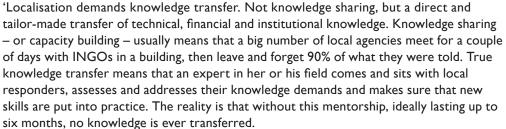
HOW TO MOVE FORWARD WITH LOCALISATION: A NATIONAL NGO PERSPECTIVE

Josephine Habba,
National coordinator Jirehdoo Foundation, President of the Nigeria NGO Network (NINGONET) and member of the DRA Local Advisory Group

'Localisation demands knowledge transfer. Not knowledge sharing, but a direct and tailor-made transfer of technical, financial and institutional knowledge. Knowledge sharing – or capacity building – usually means that a big number of local agencies meet for a couple of days with INGOs in a building, then leave and forget 90% of what they were told. True knowledge transfer means that an expert in her or his field comes and sits with local responders, assesses and addresses their knowledge demands and makes sure that new skills are put into practice. The reality is that without this mentorship, ideally lasting up to six months, no knowledge is ever transferred.

'Sincerely promoting localisation also means that INGOs should stop sub- and even sub-subcontracting. Before international funding reaches my NGO in Nigeria, the money has gone through the hands of at least four agencies, every one of them charging something. This is extremely cost-inefficient and causes serious – and fatal – delays of humanitarian responses. It is also disrespectful towards the frontline workers who take most of the risks.

'Localisation is about knowing and respecting the roles of all humanitarian actors. We need one another. So let's work together in the most efficient and respectful manner.'

'National NGOs are humanitarian assets. Stop treating us as implementing machines. If INGOs take localisation seriously, they should also introduce us to their donors and back donors. Not to compete with them – we will always need one middle man – but to allow us to operate on equal terms.

'Localisation is about knowing and respecting the roles of all humanitarian actors. No one can do everything. Local first responders are in the frontline, but cannot be everywhere. INGOs are key in coordinating and raising funds. We need one another. So let's work together in the most efficient and respectful manner.'

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD WITH LOCALISATION:
AN INTERNATIONAL NGO PERSPECTIVE

Inge Leuverink,
Chair of the DRA Localisation Working Group

'Localisation is about sharing risks, resources and responsibilities in order to respond more efficiently and effectively. International donors, UN agencies and INGOs need to walk the talk. They need to change their way of working, give more space to local actors and improve partnerships with them. This also implies changing the way contracts are set up. Currently, contracts are very protective of internationals. International organisations can cover overhead costs, local actors often can't. The security of international staff is well taken care of, that of local partners isn't. Pictures, videos, reports and other response data are often exclusively owned by internationals.

'Increased international due diligence and accountability demands are overburdening and restricting local actors. Sometimes they even obstruct humanitarian work. Donor agencies should shift from being overly preoccupied with risk management to risk sharing, enabling first responders to do what is most important: keeping death tolls as low as possible and assisting affected populations to recover.

'Local actors, on the other hand, need to be bolder, claim their operating space and raise their voices. Many of them have the capacity to lead effective responses but are afraid to take up a leadership role out of fear it has implications for their funding. If we want more equal partnerships, it is also up to them to step in and to step up, not as the 'implementing machines' Josephine mentioned, but as leaders. Humanitarian coordination mechanisms can be used to increase their leading role and influence.

> 'International donors need to give more space to local actors and improve partnerships with them.'

> 'Local actors, on the other hand, need to claim their operating space.'

'Protracted crises have changed humanitarian needs and responses. They are changing our intervention strategies and increasing the demand for stronger local humanitarian leadership. And we, internationals, need to take a step back whenever possible in order to collaborate more effectively.'

DUTCH RELIEF ALLIANCE

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The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is a collaboration between 15 non-governmental humanitarian organisations based in the Netherlands, in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. DRA is committed to saving lives and improving the well-being of those hit hardest by humanitarian crises around the world. The DRA was established in 2015 with the aim to enable participating NGOs to timely and effectively respond to international crises. The DRA shows leadership in delivering on Grand Bargain commitments and is a highly-regarded actor in the humanitarian field. DRA's strategic priorities are accountability, innovation, collaboration and localisation.

www.dutchrelief.org | office@dutchrelief.org