

LOCALISATION IN PRACTICE

Three examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's collective localisation efforts



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Acronyms

AAP:	Accountability to affected populations
CSO:	Civil society organisation
C4C:	Charter for Change
DRA:	Dutch Relief Alliance
ICR:	Internal Cost Recovery
INGO:	International non-governmental organisation
JR:	Joint response
KUNO:	Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands
MEAL:	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
NGO:	Non-governmental organisation
SEA:	Sexual exploitation and abuse

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INTRODUCTION



I.1 BACKGROUND

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is an alliance of fourteen Dutch NGOs which collaborate closely to respond in a timely, effective and efficient manner to the most serious and complex crises through joint responses (JRs). The DRA was established in 2015 by ten Dutch humanitarian NGOs, which started cooperating in 2014 on three crises: the Ebola outbreak, and crises in Iraq and South Sudan. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was funding these relief projects, saw an opportunity for a large-scale, lean funding model. From the beginning, DRA has worked in close partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The DRA aspires to be more than an operational humanitarian funding modality. It aims to be a leading example of humanitarian sector reform, in line with the Grand Bargain commitments and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. The DRA is as much an approach as an alliance.

I.2 PURPOSE

Like all international and local/national actors, the DRA had to learn how to translate the Grand Bargain commitments, including the localisation commitment, into practice. 'Localisation' refers to the efforts of international aid organisations to support and reinforce local organisations, rather than replacing them, in a spirit of equitable partnership. The DRA's Localisation Working Group initiated this report to document and celebrate progress and achievements within the DRA, now that its 2018-2021 strategic period is ending. It aims to identify and analyse both success factors and limiting factors for localisation, highlighting the achievements, as well as the challenges that the DRA has faced. The report reviews these primarily by exploring the practices and experiences of three joint responses to protracted crises: in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. It is not an evaluation of these JRs, neither does the report review the individual localisation-related practices of the participating organisations. The findings regarding these three JRs are not necessarily representative for all DRA JRs and cannot automatically be generalised. In addition, the JRs do not necessarily reflect DRA members' efforts regarding localisation in their full programming in the respective countries. The purpose of this report is to provide an additional input to the ongoing learning within and beyond the DRA. It complements other recent reflective reports (notably [Heintze et al, 2021](#)).

I.3 SOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS

The report draws on reports from the three JRs under consideration and on online interviews with key focal points for each JR, in the Netherlands and in the respective countries. The JR reports cover 2019-2020, and the plans for 2022-2023. No annual report for 2021 is due before mid-2022. Other relevant DRA documents and reports have also been taken into account. Competing priorities and sometimes contextual challenges made it difficult to use a wider range of interviews.

I.4 REFERENCES TO ASSESS PROGRESS

'More effectively supporting locally led-responses' is one of the four strategic objectives¹ of the [2018-2021 DRA strategy](#). In the five years since the Grand Bargain commitments were introduced in 2016, the topic of localisation has been extensively debated and researched globally, and over time more guidance has emerged on how to translate these commitments into practice. In the past few years, the DRA has significantly evolved its own internal guidance.

¹ The three others are: 'more accountable humanitarian action', 'collaboration for effective responses' and 'innovation and learning'.

The 2018-2021 DRA strategy document has a clear perspective on localisation:

'Wherever possible, humanitarian action should be locally led with national and local governments fulfilling their responsibility to assist and protect their own citizens and national civil societies holding governments to account and filling gaps in responses. [...] Where possible, capable local actors will collaborate with the JR lead to co-lead the JR. The Grand Bargain aims for at least 25% of donor funding to go as "directly as possible" to national and local actors by 2025. In JRs 2015-2017, about 15% of funds were allocated to local actors, mostly as implementing subcontractors. The average allocation to local actors in DRA JRs will meet a 25% target by the end of 2019 and will aim for 35% by 2021. [...] DRA funding that is predictable and multi-year in protracted crises will enable more strategic partnerships and deeper capacity strengthening with local actors. DRA members will mitigate the potential that localisation can transfer the physical, financial and programmatic risk from INGOs to local actors by strengthening the risk management capacity of local responders. DRA support will aim to enable local partners to access country based pooled funds and support from other donors.' (2018-2021 DRA strategy, p. 16)

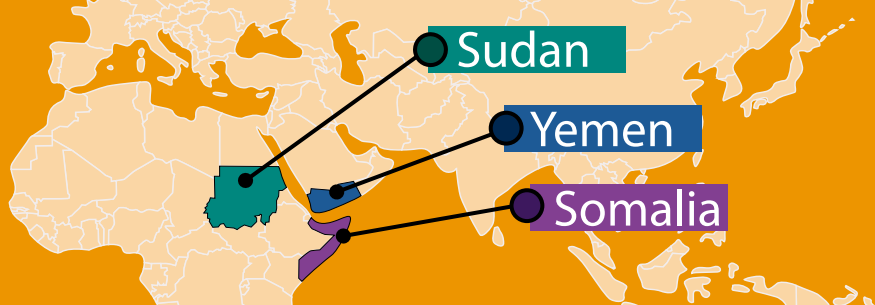
The DRA strategy also sets out five action points to turn the localisation ambition into practice and be able to assess progress:

1. Increased funding to local actors: at least 25% of DRA funding will flow as directly as possible to local actors by the end of 2019. The DRA will aim for 35% by the end of the strategic period.
2. More efficient funding: the DRA will focus on minimising transaction costs and ensuring funds flow as directly as possible to local actors, in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, whilst maintaining quality, strong risk management structures and robust accountability mechanisms.
3. Enhanced capacity strengthening: local actors will be more strongly supported through capacity strengthening mechanisms allowing for effective and accountable humanitarian action. The DRA aims for 5-8% of JR budgets to be related to strengthening the capacity of local actors by 2021, as needs dictate.
4. Amplifying local voices: the DRA will work to amplify the voices and capacities of local actors in international fora, coordination systems, and with other donors.
5. Improved partnerships with local actors in conflict contexts: the DRA will continue to innovate new methods to support partners in conflict settings through remote management, monitoring, negotiating and maintaining access.

The DRA quickly took up the localisation commitment. JR budgets for 2018 saw an average of 23% allocated to local partners, up from about 15% in the years before. An August 2018 Guidance Note drew attention to other critical aspects, such as: the quality of partnership; joint learning; joint advocacy; besides training, other capacity development approaches; and shifting accountability from DRA members to local partners. The rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic as of the spring of 2020 led to additional funding to top up the budgets of the JRs. In a situation where local actors were often the first but also ongoing frontline responders, the DRA reinforced its recommendations to increase the allocation of flexible funds to local partners, involve them in decision-making, ensure that their personnel could protect their own health (COVID-specific), and ensure that their roles and contributions were made visible in reports and wider communications.

As for most international aid actors, DRA's internal guidance developed iteratively. Noteworthy, however, is its quick evolution from a primary focus on quantitative targets, to also focusing attention to the qualitative aspects of the collaboration with local actors.





2.1 A SNAPSHOT OF THE JOINT RESPONSES

**Partners* in the Joint Response:**

Oxfam Novib (lead), SOS Children' Villages; Help a Child / Medair, World Vision, Havoyoco, Candlelight, KAALO, Zamzam, Development Agenda for Girls and Women in Africa Network (DAWA), Somali Aid, SAACID, Taakulo

	2019	2020	2021**
Total original budget JR:	€ 6,322,282	€ 5,365,552	€ 5,356,552
% implemented by local actors:	22%	27%	31%
% capacity strengthening:	4.9%	1.8%	0.5%

**Partners* in the Joint Response:**

Plan International (lead), World Vision, ICCO (Part of Cordaid), Norwegian Church Aid, ASSIST, The Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), GAH, ERRADA, and Sudanese Development Call Organisation (Nidaa)

	2019	2020	2021**
Total original budget JR:	€ 3,638,288	€ 4,000,000	€ 4,071,513
% implemented by local actors:	20%	36%	35%
% capacity strengthening:	0.1%	0.3%	1.2%

**Partners* in the Joint Response:**

CARE Netherlands (lead), Save the Children, ZOA, Cordaid, Stichting Vluchteling/ International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxfam Novib, Diversity Yemen Organization, Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), Coalition of Humanitarian Relief, Altadhamon Foundation for Development (AFD), Yamaan foundation for Health and Social Development, SPHEREYE Foundation

	2019	2020	2021**
Total original budget JR:	€ 4,175,723	€ 5,886,662	€ 6,258,034
% implemented by local actors:	1.3%	19%	22%
% capacity strengthening:	0.3%	1.7%	4.3%

* The partners mentioned are the partners as per 2021 **2019 and 2020 show figures spent, 2021 shows figures planned.

2.2 CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE THE POTENTIAL, TRAJECTORY AND PACE OF LOCALISATION

All three contexts (with subnational context variations) of the JRs in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen presented significant challenges during the period under review, which may influence the potential, trajectory and pace of localisation.

The first factor is the amount of space governmental or de facto authorities give to local and national non-governmental organisations, and to international aid actors. In two of the three JRs, that space is tightly controlled. In Sudan, governmental policy obliges international agencies to implement at least part of their programme in collaboration with Sudanese partners. In principle, this is an enabling factor for localisation. In practice, the government controls Sudanese civil society organisations (CSOs) through its decision to register or deregister them. The political upheavals and changes that have occurred since 2019 have affected Sudanese CSOs. Historically, the Sudanese government has not allowed agencies to carry out formal assessments, and there was no practice of affected people giving frank feedback, let alone participating in the design of activities for their benefit. Permissions for all operational activities were and are still required from the Humanitarian Aid Commission, which tends to be bureaucratic and inflexible. In Yemen, different authorities control most of the North and the South. Each has its own administration and controls over aid in general, and over international agencies or international staff in particular.

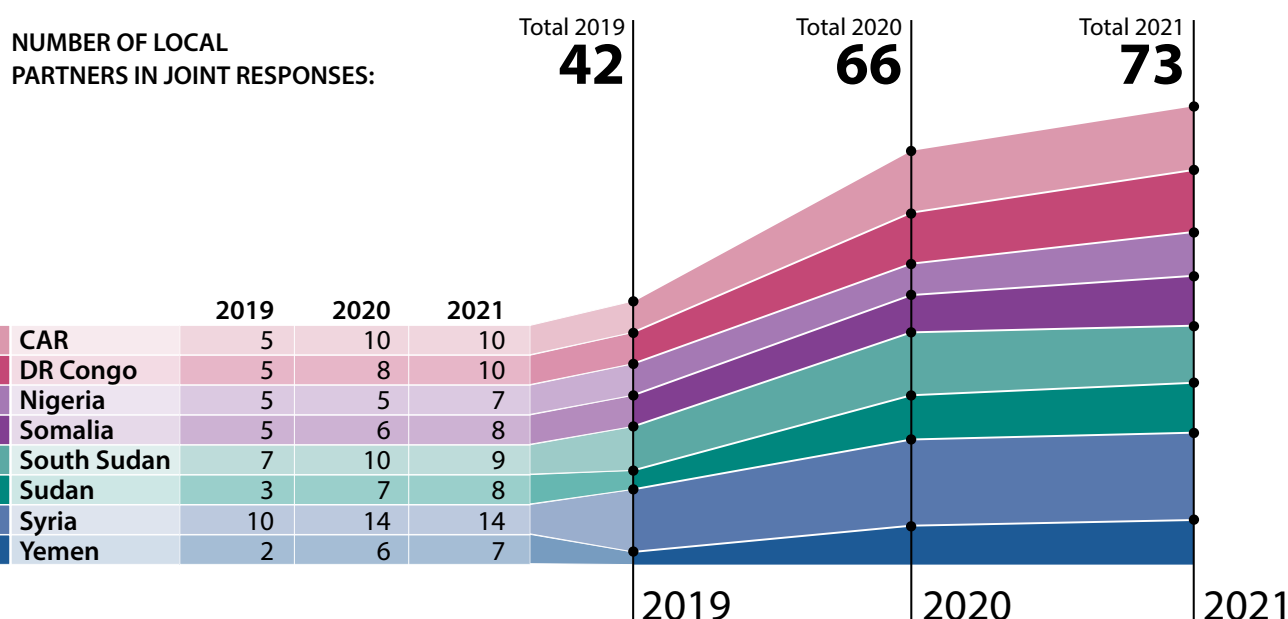
A second factor is the roles national and local governing authorities take on in the provision of basic services and responding to humanitarian needs, as well as their capacity to do so. In all three contexts, public sector capacity for such service provision is limited, and the civil service cannot always protect itself from politically motivated appointments.²

A third factor relates to health (COVID-19) and security conditions. All three JRs faced and continue to face significant insecurity in at least some important parts of their operational areas. In early 2019, Sudan entered a period of political crisis and confrontation that eventually led to the fall of Omar al-Bashir, but power struggles continued and led to a new political crisis in October 2021. In Yemen, JR members and their partners must operate in the different zones controlled by opposing and warring groups. In Somalia, the security conditions in Somaliland are relatively good, but greater security threats exist in several parts of south-central Somalia, including Mogadishu.

2 For a broader reflection on contextual factors that are likely to influence the pace and trajectory of localisation, see GMI (2020). *Contextual Factors that Influence Localisation or Internationalisation*.

2.3 PROGRESS ON LOCALISATION

Notwithstanding significant challenges in the political and operational environments, all three JRs made significant progress on localisation.



A. Partnerships

Number of local agencies participating in JRs

In recent years, the three JRs saw a gradual increase in the number of local agencies taking part. The Yemen JR, for example, had only one local partner in 2019, six in 2020 and even more in 2021. In some cases, this is due to new INGOs joining the JR, such as ICCO/Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) in the Sudan JR, and Oxfam Novib, ZOA and Cordaid in the Yemen JR in 2020. In other cases, it is because INGOs that were already participating bring in more local partners, such as Medair in the Somalia JR adding Somali Aid and SAACID in 2021. Moreover, an INGO that did not previously work with a local partner in a JR context, started doing so. For example, World Vision brought Taakulo into the Somalia JR, which was possible thanks to the 2019 top-up to the JR budget, and Save the Children brought SPHEREYE into the Yemen JR in 2021.

Implementing or decision-making partners

All three JRs made progress on joint decision-making. Their recent annual reports mention not only 'local partners' in the JR, but also other key stake-holding 'local actors' being part of the 'kick-off' workshops of the annual JR programme, and the design and planning of the next year's one. In the Sudan JR, for example, such workshops also involve relevant local branches of line ministries, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Netherlands embassy, and, more recently, even a few community representatives. In 2019, reflections also revealed the importance of having relevant field staff of the local partners present, not just staff from their Khartoum headquarters. Local partners are said to have the same 'voting rights' over joint activities as the JR INGO members. In the Yemen JR, the plan for 2021 envisaged increased joint decision-making. Yamaan Foundation, a partner of Cordaid, participated in the JR 2020 planning workshop and reportedly 'played a key role in the design of their programme' for 2021. Oxfam Novib's partners for 2021 in Yemen, the Attadhamon Foundation for Development (AFD) and the Coalition of Humanitarian Relief (CHR), are said to 'have been part of the project design and will continue to play a key role throughout the project cycle'.

In the Sudan JR, the proportion of the 2020 COVID-19 top-up going to local partners was significantly higher than that of the initial JR budget. Sudanese partners are said to have taken a leading role in designing the JR's COVID-19 response. Local agencies worked with their primary INGO partner to draw up proposals and budgets, clarifying each other's complementary roles and capacities. One of the decisions was to allocate more funding to South Kordofan, where all three JR INGOs have a local partner, each of which received COVID-19 response funding. (DRA Localisation Working Group, 16 June 2020:4) The existence of a rapid response mechanism for local partners ('crisis modifier') in the Somalia JR enabled quick action when COVID-19 started to spread: 'With many INGO staff out of country or forced to stay in their homes and offices, local partners have led the proposal, implementation and reporting process of crisis modifiers independently and were in this way able to respond in a timely and effective manner.' (2020 combi report:10).

However, at a deeper, strategic level, local partners can remain disempowered. In the Sudan JR, for example, significant changes in partner participation are taking place in 2020-2021 and 2022-2023. Some INGOs are stepping out of the JR and others are coming in. The primary reasons for this are reportedly related to central DRA dynamics. In the strategy period 2022-2026, JRs in some countries will not be continued, while new ones are initiated where they did not take place before. Members have reviewed their choices in line with the internal DRA rule that a member can participate in a maximum of three JRs. In addition, the merger between ICCO and Cordaid reduced the new entity's options from six to a maximum of three JRs. There was an urgent request from the Sudan JR for the incoming INGOs to take over the local partners of the INGOs leaving the JR. The request was not fully granted. The incoming INGOs retained their right to choose where they work, in what areas of intervention, and with whom. Understandable as this is, it also shows that local actors only participate in a JR by the grace of an INGO and have no real influence when there are changes in INGO participation. This reveals the unequal power relations.³ Reportedly, Sudanese partners want the DRA to consider them as primary JR stakeholders who can remain part of it even after changes in INGO participation take place. This resonates with the wishes of local partners in the Somalia JR, who expressed their desire for greater JR co-ownership to the visiting regional Humanitarian Coordinator of the Netherlands embassy in 2019.

3 The snapshot also shows that, for example, Candlelight and Havoyoco will no longer be partners in the Somalia JR in 2022 and 2023. This is not because Oxfam Novib has left the JR, but because – in joint consultation – it has been agreed that their ongoing support will come from other funding sources.



B. Financing for localisation

Quantitative targets

The 2018-2021 strategy set three quantitative targets: reduced transaction costs; 25% of the JR budget to flow to local partners by 2019, increasing to 35% by the end of 2021; and 5-8% of the JR budget to be allocated for capacity strengthening of local partners. Note that 25%-35% flowing through local partners still means that 65-75% flows through international agencies.

- **Reducing transaction costs**

There is no indication that reducing transaction costs has received dedicated attention so far in the JRs reviewed or at an overall DRA level. This would require all agencies receiving DRA funding to use a shared understanding of what counts as 'transaction costs' and have the accounting systems to generate the numbers. Given that Dutch DRA members may pass on JR funding to another INGO in their network or alliance, which may then pass on some of it to a local partner, transaction costs may actually increase. Nor is the funding allocated 'as directly as possible', which in the context of the Grand Bargain was defined as through 'no more than one intermediary'.⁴

- **Percentage allocated to local partners**

We see gradual increases in the percentage allocated to local partners in all JRs, approaching but not yet reaching the 25% and 35% aspirational targets. However, the aspirations by the country level teams for 2022-2023 are 35% for the Somalia JR and over 50% for the Sudan and Yemen JRs. Comparing performance against targets between the different JRs should be done with caution. It can be tempting to conclude that those who spend a higher percentage via local partners are more committed and doing better on localisation than others. This can be misleading if other influencing factors are not taken into consideration. For example, Sudan's government policy that requires international aid agencies to collaborate with Sudanese partners will be an important driver to spend more via local partners. In practice, INGOs in the JR felt that spending most of their budget through local partners, several of whom did not yet have robust finance systems, was too risky. That is why they decided to increase the percentages gradually.

- **Aggregates**

As with the 25% by 2020 target of the Grand Bargain, these are aggregate percentages. That leaves room for manoeuvre by international agencies, for valid or less valid reasons, to explain that they weren't able to achieve the target, leaving it to others to make up the difference. This also happens within these JRs with, for example, Cordaid in the Yemen JR, ICCO in the Sudan JR and Oxfam Novib in the Somalia JR, all being significant contributors to the eventual percentage figures.

- **Capacity strengthening funding**

None of the JRs reached the 5-8% target of the budget for capacity strengthening, though the Yemen 2021 JR plans come close. The reasons could not be ascertained within the constraints of this inquiry. One factor that might have played a role is that not all learning happens through formal activities that can be easily costed. It is hard to quantify the many on-the-job and informal learning activities, including mentoring. These will be seen as regular staff costs rather than allocated to a capacity strengthening budget. Another factor may be that, as of the spring of 2020, many activities took place online, which is significantly cheaper. Other influencing factors are contextual. For example, due to the political turmoil in Sudan in 2019 many activities were slowed down or temporarily suspended. It is interesting to note that there are great differences in actuals. For example, in 2019, the Sudan JR budgeted 57,200 euros, while the Somalia JR budgeted nearly 300,000 euros for capacity support. No automatic conclusions can be drawn from this, however, since figures cannot explain themselves.

4 It could even become a disincentive to work with and sub-grant funds to a local partner, as it increases the number of intermediaries.



Quality of financing

For all organisations, both international and local, an amount of flexible income is critical for financial health. It enables them to deal with cash flow challenges and to invest in new areas of organisational development, but also to invest time in developing proposals and even a fundraising strategy to diversify their income. Organisations living in constant financial fragility cannot attract and retain qualified staff. Minimally, local organisations need to have their core/support costs fully covered, not just their direct project implementation costs, which would mean their staff members are used as cheap labourers. (See also Heintze et al, 2021:41-42.) Even earmarked funding for certain core costs does not provide them with the flexibility required. International aid agencies routinely receive a totally unearmarked management fee, also referred to as Internal Cost Recovery (ICR). In the DRA, this can be 6-8%, in practice usually 8%. From a political economy perspective on localisation, providing local organisations with an equal ICR is inevitable; from a humanitarian economy perspective on localisation, this seems to have the opposite effect.

• ICR

There are no consistent practices on ICR in the JRs, nor has there been a common position on it so far in the DRA. In Yemen, Cordaid reportedly shares its ICR with Yamaan Foundation; some other participating INGOs may do the same, but there is no common practice. The issue is under discussion in the Yemen JR. In the Somalia JR, no flexible ICR is provided, although some, but not all, INGOs write support costs of the Somali partner into the budget. Here too, the issue is left to the discretion of the participating INGOs.⁵ In the separate DRA pilot with the Nexus Platform in Somalia, Oxfam Novib, which is (currently) acting as fund manager for the Platform, receives 50% of the ICR, while the other 50% is shared pro rata among the implementing members.⁶ The current view is that the ICR is a DRA-wide conversation topic first, not a JR-specific one. The topic is part of the current discussion between the DRA and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

• Multi-year funding

The framework agreement between the Netherlands Ministry and the DRA was for a three-year funding period (2019-2021). Internal DRA planning and budgeting processes led to two-year commitments to the JRs (2020-2021), but without budget specifics for the second year. In practice, this turned it into a two-times-one-year formula, not a one-time-two-year formula. That does not constitute multi-year funding or multi-year investment in local organisations, as committed to in the Grand Bargain. On the other hand, the Sudan JR reportedly developed a multi-annual capacity development plan in 2019, even if the annual allocations for this may not have been fully decided at that time.

• Anticipatory and rapid response funding

In 2020, the Somalia JR also introduced a 'crisis modifier'. Reportedly, this happened upon request of the Somali partners who wanted to be prepared for a rapid response to crises arising during the project period, but *'who, unlike their INGO counterparts, do not have flexible funding and contingency amounts/ICR in their budgets to rapidly respond to emergencies'*. (2019 combi report:22) The 2020 amount of 33,000 euros increased to 40,000 euros per local partner in 2021. A review in late 2020 confirmed these modest but flexible sums for

5 This can lead to a situation where a local organisation gets funding from the same back donor but through different INGOs, one of which shares the ICR while the other does not. This occurs globally and was also noted in this research.

6 Nexus (2020). Implementation Plan. pp. 12-13.



rapid response ‘empowered local partners to identify humanitarian needs as they arose, design interventions in collaboration with affected communities, and adjust humanitarian interventions to changing conditions. Local partners did so independently of their international partners, with some limitations.’ (Harrity, 2020:4) It can, therefore, be seen as a contribution to localisation, and possibly be more community-driven than local NGO-driven. The review, however, also noted that local partners whose INGO counterpart remained the budget holder and therefore the decision-maker were not able to realise the full potential of such a crisis modifier. (Harrity, 2020:15) Such flexible funds for rapid preparedness and response are gaining traction. In 2021, the Sudan JR decided to earmark 7% of the JR budget to contingency planning, to enable local partners to implement rapid responses, and explicitly included a preparedness and anticipatory action figure in its 2022-2023 planning. The same is happening in other DRA JRs. Also Nexus, a consortium of Somali NGOs that is supported by DRA funding in a pilot parallel to the JR and with wider learning objectives, has a collectively managed Anticipatory and Emergency Response Fund. However, such a flexible anticipatory and response budget does not equate to and does not substitute for an unearmarked management fee.

- **Value for money**

Although value for money is a consideration in several of the JR reports, there is little explicit reflection whether the implementation by local agencies rather than international ones, offers any significant value for money advantages. An exception is found in the Yemen JR 2020 report, which states, albeit somewhat ambiguously: ‘Working and strengthening of the local capacities by the already trained project teams increases cost effectiveness and sustainability.’

C. Capacity support for localisation

Dedicated funding for capacity support in humanitarian responses is critically important, yet donors are often reluctant to fund it. Funding is an input, of interest are the outcomes and the approaches that helped achieve them.

- **Whose capacities are strengthened, and why?**

The reports mostly contain references to capacity support initiatives for local NGOs and CSOs, but also for governmental actors and communities. For example, World Vision in the Somalia JR works with communities on disaster risk reduction and community contingency planning. SOS Kinderdorpen collaborates with internally displaced persons associations on, for example, business planning and follow-up, as well as on leadership skills. In 2021, CARE planned capacity building training for ‘community committees’ on leadership, conflict resolution, humanitarian principles, community communication, record keeping and report writing in the Yemen JR. In the Sudan JR, much of the capacity support budget of 2019 and 2020 was invested in the creation of the Sudan National NGO Forum. Content-wise, the Somalia JR reports refer to a diverse set of programming areas, including nutrition, health services, cash, disaster risk reduction, gender in emergencies, conflict sensitivity, safeguarding, networking and advocacy, security, accountability to affected populations (AAP), and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL). Several of these are also mentioned in other JR reports. The Organisational Learning Capacities assessments, conducted by the Yemen JR in 2020 among numerous Yemeni organisations, also identified improved operational and technical policies, procedures and guidelines, such as enhancing skills in writing proposals, negotiation and advocacy. The aim here was to build meaningful partnerships with different stakeholders, including donors and funders. By the end of 2020, CARE in the Yemen JR was recruiting a financial consultant to help enhance its partner’s systems to better manage donor requirements. In the Sudan JR, essential office supplies, such as computers, a photocopier, and better communications equipment, are recognised as organisational capacities, the purchase of which the JR can fund.

- **Who decides?**

In 2018, the Yemen JR started offering some training, for example, on procurement and financial management, gender and protection, and media and communications. The INGO partners in the JR had decided on the topics and design. A subsequent review showed that this supply-driven approach had little impact. The Yemen JR then introduced a radically different approach to the localisation workshops it organised in North and South Yemen in 2020. Thirty participants from 20 northern NGOs and twenty participants from 11



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7 Whether peer learning among local organisations is more widely practised and enabled by INGOs in the JRs could not be assessed. When briefly mentioned in conversations, the responses usually gave the impression of practical collaboration between local agencies, for example, one using its local knowledge and contacts to facilitate the entry of another in a particular area, than focused peer learning on programmatic and organisational development themes. One person mentioned that the more experienced local NGOs could help newer ones by sharing more of their reflected experience of how they got to where they are now.



southern NGOs participated in the respective events. Governmental authorities also took part. The workshops were structured around three core questions: where do you want to be as organisations in three to five years? How will you get there? And what stands in the way? The workshops were facilitated by a Yemeni third party. The workshops revealed fairly broad differences between the priority needs of the northern and southern NGOs. Those in South Yemen needed support on fundamental organisational issues, such as human resources and finance management. Those in North Yemen tended to be organisationally stronger and identified their further development areas in terms of reinforced capabilities to engage with the international aid system, for example, related to fundraising or broader advocacy. The process was subsequently extended to the east of Yemen, with another nineteen local NGOs taking part. Meanwhile, the Somalia JR provided sustained support on AAP and MEAL, as requested by its local partners.

- **How is it provided and by whom?**

All three JRs use a variety of learning methods, ranging from training sessions and learning workshops to on-the-job mentoring, joint assessment and joint monitoring trips, and the deployment of a resource person to their local partners, for example, a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene expert for Somalia JR's COVID-19 response. This suggests a strong focus on practice-based learning and learning through reflection.⁷ The identity of the trainers, learning facilitators and mentors is not systematically detailed, but it seems to involve different staff members from the INGOs, who may be dedicated resource persons at their headquarters. However, consultants may also be from national and/or regional organisations, as is the case in Somalia JR.

It seems that in some JR's (for example, in Somalia) the participating INGOs decide on the capacity support approach for their local partners. There is no collective approach or strategy. However, in 2020, the Yemen JR contracted the Humanitarian Learning Academy as a major learning facilitator. The Academy created a Yemen window in its general Kaya online learning platform, which offered all materials in Arabic, as well as online facilitation and support. In addition, the Yemen JR drew on Yemeni resource organisations, such as Insights and the Itar Foundation for Social Development, to co-design and facilitate workshops, translate materials, and so on.

- **Collective capabilities?**

A vision of what long-term localisation success might look like, sees local and national actors (governmental and non-governmental, communities and private sector) work together more and more to manage crises themselves. These actors take the lead even if they are reinforced by international actors. This vision requires a broad system perspective that goes beyond the bilateral relations between individual international aid agencies and their local partners. All three JRs appear to be taking this broader perspective. Much of the capacity budget in the Sudan JR in 2019 and 2020 was allocated to the creation of the Sudan National NGO Forum, to replace the NGO Board that had become very politicised under the Bashir regime. One of the stated aims was to gain a stronger collective voice towards the international aid community. In 2021, the Sudan JR also planned to organise a national forum event to bring together a broad spectrum of Sudanese and international actors to develop a common understanding on localisation in the country, which could lead to the development of a broader localisation strategy or roadmap. As early as 2019, the Yemen JR noted two areas where it can impact localisation: in its own programming and work with local partners within the DRA JR context; and through '*support to localisation capacity strengthening and overall transformation in Yemen*'. As mentioned above, its current capacity development platform is open to many more Yemeni NGOs than the JR's formal 'local partners'. The Somalia JR puts its localisation efforts in the wider context of the '*Framework for Localisation in Somalia*', a whole-system reference, developed in late 2019 - early 2020 through a multi-stakeholder process, partly financed by the 2019 budget top-up.

- **What is the added value of JR capacity strengthening?**

The documentation reviewed does not answer this question, with one exception. Prior to joining the Yemen JR, funders including Cordaid reportedly supported the development of Yamaan Foundation's capabilities related to shelter, rehabilitation and cash. In the context of the JR, further capacity support subsequently concentrated on water, sanitation and hygiene, community health services, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

D. Amplifying local voices

As per the DRA's own reference, amplifying local voices relates to at least three spheres of action.

- **Coordination platforms**

The internal DRA references are not explicit in differentiating possibly consecutive objectives, from getting a seat at the table, to being able to meaningfully participate and influence decisions, to co-leading and eventually leading coordination groups. In the Somalia JR, Somali NGO partners have occupied one of the two seats reserved for Somali NGOs in the Humanitarian Country Team since 2019. In addition, the 2019 top-up of the Somalia JR enabled a sub-grant to the Somalia NGO Consortium, one of the few in the world with international and national NGOs, which has been a strong advocate for localisation. The local organisations can also play coordinating roles at local level, like Candlelight has been doing around protection in the Sool region. Local partners in the Sudan JR have also been intensely involved in sectoral working groups and clusters at local and state level. As mentioned above, the Sudan JR put a lot of effort into the creation of the Sudan National NGO Forum in recent years. In 2020, five of the six Sudanese NGOs participating in the JR were on the Steering Committee driving these efforts. Ongoing political turmoil, which also impacts dynamics between Sudanese NGOs, and between them and governmental authorities, forced the suspension of this potentially strategic initiative in late 2020.

- **Direct interaction with donors**

One of the interesting examples provided by the Sudan JR is its close interaction with the Netherlands embassy in Khartoum. The embassy is seen as very supportive, and willing to meet with and listen to Sudanese NGOs. One of the embassy staff members habitually participates in design, planning and review workshops. In 2020, the Sudan JR also organised a panel discussion with the embassy 'to facilitate direct dialogue between donors and national partners'. Compliance was one of the topics on the agenda. Another example is the direct interaction between the local partners in the Somalia JR with the visiting Humanitarian Coordinator for the Horn of Africa of the Netherlands embassy. At that meeting, the local partners expressed their wish for greater ownership of the JR in-country, possibly through a consortium structure.

- **Participation in international fora**

Internal DRA references acknowledge the Charter for Change (C4C) commitments and benchmarks as relevant to localisation, and some of the DRA members are C4C signatories. Reportedly, some Sudanese partners endorsed C4C, triggered by the Sudan JR. In its new planning for 2022 and beyond, the Sudan JR is more intentional about this: *'The JR national partners will be able to engage through the Charter for Change platform to link with international donors, which means better representation and exposure to wider sector learnings.'* In Somalia, meanwhile, the Somalia NGO Consortium organises lobby tours with local organisations. In 2019, it enabled Somalia NGO presence at the Global Conference on Localisation of Aid organised by European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) in Brussels, and at that year's C4C annual gathering in Copenhagen. DRA members organised additional meetings in The Hague en route.

2.4 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Notwithstanding challenging contexts, it is obvious that participating agencies in the three JRs have taken the localisation objective seriously and made real progress. Over time, more local agencies have joined the JRs and become decision-making partners. The JRs are also allocating more of their budgets to them. Capacity support has been provided on a range of technical, thematic and managerial topics, achieving a broader perspective than just local JR partners. Moreover, intentional efforts were made to increase their meaningful participation in coordination fora, connect them to relevant international events and initiatives, and definitely enable direct interaction with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.





This report and other localisation-relevant reviews done or commissioned by the DRA show the strategic objectives have been actively worked on in the current strategic period and significant progress has been made in these three JRs, as well as in others. [The DRA 2022-2026 strategy](#) reveals that much internal reflection and learning has taken place. Its foundational orientations are to put people affected by crises at the centre of a humanitarian response and to increase the leadership of local actors and institutions. This, it is believed, will make the humanitarian system more efficient, effective and impactful by boosting resilience. Achieving this will require a nexus-perspective without losing sight of fundamental humanitarian principles and preparedness for rapid responses, as well as truly equitable partnerships.

The ten Grand Bargain commitments are now at the heart of DRA's work, and the understanding of 'localisation' clearly includes awareness of the unequal and unfair power relationships in the global relief sector. *'Subcontracting and transactional relationships are not equitable partnerships.'* (DRA strategy 2022-2026:15) Acquired insights and points of attention now include critical issues like the quality of funding, organisational development rather than just individual learning, capacity sharing instead of one-way capacity strengthening, as well as sharing risks and benefits, and participation of affected people in the design and planning process.

The DRA Localisation Working Group has also specified the implications in practice for the coming four years. While the target of at least 35% of funding to local partners stands, the benchmarks are now overwhelmingly qualitative. Key components are:

- Decentralised decision-making (to the country level) and JR co-leadership with a local partner.
- Development of a partnership framework with local partners which envisages strategic, long-term, equitable and principled partnerships.
- Investment in locally-led approaches to mutual capacity strengthening, and more structural organisational development of local partners.
- Development and implementation of yearly partnership satisfaction surveys.
- Active risk reviews with local partners and identification of risk reduction and risk-sharing practices and principles.
- Transfer of a proportional share of ICR based on the programme budget to local partners by 2026.



Some DRA-wide points of attention that emerged from this review are:

3.1 A CLEARER POSITION ON LOCALISATION-BY-DESIGN VERSUS LOCALISATION-BY-DEFAULT

The argument is made, at the JR level and elsewhere, that ‘localisation is not just for localisation’. The objective is to deliver quality assistance, often at scale, with robust accountability. This can lead to a practice where international aid agencies implement directly, but work with local partners when they are not allowed access to certain areas or find it too risky. This is no different from ‘remote management’ practices established before the Grand Bargain and can imply significant risk transfer to the local actor. It also reflects an understanding of ‘complementarity’: the international agency collaborates with others when it reaches the limits of what it can do itself, rather than see how it can complement what local actors are doing.⁸ This amounts to localisation-by-default, not localisation-by-design. Localisation-by-design is not anti-international agencies; it recognises they can add value, if contextually assessed. In Sudan, for example, international agencies have been better able than Sudanese ones to put socially and politically sensitive issues, like gender-based violence and child marriage, on the table. This is partly because the risks are lower for them: at worst, they get expelled from the country. The possible repercussions for Sudanese CSOs can be more serious. The Yemen JR has already clarified its position on this. In its first years, virtually no Yemeni organisations were involved in the JR. The leadership message was to see localisation as desirable ‘when possible’. By 2020, that position had shifted to one in which collaborating with local partners was expected, and participating INGOs would have to explain and justify situations in which they did not do so.

A contextualised strategy for localisation to which the DRA contributes, will do away with some of the internal DRA practices that create pictures that do not match with contextual realities. An important one identified in this review is that international INGOs move in and out of JRs, sometimes taking along some or all of their existing local partners. INGOs may not be working with local partners in the JR framework, but do so in their programmes outside the JR. They may also support other localisation initiatives outside the JR framework. And there may be DRA members (or alliance partners) working in a country with local partners who have not joined the JR throughout the period under review.

3.2 PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OF THE ACTION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The JRs already show that international and local partners are not just delivering goods and services to affected populations but are engaging with community-based structures, and formal and informal leaders and influencers to strengthen their resilience. This invites a critical reflection on how resilient households and social groups can realistically be without support from governmental and non-governmental capabilities. In aid-giving countries, people do not assume that households and social groups can be adequately resilient without additional support from public, private or not-for-profit organisations. These countries have a wider organisational infrastructure in place to provide support.⁹

3.3 STRATEGIC CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development must be managed from the perspective of outcomes, not inputs. Planning it should also envisage role changes: what will the organisation with strengthened capabilities be able to do (or do more of) than is currently (mostly) done by another organisation, particularly an international one?

From the outset, capacity development implementers must ensure that the organisation will be able to retain the strengthened capabilities. Capacity support can no longer be separated from the financial health of an organisation. The Grand Bargain (see page 5 of [the Grand Bargain declaration](#)) clearly commits the international relief sector to ‘multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders’. However, organisational development support is a different competency from technical-thematic expertise. It tends to be more present in the ‘development’ than the ‘humanitarian’ sector.¹⁰ This keeps the question of who gets (a share of the) ICR on the table. In practice, it is unlikely that a temporary increase in expenditure on core organisational functions can be avoided. This is also implied in the notion of ‘investment’: the cost benefits of an investment do not show rapidly. Transition periods typically also lead to a temporary increase, even doubling, of costs, for example, when organisations restructure, merge, opt for a substantial strategic reorientation, introduce a new financial management system, or go through a wider digital revolution.

8 See, for example, Barbelet, V. et al (2019). *Local Humanitarian Action in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Capacity and complementarity*. Overseas Development Institute

9 Some international aid agencies, though not the DRA, argue that they do not need to support and reinforce local governmental or non-governmental organisations, but rather ‘localise’ their direct implementation because of their extensive engagement with the affected populations. This way of working is built on the assumption that sustainability and resilience can be not only necessary, but also sufficient, at the level of households, social groups and/or communities and that broader organised and institutionalised capabilities are not essential.

10 For a rich resource manual, see Ubels, J., N-A, Acquaye-Baddoo & A. Fowler (2010). *Capacity Development in Practice*. Earthscan

3.4 RISK TRANSFER AND RISK SHARING

Risk management is a critical issue for localisation in practice, one in which donors have a major role and responsibility.¹¹ Risk and risk sharing was the topic of a [webinar](#) on 11 June 2020 co-organised by the DRA, Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands (KUNO), C4C, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and the Global Interagency Security Forum. The issue is being discussed within the DRA, and between the DRA and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On the positive side, the review of the reports of the JRs under consideration show that local organisations do not intrinsically see themselves as a 'risk', as is the case in the mindsets and practices of some international donors and operational agencies. Most of the risk factors discussed refer to external ones. One of the reports mentions the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), but formulates it as an internal one in the first instance, which also applies to local partners.¹² The Somalia 2019 JR report refers to the (obligation of) 'screening partners and suppliers for terrorism and conducting anti-fraud/corruption and aid diversion trainings' by both INGO staff and partners.

A serious reflection on risks needs to address these questions: what sort of risk is most applicable to which partner?¹³ What is the likely impact and on whom? What does the proactive mitigation of these risks mean in practice and for whom? What happens in practice if an incident occurs and needs to be managed and investigated under shared risk? Who shoulders what damages and losses when these occur?

Risk considerations should include those caused by donor actions and donor inactions.¹⁴ Risks also need to be weighed against opportunities and the vocabulary needs to include the notion of risk reward, that is, the benefits obtained from having dared to take a certain risk.¹⁵

11 See, for example, GMI (February 2020). *No Shared Risk No Partnership?*

12 'SOMJR organisations mitigate any SEA-related risks with sound child protection and safeguarding policies which also extend to local partners.' (2020-2021 combi report:21)

13 Different types are identified in Humanitarian Outcomes & Interaction (2019). *NGOs and Risk: Managing uncertainty in local-international partnerships*. A global report and South Sudan & Nigeria case studies are available.

14 Open Road Alliance (2018). *Roadblock Analysis Report. An analysis of what goes wrong in impact-focused projects*. This study of a large number of cases where potential impact of programmes and projects was hampered, discovered that, in a significant percentage, this resulted from unplanned changes by the institutional donor.

15 See, for example, Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2016). *DFID's Approach to Managing Fiduciary Risk in Conflict-Affected Environments. A performance review*



3.5 OTHER ISSUES FOR FUTURE INQUIRY AND LEARNING

Inquiries and reviews answer some questions, yet also bring up new ones. Relevant and interesting ones that came up during this review were:

- Does being part of the DRA, and more specifically participating in a JR, strengthen the motivation and ability of organisations to turn their localisation commitment into practice? Is the lead agency of a JR typically the main promotor or can it (also) be other participating organisations? Does the engagement for localisation through the JR inspire the participating INGO to do more towards that objective in its wider programming in the country, beyond the JR?
- Has the JR experience given participating organisations wider knowledge of the meaning of complementarity, about collective impact, and eventual role changes between international and local organisations?
- It was assumed that dedicated funds for capacity strengthening would be an important enabler to advancing localisation through a JR. Yet the three JRs reviewed here did not allocate the target percentages of their overall budgets. More importantly, they often did not spend what they had allocated. Why not?
- Has participation in a JR opened other opportunities for funding, partnering, learning etc. to local partners? Which ones? How did this come about? Did they use it as leverage to open other doors?
- How to think about value for money in relation to localisation? Does the short-term appreciation still hold in the long term? In other words, does the appreciation change depending on the time horizon applied – as happens with investments? What is included in that appreciation: only the operation cost comparisons, or the wider institutional backup and support costs? How do we assess the non-monetary value of contributions relevant and perhaps even necessary to achieving our objectives?¹⁶

16 The Start Fund in Bangladesh has been able to compare the cost-effectiveness of INGOs and (already quite experienced) Bangladeshi CSOs responding to the same disaster, and it concluded that the Bangladeshi CSOs were significantly more cost-effective.



3.6 EXPECTATIONS OF THE DRA

The examples from Somalia, Sudan and Yemen illustrate that the DRA's localisation efforts have grown steadily since 2018. While localisation was translated into practice within JRs, they also started to contribute to broader localisation efforts, sometimes thanks to JR resources.

As an alliance, DRA members have different perspectives, experiences and interests in localisation, and localisation remains to a large extent context-, JR- and member-specific. As such, the (changing) composition of a JR partnership shapes localisation efforts and results, and localisation within the alliance remains a balancing act between context drivers, collective DRA-wide commitments and interpretation by individual members.

From 2022 onwards, the DRA will build upon the significant progress made and pursue a localisation-by-design approach more explicitly. Naturally, it will face higher expectations from its local and national partners. A first taster comes from the Nexus Platform in Somalia, with its clear transformative vision:

'Not only should partnerships be equal, but transformational with the vision in mind that the Somali humanitarian system should be centred around Somali government and Somali civil society, not international actors.'

'Recognising and promoting the role and work of local actors in emergencies contributes to local actors' visibility, brand, and capacity for fundraising, communications, and advocacy. It aligns DRA's messaging with the principles of fairness and transparency that the DRA means to live and work by. It helps debunk negative stereotypes about local humanitarian actors and end the systematic ways in which we are denied funding, visibility, power, and a strong voice in decision-making.'

This renewed focus on equal partnerships will allow the DRA to advance its localisation ambition, for example, through ensuring decentralised decision-making, adaptive programming and Southern partners' representation in the revised governance structure, allowing local and national partners to hold the DRA accountable, as the Nexus Platform continues to do:

*'DRA can also broker direct contact between local partners and donors, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [...] DRA could also advocate more strongly with UN, other donor governments and INGOs to challenge assumptions, practices, and policies which limit progress on local humanitarian leadership.'*¹⁷

17 Nexus (2020). Learning Paper. pp. 30-31

ANNEX: DRA DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS REVIEWED



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- Ausma, L. (June 2019). Localisation Scan 2019. An analysis of the Joint Response 2019 protracted crisis proposals. KUNO
- Dutch Relief Alliance. Strategy 2018-2021
- Dutch Relief Alliance (August 2018). Putting Local Actors at the Heart of Humanitarian Responses
- Dutch Relief Alliance (January 2020). Localisation Best Practice: Increasing the effectiveness of global humanitarian response
- Dutch Relief Alliance. Strategy 2022-2026
- Harrity, R. (December 2020). Somalia Joint Response. Crisis Modifier Learning Paper. Dutch Relief Alliance
- Heintze, P., M. Gommans, I. Hilhorst (April 2021). Shifting Minds & Setting the Course. Looking back and looking forward on the Dutch Relief Alliance localisation strategic priority. KUNO
- Kiewied T., O. Soremekun, Jok Madut Jok (December 2020). Towards Principled Humanitarian Action in Conflict Contexts. Understanding the role of partnerships. Voices from Nigeria and South Sudan. Dutch Relief Alliance
- KUNO (June 2020). Towards Risk Sharing. Perspectives on localisation and risk management in the context of COVID-19. Webinar recording
- KUNO. 2018-2021 Analysis AC JR Budgets – Localisation scan
- KUNO. 2018-2021 Analysis JR Budgets – Localisation scan
- Nexus (undated). Nexus: A platform for locally led change. External concept note
- Nexus (undated, probably second half 2020). Enough Theory! A Somali consortium putting nexus programming into action. Future Dutch Relief Alliance-Somalia Nexus Platform
- Nexus (October 2020). Perspective on Change. Somali-led nexus-integrated humanitarian system
- Nexus (October 2020). Implementation Plan. Pilot joint response
- Snel, E. (November 2019). Localisation Scan. Scan on the progress on localisation objectives in the different joint responses of the Dutch Relief Alliance in 2018, based on evaluations and narrative reports of the DRA. KUNO

In addition, the following internal documents were reviewed:

- DRA documents regarding Somalia, Sudan and Yemen JRs, including combi reports, financial reports and workshop reports, covering 2019-2021
- DRA Localisation Working Group documents, including work plans, guidance notes and localisation analyses



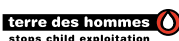
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