

RIAP Charter on Humanitarian Localisation

Greater localisation of humanitarian aid is both a practical and a moral imperative. This was widely recognised among the 9,000 participants at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, and led to formal commitments by key international actors in the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change.

Two years later, however, the implementation of localisation has barely advanced even among signatory countries and agencies. The response to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh sadly highlights the extent to which Grand Bargain and Charter for Change commitments have failed to transform actual humanitarian practice.

The RIAP network of South Asian ecumenical Christian agencies calls for a recommitment to genuine localisation—not because it would benefit our organisations, but because it would benefit the hundreds of thousands of people affected by disasters in South Asia every year, as well as all the other citizens who benefit from the strengthening of civil society.

We endorse the Grand Bargain's vision: a humanitarian community characterised by genuine partnership, a level playing field where we all meet as equals. In order to achieve that:

1. We call on our international partners to **adhere to the localisation commitments** made in Grand Bargain and Charter for Change. We contend that the primary obstacle to localisation is not the limits of local capacity, but rather the institutional consequences for large humanitarian actors of genuinely releasing power and funding to their national partners. That is the main obstacle which we must prayerfully seek to overcome.
2. We commit to **honest reckoning of our own capacities**. Although we contend that current local humanitarian capacity is underestimated and under-used by international actors, we also welcome and invite partnership as we work to further strengthen our capacities.
3. We call on all international humanitarian actors to accept responsibility for **reinforcing national actors' humanitarian initiatives and capacities** through long-term partnerships, and not to compete with national and local actors for resources and space.
4. We call on international humanitarian actors to **refrain from direct operational intervention in a disaster** unless they mutually agree with their national partner(s) that the disaster calls for international capacity.
5. We call on international humanitarian actors to **increase direct funding** to national and local partners. The Grand Bargain's language of "as direct as possible" should be taken to mean direct grants or pooled funds directly accessible to national and local civil society partners, rather than assuming the need for more mediating institutions.
6. We call on international humanitarian actors **not to include national organisations closely affiliated with themselves** when they report on their localisation progress. The franchises of international aid agencies too often displace homegrown civil society because of the advantages of an intimate relationship with an overseas institution that shares their name, systems, and brand. Counting them as national and local actors will not lead to a transformation of the humanitarian system.
7. We call on all international humanitarian actors to **support the marketing, brand-building, and fundraising capacity of indigenous Southern partners** and not to fundraise themselves in Southern nations, neither directly nor through national agencies that share their brand.

8. We call on all international humanitarian partners to **share overhead and administrative costs fairly and equitably** with their national and local partners. Any funds received from donors and any limits on overhead spending (i.e. both the resources and obligations around overheads) should be equitably divided, by transparent and mutual decision. We commit to treating our own local partners on this principle.
9. We commit to **IATI adherence in our humanitarian work**, making our humanitarian income and expenses public, and we call on our international partners to do the same.
10. We commit to reinforcing and strengthening **in-region and in-country surge mechanisms**, to avoid over-reliance on international actors for surge capacity in a disaster. We call on our international partners to also support these mechanisms.
11. We call on all humanitarian actors to **live up to good practice standards for cash transfers**, including rigorous contextual and situational analysis before committing to cash in any given disaster response. Cash transfers should not be automatically treated as the best response in all contexts.
12. We call on all international humanitarian actors to dedicate budget for **national and local partners to carry out rapid post-disaster need assessments**, to reduce the frequency with which international staff are sent in to do this job. We commit to dedicating trained staff for this purpose.
13. We call on all international humanitarian actors to **support the use of a national language in coordination platforms** (e.g. the UN Clusters and Humanitarian Coordination Team) rather than defaulting to English. We commit to doing likewise.
14. We call on all international humanitarian actors to **actively encourage national and local actors' participation in coordination platforms** like the Clusters and HCT, and commit to doing likewise.
15. We commit to support **coordination and sharing of assessments, participation, and feedback information** to reduce repeat visits by different agencies to the same communities. We call on major international humanitarian actors to agree upon and fund a common platform for sharing these kinds of data.
16. We call on all humanitarian actors to support **adaptable, flexible programming in light of feedback** from disaster-affected communities rather than programmes that are hard to change.
17. We call on humanitarian donors to **provide multi-year funding for reconstruction, rehabilitation and risk reduction** following natural disasters, not only in situations of chronic conflict.
18. We call on all humanitarian actors to **support the opening of CBPF and other earmarked funds** to national and local civil society actors, with a greater percentage of CERF funds passed to national and local actors, in keeping with the Grand Bargain's 25% target.
19. We commit to **supporting joint feedback initiatives at national level** for reviewing the compliance of signatories to the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change. We call on all signatories to support and publicise these national initiatives.
20. We endorse the Grand Bargain's call for simple and consistent reporting requirements. As members and implementing partners of the ACT Alliance, we call on ACT to lead the way in **harmonizing and simplifying reporting requirements** in humanitarian response.