

AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON LOCALISATION
ADDIS ABABA, 15 - 16 JULY 2019



CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, major donors and humanitarian organisations signed the “Grand Bargain” with ten top-level commitments to reduce the costs of humanitarian aid and make it more effective. Among these were the commitment to increase international funding and support for national and local responders (known as the “localisation of aid”). Since adoption of the Grand Bargain, signatories have continued to work together to support the achievement of their localisation commitments through a network called the “Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream.”

This workshop, hosted by the African Union in Addis Ababa, gathered more than 70 individuals, representing local non-governmental and civil society organisations, government agencies, international non-governmental organisations, National Red Cross Societies, UN agencies, and donor agencies. It was the first in a series of regional events that will be organised this year with the following objectives:

1. Share recent developments in global processes, research findings and progress on localisation;
2. Facilitate a dialogue between different stakeholder groups in the region on the opportunities and challenges of localisation;
3. Ensure perspectives from the region help guide planned global guidance products and other initiatives to promote localisation;
4. Initiate and/or support ongoing discussions and planning for individual and collection action in the region on localisation

PRIORITY ISSUES

The Conference participants identified a number of priority issues that should be addressed to accelerate the realisation of localisation agenda.

1

FLEXIBLE, ACCESSIBLE, PREDICTABLE FINANCING FOR LOCAL ACTORS

- The current situation is still dominated by **short-term, ad-hoc funding channeled through international intermediaries**, with conditions over which national/local humanitarian actors have little or no influence.
- Practical examples/initiatives show that **inclusive spaces on decision-making on funding** can work, e.g., NGO presence in the governance body of the Somalia Humanitarian Fund was instrumental in a shift to almost 50% of funding to local actors. Such initiatives, including funds targeted to local actors and better tracking of in-country funding and transaction costs are particularly important for women's rights-based and/or women-led organisations.
- There are also a number of **institutional and legal hurdles** (such as domestic regulations on civil society organisation receipt of international funds), as well as **capacity issues**, that need to be addressed as they get in the way of better access by local actors to in-country funding opportunities.

STRATEGIC, JOINED-UP WIDE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING SUPPORT

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- While there is a consensus around the need to strengthen capacities of local humanitarian actors, **the dominant framing is a uni-directional transfer of capacity** from international actors to local actors, rather than a two-way capacity sharing that enables capacity building of all actors in the humanitarian ecosystem. Such a **systematic and strategic approach to capacity development** builds on respective and complementary capacities and competencies of different humanitarian actors required for their dynamic and changing roles in the humanitarian system (and not transforming local organisations into the image and likeness of international organisations); it builds on local knowledge and pre-existing capacities and resources at local levels.
- Capacity is still often defined as largely **technical skills** and less in terms of **institutional competencies**, including the ability to influence, create transformative impact, create value, and sustain organisations. Institutional development, including investment in women-led organisations, should be a core element of the capacity strengthening agenda.
- Capacity strengthening takes **time and resources**. The humanitarian ecosystem therefore needs to make long-term and strategic resources accessible to local actors to enable the latter to define and manage their own capacity strengthening agenda.

3

MAINSTREAMING GENDER & AMPLIFYING THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

- Women constitute a large number of many affected populations, they are often-times first responders, they are an important source of local knowledge and capacities, and yet, despite efforts on gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian sector, **their voice is still often not heard**, partly due to deeply-ingrained normative challenges that makes substantive transformation a long-term task.
- The number of women rights-based and/or women-led organisations engaged in humanitarian work has increased but they remain on the sidelines of coordination platforms and decision-making spaces. Their voices and contributions remain **invisible and marginalised**. They also report extra burdens in obtaining resources
- Accelerating **gender-responsive localisation** depends to a significant degree on promoting and recognising **women's leadership** in humanitarian action. Women leadership needs to be visible and substantive in decision-making and accountability platforms.

STRONG, STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS THAT BUILD TRUST AND BROADEN CONSENSUS

4

- There has been some progress in the development of effective partnerships among different humanitarian stakeholder groups in the past few years. However, the scale of the change is still below the tipping point of real transformation. Dominant modes of partnerships remain **unequal and instrumental**, i.e., driven by project delivery, finance, and administrative considerations, with stringent conditionalities and often exclusionary, with one party deciding on almost everything. Partnerships are often between individuals and personalities, rather than institutional and systemic.
- The localisation agenda needs to be underpinned by **strong, strategic and institutional partnerships** that deepen trust and broaden consensus, and provide spaces for legitimate debates, meaningful dialogues and contestation.
- **Trust and risk are inter-connected**. Often the lack of trust in another party is driven by a perception of risk that such trust might involve. There is therefore an imperative to initiate/continue the dialogue between international actors and their local partners and to explore possibilities to develop minimum standards for quality and genuine partnerships to better understand and address the different perspectives, concerns, and institutional constraints. Such partnerships, in the end, need to be long-term and strategic.



FOSTERING BROADER AWARENESS OF THE GRAND BARGAIN AND LOCALISATION

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- Three years after the signature of the Grand Bargain, there is still a **significant gap in understanding** about it, both within signatories themselves (between Headquarters and Country Offices) and among potential “beneficiaries” such as local actors.
- Significant debates are still ongoing within and across stakeholder groups on the **concept of localisation and the range of possible understandings**, including its context-specificity, the identities of “local actors”, what “localisation” means at the community level, different configurations and models of local action, and the changes required in policy and practice of relevant institutional actors, especially international ones. An important dimension of the localisation discourse is the role and duty of government, its capacity and governance requirements, the need for ensuring a robust legal framework, and its relationship with civil society organisations.
- A **wider shared understanding** of the Grand Bargain and localisation agenda and its ongoing debates can help bridge relationships and collective action among humanitarian stakeholders, including sharpening advocacy priorities.

6

COORDINATION MECHANISMS AND COMPLEMENTARITY ARRANGEMENTS THAT AMPLIFY LOCAL ACTORS' ROLES AND VOICES

- There is growing acceptance that accelerating progress in localisation, and effective and efficient humanitarian action, comes through effective representation of local actors in relevant decision making platforms. While there are some improvements in this regard, it was felt by a number of the conference participants that current coordination mechanisms are still not good enough at **amplifying local voices, especially to global levels**. There is apparently little progress in local representation in HCTs and other coordinating bodies, including the quality of representation beyond presence. This
 - is a **shared task and responsibility**. Coordination mechanisms should build on complementarity between local and national and international humanitarian actors, rather than a “we” versus “them” proposition. There is a need for different humanitarian actors to be clear about their expectations of various coordination mechanisms – e.g., effective representation of local voices, in particular representation of women’s and women-led organisations, and policy-backed approach to representation. These can be bases for advocating with international actors in terms of inclusion of local actors in key processes, needs assessments, in decision-making spaces, and co-leadership of clusters.
 - There is also the need for mechanisms to address **coordination among local and national actors**.
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TAKING ACTION 2020 - 2021

Towards the end of the conference, the participants, through discussions, came up with propositions that they believe will contribute to making localisation a reality at the country level. It is important to frame these propositions with the broader suggestions from the global progress reports on key areas to address to maximize the potential of the Grand Bargain:

MAXIMISING THE POTENTIAL OF THE GRAND BARGAIN - THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Harmonised reporting: scale up from existing pilots to standard practice

- Localisation: focus on the quality of investments in local/national partners
- Promote more peer-to-peer learning and exchanges
- Incentives from donors to encourage shift in approach
- Predictable funding for capacity strengthening programmes
- Strategic approach that considers how the opportunities for and benefits of
- Localisation can be realised across the Grand Bargain framework

MAKING LOCALISATION A REALITY - THE LOCAL / NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1 CONTINUE TO STRONGLY PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

- Comprehensive mapping and database of women-led NGOs in all countries in the region;
- Mainstream gender and advocate for full implementation in all countries of gender dimensions in all humanitarian policies, programmes, projects, and specific responses, and set up tools that meaningfully track progress made;
- Investment in women's leadership development in the humanitarian context

BUILD BROAD SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE GRAND BARGAIN AND LOCALISATION AT ALL LEVELS

2

- Create localisation platforms at country level to broaden awareness about Grand Bargain and localisation among humanitarian actors and the general public;
- Ensure substantive knowledge of localisation and Grand Bargain issues among local actors to enable them to hold signatories to account;
- All Grand Bargain signatories should create proactive disclosure/awareness at their national level offices about their commitments to the Grand Bargain and the implications to their policy and practice in-country.

3

CLARIFY AND ENHANCE THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE LOCALISATION AGENDA

- National governments should establish conducive policy environment for localisation;
- Strengthen government role for capacity development of local actors and communities in crisis;
- Engage regional bodies to lobby and support member-states to achieve Localisation

STRATEGIC AND SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

4

- Develop a joined up and long-term capacity strengthening approach that builds on what is currently working on the ground, with focus on local actor-led capacity strengthening efforts.

5

PUSH FOR THE AVAILABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO LONG-TERM FUNDING

- Develop local/domestic resource mobilisation to diversify funding sources;
- Continue to advocate with international actors to support local actors' access to predictable humanitarian funding
- Design demand-driven humanitarian programmes as alternatives to donor-driven ones

COORDINATION

6

- Push for standardised, systematic approach to representation of local actors in international humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including leadership roles, spaces for women-led organisations, and full representation (i.e., so that representatives do not only speak for themselves but on behalf of a wider local humanitarian community);
 - Advocacy and meaningful engagement with regional bodies to support localisation and enhancement of local actors role in coordination mechanisms;
 - Initiate a regional network on localisation to promote information sharing and joint advocacy.
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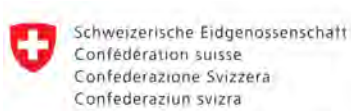
AFRICAN HUMANITARIAN AGENCY (AfHA)

The African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA) was established in response to the expectation across the continent for the African Union to be involved in humanitarian work. AfHA will support member-states and institutional mechanisms by RECs to better deliver on humanitarian action and will backstop action by member-states as well as at the sub-regional level. The importance of localisation on AfHA's mandate was acknowledged specifically around working with and supporting the capacity strengthening of National Disaster Management Agencies as well as local NGOs and the wider civil society.



Group photo taken at the Africa Regional Conference on Localisation in Addis Ababa on 15 July 2019.

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