



LOCALISATION WORKSTREAM

DEMONSTRATOR COUNTRY MISSIONS EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

BANGLADESH
IRAQ
NIGERIA

8 - 13 SEPTEMBER 2018
18 - 22 NOVEMBER 2018
1 - 5 APRIL 2019

BANGLADESH

8 - 13 SEPTEMBER 2018

In recognition of the need for sustained political engagement and the shift of attention towards the relevance of the Grand Bargain (GB) Commitments to field operations, the first “demonstrator country” Field Mission of the Localisation Workstream was held in Bangladesh between 9 to 13 September 2018. The multi-agency Mission was aimed at promoting and facilitating the achievement of the Localisation Commitments through understanding what localisation means for the various stakeholders, identifying good practices and barriers, and drawing up actionable recommendations for GB signatories and key stakeholders.

Bangladesh’s extreme exposure and high vulnerability to natural hazards has pushed the Government to invest heavily on disaster risk management. The country’s active civil society has worked with and alongside a high number of international aid agencies and donors from preparedness, response, to building resilience. The critical humanitarian emergency following the influx of people fleeing the violence from across the border in Rakhine, Myanmar to Cox’s Bazar in August 2017 presented a different and complex challenge to the local, national and international humanitarian community. The future of close to a million Rohingyas¹ in crowded camps in Cox’s Bazar remains uncertain while impacts of climate change and rapid urbanisation are intensifying disaster risks in large parts of the country.

For local and national humanitarian actors, particularly civil society organisations, localisation in the context of the Grand Bargain is about international actors’ recognition of and support for their leadership and capacity to lead effective and accountable response. Many international actors understand localisation from an implementation partnership standpoint and as such there is limited attention and varied appreciation to issues around power, decision- making and leadership. The Rakhine crisis accentuated these differences on understanding of localisation and its end goals but at the same time provided lessons around what combination of actors deliver the best positive outcomes for the affected population.

¹ The Government of Bangladesh refers to the same community as “Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals” and the UN system refers to the population as “refugees”.

The advocacy and campaigns work of local and national actors towards increased voice and influence in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and decision-making bodies have produced positive results such as greater representation in the HCTT, but their work is far from being done. Coordination meetings remain intimidating for many due to complexity of documents, the use of English as main communication language and the absence of translation in local and comprehensible language that is jargon-free.

There is a strong agreement among all humanitarian actors that capacity strengthening (programmatic, technical, and organisational development support) should be two-way, built on the local actors' knowledge and detailed understanding of how the context operates. In the context of great need there will always be some other reason why changing the way we respond, as is the purpose of localisation, is pushed to the background. The Mission Team saw this as a critical issue and a function of the transition process in Cox's Bazar. The crisis needs to be seen as a protection crisis and a coherent approach to capacity strengthening could contribute to a deliberate intention to shift the implementation of most humanitarian programming to local and national actors as soon as feasible.

Major donors are still constrained from partnering directly with national and local NGOs, and those who are able to face capacity constraints with more than a handful of local and national NGOs. A few pilot country-level financing mechanisms e.g., National Start Fund and Humanitarian Response Grant Facility, that are intended for or directly accessible to local and national actors have produced some good practices that may be scaled up or replicated and would be useful to study further. Apart from demands to address issues around overhead and core costs, there is a strong call particularly from the local and national NGOs responding to frequent small to medium scale natural disasters to establish and have direct access to pooled funds.

There are very few women-led or women organisations among the local and national actors that appear to be at the forefront of discussions on localisation. The recent formation of the Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform is a good start to increase attention to gender equality and women empowerment in localisation. Affected communities can also be better included as localisation is intended to strengthen outcomes for them. Reference to the recent Ground Truth report on the perspectives of beneficiaries in the Rohingya response would be good as an evidence base to strengthen the case for more locally led response.

To support a shift to increased implementation of humanitarian aid by local and national actors, a shift that is aimed towards equitable partnership, good practices on funding, and coordination approaches which increase leadership by local and national actors including women, host communities and affected people, the Mission Team proposes the following key recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FOR INSTITUTIONAL DONORS & BILATERAL AGENCIES

to have partnership agreements that integrate good practices that support leadership and capacity of local and national humanitarian actors, and to increase the proportion of un-earmarked and multi-year humanitarian assistance through direct or as-direct-as-possible (one transaction layer) partnerships with national and local actors or through country based pooled funds.

2. FOR UN AGENCIES & INGOS

to develop ethical human resource standards relevant to surge, support mutual capacity strengthening systems, put in place more flexible, contextualised and inclusive coordination mechanisms, improve access to and engagement with the humanitarian donor architecture for the local and national actors, provide fair coverage of overhead costs, and foster the engagement of women through the work of the Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform (BWHP).

3. FOR LOCAL & NATIONAL ACTORS

to work with smaller local humanitarian actors in a transparent and equal manner, to use existing networks to come up with a common definition of local and national actors, and to agree on ways on how to better collaborate, respect and build on one another's strengths.

4. FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

to identify opportunities to strengthen local and national leadership and decision-making in humanitarian action, including the enabling and regulating role of the NGO Affairs Bureau.

We also support/call for a sustainable transition in Cox's Bazar through:

- A three-year timeline of transition where each year, local actors, led by national and local government, have greater responsibility in directly managing and delivering the response;
- Greater investment in capacity strengthening on protection and refugee rights-based programming for local and national actors
- Targeted investments in national and local organisations, which may have the ability and desire to scale up their responses to meet a greater proportion of need

IRAQ

18 - 22 NOVEMBER 2018

The second localisation workstream demonstrator country field mission was conducted in Iraq from 18 to 22 November 2018 with the aim of promoting and facilitating the achievement of the Grand Bargain Localisation (Workstream 2) commitments. The seven-member mission team co-led by the Localisation Sherpas from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) held discussions with humanitarian actors from various agencies and stakeholder groups mainly in Kurdistan Region and a short visit in Baghdad to better understand what localisation means for them and identify good practices and remaining barriers.

Iraq is currently in a post-conflict situation after the end of military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in December 2017. There are, however, unpredictable dynamics throughout the country that lead to new displacement and affect the return of internally displaced people (IDPs) – these include sporadic attacks by armed groups, small-scale military operations, and new sources of instability linked to rising poverty rates, lack of livelihood opportunities, and political and social tensions.

The impact of the armed conflict coupled with the country's susceptibility to natural hazards such as droughts, floods, desertification and earthquakes have exacerbated the vulnerability of Iraqi people, handicapped its government's capacity, and crippled many essential services. Women and girls have been particularly affected and continue to be at risk, with protection high on the agenda of government and humanitarian agencies.

Localisation is progressing in Iraq although there is uneven progress across Grand Bargain signatories and other entities, as well as across the different commitments. Local and national NGOs and civil society organisations have been on the frontline of humanitarian assistance as they had access to highly insecure, sensitive and inaccessible areas at the onset of the ISIL takeover; this was seen as their comparative advantage. On the flip side, they recognised their capacity constraints to take on a larger role and more leadership role in humanitarian programming.

Both international and local/national actors acknowledged the ongoing difficulty in finding the right balance of risk-sharing between them when it comes to fiduciary and operational risks. We observed that local actors did face challenges in upholding humanitarian standards, but the Iraqi reality was much more nuanced and complex than the way in which the issue is often portrayed in headquarters debates.

Steps have been taken by international actors to address some of the partnership and capacity problems that have been identified in the Grand Bargain, but more needs to be done to walk the talk on localisation. There are a number of good practices contributing to the advancement of the localisation agenda, especially those seeking to maximise complementarity and working towards true partnership. Stumbling blocks remain, however, such as risk aversion that leads to lack of trust, attitudes and ways of working that are perceived by local actors as a “superiority complex”, and methods of capacity strengthening that remain one way and project-delivery focused. The lack of self-organisation among local and national actors, in particular civil society organisations engaged in humanitarian work to demand change and find “local solutions” was also found to be an impediment to progressing localisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards a transformative localisation agenda in Iraq in which local actors lead effective, principled and accountable humanitarian response, the following recommendations are put forward by team members:

1. FOR INSTITUTIONAL DONORS & BILATERAL AGENCIES

to: (a) develop/pilot strategies on risk sharing that address fiduciary compliance and impartiality concerns for local and national actors; (b) include provisions in partnership agreements with international partners for minimum percentage coverage for overhead costs, capacity strengthening and visibility for local and national partners; (c) support consortium projects between UN agencies/INGOs and local and national actors; (d) increase funding for capacity strengthening for local and national actors to efficiently manage the funds provided through the Iraq Humanitarian Fund and increase multi-year investments and; (e) provide more flexible, simplified and harmonised reporting requirements.

2. FOR UN AGENCIES & INGOS

to: (a) lobby donors and other international partners to accept or make use of their local partner risk assessment and create opportunities for local and national actors to demonstrate their trustworthiness;

(b) hold open, honest and regular conversations with local partners on both sides' views of the risks and challenges and agree on ways forward;

(c) explore multi-lateral funding and non-funding partnerships with local and national actors

(d) review or develop partnership strategies and policies in cooperation with local partners;

(e) support NGO Coordination Committee Iraq's work on capacity strengthening to local and national NGOs;

(f) initiate regular country-based consultations and dialogue on the Grand Bargain, including its commitments on localisation;

(g) address specific concerns by local actors on coordination structures and meetings;

(h) recognise the critical role of women's rights and women-led organisations in the reconstruction phase and intentionally engage with them, especially on protection and gender equality.

3. FOR LOCAL & NATIONAL ACTORS

to (a) conduct consultations to explore the possibility of forming an alliance/coalition/network that is informed and guided by a shared understanding and vision of localisation;

(b) develop or strengthen organisational development strategy and prioritise capacity-strengthening initiatives that address weaknesses in governance, systems and policies;

(c) explore opportunities and feasibility to undertake local fundraising activities (individually and as a collective) in support of humanitarian response work and of their own financial sustainability.

NIGERIA

1 - 5 APRIL 2019

The third Localisation Workstream demonstrator country field mission was conducted in Nigeria from 01 to 05 April 2019 by a nine-member mission team led by the Localisation Co-Sherpa from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Discussions were held with humanitarian actors from various agencies and stakeholder groups in the capital Abuja and in field visits to Maidaguri in the Northeast and Makurdi in Benue State to better understand what localisation means in the country and to identify good practices and barriers on delivering the Grand Bargain localisation commitments.

There are several on-going humanitarian emergencies in the country, with the largest and most severe in the Northeast having displaced some 1.8 million people, while new displacements continue due to insecurity. In 2017 the international response to the crisis scaled up significantly following warnings of looming famine in the Northeast, and this required establishing a presence for both international and national actors in locations where there previously had not been any, recruiting additional staff, setting up partnerships, and building the acceptance and participation of local communities. The operational scale-up coincided with a system-wide mobilisation to strengthen capacities across humanitarian leadership, coordination, delivery, support and funding mechanisms. Inter-communal and political conflict in other parts of Nigeria has also created pockets of humanitarian need which did not previously exist or exist at the present scale. In the Middle Belt region, the growing presence of pastoralists from the north seeking grazing for their livestock, and the increasing cultivation of land by local farmers, has resulted in a number of violent inter-communal conflicts and displacement for tens of thousands of people. In Makurdi, Benue State, flooding and inter-communal violence have led to significant hardship and displacement, but have inspired only very minimal international presence.

Many of the challenges present in the response in Nigeria's Northeast resemble those seen in other large-scale responses. Local civil society organisations know the context well but have struggled to and cannot adequately deliver to scale. International staff are on short rotations and a resulting high turnover is an impediment to effectiveness. Local authorities have mainly fled from many affected villages or small towns, so the delivery of assistance is essentially in the hands of local civil society actors in conjunction with the international community. In addition, while local needs have galvanised L/NNGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) to step up, many of these are either newly formed, new to humanitarian work or new to the area of response – limiting their impact.

Fraud and high fiduciary risks are pervasive concerns in the country and a major impediment to stronger partnerships between international and local actors. A level of distrust among stakeholders' groups, including civil society, certain government agencies and the international community has also been observed. There were also concerns about the perception of neutrality of aid and on some of the counter-terrorism measures that are having adverse impact on principled humanitarian action and humanitarian actors' ability to deliver humanitarian aid.

For most L/NNGOs interviewed, localisation was understood to be primarily concern funding, both for their program and for their longer-term organisational sustainability. Adequate and quality representation in the HCT and other coordination mechanisms, long-term equitable partnerships and adequate support for capacity strengthening, sharing of security information and support for security management, increased transparency and complementarity, and recognition of their capacity and experience were also key issues colouring their understanding of localisation.

For some UN agencies and INGOs, localisation was understood to be a strategy to access otherwise inaccessible areas, to support the delivery of their projects/activities, or to deliver better outcomes for the (disaster-affected) communities. Others see localisation as a long-term approach to partnership and as an investment for and acknowledgement of the legitimate space for local actors including local governments to work alongside communities to be (disaster) resilient.

There are efforts across donors, UN agencies and INGOs to action the GB localisation commitments and there are emerging good practices observed, particularly around capacity strengthening and financing. Many blockages remain, however, as there seems to have been limited space and opportunity to have regular and open dialogue between and among local and international actors.

Trust needs to be built from both sides, and from this a shared objective towards localisation that delivers principled and effective humanitarian aid and more importantly accountability to affected populations. Concerns about fraud, high fiduciary risks, and perceptions of neutrality of aid make localisation more complex and challenging and local/national and international actors need to have honest and evidenced based conversations and agree on what can be done to address these.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards a transformative localisation agenda in Iraq in which local actors lead effective, principled and accountable humanitarian response, the following recommendations are put forward by team members:

1. FOR UN AGENCIES AND INGOs

to support L/NNGOs' consortia building, including support for the newly-formed women's organisation network, provide longer-term and more demand-driven capacity strengthening support to their local partners, take greater responsibility for their local partners' security, to support and encourage direct dialogue between their local partners and back donors, to adhere to ethical HR procedures on recruitment of local actors' personnel, and to promote awareness on, and articulate, their agency's localisation commitment under the Grand Bargain.

2. FOR DONORS

to encourage true partnerships between the intermediaries they support and L/NNGOs, to develop strategic criteria within project selection focusing on projects that include long-term capacity strengthening, to include security needs and passing on indirect costs for local actors in project financing, to explore ways to use development funds for capacity purposes and the potential for dedicated funds, to promote awareness on and articulate their agency's localisation commitment under the Grand Bargain, and to elaborate on a new funding mechanism to "channel" funds as direct as possible to local actors including L/NNGO networks or consortium.

3. FOR LOCAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS

to come together and develop a more unified voice in joint advocacy on localisation, to seek alternative ways of raising funds such as endowment facilities and from the private sector, to prioritise capacity strengthening initiatives that support improvement in governance, systems and policies, and to commit to transparency and improvement in risk mitigation within partnerships.
