Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action

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About the authors

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Acronyms

3W	Who, What, Where
BVI RC	British Virgin Island Red Cross
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBPF	country-based pooled fund
CCNF	Cox's Bazar CSOs-NGOs Forum
CCONAT	Cadre de Concertation des ONG Nationales
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
ELNHA	Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
HRGF	Humanitarian Response Grant Facility
HUCOCA	Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LNGO	local non-governmental organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of NGOs
STRIDE	Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence
TTL	Take the Lead
UN	United Nations
VANGO	Vanuatu Association of NGOs
WHS	Word Humanitarian Summit

Executive summary

Humanitarian action has been a mainly international endeavour, where power continues to lie with donors, UN agencies and large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). This led to a call at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) for humanitarian action to be as 'local as possible, as international as necessary' (UN, 2016), inspiring numerous debates and initiatives, including the Grand Bargain. To better inform local humanitarian action, HPG launched a two-year research project in 2017 on capacity and complementarity, of which this is the final report.

A number of key findings came out of this work, including:

- A lack of recognition of existing local capacity is the main obstacle to more complementarity between local and international actors. This stems from how capacity is understood and assessed – actors tend to define capacity in the way that best matches their own interests and perceptions of their own strengths.
- Complementarity between local and international actors does not readily exist in practice. Instead we found two situations: one where humanitarian action aimed to be as local as possible and only local; a second where humanitarian action was as international as possible and as local as necessary.
- Levels of complementarity are affected by a number of factors including coordination practices, donor attitudes to fiduciary and reputational risk, government attitudes and policy, lines of accountability, access to affected people and the nature of the crisis.
- Low levels of trust, unequal power dynamics and perceptions of legitimacy all play a significant role in how complementarity plays out in a crisis context.
- Where long-term and strategic partnerships exist and there are well-established development organisations, complementarity in humanitarian action tends to be higher.
- While strong localisation activism can lead to tension rather than collaboration, it demonstrates how networks of local actors can alter power dynamics through using the language of the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation.

For complementarity between local and international actors to be supported, several practices need rethinking. The 13 recommendations below have implications for the policies and practices of donors, global cluster coordinators, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN agencies, INGOs, affected governments and local actors in all their diversity.

- The capacity needed to respond to a specific humanitarian situation should be defined through local consultation with a wider and more diverse group of stakeholders, including affected people.
- Capacity should be defined in relation to each specific context and each specific crisis.
- Alongside risk assessment and capacity gap assessment, introduce a context-wide mapping of existing capacities aligned with the above consultation on defining capacity.
- International actors should rename capacity assessments as risk assessments and capacity gap assessments and harmonise these to reduce the burden on local organisations. With the agreement of local actors, international actors should agree to accept each other's assessments of risk and capacity gaps.
- Where international actors require a risk assessment or capacity gap assessment (e.g. to provide funding and work in partnership), these assessments should come hand in hand with the investment and commitment to addressing the gaps identified. These assessments should also be reciprocal to identify capacity gaps of both international and local actors.
- Investment in capacity strengthening should build on existing evidence of good practices. Clusters could be more strategic in supporting coordinated capacity strengthening in specific sectors and there could be a collective approach to capacity strengthening similar to those currently implemented for communications and community engagement.
- Continue to document and provide evidence of innovative practices in partnering that leads to better complementarity.
- Localise coordination through adapting it to context and existing structures.
- Use coordination structures to shift power and support more strategic and equal partnerships.

- Donors should convene a more honest discussion on risk sharing by engaging at the political level. In discussing risk sharing, they should also consider how to use national and local systems of accountability (social accountability through communities, peer-to-peer accountability) to mitigate fiduciary risks.
- Donors should redefine success by rewarding organisations that create strong and equal partnerships in crisis-affected contexts and allocate funding to support these partnerships in ways that leads to more complementarity.

- Local actors should be supported to better recognise and constructively challenge perceived and hidden power dynamics in the humanitarian system, including at the partnership level.
- Support local actors to demonstrate their capacity through capacity assessments, by helping them to conduct self-assessments and approach international actors with requests for partnership, as well as supporting capacity strengthening when needed.

1 Introduction

Humanitarian action has been a mainly international endeavour, where power continues to lie with donors, UN agencies and large INGOs. This led to a call at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) for humanitarian action to be as 'local as possible, as international as necessary' (UN, 2016), which has inspired numerous debates and initiatives, including the Grand Bargain. A more local and locally led humanitarian action is believed to be supported by more contextualisation, a better understanding of local dynamics, and greater acceptance of and accountability to affected people, leading to better outcomes for affected people.

The Grand Bargain localisation workstream (see Box 1) has stumbled over issues of definition and progress towards the commitments has been slow (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018). Another notable initiative is the Charter for Change, which has brought international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) together under a series of commitments to support more local humanitarian action and more equal partnerships. Alongside these Northern-led initiatives, several national organisations have come together to advocate for more local humanitarian action and local leadership such as through the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), a movement of civil society organisations

(CSOs) from the global South who are rooted in communities affected by crises.

Among the challenges to a more local humanitarian action have been two central issues: capacity and complementarity. On one hand, international and national actors have called for more recognition of existing local capacity and support to strengthen it – through more direct and better-quality funding as well as investment in capacity strengthening. On the other hand, some international actors (including donors) have voiced concerns over a lack of local capacity in many contexts. In the localisation debate, there is a growing discourse calling for a new division of labour between local and international actors, in order to bring about greater complementarity, which is primarily concerned with rebalancing power relations in the humanitarian sector.

1.1 The research project

To better inform humanitarian action that is as local as possible and as international as necessary, HPG launched a two-year research project on capacity and complementarity in 2017. The project explored two central questions:

Box 1: Commitments under the Grand Bargain localisation workstream

Commitment 2.1: Increase and support multi-year investments in the institutional capacities of local and national responders, including preparedness, response and coordination.

Commitment 2.2: Understand better and work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders in order to lessen their administrative burden.

Commitment 2.3: Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles.

Commitment 2.4: Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transaction costs.

Commitment 2.5: Develop, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and apply a localisation marker to measure direct and indirect funding to local and national responders.

Commitment 2.6: Make greater use of funding tools that increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders such as UN-led country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), the IFRC Secretariat's Disaster Relief Emergency fund (DREF), and other pooled funds.

- How can capacity be better understood and applied to support more complementary and collaborative humanitarian response?
- What are the opportunities for and obstacles to harnessing the capacity of and forging more effective complementarity among local, national, regional and international actors responding to humanitarian crises?

This report draws on work published during the project, including an initial paper reviewing literature and practice that provides a diagnosis of current challenges (Barbelet, 2018); a case study on the response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, which delves deeper into questions of localisation in a refugee context (Wake and Bryant, 2018); and a case study on the humanitarian response to conflicts in South Kivu and Kasai Central in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which looks at capacity and complementarity in protracted and emerging conflict contexts (Barbelet et al., 2019). It also draws on a series of short, unpublished case studies from desk-based analysis and interviews, which examine positive examples of complementarity between local and international actors.

The research team conducted additional interviews with donors and organised four workshops. The first workshop focused on capacity and capacity assessments and explored innovative approaches to conducting these assessments in support of more complementarity between local and international actors; the second focused on coordination and local humanitarian action and brought together global cluster and area of responsibility coordinators; the third focused on complementarity and partnerships; and the fourth focused on power dynamics and how local actors can create space to address hidden, visible and invisible power dynamics between local and international actors in humanitarian action. Given the limited number of case studies conducted for this research, the workshops aimed to broaden the analysis by integrating other contexts and types of crises to better understand whether and how the findings from the case studies resonated more generally.

1.2   Overview of the report

This report will aim to inform a more local humanitarian action, reflecting on the evidence from the case studies as well as the interviews and discussions that occurred in the final stage of this research project. Chapter 2 focuses on the key findings related to defining, assessing and strengthening capacity. Chapter 3 focuses on the key findings related to complementarity. Chapter 4 analyses these findings and their implications for moving towards a better understanding of capacity and supporting greater complementarity between local and international actors.

2 Capacity in humanitarian response

For complementarity[1] to be achieved, capacities must be harnessed at all levels. However, a lack of recognition of existing local capacity is the main obstacle to more complementarity between local and international actors in humanitarian action. According to our research, this stems from a combination of challenges regarding how capacity is understood and assessed in the humanitarian sector. We found that actors define capacity in the way that best matches their own interests and perceptions of their own strengths. While this could be viewed as a result of human nature, it becomes problematic in the humanitarian sector – the most powerful (usually international) actors can impose their views on others and those perceived to have more capacity can access more resources. As a result, understandings and definitions of capacity have been used, consciously or unconsciously, to keep resources in the hands of a small number of powerful actors. If the humanitarian sector is truly motivated to support a more local humanitarian action, it is critical to rethink how capacity is understood, defined, assessed and strengthened.

2.1 Defining capacity

Our review of literature and practice identified early on that there was no consensus around how capacity is defined in the humanitarian sector (Barbelet, 2018). Indeed, a predominant theme is the lack of one clear and universal definition (Dichter, 2014; Few et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015). Capacity can be understood in organisational terms (management, governance and decision-making) and in operational terms (delivery of programmes and projects), with an understanding that these capacities are interrelated and enable one another. Howe et al. (2015) note that international organisations tend to be far stronger in organisational capacity than their local counterparts, while local organisations

tend to be more focused on operational capacity. Our research highlighted a disconnect between how capacity was defined by international actors and the specific capacities needed in a given context or crisis.

Because of international actors' power to define what capacity is valued and needed, the actors and forums that determine allocation of resources in DRC and Bangladesh tended to focus on organisational capacity, technical capacity and the capacity to uphold international standards. These were not linked to the context or crisis at hand and were defined in isolation from outcomes for affected people (see Box 2). In fact, no organisation asked people affected by crises what kinds of capacity they would like to see in the organisations helping them.

The case studies in Bangladesh and DRC confirmed that there were multiple understandings of capacity. In DRC for instance, while all actors interviewed put great emphasis on organisational capacity,[2] local actors tended to prioritise the capacity to: analyse and understand contexts, community dynamics, local conflicts and politics; engage with affected people to understand their needs; and negotiate, manage and maintain access (Barbelet et al., 2019). In contrast, the emphasis in international organisations tended to be on 'scaling up' responses. These perspectives were mirrored in Bangladesh (Wake and Bryant, 2018: 17).

We found that capacity tends to be defined in terms of what actors feel they have. International actors are usually less critical, whereas local actors tended to reflect more critically on their own capacities. In other words, international actors defined capacity according to their own strengths, including the capacity to raise and manage funds, the knowledge of international humanitarian standards, or technical capacity.

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1 For the purpose of this research, the team developed a working definition of complementarity as an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in such a way to support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities.

2 Here organisational capacity is understood as the more formal and institutional aspect of an organisation, such as its policies and processes, including capacity for financial management, human resources and procurement, as well as the means available to an organisation, whether financial, logistical, material assets or human resources.

Affected people are not asked to assess capacity or define it. In DRC, people affected by crises told us that the capacities they valued in the agencies who wanted to help them were as follows:

- Capacity to be present and grounded at the community level, to maintain presence over time and not just in times of crisis.
- Capacity to deliver and shift from emergency response to recovery to resilience to development with interventions that have a longer-term impact on affected people.
- Capacity to build the resilience of communities either through building infrastructure or

strengthening the capacity of communities to manage conflicts.
- Capacity to understand and address the needs of the population in ways that meet their priority needs and have a long-lasting impact on the community.
- Capacity to take on board community feedback and adapt interventions accordingly.
- Capacity to ensure effective community participation.
- Capacity to target aid in a fair manner, with no discrimination and in ways that support peaceful community relations.

2.2   Assessing capacity

The literature review identified trends on how capacity is assessed in the humanitarian sector, which were confirmed in our case studies. Current practice can be summarised as follows. Local organisations' capacities are assessed, usually bilaterally, by a donor or an international organisation and a partner organisation, mainly for the purpose of funding or partnering. Donor policies and the nature of the international humanitarian system (loose governance, competition for funding and survival) have played a major role in shaping how capacity is assessed, meaning that power, authority and control are embedded within this process. This has resulted in generic statements that local and national capacity is lacking across the board, rather than identifying specific shortages that international assistance could meet (Harvey, 2009; Poole, 2014; see Collinson, 2016 for a discussion of Barnett and Finnemore's 1999 analysis of bureaucratic agency). Additionally, existing operational mapping (such as OCHA's Who, What Where (3W)) often fails to acknowledge the contribution of local actors because they may not be represented in formal coordination systems or funded through tracked funding. For instance, in South Sudan church organisations played a key role in peacebuilding, informing humanitarian assessments, supporting resilience and aiding in trauma recovery. However, these contributions were not acknowledged in formal mapping such as the 3W because churches did not take part in the cluster system and their activities were funded by small, informal sources (Tanner and Moro, 2016).

The same practice was observed in Bangladesh and DRC. In both cases, capacity assessments carried out

by international actors prioritised the management of international organisations' risk rather than understanding what local capacity existed and who was contributing what to alleviate human suffering. Indeed, in the protracted crisis in South Kivu, DRC, where there are large numbers of local actors, the international actors we interviewed struggled to identify who had what capacity and lacked mechanisms to map out capacity in the context. This lack of context-wide understanding was documented in both Bangladesh (Wake and Bryant, 2018) and DRC (Barbelet et al., 2019), despite the numerous capacity assessments carried out every year and extensive coordination systems in place.

The scale of the task is challenging: operational agencies cannot assess all capacities on their own and coordination structures have not taken this responsibility on board. In DRC, some international actors highlighted the large number of local actors, saying they did not know where to start. OCHA's 3W database was mentioned by some actors in DRC as a map of current capacities, but this does not identify existing yet unharnessed or unfunded capacities as well as capacity funded outside of funding tracking mechanisms. With no way to map out existing capacities in a context, international actors felt unable to approach capacity assessment differently.

2.3   Strengthening capacity

Capacity strengthening is critical in the current localisation debate: local actors have repeatedly demanded it and international actors continue to claim gaps in local capacity. Capacity strengthening of

local actors is not a new concept in the humanitarian sector, but has lacked systematic implementation, investment or demonstrated sustainable impact. A lot has been written on the importance of capacity and how best to strengthen it (Christoplos, 2005; Few et al., 2015; Howe et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2016). According to our review of practice and literature, humanitarian actors continue to question whether capacity strengthening should be a part of humanitarian action and it is not a readily accepted humanitarian objective (see Christoplos, 2005; Barbelet, 2018). However, there are clear global commitments that place capacity strengthening at the heart of humanitarian action: the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles (Principle 8), Core Humanitarian Standards (Standard 3), the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (Principle 6), and commitments made as part of the WHS and the Grand Bargain (Commitment 2) (IFRC and ICRC, 1994: 4; Sphere Project, 2015; WHS, 2016: 3; IASC, n.d.) all commit to strengthen the capacity of local actors for humanitarian action.

The case study findings allowed the research team to look at a number of issues regarding capacity strengthening. In DRC, we found some instances of capacity strengthening, but these were limited and not systematic. In South Kivu, the study examined how local capacity was affected by years of humanitarian crises. Capacity strengthening lacked investment and was not carried out systematically, resulting in little overall impact. This was due to continuing direct implementation by INGOs and partnerships that did not involve a capacity strengthening component. Instead, local organisations' capacity was mainly strengthened through the movement of local humanitarian professionals from international organisations into local ones. These individuals brought the expertise and knowledge of sector-wide standards into local organisations and therefore strengthened their ability to deliver high-quality humanitarian action. However, in South Kivu, despite these individual capacities, local organisations still suffered from low-level organisational capacity, blocking them from accessing more funding and taking leadership roles.

In Bangadesh, we found more consistent investment in capacity, which was mainly related to INGOs providing training. Training tended to focus on issues such as core organisational capacities (e.g. financial management), standards (e.g. humanitarian principles) and technical skills (e.g. protection, gender, cash programming), which did not necessarily align with the priorities of local actors. There was little focus on strengthening the ability of local actors to navigate formal international sectors; nor was there reflection on how international actors could strengthen local capacity, or the potential for reciprocal learning between international and local actors (for example, where international actors could learn about the local language, technical expertise, contextual knowledge or cultural understanding from local actors). The effect of training was limited as it did not tackle other constraining factors, such as trust, funding, policies and risk.

Finally, the evidence gap of what works where in terms of capacity strengthening continues to grow due to a lack of systematic investment in capacity strengthening programmes as well as a lack of commitment to monitoring and evaluating the impact of these programmes. Indeed, limited investment in monitoring and evaluating the impact of capacity strengthening programmes in Bangladesh means there continues to be little evidence of what has worked or failed and why (Wake and Bryant, 2018: 21).

3 Complementarity between local and international actors in humanitarian response

Alongside calls for a more local humanitarian action is a wish to redefine how local and international actors work together, divide their work and take advantage of specific expertise, capacity and experience to reach improved humanitarian outcomes – in other words complementarity (Barbelet, 2018). The study explored whether better understanding capacity and how it is harnessed and combined would support more complementary and collaborative humanitarian response. Indeed, it was argued that not comprehending the challenges and opportunities resulting from interactions between local and international actors would cause difficulties in supporting more complementary and collaborative humanitarian action. The study proposed a definition of complementarity to fill the lack of definition in existing literature:

> *An outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in a way that supports the best humanitarian outcomes for affected populations* (Barbelet, 2018: 17).

As with capacity, there is no agreed definition of what complementarity between local and international actors in humanitarian action is. It does not readily equate to coordination: efforts to increase participation in formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms may increase complementarity, but complementarity in its fuller sense denotes a much wider set of relationships and interactions. A complementary response should combine the different contributions and existing capacities of the myriad actors in that context and all actors would understand and respect each other's capacities and where gaps exist. Complementarity recognises and assesses

existing capacities at all levels as well as the process of combining of those capacities.[3]

3.1 Complementarity questioned

Humanitarian action that is as local as possible and as international as necessary in a complementary manner remains an aspiration. Our findings demonstrate that complementarity between local and international actors does not readily exist in practice and is not always valued by some international actors. Instead we have found two situations: one where humanitarian action aimed to be as local as possible and only local; a second where humanitarian action was as international as possible and as local as necessary – the reverse of the WHS commitment.

In crisis contexts, we observed a rising localisation activism that does not necessarily seek complementarity with international actors, but instead wants all humanitarian action to be local. This has in some ways been a necessary and important way to shift power and challenge the status quo, but in some instances has created a greater divide and increased tensions between international and local actors. This could be argued in the case of Bangladesh, where national and local actors are pushing very strongly for a local response to the Rohingya refugee situation. Groups such as the Cox's Bazar CSO Forum have been prominent in this discussion and have drawn upon international commitments such as the Grand Bargain to hold signatories to account. Tensions have resulted from the differing positions taken by local and international organisations vis-à-vis the repatriation of refugees. According to local non-governmental organisations (LNGOs), the Cox's Bazar CSO Forum fulfils a vital

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3   A recent study on complementarity in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Austin and Chessex, 2018) highlighted the importance of committing to an operational principle that recognises the benefits of more complementarity between international and local actors. Recognising that all actors have something important to contribute is critical for delivering better humanitarian outcomes for affected people.

function in facilitating relations between the host community and Rohingya, but also puts pressure on INGOs and the Bangladeshi government regarding the repatriation of the refugees.

In DRC, we found a trend of humanitarian action being as international as possible. In other words, international actors did not seek complementarity with local actors because they did not recognise or value their capacities, which they saw as secondary to their own. Complementarity with local actors was usually sought as a last resort, as a result of international actors being unable to access certain areas as opposed to be the result of a commitment to supporting greater complementarity. While international actors recognised challenges related to access in DRC, they did not perceive these as gaps in their capacities or recognise the ability of local actors to gain and maintain access. Instead, they talked about cross-sectoral complementarity. Conversely, local actors valued the opportunities that arose from partnering with international actors (beyond funding), particularly the learning that international actors share from being present in other crisis contexts.

A challenge to complementarity is the different lines of accountability that different actors have. Local actors in both Cox's Bazar and DRC felt a sense of responsibility towards their communities and constituencies. However, while international actors feel responsibility towards affected people to an extent, they are more accountable to donors and want local organisations to be accountable to them (hence the focus on partnerships that meet organisational capacity requirements). In a refugee setting, local organisations are not necessarily accountable to refugee populations (see Box 3). As we observed in Bangladesh, they are concerned with the well-being of host communities and their relationship with the government, sometimes over the rights and protection of refugees.

Complementarity will continue to be challenging if issues of trust between local and international actors are not addressed. We found trust between INGOs and LNGOs to be low in both case studies. In DRC, many international actors believed that local actors could not resist the pressure to divert aid to their

Box 3: Who is local in refugee settings and highly divided societies?

Researching capacity and complementarity in Bangladesh highlighted questions around the definition of 'local' in a refugee setting – it is not a simple categorisation. Here, local Bangladeshi actors were considered to be local, rather than actors within the Rohingya refugee population. In that sense, while Bangladeshi actors were local to the context and able to understand and navigate the context dynamics, particularly within government, they were not local to the Rohingya refugees. This meant, as outlined above, that local Bangladeshi actors were more readily accountable to the host community than to the refugee population.

Similarly, our research came across another example where international actors 'localised' the response by transferring responsibility for the management of internally displaced person (IDP) camps to local organisations. However, this happened in a highly divided society where IDPs and local organisations came from opposite sides of the conflict. In DRC, we found that affected populations did not consider organisations based in the provincial or national capital as local to them because of the lack of accountability between these organisations and affected populations.

While discussion around who is local can detract from the central issues at hand in the localisation debate, it becomes critical in a displacement or in a context of highly divided societies to analyse the implications of different perceptions of local. A recent HPG report on dignity in displacement raises similar questions and reflections:

These findings throw up important questions for the current trend of localising aid, and around what is considered local in any given response. In our studies, Bangladeshi and Lebanese may be local to the context, but they are not local to the displaced population, as host communities often have very different values, ideas and expectations. Here, any advantages they may have in terms of local contextual understanding and ability to navigate the local bureaucracy and context may be outweighed by tensions around resources, which in turn may undermine the dignity of the affected population. It is thus important to scrutinise in more depth why the sector is aiming to localise aid and understand what this may mean in practice – in particular in refugee contexts where the desire for 'localisation' will need to be carefully balanced with the goal of upholding the dignity of the displaced (Mosel and Holloway, 2019:16).

own communities. Conversely, local actors were not convinced that international actors were willing to provide support or to give up the dominance of coordination structures and funding necessary to allow more complementarity. There was a perceived lack of transparency on both sides: local NGOs felt that many INGOs dominated funding and their own exclusive coordination structures, while INGOs did not believe that many LNGOs had the necessary policies and processes in place to fulfil reporting requirements.

In DRC, complementarity was affected by international actors questioning the neutrality, impartiality and independence of local actors. They also used humanitarian principles negatively as a tool for maintaining control. Local organisations' understanding of the local context is often perceived by international organisations as evidence for their lack of neutrality; while this may be true in some instances, this double standard is problematic. International humanitarian organisations must also balance humanitarian principles, making pragmatic decisions on prioritising humanity and mitigating impacts on neutrality and impartiality, but their integrity in doing so is rarely questioned to the same degree as local organisations. Some international organisations such as Oxfam have rejected principles of neutrality, for instance, but are still trusted to deliver principled humanitarian action. UN agencies' independence is, however, often challenged due to their identity and governance systems based on inter-governmental bodies. Research from Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships in 2019 recommends open and frank discussions between humanitarian stakeholders on their understanding of humanitarian principles.

In DRC, it became clear that when local NGOs partnered with INGOs with a strong capacity strengthening agenda, such as Christian Aid or CAFOD, they gained the trust of INGOs in general. Local NGOs also gained legitimacy when they became eligible for the CBPF. While some of these partnerships may indeed result in stronger capacities, they also confer a status to local NGOs that results in them being perceived more favourably by other international actors, independent of the capacities gained through the partnership.

Our research also showed that a strong individual can attract trust. When a strong individual was introduced within a local organisation, it resulted in more trust from international actors, leading to more power, legitimacy and the ability to set the agenda. One of our desk-based case studies examined the response to recent hurricanes in the British Virgin Islands. An international emergency cash transfer expert was seconded to the British Virgin Islands Red Cross (BVI RC). Partly because of the person's reputation and recognised expertise, they proceeded to set the agenda, convincing the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to run the programme in a completely different manner from how they originally intended (i.e. the way they ran it in other islands) and, as a result, major INGOs gave the BVI RC funding and put them in charge of the programme. This relationship has long-term implications – in future the BVI RC will not be reliant on the international secondee, as the leadership role is now located within their organisation.

3.2 Partnerships and complementarity

The literature review points out that partnerships can support complementarity but current practices have not automatically translated into more complementary outcomes (Barbelet, 2018). Partnerships between international and local organisations may not always be strategic (Poole, 2014: 18). Even when local organisations are deemed to have the capacity to partner, their contribution can be undermined or overlooked (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014) and this is often a result of an imbalance in power (Christoplos, 2005).

The country case studies confirmed this. We found that partnerships in DRC and Bangladesh remained focused on a functional implementing partner approach. There are, however, several initiatives (such as Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships)[4] within international organisations that aim to improve partnership practices to ensure complementarity by building on the principles of partnership.[5] The study observed two main ways in which the discussion on partnerships has evolved around supporting locally led humanitarian action. First, in DRC we observed many INGOs continuing to use a direct delivery model. However, a number of INGOs are considering how to transition towards a partnership approach

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4   Initiatives such as Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships are asking national and local organisations partnering with international organisations to define how future partnerships should look (see Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019).

5   The principles of partnership are equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity (Principles of Partnership, 2017).

The Charter for Change is an initiative, led by both international and local organisations, that aims to implement changes in the humanitarian system to enable a more locally led humanitarian response. According to its 2018 annual report, the Charter for Change counts 33 signatory organisations that have made commitments on financial flows and tracking, partnerships, recruitment, advocacy, equality, capacity support and communications. The Charter for Change has been instrumental in signatory organisations shifting practice. For instance, as part of their Charter for Change commitments, Islamic Relief Worldwide initiated a partnership and capacity strengthening programme to support their move from a direct delivery organisation to a partnership organisation. The Charter for Change has also been instrumental in global advocacy and ensuring that local organisations are empowered by the commitment to localisation as well as supporting national level dialogues to inform practice on the ground (Charter for Change, 2018).

as part of their commitments to the Charter for Change (see Box 4). Increasing partnership approaches among INGOs is a first but important step towards enhancing complementarity in humanitarian action. Second, those INGOs that have traditionally operated through a partnership approach are further considering how to rethink these partnerships to create more complementarity. In this sense, the Charter for Change has greatly contributed to pushing the boundaries of how partnerships operate.

3.3 Coordination and complementarity

The findings on coordination and complementarity in the initial literature review were confirmed in the case study countries. While formal coordination aims to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership, it is unclear whether it has also supported complementarity between local and international actors (Steets et al., 2010, 2014; Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2015; Knox Clarke and Obrecht, 2016). One criticism levelled at formal UN coordination has been its exclusive nature in terms of participation, influence and funding allocations (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016), with national and local governments often feeling excluded (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016; Tanner and Moro, 2016).

While coordination was perceived by individuals interviewed for the case studies as essential to complementarity, current practices have failed to increase it. In DRC, for instance, the cluster system was not seen as providing strategic direction and coordination but was instead viewed as an extension of the work and partnerships set up by UN leads. This meant there was little space to influence the strategic direction of work and fund allocations or to create better synergies and partnerships. Decision-making bodies in the formal humanitarian coordination system reinforced its primacy with a high representation of UN agencies and limited representation of INGOs. Local organisations have only recently – through advocacy by networks of local organisations – succeeded in having some representation (limited to two members as opposed to five for INGOs) in the inter-agency decision-making body at the provincial level. Local actors in DRC called for more meaningful participation in formal coordination systems and more localised coordination mechanisms that recognise existing structures such as local authorities and local civil society bureaux. In brief, local actors felt existing coordination structures lacked contextual understanding and left them feeling marginalised.

In Bangladesh, the issue with coordination was one of fragmentation, which effectively led to two parallel coordination structures (one organised by the Government of Bangladesh and another led by UN agencies) with limited opportunities for complementarity between local and international actors. Individuals interviewed for the research highlighted the lack of contact between the two structures, undermining the effectiveness of the response and a situation comprising two worlds with differing languages, standards, ways of working, relationships and priorities.

3.4 The role of affected and host governments in complementarity

Government attitude and policy can restrict or facilitate interaction between international and national actors, therefore affecting the likelihood of complementary approaches. The role of the government differed dramatically between Bangladesh and DRC. The Bangladeshi government has taken an assertive role in the response, delivering aid and services as well as coordinating – and often restricting – the roles of international actors. In contrast, the DRC government is notable by its absence in the humanitarian context of the Kivus, exercising little control.

The Bangladeshi government used its position to drive a basic level of engagement between local and international actors, giving local actors more power and legitimacy – this was most notable in the inconsistently applied ruling that international actors require a partnership with a national actor to gain access to the refugee camps. This enforced complementarity is increasingly becoming practice in the Asia region, with similar government policies and attitudes evident during the Nepal earthquake response and in the Sulawesi tsunami response in Indonesia (see Box 5). Local Bangladeshi organisations responding to the Rohingya situation defined their roles as supporting the government, leading to an underlying perception by international actors that they are unwilling to put refugee rights at the centre of their response or contradict the government's repatriation standpoint. In this case, understanding the relationship between civil society and government is critical to inform complementarity.

In DRC, where the government is absent from humanitarian action, local actors felt unable to reverse power dynamics and systematically called for greater government engagement. The local actors we interviewed felt that a more assertive government in DRC would force international actors to consider local institutions, organisations and civil society in ways that would enable them to influence the humanitarian agenda and access more equal partnerships and funding. There is a risk, however, that although a more assertive government in DRC may lead to more power for local actors, it would also risk undermining humanitarian space and humanitarian outcomes as the government has been reluctant to acknowledge the full scale of the humanitarian situation in DRC (see Barbelet et al., 2019: 30).

Box 5: How government policy can shift the way of responding to emergencies: Sulawesi

Following the earthquake in Sulawesi, the Indonesian government adopted a policy of humanitarian action that was only local. They based this on their experience of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami response, where they observed a lack of coordination by international actors. As a result, when a tsunami hit the town of Palu in September 2018, the government ensured the humanitarian response was going to be different, taking the lead and setting 'limits on the types and quantity of assistance required from international organisations', announcing 'that all assistance needed to be channelled via national or local humanitarian partners' (HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019: 4).

According to the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and Pujiono Centre report on the response, the positioning and stance of the government on international organisations meant that international actors had to change the way they traditionally responded to the emergency:

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) played a support role in mobilising Clusters, rather than a leading role. International organisations – such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the international Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and Child Fund – provided technical guidance in specialised sectors such as gender-based violence, reproductive health and people living with disability, rather than playing leadership roles in the implementation (HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019:7).

Coordination was led by government institutions and partnerships allowed local organisations to take a more powerful, assertive role (HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019). This example demonstrates how government policy can provide opportunities for new ways of working between international and local actors and lead to more complementarity.

3.5 The role of donors in supporting complementarity

Donors have also committed to supporting more local humanitarian action. In the country case studies, we found several examples demonstrating the challenges and need for donors to support local humanitarian action. A number of INGOs in DRC felt that donors funded them to be direct delivery organisations and that partnerships with local organisations were not rewarded. In another instance, a donor reflected that their humanitarian funding portfolio was driven by giving larger funds to a small number of organisations, making a more local approach more difficult. This principle is often a result of how value for money is interpreted and put into practice as well as donors' lack of capacity to manage a high number of smaller funds going to more organisations.

To inform this final analysis, we conducted a number of interviews with institutional donors to better understand their commitment to local humanitarian action, the challenges they faced and the role they think they should play. Those interviewed reiterated their commitment to supporting the localisation agenda. Some felt this commitment was not new to their work but perhaps had become a more strategic priority, while others positioned their commitments to localisation as part of the Grand Bargain as secondary. All the donors we interviewed said that supporting more local humanitarian action faced a number of obstacles, and other priorities, strategies or principles worked at cross-purposes to this aim.

The main challenge for donors wishing to support local humanitarian action is the fiduciary and reputation risks associated with giving direct funding to local organisations. Donor appetite for such risk is low and due diligence requirements are increasingly stringent. All donors interviewed confirmed that this trend was here to stay and was a non-negotiable element of current donor practice. There was a recognition that the current practice of risk transfers to international actors needed more attention, especially as donors are expecting international organisations to support more local humanitarian action without currently adopting a practice of risk sharing.

A second aspect raised by donors was how humanitarian funding was positioned as soft power.

Some donors stated that their humanitarian funding was an expression of their sovereignty and an important aspect of their foreign policy,[6] including for citizens who wanted to see that aid in the world. In this sense, being visible as a donor was important. Localisation was seen to undermine this visibility either when local humanitarian action happened through governments (the Sulawesi response for instance, where government leadership has reduced the visibility of international donors) or when the response was not done through large INGOs known to the public. Therefore, donors have tended to direct more funding to INGOs from their own countries.

Finally, another obstacle faced by donors is their capacity. Many do not have the capacity to maintain a presence in countries affected by a humanitarian crisis and cannot increase the number of partners they work with. As a result, many donors have addressed commitments to the localisation workstream of the Grand Bargain through increasing their allocations to CBPFs. By doing so, donors argue they are funding local organisations more directly without increasing the number of partners they work with. The CBPFs then take on the role of managing an increased number of partners including through supporting capacity strengthening and ensuring complementarity with other actors on the ground. While more funding to CBPFs does not automatically increase complementarity, CBPFs in some contexts have committed to using their funds to identify potential capacity, strengthen it and support better collaboration across local and international actors.

These findings mean that expectations may need to be adjusted on how possible it is for donors to directly fund local organisations. Donors' capacity to manage a higher number of organisations and grants is unlikely to increase in the near future and neither is their appetite for risk. However, the donors interviewed all felt they had played a role in supporting more local humanitarian action and will continue to do so. In brief, donors can play a role by supporting and requesting UN agencies and INGOs to direct funds to local organisations within the frameworks of good partnerships, including capacity strengthening, and supporting the development of localised autonomous systems of coordination where possible, as well as ensuring due diligence around risk sharing and security.

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6   For more discussion on the link between foreign policy and humanitarian aid see past research on state humanitarianism (Willits-King et al., 2018).

4 Rethinking capacity and complementarity

4.1 Factors that impact on complementarity

One gap in evidence identified by this study was the lack of knowledge about factors that facilitate or hinder complementarity between local and international actors. The two case studies found a number of elements that impact complementarity positively or negatively.

Our findings point to **interlinkages between capacity and complementarity**. How capacity is understood, defined and the amount of knowledge of where capacity exists impacts levels of complementarity. Complementarity between local and international actors is first and foremost affected by how capacity is understood and defined. When international actors adopt a narrow understanding and definition of the capacities needed in humanitarian action, they miss out on the contributions of local actors. Harnessing all existing capacities also presumes a knowledge of what capacities exist and where. Unfortunately, our findings show that international actors tend not to know what local capacities exist. An investment in effective capacity strengthening can increase complementarity by highlighting existing local capacities.

Levels of complementarity are affected by whether it is valued, which can be demonstrated through **commitments to complementarity in policy and practice**. When complementarity is not valued by local and international actors, it is undermined (Wake and Bryant, 2018; Barbelet et al., 2019). In this sense, the policies and standard operating procedures of donors, UN agencies and INGOs can affect levels of complementarity. A recent study by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement found that a commitment to complementarity in operational terms supports more complementary ways of working between the local and international elements of the Movement (Austin and Chessex, 2018). Changes in policies and procedures should come with changes to individuals' job profiles to include a commitment to a complementarity approach to ensure it occurs in practice.

Coordination was repeatedly mentioned in our research as an element supporting complementarity. However, in both DRC and Bangladesh we found that practices around coordination could lead to exclusion rather than complementarity. For example, in Bangladesh exclusion occurred due to international organisations dominating coordination mechanisms, poor coordination with host governments, and the English-language nature of many coordination fora. Supporting more complementarity should involve rethinking how current coordination practices can evolve.

Current **donor attitudes** to fiduciary and reputational risk are transferred to international actors and greatly affect levels of complementarity. Complementary ways of working necessitate a shift of power, which ultimately means less control by international actors. However, international actors believe this to increase risk as they are responsible for reporting to donors, who in turn must report to their parliaments. Donors interviewed for this report highlighted the low appetite for risk as an obstacle for localisation that cannot be changed (whether these are fiduciary risks due to low organisational capacity or reputational risks when aid is diverted in politically sensitive contexts). A recent report on risk management in local–international partnerships calls for risk transfer to move towards risk sharing (Stoddard et al., 2019), a view shared by one donor we interviewed. This respondent felt that there was an opportunity in the current donor landscape to have a political discussion among donors on how risk is shared.

Low levels of trust, unequal power dynamics and perceptions of legitimacy all play a significant role in how complementarity plays out in a crisis context. Defining what is possible in terms of local humanitarian action is not just about capacity; it is also about perceptions of who has what capacity. Such perceptions are affected by trust, power and who is perceived as being a legitimate partner. Similarly, the way coordination mechanisms work often diminishes rather than improves trust between actors, sometimes

as a result of double standards and exclusive coordination processes.

Government attitude and policy can restrict or facilitate interaction between international and national actors, therefore affecting the likelihood of complementary approaches. Assertive governments that push for more local leadership and local ownership in responding to humanitarian crises can shift power dynamics, leading to more complementarity (see Wake and Bryant, 2018, with regards to Bangladesh). By imposing local humanitarian action, governments effectively extend their power to local actors. In doing so, governments are supporting 'positive discrimination' towards local organisations to raise their profile and legitimacy as leading actors of a humanitarian response, thereby forcing international humanitarian actors to consider, partner and work with them. However, this approach may also limit complementarity as it does not build trust or genuine partnerships. Such 'localisation' policies from governments can be effective in reaching better humanitarian outcomes when they are based on an understanding of existing capacities in a context and ensure that international actors are only utilised to fill capacity gaps. However, this can be problematic when a government is not acting in the best interest of affected populations. Such government policies should also be considered carefully to ensure they do not lead to a closure of the civil society space (i.e. if local organisations become unable to act outside of state control) or a humanitarian action that lacks independence, neutrality or impartiality.

Local and international actors often have **different lines of accountability**, which affect their response objectives as well as how they approach their work. This was the case in both case study countries, but particularly in Bangladesh where the local civil society is accountable to the host community rather than the refugee population. While varying accountabilities make complementarity more challenging, this does not negate the need for international actors to consider the capacities and specific strengths of local actors. This encapsulates dilemmas around localisation – greater power and autonomy need to be given to LNGOs but this means weakening the international community's monopoly of the humanitarian system. To avoid an adverse effect upon the relief and services provided to affected people, the 'localisation' agenda must be valued.

The nature of the crisis will affect complementarity in a number of ways. For instance, a large-scale crisis may overwhelm local capacity and therefore undermine complementarity because international intervention is needed. International actors also tend to react differently to a locally led humanitarian response in a natural-hazard related disaster (disasters) compared to a more politically sensitive crisis (refugee crisis or conflict). This was observable in Bangladesh where the national government and local actors are seen as able to respond to natural-hazard related disasters. This perception changed with the arrival of Rohingya refugees, both because of the scale and the type of crisis.

Box 6: Complementarity in practice in Myanmar

In some areas of Myanmar, we have seen evidence of complementary ways of working between local and international actors where a few large local organisations (with annual budgets in the millions of dollars) were leading a large-scale response in areas not accessible to international actors. These local organisations tend to be more development-oriented and some are large church organisations. There are several elements that have facilitated this locally led response:

- Local organisations have long partnered with international organisations (over 20 years).
- They have a significant on-the-ground presence and network of staff and volunteers,

in many cases linked to their existence as churches, primarily doing 'community development' work.
- They combine this local presence with a national hierarchical structure.
- This hierarchical structure has helped them build a reputation for being able to deliver aid at scale.
- They work where international agencies cannot work.
- They work where international agencies cannot monitor and so they control the information about their own work.
- For church organisations, the dioceses are effectively the local branches of a large international organisation (especially Catholic and Baptist churches).

Where **long-term and strategic partnerships** exist and there are **well-established development organisations**, complementarity in humanitarian action tends to be higher (see Box 6). While development organisations are not readily considered able to respond to humanitarian situations, through partnerships they are often well-placed to adapt their work and capacity in times of crisis. Working with development organisations in times of peace or pre-disaster as part of preparedness activities is one way to support more complementarity. This can be done by strengthening adaptive capacity (adapting from development procedures to humanitarian ways of operating), which can also potentially sustain capacity between crises, and building strong relationships between local and international actors. Islamic Relief's STRIDE project (see Section 4.2.3) is a good example of how to work with well-established development organisations to enable them to become effective actors in humanitarian crises.

International organisations' **access to affected people** impacts levels of complementarity. Indeed, when international organisations lack access, they tend to have no choice but to trust local actors present in those geographical areas to implement humanitarian action. Two things happen in these scenarios: the power dynamic between local and international actors shifts towards local actors who can more readily influence how humanitarian action will take place; and international organisations are forced to better understand who has what capacity in this context. Such scenarios can be observed in Somalia, Syria, Myanmar and parts of Sudan. It is unclear from our research whether these experiences have a longer-term impact on how international organisations value or seek complementarity with local actors, especially when access is no longer an issue in a particular context. However, we have anecdotal evidence that in Syria, Myanmar, Nepal and Indonesia, the experience of INGOs has triggered a strategic shift towards more consideration of how to harness the benefits of working in complementarity with local actors. Indeed, when these INGOs had no choice but to work with local actors they gained first-hand experience of the benefits of working in good partnerships with local actors and realised the possible missed opportunities in other contexts.

While the strong **localisation activism** we observed in Bangladesh could lead to tension rather than collaboration, it demonstrates how networks of local actors can alter power dynamics through using the language of the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation. From the earliest international involvement in the Rohingya response, local organisations have used the Grand Bargain commitments to advocate for a more locally led response that is under government control (CCNF, 2017: 5; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018: 7). In South Kivu, we observed the role played by Cadre de Concertation des ONG Nationales (CCONAT) in advocating for a more localised system and more effective representations of local actors in formal decision-making structures. This advocacy resulted in local organisations being better represented at the Provincial Inter-Agency Committee where decisions on funding and humanitarian response are made. Local actors have the benefit of numbers and can organise themselves to be powerful voices in crisis contexts. Established networks of local actors can become important in supporting the mapping of existing capacities and help negotiate the terms of relationships with international humanitarian actors. However, competition among local actors can make organising into networks difficult. Fragmented local networks can feed negative perceptions among international actors who tend to distance themselves as a result.

These elements all affect complementarity in different ways. Box 7 proposes key questions that could inform how to analyse and understand these different elements in order to instruct how complementarity between local and international actors plays out during crisis. The next sections will delve deeper into how rethinking capacity, partnership, coordination, the role of donors and addressing power dynamics could support more complementarity between local and international actors.

4.2 Rethinking capacity: ways forward and innovative approaches

4.2.1 Rethinking definitions of capacity
Local actors and affected people have very little influence over how capacity is defined in the humanitarian sector. At the same time, international organisations assessing the capacity of local actors are often motivated by concerns over fiduciary and reputational risks. With a risk lens strongly attached to capacity, the humanitarian sector has prioritised certain aspects of capacity over others, leading to its narrow definition. Consequently, when international actors talk of an agency (or local civil society more generally) lacking capacity, this must be understood in relation to the strengths and abilities they are choosing to call 'capacity' and which are not being prioritised or are excluded under this label. This

Box 7: Key questions that inform how complementarity plays out

The analysis in this two-year research project indicates that complementarity will look different depending on context. The study concludes that these key questions would help donors, international humanitarian actors and local actors to critically examine how complementarity could play out in a given area. This analysis should ideally be done at the onset of a crisis to inform the design of the response.

1. Who is contributing what to the humanitarian response in the local ecosystem? Who has the potential to contribute? What are the relationships between these actors? What could be biases in international actors' perceptions of local capacity?
2. Are there existing coordination systems for humanitarian response that could be strengthened and harnessed? If not, are there local organisations or individuals that are well-placed to support coordination of humanitarian action?
3. Do all actors involved in the response value complementarity? What are the policies and commitments to complementarity within organisations present on the ground? How are donors supporting and influencing complementarity on the ground?
4. How are relationships between local and international actors affected by trust and power

dynamics and what are the impacts of that on behaviour? What are the trust and power dynamics that affect the crisis context? Where do they lie?
5. What are the perceived and real risks identified by international actors in supporting a locally led humanitarian response in that particular context? How can these be addressed?
6. What are the objectives, interests and accountability systems for the actors present in the context? Is there an alignment or divergence in objectives and priorities in the humanitarian response between these actors?
7. What is the nature of local civil society? What is the relationship between civil society and government?
8. What are the policies of the government towards partnerships, the role of international humanitarian organisations and what motivates these policies?
9. Are local actors organised in networks? How can these networks inform where capacity is and support complementarity?
10. What is the nature of the crisis and how does this affect relationships between different actors including international humanitarian actors, government, communities, affected people, local actors, etc.? What are the implications of this on the ability to deliver principled humanitarian action?

has led to a narrow understanding of capacity and undermines the value added by local actors. By defining capacity narrowly, international actors are missing opportunities to harness important capacities and collaborate with a range of local actors. Indeed, if local actors do not meet technical, organisational and sector-wide standards, their other capacities – no matter how relevant they are to the context – are not considered by international actors.

To overcome some of these challenges, the way capacity is defined needs to change; understandings of it must be broadened and contextualised; and power dynamics in how capacity is understood must be addressed.

A wider consensus is required around what capacities are needed in a particular situation; therefore, capacity could be defined at the context level through consultation with those engaged in humanitarian action. In this case, defining capacity

would entail making a proper inventory of the skillsets and abilities needed for the response as a whole. Consultation should include actors that are considered humanitarian in nature (whether local or international), as well as wider civil society groups, the government (or, in conflicts where the government is a party, the more technical parts of the civil service) and affected people. Donors should also be included in these discussions as they have the power to drive change through their funding, although this would require changes in how they define capacity. Such a consultation would not only gain more consensus among actors but would also deliver a more context-specific definition of the capacities needed to respond to the crisis at hand. This might lead to more targeted capacity strengthening efforts (for international and local actors).

This approach could build on existing sector-wide standards and practices that are already included as elements of capacity, such as the capacity to respond

at scale, which may not be specific to a context. Standards such as procurement policies and processes or the principles of humanitarian action have developed and evolved from decades of experience in implementing humanitarian aid in complex situations. However, this approach would create a dialogue that could lead to a wider understanding of capacities and a re-prioritisation of context-specific needs.

While the current formal humanitarian architecture may need reforming, for the time being it could provide a platform to conduct such a consultation. Current processes through the cluster system that lead to the annual development of Humanitarian Response Plans could potentially provide an opportunity to open up this discussion. Given that participation in the clusters is not always representative of all actors (particularly affected people), parallel consultation as part of government coordination systems, the NGO forum or networks of local civil society groups could ensure engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders. Similarly, government coordination mechanisms could lead this consultation where feasible, especially when recognising that the cluster system is external to local response practices and that not all host governments allow the formation of Humanitarian Country Teams and Humanitarian Response Plans. In conflict settings, networks and platforms of local actors could consult on defining capacity and the views of affected people could be integrated via existing working groups that focus on accountability to them. Going further, such engagement could enable the capacities of affected people to be recognised, considered and integrated as part of the humanitarian response.

4.2.2 Rethinking capacity assessments for more complementarity

Current practices for assessing capacity cannot inform humanitarian action that is as local as possible and as international as necessary. The humanitarian community as a whole, and humanitarian organisations individually, do not have any overview of where capacities lie, in part because they have limited their understanding of capacity to systems and processes, especially around finances and the formal adoption of standards. In doing so, they have largely ignored or deprioritised skills related to managing and maintaining access, understanding local contexts and relationships with communities. Instead, understandings are geared towards managing risks or filling gaps for international actors rather than vice versa. This approach also leaves the decision on who has capacity firmly in the hands of international actors, with little involvement from local organisations

who may better understand capacity in their context. Currently, capacity assessments are not a two-way process. Indeed, there is no evidence of local actors assessing the capacity of international actors to determine whether they want to partner with them.

Currently, capacity assessments increase competition and place a high burden of evidence on local organisations who often have to do more than their international counterparts to prove their legitimacy, neutrality and impartiality as well as their ability to deliver better, cheaper and more effective humanitarian aid. A context-wide mapping of capacity needs to happen in crisis contexts to address these challenges and better inform a more local humanitarian action.[7] If capacity mapping is geared towards finding partners or designing capacity building interventions, it will be based on predetermined capacities, which risks restricting the view of international agencies to the capacities they already recognise. A collective effort is required to capture the full range of critical capacities in any given situation and address the role of power imbalances in shaping capacity discourses.

A context-wide mapping of capacity in a crisis would help inform humanitarian action that is as local as possible by identifying what capacities exist where. It must also take on a wider, more consensus-based, definition of capacity as explained above. Outcomes from this mapping may then lead to new funding opportunities, partnerships (including new ways of partnering) and solutions to addressing capacity gaps (via capacity strengthening or other means). One example of this is the NEAR Organisational Capacity Assessment tool, a hybrid of a number of capacity assessment tools developed by NEAR in consultation with their local civil society members around the world and which goes some way towards including these unrecognised capacities.

Mapping capacity should be a collective and consultative effort with a 360-degree approach, where local and international actors, donors and affected populations have a say in identifying and assessing capacities and gaps. The capacities of all actors should be assessed. This process would begin to address some of the existing power imbalances in capacity assessments. A critical step would be to understand who is contributing what to addressing a humanitarian crisis, therefore moving away from a risk management approach to capacity assessment. This may uncover contributions from non-humanitarian and non-formal actors such as

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7 This recommendation was also made by Ramalingam et al. (2013: 27): 'Seek to build shared capacity maps of known crisis hotspots'.

those from the private sector or networks of local volunteers, therefore strengthening links between capacity and humanitarian outcomes.

Current formal coordination structures could also offer an avenue for this process, but only if a wide group of actors can participate, including those from the local private sector, local civil society and organisations representing affected people (e.g. committees of refugees, IDPs and host families). Leadership of such a mapping process may be context-specific, but could involve government or local authorities, networks of local organisations or OCHA. However, care should be taken in selecting the facilitator of a mapping process: OCHA could be perceived as too external, too Northern and too top-down, while government and local civil society may need resources and support. In some contexts, governments may not be neutral in their assessments of local civil society and therefore local networks may be best placed to carry out such work. The main challenge with this approach will be to find a mediator or a sense of consensus on the findings of a capacity mapping. In this sense, capacity assessments may inevitably be about contested power. To address this, it is critical to be explicit about needing all capacities to deliver a good response, emphasising the importance of capacity definitions and mapping to best alleviate the suffering of affected people.

There are three important potential benefits from this context-wide approach to mapping capacity. First, it could provide a baseline to understand how capacity evolves over time, particularly in protracted crises such as in DRC. This would also demonstrate how current investment in capacity strengthening is or is not shifting levels of capacity. Second, it would assess the capacity of both local and international actors to determine whether international actors are best placed to respond and how. Third, it could inform new ways of partnering and collaborating between all actors present in a context, whether across types of actors (private sector, government, humanitarian) or across local and international actors. Better understanding what capacities exist where could inform the type of coordination, collaboration and partnerships needed to support and harness these capacities. This could lead to more innovative ways of addressing capacity gaps, such as using local actors to strengthen the capacities of international actors or exploring different types of partnerships. This would lead to greater complementarity and assessments could focus more on conversations between partners rather than quantifying capacity. Such outcomes, particularly

Box 8: Oxfam's Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis (HUCOCA) and Take The Lead (TTL) initiatives

Oxfam's approach in the HUCOCA and TTL models is to use their influence to support local leadership of NGOs and other relevant actors (e.g. local media). The principle behind their capacity assessment is to move away from project-based capacity building and bilateral relationships towards better understanding of the local humanitarian context and supporting the collective. Other principles driving this agenda include leadership and ownership by local and national humanitarian actors, complementarity, integration into local dynamics for sustainability, and being more people-oriented, strategic (longer-term impact, system-wide), accountable to each other and to communities, and mutual learning.

These projects aimed to support more locally led humanitarian action through collective capacity mapping and capacity strengthening plans. They have led to:

• increased capacity and complementarity in formal and informal networks and spaces;

• greater trust at the local level;
• better understanding of each other's strengths;
• more engagement and stronger relationships with government;
• horizontal partnerships and accountability with mutual understanding of all roles and responsibilities;
• more consortia built to access funding; and
• inclusion of non-traditional actors.

The key benefit of these assessments is a shift towards defining priorities based on long-term, sustainable measures rather than short-term priorities dictated by project designs. This is strategic and empowering for local actors, going beyond the needs of international funders. Broader mapping of different stakeholders' strengths and weaknesses makes it possible to identify capacity providers locally, instead of through international organisations. The resulting empowerment and increased strategic drive have transformed interactions between local and international actors.

regarding mapping and greater work in consortia, have been one of the results of Oxfam's HUCOCA and TTL initiatives (see Box 8).

This study finds that implementation of a new approach to capacity assessment is required to inform a more local humanitarian action. However, a dual approach is needed as donors and international actors continue to require bilateral capacity assessments as part of their due diligence, risk management and partnership process. This study acknowledges that, given current risk appetite and continued donor accountability requirements, assessments of organisational capacity and capacity to uphold technical and other sector-wide standards for the foreseeable future. Interviews with donors as part of this study highlighted that the main constraints on donors' commitments to the localisation workstream under the Grand Bargain are the risk management and due diligence processes required by their governments. As one donor explained:

> *We have a strange problem. We make the point [on localisation] at the policy level. At the same time our accountability rules are strengthened, and tolerance for risk lowered. We are clear on wanting to make space for localisation but once it goes wrong we automatically stop the funding. This is a strange signal to give and a negative one to make a commitment to localisation and not back up flexibility or take risk. These two issues work at cross-purposes* (Interview).

A first step in the right direction would be to ensure that risk and capacity assessments for the purpose of receiving funding or forming a partnership involve a two-way assessment, where local actors assess the capacities of donors and international partners to determine whether they have the right capacity to be working in the context and wish to partner with them and vice versa. Reframing assessment processes and bringing about a humbler approach to capacity assessment could be a powerful tool for change (see HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019; VANGO et al., 2019).

A second step could be to rename current capacity assessments to reflect what they really are: risk assessments. This would provide space for other ways to assess capacities, while continuing to address the needs of donors and international actors in terms of managing fiduciary and reputation risks.

As a third step, international actors should strive to streamline these risk assessments to reduce the burden on local actors who often have to go through numerous assessments with each international partner. This effectively reduces and undermines the capacity of local actors, forcing them to invest in staff dedicated to supporting assessment processes rather than delivering humanitarian assistance and protection. Harmonising risk assessment processes could happen in two ways: (1) having one risk assessment process in a country that is adopted by all actors; or (2) international actors accept each other's risk assessment of the same local actor (this would require the permission of the local actor). Networks and alliances such as ACT Alliance could be potential platforms for sharing and discussions are already underway on piloting such approaches. The second option is already being developed by the Start Network and the Country-Based Pooled Funds. Through such structures, there is an opportunity to discuss how each country can move towards streamlining their processes. Formal coordination systems and CBPFs could provide important spaces to discuss country-based approaches to risk assessment that support rather than undermine local humanitarian action.

Finally, any risk assessment conducted by international actors should come with investment to allow organisations with high risk ratings to strengthen their capacities and lower their risk in the future.

4.2.3 Rethinking capacity strengthening for more complementarity

Those who champion the localisation agenda, including local actors, have specifically asked for more capacity strengthening for local actors, which is also one of the commitments of the Grand Bargain localisation workstream. Capacity strengthening has suffered from a number of challenges, including a lack of systematic investment or good-quality capacity strengthening interventions.

An initial step towards addressing such challenges would be for donors to ensure that any capacity assessment (in the sense of risk assessment) is accompanied by a commitment to addressing the jointly identified gaps. This could be done by ensuring international actors allocate budget to invest in strengthening the capacity of local organisations they partner with. The Iraq CBPF (known as the humanitarian fund) has adopted this approach. While CBPFs usually conduct assessments to assess fiduciary

risks and decide whether an organisation is eligible to receive funding and what level they should be granted (see Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream, 2018), the Iraq CBPF has adopted a participatory capacity assessment methodology to identify and address capacity gaps. Funding allocated to UN agencies and NGOs includes a distinct and verifiable capacity building component to ensure support and coaching for local actors. The CBPF in Iraq also supports the coordination of capacity strengthening efforts among other stakeholders such as donors and clusters. These efforts have also focused on developing stronger organisational capacity rather than solely strengthening the technical capacity to implement projects.

Another interesting approach the study came across was implemented by Islamic Relief, who undertook organisational capacity strengthening as part of preparedness efforts. The Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence (STRIDE) project was initiated in 2016 by Islamic Relief in the Asia region to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their humanitarian response. While one aspect of the project was dedicated to Islamic Relief's internal capacity for preparedness, the other side aimed to enhance the organisational capacity of local partners in emergency preparedness and response (Wake and Barbelet, 2019). The project is innovative in several ways:

- It targeted small- and medium-sized organisations with a mainly development background that tend not to be the preferred partners of international humanitarian actors, but have close relationships with communities in disaster-prone areas.
- It focused on strengthening organisational capacity and preparing organisations to respond in times of crisis as well as becoming better able to attract funding.
- It happened prior to a crisis and not during a humanitarian response.
- STRIDE was based on a self-assessment of capacities where local organisations set their priorities.
- It encouraged a multi-dimensional approach to capacity strengthening that included coaching, mentoring, accompaniment, review of policies and procedures and training. Capacity strengthening was delivered by local actors who were able to realistically contextualise any capacity strengthening interventions and activities.
- STRIDE developed tools to support and accompany local organisations rather than standardising or imposing approaches.

This approach to capacity strengthening, where it is carried out by local actors rather than actors from Geneva or London, highlighted a lack of available capacity strengthening specialists in crisis-prone contexts. As such, an HPG study on the STRIDE programme recommended that 'donors [should] consider investing in the development of local training for humanitarian capacity, supporting organisations such as Sphere to further develop their network of trainers in countries most at risk of natural hazard-related disasters, conflicts, and displacement' (Wake and Barbelet, 2019: 20). Initiatives like this do exist; for instance, HumanSurge and NEAR are working to link local humanitarians around the world to share contextualised aid expertise.

While investing in capacity strengthening, the lack of high-quality, long-term funding going to local organisations means that sustainable outcomes may not be possible. Local actors in the STRIDE project worried that investments may not be sustained if core funding could not be attracted to retain staff and maintain processes (Wake and Barbelet, 2019: 20). Commitments to strengthening local actors' capacity should come hand in hand with core cost funding for local organisations. However, such funding is not often implemented in partnerships with international actors in humanitarian response. As one participant in the localisation and coordination research workshop organised for this study highlighted, capacity strengthening occurs in times of crisis through international organisations receiving a percentage of overhead costs as part of their donor agreements, which is used to purchase computer software, pay rent or train staff – all elements that result in strengthening their capacity. There is no good reason why such funding should not be extended to local organisations of whom the same levels of capacity are required.

Currently there is little consideration as to how capacity can be strengthened other than via training or coaching. Importantly, it should be noted that capacity can be maintained and strengthened by not engaging in practices that undermine existing local capacity, for example when international actors poach staff from local organisations with no compensation. This is a central commitment of the Charter for Change. The buying in of capacity by international actors through hiring staff or even through constraining partnerships too often denies or ignores the true benefits of local staff and partners.

Underlying such practices is the belief that capacity flows one way – from international actors to local actors – rather than being a reciprocal process where

capacity issues are recognised on both sides and lead to different ways to collaborate and partner. Capacity gaps, particularly during large-scale emergencies, could also be addressed through secondment of international staff to local organisations, as well as local to local secondment, shifting current practices of emergency surge teams' deployment, which undermines and replaces rather than supports and strengthens local organisations (see Austin and O'Neil, 2016; Featherstone and Bogati, 2016; Featherstone, 2017). Secondments could also benefit international organisations by allowing international staff to bring back learning and experience from their deployment in local organisations.

4.3 Supporting complementarity: ways forward and innovative approaches

4.3.1 Rethinking partnerships for more complementarity

Below are four examples of how rethinking partnerships could lead to more complementarity. It is important to note that while these examples show how INGOs can alter their approach to partnerships, these country specific examples may not always be institutionalised and experiences from local organisations partnering with these INGOs in other contexts may not necessarily experience similar levels of complementarity.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) complementary approach to partnership. The IRC has traditionally been a direct delivery organisation. In the past, IRC's partnerships were functional rather than strategic and followed an implementing partner model. In the last few years, however, IRC has been rethinking its approach to partnership. This partly stems from their operational experience in Myanmar and Syria where, due to a lack of access, they had to partner differently with local organisations.

IRC's partnership approach stems from an analysis of the local humanitarian response ecosystem (whether it is informally or formally organised) that aims to understand actors' roles, interests, influences, relationships, and existing and potential capacities. Through stakeholder and social network analysis, IRC has been able to understand how change can happen, informing their role in supporting that change and the response modality (partnership, direct delivery, or both). Essentially, this exercise mirrors this study's recommendations on rethinking capacity assessment

at the context level: a mapping of existing capacities to inform how local humanitarian action should be. Importantly, IRC's partnership approach does not start by assessing local actors' capacities or selecting IRC's partners; instead it explores existing capacities and what that means for partnership and the role of IRC. Because IRC's partnership approach begins with an understanding of what local actors can contribute, it creates more opportunity for complementary response and ways of working. The change management necessary for IRC to expand this approach within the organisation partly relies on its ability to evidence why this approach leads to better humanitarian outcomes. While all existing evidence points to the benefit of complementary partnerships, this evidence base is not yet well developed (IRC, 2019), highlighting the need to continue building evidence on the link between complementarity, partnerships and better humanitarian outcomes.

Islamic Relief's approach to partnership in times of preparedness for capacity strengthening. Like IRC, Islamic Relief has not traditionally been a partnership organisation. Islamic Relief has been considering what it needs to change in its partnership approach as part of its commitment to the Charter for Change, as well as reflecting on affected governments' policies towards local humanitarian partnerships through their experience in Nepal and Indonesia. Realising that emergency response is not the best time to forge partnerships and support local organisations to strengthen their response capacity, Islamic Relief has implemented the STRIDE project (see Section 4.2.3), which aims to create partnerships between Islamic Relief and local organisations as part of preparedness activities, with a focus on supporting the strengthening of local organisational capacity (see Wake and Barbelet, 2019). Islamic Relief's work on this supports more complementarity by creating more local humanitarian capacity within organisations that have historically focused on development. By supporting these organisations to be ready for partnerships as well as to receive direct funding from donors, Islamic Relief is realising potential capacities. This investment in partnership and preparedness also means that Islamic Relief can deploy emergency capacity differently: seconding international humanitarian actors to local organisations and strengthening rather than replacing these organisations while addressing gaps in capacity. In other words, this would mean emergency surge deployment conducted in a complementary manner.

Oxfam's brokering role. Oxfam has a long history of partnering in both development and humanitarian

settings. In one context, Oxfam and a collective of local NGOs are piloting an innovative form of financing through a rapid response grant. The Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF) provides funding opportunities to support and drive diverse local and national actors to be better equipped to lead humanitarian responses. The approach allocates more humanitarian funding (and therefore more power and responsibility) directly into the hands of local or national organisations. The HRGF promotes leadership of local and national humanitarian actors by providing the opportunity to access funding competitively for local organisations. The funding supports these organisations to independently design and implement quality responses, to increase their visibility and autonomy in responses, and to provide learning to the wider humanitarian community on funding modalities that meet objectives of enabling quality responses as well as facilitating leadership of local actors.

An institutional donor provides funding to Oxfam and acts as the guarantor, but decisions are made by the platform. Grant allocations are made by two members of the platform and another local organisation on a board, which selects and approves proposals for rapid responses. Part of the brokering role Oxfam played was to use their reputation and relationships with donors to negotiate light touch processes in line with the capacities of the platform's members. For instance, proposals to the rapid response grant are a one-page proposal in the local language. Built into the process are reflection workshops after the response (whenever the mechanism is triggered), which look at both the mechanism itself and the interventions funded (i.e. the programme quality).

The aim is for Oxfam to eventually leave the brokering role and allow a direct relationship between individual local organisations or the collective of local actors and the donor. One obstacle to this is the lack of legal entity of the platform (and some of the small CSO members). The lack of legal title for some small CSOs is not necessarily due to capacity limitations but an issue with the registration of CSOs in that country. The brokering role of Oxfam circumvents these challenges and enables the best actor to contribute to the humanitarian situation rather than blocking humanitarian action based on a legal challenge. Through this experience, Oxfam is also learning about its own internal challenges with systems and processes, particularly how to manage compliance. These challenges were mainly resolved by putting the principles of the Grand Bargain at the forefront of their operation and forcing systems and processes

to change. Similar findings were highlighted during the localisation and coordination workshops where international actors recognised that some challenges to localisation are in fact due to internal ways of working that could be changed. The HRGF's approach to partnership was facilitated by a donor that was open to certain risks and by the nature of the political situation and civil society in that area of the country. Such approaches may not be readily implementable in other contexts. This partnership approach is supported by the HUCOCA and a capacity investment plan.

The mixed consortium approach. The research team encountered several examples of mixed consortia (that is, where members are from both international and local organisations). By positioning international organisations as 'members' rather than 'donors', a mixed consortium has the potential to change power dynamics associated with ownership of funding as well as supporting a more direct relationship between local organisations and institutional donors. One positive example is the CAN DO consortium in the Asia Pacific region, where eight church agencies and their country church partner collaborated in a consortium to better coordinate and strengthen global humanitarian work, disaster risk reduction and management and resilience building work.

This approach offers potential, but brings challenges in implementation. In DRC, examples of mixed consortia reinforced rather than addressed power differentials by forcing stringent capacity assessments on local organisations and offering a lower overhead cost percentage to local organisations compared to international organisations. Donors funding mixed consortia should consider how their set-up could provide fair and equal treatment of local and international organisations to bring them together rather than push them apart, and to mitigate potential negative power dynamics.

These examples are not exhaustive but show that it is possible to rethink how partnerships can support more complementary ways of working. A number of INGOs have already spearheaded initiatives to support localisation through better and improved partnerships. Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships is a two-year programme supported by a consortium of INGOs (ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund) working with local and national organisations in Nepal, Nigeria, Myanmar and South Sudan. It aimed to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action through strengthening local and national leadership in humanitarian response; and enable local and national actors to progress

the localisation of humanitarian response at both national and global level. The initial project focused on diagnosing problems and identified that partnerships were only perceived as genuine by around a quarter of survey respondents (27% of INGO representatives; 24% of L/NNGO representatives) (see Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019). In addition, 80% of survey respondents believed these same partnerships to be 'very' or 'moderately' instrumental in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people in disaster response operations. A third of survey respondents believe there is a better pathway to strengthen national and local NGO leadership in humanitarian action than through partnerships.

Donors also have a significant role to play in ensuring that partnership approaches become standard practice in humanitarian action as well as funding mixed consortia and setting up parameters that enable partnerships to become more complementary. These cases demonstrate the importance of building evidence on how linking complementarity and partnerships will lead to better humanitarian outcomes for affected people. The contribution and impact of partnerships should be a standard item of humanitarian evaluations and past studies have developed approaches for this (Ramalingam et al., 2013; Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Featherstone and Bogati, 2016; Tanner and Moro, 2016).

4.3.2   Rethinking coordination for more complementarity

While coordination was perceived by individuals interviewed in the case studies as essential to complementarity, current practices undermine complementarity between international and local actors in three main ways. First, although fragmented coordination structures allow for addressing the diversity of coordination needs and objectives, they often result in parallel rather than complementary systems. Second, formal humanitarian coordination ignores existing local systems and tends to be too centralised in capitals and with humanitarian country teams. Finally, current coordination systems do not allow local actors to have more influence, power to set the agenda or opportunities to lead, which has resulted in them being undervalued.

Localisation taken to its limit could mean a much smaller role for formal humanitarian coordination. Meanwhile, the cluster system (including at the global level) and humanitarian country teams have a significant role to play to ensure coordination supports more complementarity. During our workshop on coordination and localisation, global cluster and area of responsibilities coordinators reiterated the role

played by coordinators as custodians of the culture in humanitarian coordination. This role becomes particularly important in settings such as Indonesia, where the government takes the lead and requires a more localised approach to coordination. To ensure complementarity, it is for international actors and the international humanitarian coordination system to learn to work differently. There are two clear ways forward to localise coordination: through adapting coordination to context and existing structures, and through using coordination structures to shift power and support more strategic and equal partnerships. The following are practical suggestions on how to do that.

Analyse existing coordination systems locally to inform international coordination deployment. Similar to the discussion on capacity, coordination cannot be complementary without understanding how local humanitarian response systems already coordinate and collaborate. A first step would be to identify and analyse existing formal and informal coordination mechanisms and determine the challenges in local coordination (including independence and neutrality from the political agenda of parties to the conflict, for example). This would inform if and what international coordination can offer to support, strengthen and fill the gaps of existing coordination structures and capacities. In this sense, the first step is to identify gaps and challenges with existing systems rather than starting with the formal humanitarian system.

Support and deploy local coordination capacity. Where cluster coordination is already in place or has been deemed necessary, there should be a systematic effort to move towards local coordination. Cluster coordination is too often automatically derived from global cluster responsibilities with little analysis on who is best placed to lead in a particular context. This has led to a lack of cluster leadership by local actors. Global cluster leadership could commit to a principle of co-leadership with local actors when contextually possible. When not possible, clusters should elaborate on plans to hand over co-lead roles to local actors. Such plans should identify the challenges to local co-leadership and address issues of leadership capacities, coordination skills and funding support to local co-leadership. Local co-leaderships would also contribute greatly to shifting power to local actors.

Locate coordination closer to affected people and decentralise decision-making. As is already the case in DRC, decentralising OCHA and the UN humanitarian system, through shifting decision-making from the

national level to the provincial level, could help better assess, harness and combine existing capacities. However, further localisation of coordination is required. One way could be through creating community-level cluster structures. Local clusters with enough power and resources could allow more rapid responses in large-scale crises, such as the ones experienced in South Kivu, which in turn could facilitate a faster return to normality and the return of displaced populations to their place of origin.

Use coordination structures to shift power and support strategic and equal partnerships. As outlined above, this would include increasing local co-leadership of clusters and the effective representation of local actors in decision-making bodies (such as inter-agency committees at the global (IASC), national and subnational level). At the global level, clusters could consolidate and share examples and experience of supporting local humanitarian action, particularly through collaborative partnership models and the impact of staff secondment to LNGOs. Clusters are also well-placed to support mixed consortium approaches if they invest more effort to analyse who is best placed to do what in their sectors and map out existing and potential capacities. Finally, where formal partnerships are not feasible due to a lack of organisational capacity to manage fiduciary risks, clusters should support informal collaboration with those actors and organisations that have a contribution to make to humanitarian outcomes, effectively harnessing capacities that exist outside of formal structures.

Support more coordinated and effective capacity strengthening including through a commitment to 7% core funding to local organisations. The clusters could play a unique role in advocating internally within their organisations to support a commitment to 7% core funding to local organisations as a contribution to capacity strengthening in all partnership agreements.[8] Currently, UN agencies and INGOs can support their own capacity strengthening through this contribution to their core costs, including training staff and purchasing materials to support their work. Additionally, clusters would be well placed to coordinate sector-specific capacity strengthening of local organisations. There is also a need to coordinate overall investments in organisational (institutional) capacity strengthening. Once more, formal coordination structures could take on a stronger leadership role to avoid duplication as well as ensuring quality of investment and monitoring of outcomes.

4.3.3 Rethinking the role of donors for more complementarity

Currently, donors are increasing their support to CBPFs as well as demanding that UN agencies invest in strengthening local capacities through the funds. Several donors are also calling for more equitable and strategic partnerships from international organisations, with investment in capacity strengthening and providing multi-year funding where possible to support longer-term partnerships; for example, they are using their role in the Good Humanitarian Donorship group to push for principles of partnerships. These actions reflect the indicators identified in the NEAR Localisation Framework (see Table 1). Donors – as well as UN agencies and INGOs – could assess their actions on localisation with this Framework and identify where they can contribute further to a more local humanitarian action.

One way forward would be for donors to support a more honest discussion on risk sharing, which would engage the political level (ministerial level, parliaments and heads of states). Several donors highlighted the issue of risk transfer to international organisations and the mixed messages donors send when asking international organisations to take more risk in how they partner with local organisations while simultaneously cutting funding when things go wrong. This dilemma, as one donor termed it, in donor practices means honest political discussion is needed among donors about risk management and risk sharing. As one donor argued, current attitudes to risk prevented donors funding the 'things that would increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action' (Interview). There are opportunities to have these debates through the framework of the Grand Bargain and the Good Humanitarian Donorship group. Donors are also currently not engaging in discussions around localised solutions to managing fiduciary risk and could be missing an opportunity to finding an innovative solution. For example, social accountability or peer-to-peer accountability systems beyond bank or audit accountability could be developed to help mitigate fiduciary risks at the local level.

A second option could be to redefine success. One obstacle to localisation is the perceived need by INGOs to grow their brand. However, a different kind of growth could be incentivised by donors rewarding INGOs for their networks of partners in crisis contexts. Success then shifts from the number of country offices and sub-offices an INGO has, to how many partners they have worked with for how long in that crisis context. This practice would also enable

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8   The figure of 7% reflects current practices among UN agencies and in partnership agreements between UN agencies and INGOs.

internal change management and buy-in from senior management in organisations that have traditionally used direct delivery.

Finally, donors should consider how their work through the humanitarian–development nexus is enabling the strengthening of a local humanitarian response system, including promoting coordination according to each context.

Table 1: The NEAR Localisation Framework

1. Partnerships	
Desired change	More genuine and equitable partnerships, and less sub-contracting
Impact indicator	Equitable and complementary partnerships between local and national actors (L/NA) and INGOs/UN to facilitate the delivery of timely and effective humanitarian response
KPI groups	1.1　Quality in relationships 1.2　Shift from project-based to strategic partnerships 1.3　Engagement of partners throughout the project cycle
2. Funding	
Desired change	Improvements in the quantity and quality of funding for L/NA
Impact indicator	Increased number of L/NA describing financial independence that allows them to respond more efficiently to humanitarian response
KPI groups	2.1　Quantity of funding 2.2　Quality of funding 2.3　Access to 'direct' funding 2.4　Management of risk
3. Capacity	
Desired change	More effective support for strong and sustainable institutional capacities for L/NA, and less undermining of those capacities by INGOs/UN
Impact indicator	L/NA are able to respond effectively and efficiently to humanitarian crises, and have targeted and relevant support from INGOs/UN
KPI groups	3.1　Performance management 3.2　Organisational development 3.3　Quality standards 3.4　Recruitment and surge
4. Coordination and complementarity	
Desired change	Greater leadership, presence and influence of L/NA in humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms
Impact indicator	Strong national humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms exist but where they do not, L/NA participate in international coordination mechanisms as equal partners and in keeping with humanitarian principles
KPI groups	4.1　Humanitarian leadership 4.2　Humanitarian coordination 4.3　Collaborative and complimentary response
5. Policy, influence and visibility	
Desired change	Increased presence of L/NA in international policy discussions and greater public recognition and visibility for their contribution to humanitarian response
Impact indicator	L/NA shape humanitarian priorities and receive recognition for this in reporting
KPI groups	5.1　Influence in policy, advocacy and standard-setting 5.2　Visibility in reporting and communications
6. Participation	
Desired change	Fuller and more influential involvement of crisis-affected people in what relief is provided to them, and how
Impact indicator	Affected people fully shape and participate in humanitarian response
KPI groups	6.1　Participation of communities in humanitarian response 6.2　Engagement of communities in humanitarian policy development and standard-setting

Source: NEAR (2019)

4.4   Addressing power dynamics for more complementarity

According to existing literature, power dynamics and incentive structures have been the main barriers to a more local humanitarian action – those with power are reluctant to give up space and resources, meaning a chronic lack of dedicated and direct funding for local organisations (Bennett and Foley, 2016; Collinson, 2016; Featherstone, 2017). Analysis of the international humanitarian system reveals how power incentives and structures play into patterns of collaboration, competition, inclusion and exclusion (see Bennett and Foley, 2016; Collinson, 2016). Levels of collaboration/competition and inclusion/exclusion affect complementarity, to the extent that the current humanitarian system has more incentives for competition and not enough rewards for collaboration (Ramalingam and Barnett, 2010; Knox Clarke, 2013; Collinson, 2016).

Current practices around how capacity is defined and assessed are usually approached as a technical issue (how to define, assess or build other people's capacity)

rather than as an exercise in power, largely because this is an example of the workings of invisible power. How capacity is defined and assessed is often used to undermine the legitimacy of local actors: if there were no power element in the exercise, then capacity assessments would be applied equally to both local and international organisations. There is an element of hidden power here, as certain actors (particularly local ones) have been excluded and, in most cases, we found that local actors had accepted such practices as the norm. Although they clearly felt an imbalance of power, they still largely accepted an imbalance of capacity as a fact (for instance, ascribing their lack of capacity to unequal funding) rather than interpreting the whole process of deciding what counts as capacity as an exercise in power, conducted to prioritise certain skillsets or abilities by those who believed they had them.

The use of a vague term such as capacity as if it were a single quality to cover the enormous range of abilities, skills and competencies required for effective humanitarian action is also a way of making the power dynamic in capacity assessments invisible. Local actors accept these definitions, which are set

Box 9: Analysing power: the powercube

While the humanitarian literature broadly talks of power dynamics between local and international actors, the literature on power is helpful to deconstruct those dynamics and identify how power plays out in discussions of capacity and complementarity in the humanitarian sector. This is necessary if we are to address power dynamics in order to support more complementarity. The 'powercube' is an approach for 'understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change' (www.powercube.net), developed by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex (IDS, 2011). One of the three dimensions of analysis of the powercube approach is to examine differences in the visibility of how power is wielded. There are two very different situations: of overt or visible power, where it is clear who is making which decisions); or hidden/invisible power, where it is difficult to know exactly where power lies in relation to certain decisions, or it may not be realised that decisions have been taken or power wielded. This idea of invisible power owes much to theories of hegemony, which describe situations where people accept as natural or unquestionable what is actually the ideology of a dominant power (for example, the acceptance by both men and women of patriarchal gender norms).

A second dimension analysed in the powercube approach looks at how power is exercised by controlling the 'spaces' where decisions are formed, either by keeping them closed entirely; or by offering some consultation and participation, but nonetheless controlling which actors are invited in and the terms of their participation. This analysis also helps prevent a simple classification of people or organisations as having more or less power, since actors who are powerful in one space may be less powerful in another.

As well as closed and invited spaces, the powercube also identifies claimed spaces, where people with less power create spaces for themselves where they can claim power. One way for them to do this is to form networks that have enough critical mass to attract a reputation that then demands attention (Gaventa, 2006; IDS, 2011). Whereas seeking invitations to spaces implicitly accepts the gate-keeping power of those controlling access to spaces, creating claimed spaces is a more radical way of trying to change power imbalances and rejecting the rights of some to choose whether to invite others to power-wielding spaces.

by international actors, as pre-requisites for forming partnerships and receiving funds. Invisible power is most effective when it is also invisible to those using it and it is undoubtedly the case that most international agencies who are applying definitions of power that favour themselves are doing so with the best of intentions, without realising that this is a consequence of unequal power relations.

The very terms within which discussions around capacity take place are the outcomes of invisible power. Invisible power then determines which skills, abilities and competencies should be included in the catch-all term 'capacity'. This perception of capacity in turn determines the access of local organisations – but *only of* local organisations – to any relationships with international partnerships and funding. Once this is recognised as an example of invisible power, it suddenly becomes striking how far 'capacity' is defined in terms of the qualities and abilities international actors possess, or believe they possess. For instance, English language skills are often a necessary component of capacity, while skills in the language of the affected people are not. This is because international agencies may believe that hiring a translator to interact with affected populations gives them enough understanding of how these people see the world. Capacity assessments often measure familiarity with international donors' requirements; however, if being able to speak to and negotiate with local authorities were part of such assessments, then many international agencies would fail. Similarly, familiarity with SPHERE standards is essential; enough familiarity with the local context to apply SPHERE standards is not. Although deep understanding of the local context and how to behave in it may be appreciated by international agencies, we found no cases where it was included in a definition of required capacity. Again, it is hardly coincidence that this is an area where LNGOs will often outperform international agencies.

During one of the research workshops organised for this study, the leader of a local NGO in Southeast Asia described how discussions on capacity were in one sense a continuation of old colonial relationships, reflecting the deep, structural subordination of the local population to the coloniser's culture.[9] This is extended into relationships with donors, who so often originate from colonising powers. Discussions around capacity are, then, ingrained in the long history of those same countries telling others they are inferior – in other words, that they lack capacity. Many individuals working for local organisations involved in humanitarian action have reportedly internalised

this feeling of inferiority, for instance feeling they lack capacity in comparison to those from the old colonial powers. Power imbalances can lead to low self-esteem and this was seen by some local actors as a root cause of local actors not claiming power. This is the result of power being exercised over many generations, to the extent that it has become invisible – local actors may not allow themselves to critically interrogate how international actors perceive them and their capacity as they have internalised this power imbalance.

The powercube (see Box 9) offers another lens through which to analyse power, by understanding the spaces where decisions are made. Currently, decisions on who has capacity are made in closed spaces that admit only a select few. Analysing such spaces to see how change can be brought about with regard to localisation moves the focus away from the pseudo-technical arena of capacity assessment and towards an examination of how to open them up, therefore broadening participation.

Power in the humanitarian system is maintained by control of the many closed spaces where decisions are made about strategies, policies and funding. For example, many policies are established by the IASC, which only represents a self-selected group of international actors. At this level, the broad agenda for humanitarian action is too often set in the global North by international actors, with local actors unable to influence it (including in terms of capacity). Most discussions on funding happen without local actors being present. The same can be said for funding. Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships research found that 57% of local and national organisations felt they had a limited or very limited level of influence on decisions about local humanitarian response with donors and UN agencies compared to 27% of international actors. Local actors are often perceived to have vested interests in calling for a response, though it is hard to argue that UN organisations and INGOS have fewer vested interests in funding flows. However, because information from local actors is not always trusted, it is often found that there is no international response when they raise the alarm about impending crises. This has been repeatedly seen, for example, in slow-onset crises provoked by droughts in the Horn of Africa and was confirmed in our case study on DRC.

Shifting power by relying on the willingness of the holder to give up power is rarely a successful strategy in any field. Power usually has to be claimed. However, local organisations reported during our research workshop that when they had tried to claim more space in decision-making forums, international actors argued

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9   The relationship between invisible power and the concept of hegemony, critical in an analysis of empire, was previously noted.

Box 10: Taking power seriously

The question of power is intrinsic to the localisation debate and it is a major obstacle to complementarity between local and international actors. A research workshop, organised as part of this study, was held with researchers, consultants and local actors from Somalia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar to reflect on the challenges of current power dynamics and what could be done to address them. The workshop identified three main ways for local actors to claim power:

- Through demonstrating capacity.
- Through creating coalitions based on the legitimacy local actors gain from affected communities to advocate and hold international actors to account to the commitments they made.
- Through negotiating conditions in spaces that are closed or controlled, including through collective bargaining.

that local actors were increasing tensions. This suggests that the humanitarian world is like every other domain of human activity, in that change in power relations can never be entirely comfortable, and that power holders resist challenges to their hegemony. It was also noted that national staff working for international organisations are often the most resistant to changes in power dynamics as they hold a position of power through being members of international organisations. The increasing practice of international organisations registering as local organisations is encroaching further on the space that local actors can claim.

Although the research found that people on all sides recognised power imbalances, there was often a stated hope that a process of localisation would help redress or mitigate this (see Box 10). However, there has been insufficient recognition of the ways in which current processes around the localisation agenda have themselves been shaped by power imbalances, and how these are constraining radical progress on localisation and towards complementarity. This lack of recognition is partly explained by the analysis above on definition and assessment of capacity, showing how power can be invisible, even to those exercising it.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

This report concludes two years of research on capacity and complementarity between local and international actors. The research aimed to critically examine how capacity is defined, understood, assessed and strengthened and whether a better understanding of capacity could support more complementary and collaborative humanitarian response. The research also aimed to identify factors that support and undermine complementarity to identify where opportunities exist to build more effective complementarity.

The country case studies in Bangladesh and DRC confirmed the initial diagnosis of the problems regarding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action made through the review of literature and practice. Capacity is indeed defined differently by different actors in humanitarian crises. Capacity tends to be understood without consideration of what capacity is needed in a specific context or crisis. Capacity is rarely reviewed at the context level to inform how complementarity could work; instead capacity assessments tend to be risk assessment or capacity gaps assessments. As a result, complementarity is often lacking due to a gap in knowledge on what capacities exist locally. The study also found a lack of systematic investment in local capacity strengthening, resulting in exclusionary practices around donor and partnership requirements.

The lack of literature on complementarity between local and international actors (although there is a growing literature on the localisation agenda) motivated the research team to coin a definition of complementarity: an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional and international – are harnessed and combined in a way that supports the best humanitarian outcomes for affected populations. Early on, the research identified that partnerships and coordination could be avenues for greater complementarity but current practices meant that complementarity was often not achieved. The country case studies and desk-based case studies identified several factors affecting complementarity. A significant obstacle, according to our findings, was the lack of value that some actors afforded to working in complementarity. Indeed, our study found two main trends where actors either felt that only local humanitarian action should be pursued or that humanitarian action should be as international as possible. Other factors affecting complementarity included:

- How capacity is understood and defined and the level of knowledge of where capacity exists.
- Whether complementarity between local and international actors is valued and demonstrated.
- Dynamics of trust, power and legitimacy between local and international actors.
- Whether coordination is adapted to the context, inclusive and offers opportunity to shift power dynamics.
- The risk tolerance of international actors.
- Governments' role, policies and practices in humanitarian action.
- Whether international and local actors' objectives, interests and accountabilities align.
- The nature of the crisis (scale, type (displacement, conflict)).
- Whether there are long-term partnerships and well-established development organisations.
- The level of access.
- The presence and role of networks of local organisations, including their attitude towards localisation.

The findings of this two-year research pointed out that for complementarity between local and international actors to be supported, a number of practices need rethinking. The recommendations below are proposals to support humanitarian action that is as local as possible and as international as necessary in a complementary manner reaching better outcomes for affected people. They have implications for the policies and practices of donors, global cluster coordinators, OCHA, UN agencies, INGOs, affected governments and local actors in all their diversity. The underlying principles behind these recommendations are to better understand the local context to ensure that local actors, coordination, existing humanitarian practices and systems are the first point of analysis to

identify what and how international capacity should be deployed in crisis contexts.

Rethinking defining capacity

Recommendation 1: The capacity needed to respond to a specific humanitarian situation should be defined through local consultation with a wider and more diverse group of stakeholders, including through consultations with affected people, to create consensus and address power issues in how capacity is defined.

Recommendation 2: The capacity needed to alleviate human suffering should be defined in relation to each specific context and each specific crisis.

Rethinking assessing capacity

Recommendation 3: Alongside risk assessment and capacity gap assessment – often called capacity assessment – introduce a context-wide mapping of existing capacities aligned with the above consultation on defining capacity to inform how local humanitarian action can be and how gaps in local capacity should be addressed, including through deploying international capacity, working in partnerships and coordination.

Recommendation 4: With the recognition that bilateral assessment processes are still needed to manage risks and strengthen capacity, international actors should rename capacity assessments as risk assessments and capacity gap assessments and harmonise these to reduce the burden on local organisations. With the agreement of local actors, international actors should agree to accept each other's assessments of risk and capacity gaps to prevent undermining the capacity of local actors who have to dedicate too much of their resources to these assessments.

Rethinking capacity strengthening

Recommendation 5: Where international actors require a risk assessment or capacity gap assessment (e.g. to provide funding and work in partnership), these assessments should come hand in hand with the investment and commitment to addressing the gaps identified. These assessments should also be reciprocal to identify capacity gaps of both international and local actors.

Recommendation 6: Investment in capacity strengthening should build on existing evidence of good practices including: strengthening capacity through partnerships as part of preparedness; strengthening capacity through providing funding for overhead costs; strengthening capacity through secondment to allow two-way learning and capacity transfers, particularly in emergency surge (secondment to local organisations to address gaps in capacity rather than deploying full blown emergency surge teams); and coordinating capacity strengthening, creating pooled resources. Clusters could be more strategic in supporting coordinated capacity strengthening in specific sectors. There could be a collective approach to capacity strengthening similar to other collective approaches on communications and community engagement currently implemented in the sector.

Rethinking partnerships for more complementarity

Recommendation 7: Continue to document and provide evidence of innovative practices on partnering that leads to better complementarity. Such approaches should continue to provide evidence of how complementarity can be achieved through partnerships and the benefits of working in complementarity. The contribution and impact of partnerships should be a standard item in humanitarian evaluations.

Rethinking coordination for more complementarity

Recommendation 8: Localise coordination through adapting it to context and existing structures by analysing existing coordination systems locally to inform international coordination deployment as well as locating coordination closer to affected people and decentralising decision-making.

Recommendation 9: Use coordination structures to shift power and support more strategic and equal partnerships. This can be done through supporting and deploying local coordination capacity, including through supporting more coordinated capacity strengthening and a commitment to at least the 7% core funding to local organisations that UN agencies and international NGOs already receive.

Rethinking donor policies and practices for more complementarity

Recommendation 10: Donors should convene a more honest discussion on risk sharing by engaging the political level. To support this, donors should develop a set of basic requirements adapted to the context to identify the 'must do' when engaging local organisations directly or through UN agencies and INGOs. In discussing risk sharing, donors should also consider how to use national and local systems of accountability (social accountability through communities, peer-to-peer accountability) to mitigate fiduciary risks.

Recommendation 11: Donors should redefine success by rewarding organisations that create strong and equal partnerships in crisis-affected contexts and allocate funding to support these partnerships in ways that lead to more complementarity. Donors should support this through using their work across the humanitarian–development nexus to strengthen local humanitarian response systems.

Shifting power for more complementarity

Recommendation 12: Local actors should be supported to better recognise and constructively challenge perceived and hidden power dynamics in the humanitarian system, including at the partnership level. This could be through international actors using their power to give a space and voice to local actors more globally. This could be through donors supporting platforms and coalitions of local organisations (such as NEAR) whose mission is shifting the power within the humanitarian system.

Recommendation 13: Support local actors to demonstrate their capacity through capacity assessments, by helping them to conduct self-assessments and approach international actors with requests for partnership, as well as supporting capacity strengthening when needed.

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