

**Grand Bargain
Localisation Workstream**

**Guidance note on
capacity strengthening
for localisation**

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This guidance note collates recommendations on capacity strengthening drawing from three regional workshops conducted by the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream in 2019, including representatives of local and national NGOs, international NGOs, government and regional donors, and UN agencies. It also draws on key findings from a research project carried out by the Humanitarian Policy Group of ODI between 2017 and 2019 that explored the issue of capacity and complementarity between local¹ and international actors, including how capacity could be better understood and applied to support more collaborative responses².

This guidance note is a product of the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream but does not necessarily represent the official position of Workstream members and co-conveners.

Understanding capacity

- The capacity needed to alleviate human suffering includes respect for humanitarian principles, the ability to prepare for, anticipate and deliver timely and cost-effective humanitarian services of appropriate quality, and to strengthen the resilience of affected population and transparent and accountable management of resources. Just as important, however, are understanding of the context, the ability to understand and relate effectively to affected persons and other stakeholders, and the ability to bridge humanitarian and development activities, among others. Moreover, capacity should be understood in relation to specific contexts and crises.
- It is helpful for all relevant stakeholders to seek shared understandings of what capacity means in a particular context through an inclusive process that involves local actors through meaningful engagement.
- Terminology matters. Capacity is usually defined as ‘lacking’ and needing to be ‘built’. Instead, the terms ‘capacity strengthening’ or ‘capacity exchange’ or ‘capacity sharing’ acknowledge existing skills and assets that can be supported and shared.

Assessing capacity

- The current process by which different organisations consider the respective contributions and value of others is largely limited to that of international organisations assessing local organisations for the purpose of funding and partnerships. A context-wide mapping of existing capacities could inform the extent to which humanitarian action can be local and how gaps in local capacity could be addressed.
- Each organisation’s ‘capacity’ is dynamic and evolving, and often dependent upon individuals and context. For example, an organisation that has capacity to respond to flooding, may not have the capacities needed to respond to an influx of refugees. It should also be recognised that every organisation requires investment to grow in a sustainable manner.

Overall recommendations:

- Capacity strengthening between international and local actors should be a two-way process, whereby international actors also take the opportunity to learn from local actors, including technical skills, operational considerations and a better understanding of the political, social and cultural context.

¹ This guidance note uses the term “local actors” to refer both to local responders with a national or sub-national scope.

² The project drew upon case study findings from the conflict in South Kivu and Kasai Central in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC) and the Rohingya refugee crisis in [Bangladesh](#), as well as a [literature review](#).

- Local actors should set the priorities for and take full “ownership” of, any capacity-strengthening support they receive with an eye both to immediate delivery and long-term sustainability.
- Moreover, actors involved in capacity strengthening initiatives and local actors should share information and explore a joint vision for context-wide capacity goals in order to promote synergies in their efforts.
- Ideally, donors and international actors should opt for long-term approaches to capacity strengthening supported by multi-year, predictable and flexible funding. Context wide capacity support could target groups or network or local actors or national entities. Strategically, such investments should also cover early warning systems, contingency plans, government institutional capacities or support to regional entities. All actors are encouraged to explore innovative and non-traditional capacity strengthening methodologies, such as shadowing and mentoring initiatives that allow a more organic process of peer-to-peer learning, and secondments including in donor institutions where possible that could allow more two-way learning as an alternative to emergency surge teams in times of crises.
- As far as possible, capacity strengthening should be an activity conducted in advance rather than following a crisis.

Recommendations for key actors

1. Donors and other international actors

- Donors should make strengthening local capacities – particularly long-term institutional capacities –, as needed, an express goal of their support to humanitarian contexts. Investments should build on existing good practices and funding arrangements be made as flexible and long-term as possible, in order to facilitate approaches that are appropriately tailored to each local actor.
- International actors should critically interrogate their own ability to strengthen the capacity of local organisations and prioritise the use of domestically-available expertise and resources for imparting knowledge and skills .
- Where donors and international actors require a risk or capacity gap assessment to be conducted in order to provide funding and work in partnership, investment should be secured to address any gaps identified. This assessment should ideally build upon any assessments that the local actor has already undertaken.
- International actors should partner with local actors to document best practices and develop consensus models for capacity strengthening to build donor confidence to invest in scale-up.

2. Local actors

- Prior to seeking partnerships, local actors should assess their own organisational capacity strengths and weaknesses. This will encourage ownership of their capacity gaps and how to address them.
- Local actors should also use the power of networks and peer review exchange to share knowledge and increase their collective voice in advocating for more equitable partnerships and capacity strengthening³.

³ One example that uses this approach is Oxfam’s *Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors* (ELNHA) programme which assesses capacities at the level of ‘networks’ of organisations in a given context and conducts joint discussions on capacity gaps and existing expertise available across these groups. Other examples of effective capacity strengthening approaches to further more localised humanitarian responses can be found in section 3.2 of the [Grand Bargain annual independent report 2019](#).