

Summary: Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream Webinar

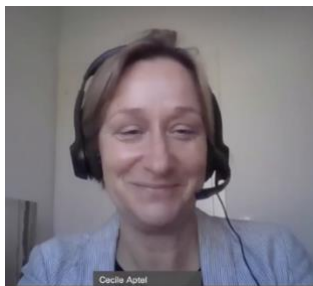
“A global domestic operation: Localisation and the humanitarian response to COVID-19”

22 June 2020

On 22 June, the [Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream](#) organised a webinar to address the challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 has created to advance the “localisation” of the aid sector. The event was organised soon after both the [Grand Bargain](#) and the [IASC](#) had endorsed guidance on how localisation goals could be put into practice and this event sought to place these recommendations in perspective.



Co-chair **Philippe Besson**, Head of the Multilateral Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, noted that COVID-19 is an opportunity for the international community to change its behaviour, listen better to local actors and to move towards building resilience. Localisation is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do as it can help to reduce future humanitarian needs. Investing in local first responders is critical to the future of the humanitarian ecosystem.



Co-chair **Cecile Aptel**, Acting Under-Secretary General for Partnerships at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) highlighted the importance of local leadership and decision-making. The heightened attention that is given to these issues is very welcome. COVID-19 highlights the duty to ensure that local humanitarians - staff and volunteers – are kept safe.



Terez Curry, President of the Bahamas Red Cross Society, shared her experience from Hurricane Dorian, where the National Society was able to provide a culturally appropriate response thanks to its strong understanding of local circumstances, politics and culture and the ability to utilize local networks. If such a large-scale disaster were to happen in the current context of COVID-19, the response would need to prioritize the safety of staff and volunteers and require a different interaction with international actors. With global travel- and other movement restrictions in place, strengthening the leadership and decision-making of national and local actors to reach vulnerable communities becomes crucial.



Muhammad Amad, Executive Director of the Initiative for Development & Empowerment Axis (IDEA) in Pakistan emphasized the need to speed the process of localisation to reach equal partnerships and complementarity instead of a risk transfer to local actors. Local actors should lead the way to a more sustainable humanitarian system. Local actors should equally be involved in the policy development, priority setting, and implementation. This requires that capacities are shared with local actors as well as multi-year funding in order to retain capacities. Humanitarian country teams should be based on 50% local actors and dialogue between donors, The context of COVID-19 presents a chance to critically assess the current system and make the necessary changes.



Suzanna Tkalec, Director of Operations at Caritas Internationalis affirmed that localisation lies at the heart of Caritas' work. Caritas believes that partnerships that strengthen the capacities of local actors to lead humanitarian and development need to be further encouraged. It is important that local actors get a spot at the table and there is an acute need for more flexibility of funds. Local and national actors should be freer to determine how funding is used and for which projects. COVID-19 can potentially help to accelerate the process on localisation. It has already prompted local level initiatives to engage private businesses to secure funds to respond to COVID-19 health and other humanitarian needs.



Edward Kallon, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria recalled that making aid as local as possible and as international as necessary should be the aim of the international community. He called for efforts to build stronger national ownership and leadership, and increase support to capacity building. In situations where local actors do not yet have all the safeguarding policies in place, it is important for international actors to support them to develop them. COVID-19 highlights challenges around risk communication and community engagement in some contexts and adds a layer of complexity to already insecure areas. The present situation presents an opportunity to maximize country-based pooled funds and scale up cash-programs. The pandemic also provides avenues to develop new partnerships or build on existing ones, in particular an enhanced engagement with local authorities.

Looking ahead, Philippe Besson concluded that COVID-19 once again highlights the need to overcome dependencies and support those that are the first to respond to crises. In the current context, donors are often perceived as part of the problem rather than the solution, which should serve as a source of self-evaluation. Resource mobilization needs to be incremental and based on subsidiarity. International actors should only step in if there is no other viable choice. Humanitarian work should enhance the autonomy of people that are being served, and processes that are led by local communities should be supported. As donors, the quality of aid should be prioritized over quantity, and genuine partnerships should be approached with mutual accountability, trust and transparency.