

Why not local? INGO statement on the urgent need to accelerate progress and accountability towards local leadership of humanitarian action

Autumn 2024

Ahead of the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting, we, the undersigned leaders from international NGOs (INGOs) and INGO platforms, call on the international community – notably donor governments, INGOs and UN agencies – to urgently accelerate efforts to promote and demonstrate equitable partnership with diverse local civil society organizations in humanitarian action.

Why this statement at this time? As INGOs, we acknowledge that we have to improve and accelerate our own efforts to transform our organisational culture, practices and behaviours which shape how we work with and treat local actors. Prior to the scale-up of cash programming, the humanitarian sector was challenged to ask itself the question “why not cash?” Likewise today, we should be asking “why not local?” Posing this question, and acting on it, requires international agencies to look at how they are configured to better support and reinforce diverse local actors, including those often left behind such as women-led, refugee-led, youth-led and other organizations representing at risk sections of society. Obviously, localisation efforts must be informed by the priorities of national and local actors, but INGOs and other international agencies have to respond to those priorities and contribute to a collective effort on them. In this context, and based on consultations with local actors, we outline the following three recommendations for donors and international agencies involved in humanitarian action:

1. Establish safe processes to promote mutual accountability between international agencies and their local partners; including honest reflection on the extent to which partnerships are equitable and empowering, rather than transactional or top-down. Both donors and intermediary agencies should factor this into the future design of partnerships, grants and consortia.
2. Establish and regularly assess progress against organisation-wide, measurable localisation plans at global and country levels; including actions towards (a) increasing local partners’ direct access to funding opportunities; (b) supporting local partners to take on leadership or co-leadership roles in the management of grants, partnerships and consortia; and (c) resourcing investments in capacity sharing and institutional strengthening of partners.
3. Implement a partnership-based approach to risk management (‘risk sharing’) for grants and consortia. Beyond investing in local partners’ efforts and systems to prevent, mitigate and manage risks (e.g. funding for safety and security and for wider institutional development), particular attention is needed to ensure a partnership approach is maintained when risks materialise, so that the costs and consequences do not fall disproportionately on local partners.

The above three issues reflect priorities raised by diverse national and local actors through the Grand Bargain Caucus on the Role of Intermediaries, the Caucus on Funding for Localisation, the Grand Bargain Risk Sharing Framework and country-level dialogues on localisation.ⁱ But there remain serious concerns over the gap between the policy or practical recommendations arising from those processes and delivery on the ground.

More than ever, localisation is seen as a priority in on-going major crises such as Sudan, Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere. In a time of funding cuts and spiraling needs, supporting local leadership is the right thing to do, but it will also make the humanitarian system more efficient and effective. Agencies share good practices through initiatives such as the [Charter4Change](#), [Pledge4Change](#), [RINGO](#) and [Shift the Power](#). Yet all too often, localisation remains more in the realm of rhetoric with too little action in practice and even less accountability. Globally local actors are estimated to receive directly approximately 1.2% of total humanitarian funding.ⁱⁱ

National and local actors have advocated for action on these priorities, but there remains a persistent gap between the commitments made at global level and the practices of international agencies on the ground. Accountability for localisation remains weak or absent amongst most donors and intermediary agencies. In fact, at present, some donors actively disincentivise steps towards more equitable partnership. For example, if an INGO adopts a global policy to provide an adequate, fair and consistent level of overheads support to local partners, that INGO may be seen as less competitive by some donors than peers who do not provide their local partners such critical support. As the momentum on localisation and equitable partnerships increase, some INGOs are taking genuine substantive action to change their policies and practices. Others are rebranding sub-granting programmes as 'localisation platforms' and deliver top-down local partner training for donor compliance, labelled as 'capacity strengthening'. As yet, there is no consistent approach by donors to holding INGOs and UN agencies accountable for meaningful action on support to local leadership.

Transformative change requires deliberate action by all, donors, UN agencies, INGOs, national and local actors alike. The undersigned INGOs are compiling examples of actions on the above priorities that we have planned to implement between now and Autumn 2026, the end of the current phase of the Grand Bargain, which will be shared in dialogue about this statement. We recognise that none of us are yet where we need and aspire to be on these issues, and that deeper and more ambitious change is required. To catalyse that change, both within our own agencies and across the wider sector, we invite peer agencies to publish their commitments to act on these issues; local actors to challenge us on what more we could be doing; and donors to translate these priorities into their policy and practice. The time has come for action and accountability.

Signatories

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ⁱ Grand Bargain Caucus outcome documents can be accessed at: [Grand Bargain Caucuses | IASC \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](https://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/)

ⁱⁱ [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023 - Development Initiatives \(devinit.org\)](https://www.devinit.org/)