

# Towards locally-led humanitarian and development responses

## Background

The EU-CORD General Assembly convened on November 7, 2023, and discussed the evolution of 'localisation' in humanitarian and development responses. While we used the term 'localisation' to frame that discussion, our strategy uses reframing partnerships to describe our work in this area. The term 'locally-led' is used in this write-up of the November 7 discussion.

Within our reframing partnership narrative, we seek to articulate a partnership approach that embodies trust, partnership, and empowerment at the local level, emphasising engagement with local, grassroots and faith-based organisations, recognising their needs and interactions, and amplifying community voices in decision-making. We aim to shift the paradigm, empowering local actors and communities to address crises and drive sustainable development.

*This discussion or way of working is not new for many EU-CORD members. But it is the first time such a discussion has been held between EU-CORD members outside of the development of our strategic framework.*

In summarising our discussion, this paper is expected to lay the groundwork for a policy paper and advocacy recommendations on locally-led response.

## Introduction

A locally-driven approach emphasises trust, partnership, and giving power to the grassroots level in humanitarian and development actions. It involves actively working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations, and local governments to understand their abilities, needs, concerns, operating environment, and what society expects. This approach focuses on inclusivity by enabling local actors to represent themselves and have a say in decision-making processes. It highlights the importance of community, for example, as local responders during emergencies.

Beyond just money, this approach highlights a bigger story involving community involvement and giving power to people. It values the differences in local situations and promotes being flexible, quick to adapt, and considering local beliefs and political factors. This broader view of the people involved extends to those working directly in the community, recognising their unique understanding of crises or systemic imbalances and how they can contribute to their solutions and progress.

Essentially, this locally-led approach means a significant change in putting community-based groups and organisations at the forefront of humanitarian and development efforts. It recognises their abilities, knowledge, and crucial role in dealing with crises and making positive changes. This approach in humanitarian and development contexts emphasises:

- 1. **Trust in Partners:** Building partnerships with local organisations and communities based on shared values, mission, mandate, and roles.*
- 2. **Open and Honest Discussions:** Engaging in open and honest discussions with local organisations to understand their needs and concerns.*
- 3. **Listening:** Actively listening to the local organisation's perspectives, the pressures they face, and their interactions with local government and community expectations.*
- 4. **Local Empowerment:** Acknowledging and empowering local capacities, allowing local people to take control of their development.*
- 5. **Inclusivity:** Promoting the inclusion and participation of local people at all levels of the humanitarian system.*
- 6. **Voice and Influence:** Making sure that local communities and NGOs have a say in decision-making and can represent themselves.*
- 7. **Community Engagement:** Strengthening the representation of those directly affected by crises, recognising their understanding of the situation and their potential to contribute to solutions.*
- 8. **Humanitarian Imperative:** Ensuring that the core humanitarian imperative of providing life-saving assistance to those in need remains a priority*
- 9. **Horizontal Approach:** Fostering a horizontal, collaborative approach in communication and engagement rather than a top-down, vertical approach.*
- 10. **Community-Based First Responders:** Recognising that local community members, including religious and community organisations, are often the first responders in emergencies.*
- 11. **Partnership Beyond Capital Cities:** Expanding the definition of "localised actors" to include organisations and individuals operating at the community level.*
- 12. **Money and Broader Narrative:** Understanding that financial resources are essential but should be part of a broader narrative that includes community engagement and empowerment.*
- 13. **Adaptive Management:** Embracing adaptive approaches, agility, and a regional, diverse analysis that respects local faith and political dynamics in framing responses.*

### **Member Approach**

Within our organisation, a crucial aspect of our localisation approach is the continuous investment made by our Country Offices in fostering a balanced mix of national and international staff, thus creating a robust local capacity. Additionally, our commitment extends to an international management team actively participating in leadership roles and global-level decision-making processes. We emphasise the importance of local presence through staff serving as regional managers and advisors in critical positions.

Encouraging networking with local civil society organisations further strengthens our ties to the communities we aim to support. Equally significant is our dedication to community and affected population participation, underscored by accountability and participation guidelines. Recognising the need for renewed attention in this area, we are committed to enhancing the capacity of local actors through investment and capacity development initiatives.

## **Advocacy & Policy Recommendations**

### **Establishing Partnership Parameters and Targets**

1. Establish clear partnership parameters and approaches while setting strategic-level targets. Ensure these are communicated and understood across the organisation to align efforts.

### **Invest in Quality Partnerships and Local Leadership**

2. Set strategic goals for investing in high-quality partnerships and enhancing local leadership capacity. This investment should focus on sustainability and skill-building within local communities.

### **Allocate Specific Funding Percentages to Local Partnerships**

3. Aim to allocate a defined percentage (e.g., 30%) of project funding to local partnerships by a set deadline (e.g., by 2026). This target underscores the commitment to fostering local collaborations.

### **Advocate for Direct Costs for Local Partner**

4. Develop a clear advocacy message directed at donors, urging them to include Recovery Cost Allocation (RCA) as direct costs for local partners. Learn from progressive donors who have already incorporated this practice and explore their successful approaches.

### **Tracking Progress and Investment**

5. Identify specific goals and indicators to monitor progress and showcase the effectiveness of locally-led approaches. Regularly track and report on these metrics to demonstrate impact.

### **Allocate Budget for Capacity Development**

6. Dedicate a minimum of 2% of the budget to capacity development and initiatives to foster local leadership. This investment is crucial for sustainable growth and empowerment.

### **Transparency and Reporting**

7. Enhance transparency by providing detailed reports on utilising funding adhering to International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATA) standards. This transparency fosters accountability and builds trust.

### **Encourage Evidence-Based Advocacy Reporting**

8. Encourage local actors to report on evidence-based advocacy efforts at the national level. Acknowledge the challenges in fragile contexts and highlight the potential for local organisations to become recognised references in their areas of expertise.

### **Promoting Localisation and Partnership**

9. Promote the partnership approach through media outreach, showcasing successful collaborations and their impact on local communities. Use various communication channels to amplify these stories.

### **Share Indirect Cost Ratios Among Partners**

10. Foster transparency by sharing indirect cost ratios among partners. This practice promotes fairness and a deeper understanding of resource allocation.

### **Highlight Investment in Local Leadership Support**

11. Emphasise investing in and supporting local leadership to drive sustainable change and community empowerment.

### **Simplifying Donor Requirements and Funding Allocation**

12. Advocate for simplifying donor requirements, aiming for more streamlined processes, particularly with institutional donors and intermediary INGOs. Seek to eliminate unnecessary administrative barriers.

### **Maximise Development Funding for Capacity Strengthening**

13. Encourage humanitarian donors to allocate funds specifically for capacity support to strengthen local humanitarian actors. This support should encompass both development and emergency response needs.

### **Empowering Local Actors on the International Stage**

14. Facilitate and support the participation of local actors at the international level to amplify their voices and perspectives. Provide opportunities for representation in global forums and discussions.

### **Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs prioritises locally led humanitarian action, favouring "locally led approaches" to encompass a range of local actions. They view this as a crucial means of achieving impact in humanitarian efforts. This approach involves equitable partnerships, sharing power and leadership, financial resources, capacity building, and agenda-setting while being accountable to the affected populations. The challenge lies in creating equal partnerships and ensuring the approach is genuinely inclusive. The Dutch government has also collaborated on risk-sharing, emphasising transparency and mitigation measures. They aim to break down silos between departments, adopting a more integrated "nexus" approach that reflects the continuity and stability of long-term partners. A working group has been established to address internal barriers and create a shared narrative around locally-led approaches. Their focus includes DAC and Grand Bargain Commitments and advocacy strategies. The ministry emphasises the importance of local organisations driving the agenda, encouraging the cascade of funding, and maintaining principled humanitarian action. Additionally, they rely on embassies as their eyes and ears in the field to enhance the effectiveness of their approach.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs conversation also acknowledges a shift in donor trends, emphasising a reduction in due diligence requirements while maintaining accountability to taxpayers. It highlights the pressing need for a transparent and accountable system. Like-minded donors are actively working on initiatives such as 'donor passports' and cross-reliance, aiming to harmonise European approaches. In terms of the vision for the next decade, there is a recognition that the current humanitarian system, including the cluster system, may need a significant overhaul. The decision on whether a system is needed should involve immediate engagement with local actors, promoting a more localised approach that prioritises the needs and structures existing in the country.

During the discussion, a question from the audience inquired about the Dutch Ministry's perspective on developing international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). The suggestion emphasised that iNGOs should predominantly function as fundraisers, brokers, and facilitators, leveraging their presence in more affluent countries where funding support is prevalent. The idea is to channel these funds more effectively to support

communities with the most intimate knowledge of their needs. While this approach may still involve a role for training and capacity support, the prevailing recommendation is for iNGOs to collaborate more within consortium models to become increasingly localised. In this context, iNGOs would facilitate relationships between communities, local actors, and donor entities.

The Dutch Ministry's approach to locally-led humanitarian action comprises eight key components:

1. **Equitable Partnerships:** Emphasising equal and fair partnerships with local actors and communities.
2. **Power and Leadership Sharing:** Sharing decision-making, leadership, and authority with local organisations and communities.
3. **Financial Resource Sharing:** Allocating financial resources to support local initiatives and priorities, including 25% funding to local organisations.
4. **Capacity Building:** Fostering, developing and strengthening local actors' capacities and capabilities.
5. **Agenda Setting:** Encouraging local actors to lead in defining and setting the humanitarian agenda.
6. **Accountability to Affected Populations:** Ensuring that affected communities are heard and actively involved in determining actions to improve their situations.
7. **Transparency and Risk Mitigation:** Prioritising transparency and openness about risks, challenges, and measures to mitigate them.
8. **Integrated Approach:** Promoting a more integrated "nexus" approach that breaks down departmental silos and fosters collaboration between various government departments, civil society, and partners to ensure continuity and stability in long-term initiatives.

Our development colleagues are primarily dedicated to enhancing civil society organisations, focusing on their financial sustainability and long-term support through their financial means. While this aspect falls outside the humanitarian domain, it carries the potential to benefit humanitarian efforts through mutual learning and influence. The Grand Bargain's principles for engaging local actors and building constituencies within the countries where they operate are integral to this approach. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that this endeavour still faces multiple due diligence requirements and is part of the broader conversation around risk sharing.

## **Next Steps for EU-CORD: advancing Locally-Led Approaches**

### **Advocating for a Biblical Narrative and Equity Perspective**

Develop a narrative rooted in biblical principles and emphasising the need to abandon an "us and them" perspective.

Reevaluate our partnerships with local organisations to foster more equitable and responsible cooperation

### **Addressing Donor Dynamics and Imbalance Issues**

Address donors' risk tolerance and its potential impact on funding continuity.

Recognise the persisting power imbalance between the Global North and South due to institutional shortcomings, inadequate local understanding, and insufficient incentives for localisation.

### **Transition to Locally Empowered Solutions**

Advocate for a shift towards locally managed initiatives, emphasising the importance of moving from externally funded approaches to locally owned and implemented solutions.

Prioritising the Global South's empowerment in shaping their development and humanitarian efforts.

### **Risk of Superficial Localisation Approaches**

Acknowledge the risk associated with superficial approaches to localisation where international non-governmental organisations (iNGOs) rebrand without genuine commitment, potentially undermining the true essence of the localisation agenda.

### **Addressing Structural Problems and Power Imbalances**

Critically evaluating ongoing efforts in addressing structural issues like structural racism and power dynamics within the system for a more equitable and authentic implementation of localisation approaches.

### **Leadership and Transformation**

Explore leadership development opportunities, emphasising transformational and value-based leadership styles.

Build national staff capacity within our organisations as a legitimate localisation approach.

### **Learning and Networking**

Facilitate connections among partners across similar sectors, fostering continuous learning for local actors through the In-Country forums.

### **Feedback Mechanisms and Local Engagement**

Investigate feedback and complaint mechanisms with a specific focus on soliciting and acting upon local and community feedback.

Expand dialogue and engagement with local partners through In-Country forums, demonstrating a supportive presence beyond financial assistance.

### **Impact Measurement and Sharing Best Practices**

Institutionalise the change within our structures, incorporating initiatives such as Charter4Change, Core Humanitarian Standards, and Inter-Agency recommendations."

Examine methodologies for measuring the tangible impact of locally-led approaches, particularly regarding their efficacy.

Continue sharing EU-CORD members' experiences of localising approaches on the website to promote best practices and informed decision-making.

### **Evaluation and Future Integration**

Finalise the Partnership Survey iteration as a robust methodology for exchanging information on the quality of partnerships between local actors and their iNGO counterparts.

Commit to revisiting discussions on localisation in future General Assembly meetings, integrating these discussions into the organisational ethos by showcasing case studies and examples of the transformations within member organisations.

### **Defining Principles and Advocacy**

Develop an EU-CORD stance on locally-led response, emphasising fundamental principles such as genuine partnership, equal respect, trust, value-oriented collaboration, and process-oriented aspects.

Create a fund that supports local partners' presence in advocacy spaces and regional/international forums, potentially requiring financial backing for travel and participation.

### **Service Delivery**

Recognise the continued significance of involving local partners in service delivery, especially in fragile contexts where their involvement remains critical.

## **Challenges and how we can respond to them**

### **Potential Loss in Shifting to Localisation Approaches**

Actively build trust through transparent communication and involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Prioritise relationship-building efforts to prevent breakdowns by genuinely listening to and addressing concerns.

### **Navigating Accountability and Donor Reporting Requirements**

Develop streamlined reporting systems that meet donor criteria while not overwhelming local partners.

Provide necessary training and support to ensure partners understand and can fulfil reporting obligations.

### **Allocating and Managing Risk**

Implement robust risk assessment strategies and clear risk management plans.

Offer capacity-building support to local partners to help them manage risks effectively.

### **Addressing Challenges Associated with Bank De-risking on Fund Transfers**

Work closely with financial institutions to find solutions and alternatives for secure fund transfers.

Advocate for policy changes or explore partnerships that ease the financial transfer process.

### **Transferring Overhead Costs to Partners**

Conduct transparent discussions to agree on fair overhead cost sharing mutually.

Offer training and guidance to partners on financial management and budget planning.

### **Urgent Need for Longer-Term Funding Commitments to Partners**

Advocate for and negotiate longer-term funding agreements with donors.

Develop sustainable funding models that provide stability to local partners.

### **Job Security Concerns Driving Internal Resistance to Change**

Implement clear communication plans about the benefits of the changes and their long-term positive impacts.

Provide training and support to staff to equip them for the evolving roles.

### **Advocating in Fragile Contexts**

Conduct thorough contextual analysis and engage in diplomacy to advocate effectively.

Collaborate with local stakeholders and build alliances to strengthen advocacy efforts.

### **Defining Measurable Indicators for Transfer of Power to Partners**

Co-create clear and specific indicators in partnership with local partners to measure progress.

Regularly assess and adjust these indicators based on the evolving partnership dynamics.

### **Striking a Balance as a Self-Implementing Organisation**

Acknowledge strengths and limitations, prioritise areas where self-implementation adds value, and partner in areas where local expertise is crucial.

### **Ensuring Visibility while Working Exclusively through National Partners**

Develop joint communication plans to highlight the collective impact of collaborations.

Promote the achievements of local partners and emphasise their role in success stories.

### **Developing Approaches for Working with Local Partners and Self-Implementing Initiatives**

Tailor support and engagement strategies based on each partner's specific needs and capacities.

Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between self-implementing initiatives and local partners.

### **Assessing Strengths, Contributions, and Strategies for Supporting Local Initiatives**

Conduct comprehensive assessments with local stakeholders to identify strengths, needs, and potential strategies.

Develop capacity-building plans to enhance local initiatives based on identified strengths.

### **Building Stronger Connections Between Head Office and Local Organisations**

Establish regular communication channels and platforms for dialogue between the Head Office and local partners.

Conduct periodic visits and exchanges to foster personal connections and understanding.

### **Rethinking the Role of iNGOs**

Engage in strategic planning exercises to redefine the role in alignment with localisation principles.

Encourage innovation and flexibility in adapting to changing needs and contexts.

### **Challenging Donor-Driven Localisation Narratives**

Advocate for genuine partnership approaches that go beyond mere subcontracting.

Provide evidence-based examples showcasing the benefits and impact of true partnerships in localisation efforts.

*END*