Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation

A literature study

Veronique Barbelet, Gemma Davies, Josie Flint and Eleanor Davey
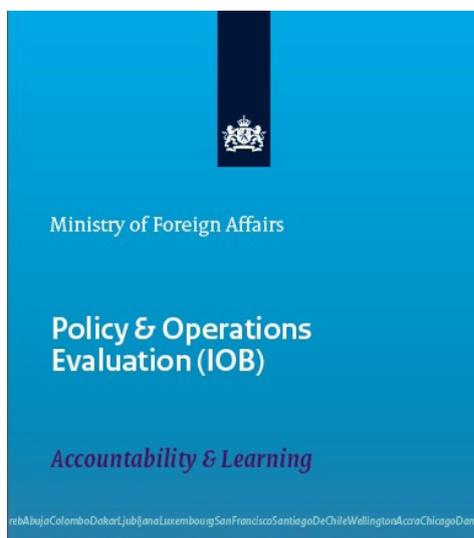
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Acronyms

3RP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
ALNAP	Active learning network for accountability and performance
ARC	Australian Red Cross
C4C	Charter for Change
CBO	community-based organisation
CBPF	country-based pooled fund
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CSO	civil society organisation
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
ELNHA	Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors
EU	European Union
FTS	Financial Tracking System
GB	Grand Bargain
GTS	Ground Truth Solutions
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
HRGF	Humanitarian Response Grant Facility
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Fund
LSESD	Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development

M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NISA	National Society Investment Alliance
NGO	non-government organisation
NIRAPAD	Networks for Information Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of NGOs
PoP	Principles of Partnerships
SAFER	Shared Aid Fund for Emergency Response
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
STRIDE	Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VANGO	Vanuatu Association of NGOs
VfM	value for money
WHO	World Health Organization
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Executive summary

Introduction

Understanding the impact of 'localisation' on strengthening effective and efficient responses to humanitarian crises continues to be a key policy and practice concern for donors and the broader sector. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) catalysed a range of commitments to strengthen local humanitarian action, most notably those made via the Grand Bargain. Criticisms of a 'broken' humanitarian system dominated by international actors led to commitments intended to bring transformational change. These included promises to address inequalities in the system, such as the inequitable recognition given to local actors despite their frontline role in humanitarian responses.

This report presents the findings of a review of the localisation literature commissioned by the evaluation department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It responds to the question: 'what added value does localisation bring in the pursuit of Dutch policy objectives and what are effective ways for the Netherlands as a donor and diplomatic actor to promote localisation?' As such, the literature review required a focus on the more technical assessment of the impact of localisation, while at the same time providing a critical assessment of this focus. The drive towards more locally led responses has become known as 'localisation', a term which has been criticised and rejected by many. By necessity this report uses the language of 'localisation' as shorthand, while recognising that this terminology is problematic and can have negative consequences (see Chapter 3).

What does the literature tell us?

Continued power imbalances in driving change

The WHS stressed that **persistent and unjust power distribution keeps communities and organisations most affected by crises furthest from decision-making on how to respond**. A significant section of the literature views localisation as a way to rethink the humanitarian sector from the bottom up, highlighting the importance of greater leadership and delivery by local and national actors.

However, **analysis of discourses and practices of localisation highlights perverse incentives and adverse impacts** (see Chapters 3 and 6), reflecting concerns about motivations in furthering the localisation agenda, critiques of colonial inheritances and ongoing inequalities within the humanitarian system. There is concern that the **construction of the localisation discourse continues to place international actors at the centre**; that localisation debates continue to be driven by international actors; and that little attention has been given to the role of local actors in transforming norms and practices. It is also perceived as being used by some to avoid difficult conversations about power and discrimination. As such, the **prevailing discourse on localisation is perceived as counterproductive to meaningful change**.

Lack of evidence of effect of localisation on impact and quality

There are **assumptions that localisation will improve the quality and impact of humanitarian responses**; however, very little generalisable evidence has tested these assumptions (see Chapter 4). Success towards localisation as set out in the Grand Bargain has focused on tracking progress on commitments to support the act of localising humanitarian responses rather than the benefits of localised responses for people in crisis.

The literature has lacked focus on assessing the impact of localisation in terms of the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian responses and outcomes for people in crises. Additionally, there is no evidence that a comprehensive value for money analysis related to localisation has been carried out. The perceptions of affected populations on the different roles of international and local actors in delivering appropriate humanitarian assistance have not been adequately assessed. There is an **opportunity to strengthen accountability to people affected by crisis through localisation**, rather than treating the two issues as separate requirements of the humanitarian system. Although it has not been comprehensively or consistently documented, there continues to be anecdotal evidence and strong opinions that localisation can deliver increased impact in a number of areas, which provides a strong basis for further exploration or validation.

Drivers of localisation

Motivations for more localised responses tend to be linked to what are perceived as the **possible benefits of localisation for improving the quality of humanitarian responses** (see Chapter 5). The literature particularly highlights resilience, sustainability and links with development; timeliness and improved accountability to affected people; and lower costs and higher cost effectiveness. However, there is only limited evidence that Grand Bargain commitments on localisation drive change at the country level. Ultimately, practice has not significantly shifted to see more power and resources going to local actors.

The desire to **increase the reach of humanitarian responses and ensure access** has also contributed greatly to driving localisation forward. Where international actors are unable to access populations and vice versa, local actors are emphasised as a means to increase coverage and reach. While this has been noted in conflict settings, with resulting concerns about transferring security risks to local actors, as well as concerns of the risks posed by working with local actors, the debate on access has been reignited by Covid-19 as the global pandemic has reduced international actors' access, presence and proximity to those in need of assistance. Some argue that the pandemic has the potential to accelerate localisation in the humanitarian sector.

Leadership also plays a vital role. Leadership by national governments of crisis-affected countries is also seen as a driver for localisation, with some recently imposing it in disaster response. Where this has not yet happened, the literature points to the need for leadership on localisation from international actors. Donor leadership is also argued to be a critical factor to drive localisation forward.

Obstacles based on perception

The **evidence on obstacles to localisation is predominantly perception-based** but has created a strong consensus in the literature (see Chapter 6). While this does not prevent localisation efforts, it affects the terms on which those efforts take place. Issues discussed include perceptions of and attitudes to the fiduciary, legal, reputational and security risks posed by working with local actors; perceptions of capacity and capacity strengthening; and the perceived ability of local actors to uphold humanitarian principles. Such perceptions shape and interact with issues including the lack of trust between international and local actors; the nature of partnerships; the quality and quantity of funding; internationals' self-preservation; and, fundamentally, power dynamics between different actors.

Issues of **risk and risk management** are among those that remain predominantly perception- and attitude-based, with uncertainty as to the likelihood these risks could differentially play out. The literature shows that assumptions about risk and localisation are not grounded in empirical evidence and that reorienting towards a risk-sharing model, including agreeing acceptable levels of residual risk, has benefits. Where risks are identified, there is little evidence to suggest that donors and international intermediaries have been willing to support effective mitigation measures, such as funding overhead costs (including for security management, financial management systems and human resources) to meet the risk threshold of donors.

In turn, perceptions of and approaches to risk management impact **partnership models**. The literature predominantly focuses on the risks to international actors when partnering with local actors, rather than vice versa, raising issues of power imbalances. Similarly, **capacity-strengthening approaches** further entrench such power dynamics: despite moves towards more sustained and participatory approaches, capacity-strengthening requirements are still largely identified by international organisations and predominantly focus on local actors' organisational capacity and their capacity to fulfil donor requirements.

These obstacles are repeatedly evidenced through systematic documentation of the attitudes of international actors towards local actors and their capacity, as well as local actors' frustration with how slow progress has been. Attitudes of international actors and their perceptions of obstacles create a clear, evidence-based picture to understand why **change is not happening on a wider scale**. The lack of more systematic evidence on the added value of local humanitarian action, local leadership and complementarity – that is, the lack of evidence on the impact on quality of humanitarian response, as highlighted above – has also undermined advocacy efforts and evidence-based policy change. Placing the burden of evidence on local actors – rather than international actors – to prove they are better placed to respond to crisis has hindered investment in localisation and momentum for change, providing another example of how self-preservation and power dynamics are deeply entrenched in the humanitarian system. Evidence on the performance of local actors almost solely focuses on financial compliance and risk management as opposed to impact. Finally, evidence-based policy change has been criticised as a technocratic approach to localisation, which many see as a normative, ethical and political imperative.

Priority strategic recommendations for donors

The literature consistently reminds donors of their critical role in creating effective policies and incentives to support localisation. However, it also points to the fundamental lack of clear strategic and policy direction from most donors on localisation. Additionally, existing recommendations to donors and other actors are based on emerging good practice and evidence that have yet to be implemented widely or systematically.

The priority strategic recommendations below are based on the findings of this literature review as well as existing recommendations in the localisation literature, framed within the realm of what is possible within the current system and the constraints faced by donors. However, proponents of localisation are demanding a more revolutionary change in the role of people affected by crises, not only as receivers of aid but as aid actors finding local solutions for local crises. To truly realise the calls for more local humanitarian action and leadership, a system-wide shift is required. This starts with local crisis response systems, local capacities and expertise, local leadership and solutions, and looks to regional and international actors to complement and support local aid through partnerships, funding and capacity strengthening as needed and outlined by local actors. However, there is very little generalisable and empirical evidence of how to shift the system towards a bottom-up local aid model, which requires strong political will across donors and humanitarian actors. **Chapter 7 of the report further elaborates on these recommendations, including approaches to operationalise them.**

Strategic recommendation 1: Work collectively with other donors – for instance through the Good Humanitarian Donorship Group, or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – to develop a common vision. Test different collective approaches to incentivise partners, particularly United Nations (UN) agencies, to change their practice.

The evidence shows there are limited strategic approaches to conceiving of and implementing ways to strengthen localisation in donor policy and practice.

This recommendation can be achieved by (see detail in Section 7.1):

- donors working collaboratively to develop strategic approaches; individual donors ensuring these strategies are incorporated across portfolios;
- creating incentives through rewarding intermediaries for their partnership practices, for cascading quality funding to local actors, for risk sharing and investing in bottom up and coordinated capacity-strengthening;
- donors using their collective diplomatic powers to influence UN agencies and other international actors including through requesting more transparency and through monitoring and evaluation of funding and partnership practices;
- ensuring requirements in grant agreements will improve partnership terms from the perspectives of local actors;
- supporting national localisation strategies.

Strategic recommendation 2: Develop a risk-sharing agenda and harmonise due diligence, compliance and audit requirements across donors.

The evidence shows that the range of assumptions about risk and localisation do not have grounding in empirical evidence, and that reorienting long-standing approaches to risk towards a risk-sharing model shows positive benefits. This requires consensus on the interpretation of zero tolerance and residual risk when considering risk sharing, with agreement on what is an acceptable level of residual risk.

This recommendation can be achieved by (see detail in Section 7.2):

- engaging in an honest dialogue at senior political levels on zero tolerance to risk and acceptable levels of residual risk;
- developing a joint risk agenda across donors, harmonising due diligence and reporting requirements;
- ensuring risk analysis and risk management are carried out jointly with local partners;
- explicitly linking approaches to risk sharing with quality funding, including through the provision of adequate funding for overhead costs and ensuring intermediaries pass on funding for overheads.

Strategic recommendation 3: Support and invest in the development of equitable, ethical and quality partnerships between international and local actors based on the principle of complementarity.

The evidence shows that multiple initiatives and efforts have shown the benefits of investing in longer-term, equitable partnerships that support the needs and priorities of local actors. The role of intermediaries is important in supporting this shift and evidence shows that international actors need to be incentivised and made accountable to change their partnership practices.

This recommendation can be achieved by (see detail in Section 7.3):

- monitoring, evaluating and incentivising intermediary actors based on the quality of their partnerships with local actors;
- engaging UN agencies and large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in dialogue and more effective accountability on their partnership practices;
- supporting processes for national and local actors to report directly to donors on partnership quality and using this feedback to inform funding decisions.

Strategic recommendation 4: Increase the quality and quantity of funding going to local actors, including through pooled funds.

The evidence shows that multiple initiatives have demonstrated the benefits of increasing quality funding to local actors, although funding to local actors has increased unequally in the system. The use of country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) seems to have addressed the desire of local actors to receive funding as directly as possible while managing the risk appetite of donors. Funding from donors continues to flow mainly through international intermediaries, which calls for a focus on the quality

of partnership practices by these intermediaries. There remains a critical gap in terms of the quality, amount and duration of funding local actors can access as well as transparency on how funding flows down to local actors.

This recommendation can be achieved by (see detail Section 7.4):

- ensuring long-term funding covers core costs to local actors as a mandatory requirement and linking funding with commitments to risk sharing;
- using diplomatic influencing to achieve greater transparency on funding flows;
- monitoring, evaluating and incentivising intermediary actors based on the quality of partnerships;
- increasing funding to pooled fund mechanisms, particularly those that focus on support to national and local actors, and non-UN pooled funds led and/or governed by local actors;
- exploring blended humanitarian–development funds.

Strategic recommendation 5: Invest in coordinated and bottom-up capacity-sharing and capacity-strengthening efforts based on the principle of complementarity.

The evidence shows that long-term capacity-strengthening efforts have been a key area of focus over the last five years and these initiatives have shown a range of significant benefits in practice for supporting locally led response. Yet, these efforts remain unidirectional, ad hoc, uncoordinated, lacking the right investment, and often use ineffective approaches to capacity strengthening.

This recommendation can be achieved by:

- making resourced capacity sharing an objective of all partnerships supported by a budget line for capacity sharing; and monitoring progress;
- requiring partners to coordinate capacity sharing through, for instance, coordination systems and working with other international actors partnering with the same local actors;
- articulating a donor approach for systematic investment in capacity sharing, including through disaster preparedness and resilience funding.

In addition to the priority recommendations, the study highlights two actions to help improve understandings of localisation outcomes and opportunities:

Action 1: Link localisation with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus: Ministries such as the Netherland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should adopt a comprehensive strategy across its humanitarian, peace and development donor portfolio to support local civil society's role in local humanitarian action and leadership in crisis response, including through strengthening blending of humanitarian and development financing.

Action 2: Build evidence, evaluate impact and reshape the research agenda on localisation: Donors and others with capacity to commission or produce research should invest in ways of

measuring the impact of localisation on the quality of humanitarian responses and outcomes for people in crises. They should also invest in approaches to understand the perspectives of crisis-affected people on the relative advantages of the status quo and more locally led aid models.

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Local humanitarian action is often presented as more effective and efficient in responding to conflict, natural hazard-related disasters and displacement, particularly where those are protracted and frequent. Yet, the evidence is not always clear. A range of commitments to strengthen local humanitarian action were catalysed by the 2016 WHS, where questions about a 'broken' humanitarian system dominated by international actors led to commitments intended to bring transformational change, as captured in the Grand Bargain and other global frameworks. These commitments sought to progress reform of the current aid system to meet and end needs, protect those at risk and respond effectively to ongoing crises, while seeking to address inequalities in the system, in recognition of the frontline role but inequitable attention given to local actors in humanitarian responses. Partnerships and national ownership are critical cornerstones of effective development cooperation, as recognised by the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (2012), which echoed similar localisation principles across the nexus.

1.2   Scope

This report presents the findings and analysis of a review of the localisation literature. Commissioned by the evaluation department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the study aims to inform an ongoing evaluation of the Netherlands' humanitarian assistance policy between 2015 and 2020. The study is relevant beyond this evaluation, as it analyses the existing evidence base within the localisation literature to inform specific recommendations to donors on how they can promote localisation. The central question (see Box 1 for sub-questions) used to interrogate the literature and current evidence in this study is:

What added value does localisation bring in the pursuit of Dutch policy objectives and what are effective ways for the Netherlands as a donor and diplomatic actor to promote localisation?

Box 1   Additional research questions

The study uses the following sub-questions to further examine existing literature and evidence:

1. How have different actors supported the localisation of humanitarian action and what understandings of localisation are reflected in those activities? To what extent are these experiences scalable (scope) and transferable (context)?
2. To what extent and in what ways does localisation have a positive effect on the quality and value for money of humanitarian assistance and its ability to reach better humanitarian outcomes for people in crises?
3. What are the challenges of localisation, including in relation to risk management, trust and accountability? What are the most effective ways to mitigate these?
4. What are the main drivers of and obstacles to localisation in humanitarian assistance, including in situations of protracted crises or forced displacement?
5. How can donors and diplomatic actors best contribute to the promotion of effective humanitarian response through more local and locally led humanitarian action?

1.3   Methodology

This study used a mix of an online systematic search, an existing list of core literature based on previous research and snowballing. Chapter 2 of this report delves deeper into the nature of the literature and the evidence found, including the limitations this brings to this literature study.

The research approach included:

- Gathering initial bibliography through identification of core literature, systematic database search and snowballing.
- Screening initial bibliography for relevance and quality.
- Reviewing final literature lists using Mendeley for notetaking and annotation.
- Coding literature using QDA Miner.
- Analysing retrieved segments.

The systematic literature database search, the core literature and snowballing led to the inclusion of 105 documents to be reviewed. In addition, the research team screened 35 evaluations of which only very few had relevant findings or evidence relating to localisation. The team also reviewed the Netherlands' 2019 humanitarian policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) and the 2015 humanitarian policy evaluation from IOB (IOB Evaluation, 2015) and the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) strategy 2018–2021 (DRA, 2017).

Due to the volume of documents, the research team fully reviewed, annotated and analysed in priority order a total of 81 documents. The remaining documents were skim-read and relevant information added later in the analysis.

The research team acknowledges that the term 'localisation' has been a controversial and much debated term. In this report, it is used as a shorthand to refer to the centrality of local humanitarian action, local leadership and the complementarity between different actors whether local, national, regional or international.

Similarly, there are multiple ways to refer to actors and organisations that contribute to local efforts, solutions and leadership during crisis. As a shorthand, the research team will use the term local actor to refer to both local and national actors and the range of local actors including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), the private sector, faith actors, and government entities. This does not refer to INGOs that are locally active. INGOs are referred to as such whether they are acting in their headquarters or in country of operations, whether they have been in these countries long-term and if a majority of their in-country staff is made up of local and national staff. Where the evidence refers to a specific type of local actor, the distinction will be made. Chapter 3 further explores the definitions, terminology and understandings of localisation.

1.4   General limitations

Limitations and gaps in evidence are highlighted throughout the report. This study, however, is framed within a number of known limitations. All the discussion, evidence and analysis below should be read with these limitations in mind:

- **Time limitation:** The literature review examined literature between 2015 and 2020. We recognise that the issues relevant to localisation have long been discussed in the humanitarian literature, although under different terms. While the scope of this study did not include review of these older documents, future studies could add value by reviewing the historical literature. While the humanitarian system has changed significantly in recent years, the historical literature could provide much needed insights into the longer-term obstacles and challenges as well as historical solutions and innovations that have been forgotten by current policy and practice. Similarly, as the literature screening was conducted in January 2021, literature published since that time has not been reviewed systematically. However, the research team conducted a quick search to add any relevant evidence to this report.
- **What evidence is recorded:** The research team is also aware of the limitation of conducting a literature review which does not capture knowledge and evidence that is not written or written in publications not easily accessible online. Who gets to write and publish evidence and who gets resources to conduct and write up research brings a certain bias to the knowledge and evidence reviewed in this report.

- **Language limitation:** The research team only reviewed materials in English. While this is a significant limitation in terms of which experience and knowledge is analysed in this study, the localisation literature is grounded in case studies where local actors' perceptions and views are widely represented.
- **Scale and scope of the review:** The research team has been limited in its ability to search for more documents due to resources allocated for this review. As a result, the following categories of documentation have been excluded: operational documents such as Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs); donor policies or organisational policies on localisation; and literature in which localisation is a marginal concern. The research team has not conducted a wider review of sub-themes within the localisation topic, which include literature on state and local government responses; diaspora responses; the role of regional organisations; remote management; the role of the local private sector;[1] and the vast literature on capacity strengthening and partnership. These sub-themes are relevant but would merit full literature studies on their own; however, they are examined when they occur within the localisation literature.

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1   On the role of the local private sector, see for instance Zick and Kent (2014) and El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al. (2017).

2   Overview of the literature and evidence base on localisation

2.1   Overview of the localisation literature

In order to assess the current evidence base in the localisation literature, the research team has systematically annotated reports according to: quality assurance, type of literature, main thematic focus, type of crises and geographical coverage (see Figure 1).

Most of the literature we reviewed had good quality assurance either through peer review or other methods (such as research advisory groups) or were methodologically sound. Only 12.5% of the literature reviewed had low or no quality assurance.[2] However, as will be pointed out below, the types of studies and the focus of the literature have not resulted in a strong evidence base in terms of the impact of localisation on humanitarian outcomes or quality of humanitarian action. This is mainly due to the focus of the literature.

Some themes are more prominent in the literature than others, in particular funding (including donor policies and practice), system reform (including the Grand Bargain), partnerships, capacity (including capacity strengthening), measuring progress on localisation, the role of local actors (including local leadership), issues of definitions and concepts around localisation (including decolonisation). The impact of localisation on the quality of humanitarian responses is present as a top theme in the localisation literature but is often perception-based rather than supported by empirical data. While the potential benefit of localisation for working better across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus is alluded to in the literature and some recommendations highlight how local capacity strengthening can be supported across humanitarian and development portfolios, the localisation literature rarely engages with the topic of the triple nexus. As a result, evidence on localisation and the nexus remains very thin.

The localisation literature mainly comprises policy (non-academic) research (44%) and grey literature (research conducted by operational organisations) (42%). The time lag for publishing in academic journals is a contributing factor in the scarcity of academic literature.

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2   Note that for 11% of the literature reviewed it was challenging to establish the quality of the study due a lack of explanation of methodology. Included in this 11% are documents that did not require a quality review, such as the DRA strategy (DRA, 2017) and the Netherlands humanitarian policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Figure 1   Summary of literature reviewed

Literature type

Unknown or other

Academic

Grey (research by operational organisation)

Policy (non-academic research organisation)

Quality assurance

Number of documents

| Peer review | Other quality assurance | Methodologically sound | Low or no quality assurance | Do not know |
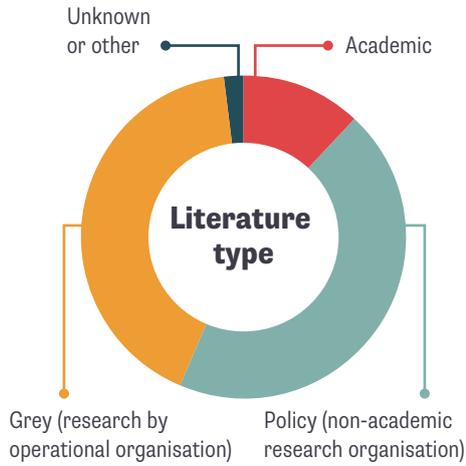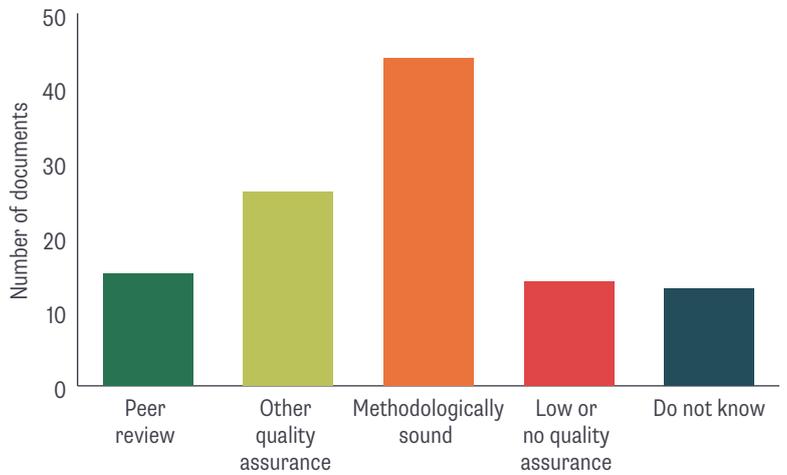
Geographic focus
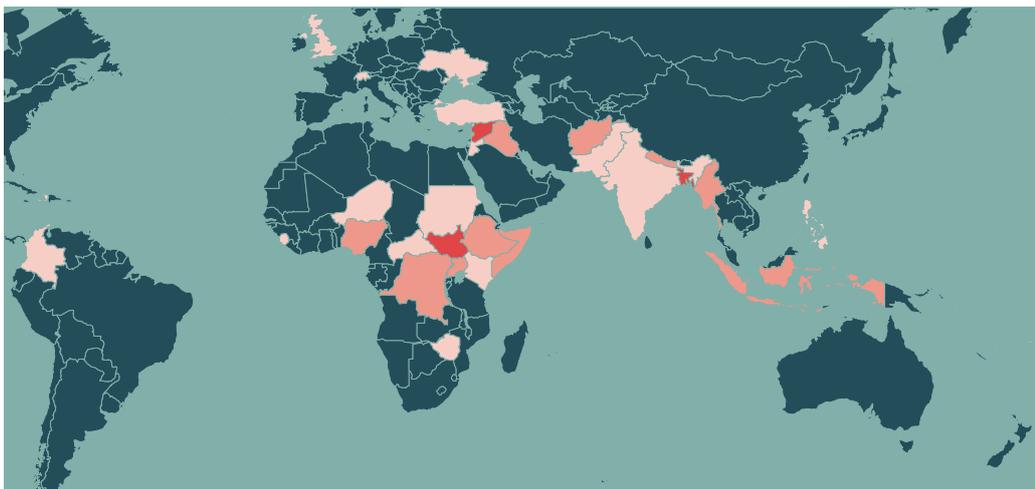
Number of documents

Global	39	Colombia	3
Syria	13	Haiti	3
Bangladesh	12	Jordan	3
S. Sudan	11	Ukraine	3
Ethiopia	9	Vanuatu	3
DRC	8	Africa	2
Myanmar	8	Fiji	2
Pacific	7	Sudan	2
Uganda	7	CAR	1
Iraq	6	India	1
Lebanon	6	Niger	1
Afghanistan	5	oPt	1
Indonesia	5	Philippines	1
Nepal	5	S. Leone	1
Nigeria	5	Solomon isl.	1
Somalia	5	Switzerland	1
Kenya	4	Tonga	1
Pakistan	4	Turkey	1
Regional	3	UK	1
MENA	3	Zimbabwe	1

Themes in the literature

Number of documents

Funding, System reform, Partnership, Capacity, Measuring localisation, Role/leadership local actors, Understanding localisation, Impact of localisation, Risk, Refugee, Complementarity, Covid-19, Accountability to affected people, Humanitarian principles, Trust, Power, Faith actors, Gender, Remote management, Coordination, Triple nexus, Global health, Local governance, Impact on local civil society, Support to marginalised populations, Surge capacity, South–South cooperation

Types of crisis

Multiple **26**

Conflict **21**

Other **20**

Refugee/forced displacement **14**

Disaster **13**

Public health **4**

Note: CAR – Central African Republic; DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo; MENA – Middle East and North Africa region; oPt – occupied Palestinian territories.

Much of the literature is not specific to a type of crisis. We found 27% of the literature focused on multiple types of crisis (26 studies), whereas 20% was specific to conflict-affected settings (21 studies) and 22% (14 studies) referred specifically to refugee displacement. While a significant proportion of studies focus on refugee displacement, the issues raised on localisation in displacement settings do not differ from those raised in non-displacement settings. Beyond the question of what 'local' means in a refugee setting, as national actors from the hosting country are not 'local' to refugees, the localisation literature on these settings does not raise the specificity of that crisis context and its implications for localisation.[3]

Some countries are more prominent in the localisation literature, including Syria (13 studies), Bangladesh (12 studies), South Sudan (11 studies), Ethiopia (nine studies), Myanmar (eight studies), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (eight studies) and Uganda (seven studies). The Syrian conflict and displacement in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey represent a significant geographical focus of the localisation literature (23 studies). The Latin American and Caribbean region is not prominently represented, with only three studies on Haiti and three studies on Colombia, all within reports that looked at multiple countries. Only 10 of the studies and documents reviewed by the research team engaged actively with operational documents. This included operational documents linked with cluster coordination; with partnership practices; operational documents internal to a specific organisation, a specific response consortium or an initiative; HRPs; and operational documents on pooled funds. This suggests that the literature is not extensively reviewing operational documents, which may be either because such documents are not considered relevant to the analysis or because they do not contain enough information on localisation.

While the majority of the research reviewed is conducted by international or Global North organisations, the literature engages systematically with local actors and many studies are conducted in partnership with local actors, including local researchers. However, some claim in the literature that the evidence base does not adequately centre local actors (see Robillard et al., 2020a). On a similar note, the literature does not engage systematically with the perceptions and experiences of individuals and communities affected by crises. The literature distinguishes between individuals and communities affected by crises as distinct to local actors who are organised actors, whether through formal (i.e. local NGOs) or informal (i.e. networks of volunteers) organisations. This finding does not infer that local actors do not engage with individuals and communities affected by crises. Instead, it highlights that in gathering evidence on the impact of localisation, the perceptions of individuals and communities do not significantly inform analysis and recommendations.

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3   In addition to the drive in the humanitarian sector on localisation, the Global Compact on Refugees specifically highlights the necessity of a whole-of-society approach in responding to refugee situations that include a wide range of actors (local and international), government, civil society and private sector (see UN, 2018).

Finally, only four studies focused on Covid-19 and localisation (noting the limitation on very recent publications). These mainly focused on whether and how Covid-19 may be an opportunity for increasing the pace of change of practice and policy to enable localisation, with a few examples of case studies on disaster response in the midst of the pandemic.

2.2   The nature of the evidence on localisation

Most evidence on localisation is focused on defining the problem and tracking progress against high-level commitments. There is far less focus or evidence on whether localisation leads to better impact, including the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action (IRC, 2019).[4] The evidence base is growing but remains largely anecdotal. Existing literature is focused on a small number of case studies, organisations or initiatives leading to nuanced but not generalisable studies (Robillard et al., 2020a).

The majority of studies reviewed are based on these case studies and secondary literature reviews. The literature tends to reference other localisation literature with some studies referenced repeatedly over time. Noteworthy is the 'missed opportunities' series (Ramalingam et al., 2013; Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Featherstone and Bogati, 2016; Tanner and Moro, 2016; Christian Aid et al., 2019), which still provides some of best evidenced, most widely referenced work on how equal and quality partnerships contribute to better humanitarian action.

The sampling for case studies tends not to be explained; given this limitation it is difficult to evaluate on what basis findings could be generalisable. Where good evidence exists, it is grounded in one programme, one organisation or one country. A number of studies and further analysis help identify the factors that could be replicable and applied in different contexts (conflict, displacement, natural hazard-related disasters). Additionally, many studies rely on perception-based evidence. This reflects the focus of the literature on different actors' perceptions of the problem and challenges and obstacles to localisation, as well as perceptions of progress towards localisation. One significant area of exception to this is studies on tracking funding going to local actors. It is important to note that the 'echo chamber' effect and limited or unclear empirical evidence base are not unique to localisation debates but frequently shape humanitarian analysis.[5]

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4   According to IRC (2019): 'However, the evidence base that looks critically at the humanitarian outcomes of projects carried out directly and exclusively by INGOs compared with those carried out in partnership between INGOs and local civil society or local governance actors, or carried out by those actors alone, is not well developed. During the course of this research, it was clear that while some narrative studies of the comparative benefits and costs of working in partnership with local NGOs as against direct implementation by INGOs are starting to emerge, there is very little quantitative research in this area, and no randomized control trials that look at the comparative benefits of working in partnership compared to direct work or service delivery by INGOs or local organizations alone.'

5   As ALNAP (2020: 9) reflects: 'While the perceptions of certain groups are fundamental to understanding humanitarian performance – particularly those of crisis-affected populations – much humanitarian research and evidence still rely on perception-based data collected from humanitarian aid professionals. This can potentially distract attention from the fact that objective measures are lagging far behind where they should be.'

2.3   The challenge of addressing the evidence gaps

Addressing the evidence gap on how localisation impacts the quality of humanitarian responses and outcomes for people in crisis remains a challenge. While there are increasing examples of locally led responses, questions remain regarding how far decision-making has shifted towards national and local actors and away from international actors. For instance, the response to the Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia is considered by many as an example of a locally led response, as the government led coordination. However, 65% of funds to this response went to international actors, raising questions regarding the degree to which local actors, including the government, were able to drive and shape the response independently of international actors (HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019). This demonstrates the challenge of defining and agreeing what qualifies as a locally led response and what evidence can be used to measure the quality of humanitarian responses and humanitarian outcomes.

Similarly, the many localisation strategies or initiatives studied in the literature tend to be short-term initiatives which are evaluated soon after implementation. As a result, the literature assessing the impact of such strategies tends to outline what was done and the outputs of the programmes; impact-level data is not offered as it is claimed to be too early to assess impact. This raises wider questions about the timing of evaluations in the sector, which tend not to look at longer-term impact. At the same time, this makes it challenging to understand how efforts towards localisation have had a wider impact on the quality of humanitarian action.

3   Localisation: understandings, measurements and approaches

Localisation, if approached holistically and ambitiously, has been advocated as 'a way of re-conceiving of the humanitarian sector from the bottom up' (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; SDC and IFRC, 2021). However, recognition that 'localization creates an opportunity to critically examine and improve the structure and functionality of the entire humanitarian system' (ICVA, 2018) has not, to date, been channelled into assessments of the impacts of localisation on the quality of humanitarian response.

This chapter explores understandings of localisation and attempts to measure localisation and progress as well as key areas of activity. Based on the literature reviewed, it argues that, while understandings of the concept have moved away from definitional arguments towards more holistic conceptions, there have not been parallel shifts in articulating the objective(s) of localisation, how to measure outcomes rather than progress, or strategies to ensure more effective implementation.

3.1   The emergence of the localisation agenda

Despite the relatively recent rise of the localisation agenda in its current form, the issues of power and inequality that it seeks to engage have long been acknowledged. Within the aid sector, efforts to improve accountability to affected populations, with examples dating from at least the 1970s, can be considered part of the longer-term factors underpinning initiatives under the localisation agenda. From the 1990s onwards, commitments were institutionalised through mechanisms such as the Red Cross and INGO Code of Conduct, Sphere Standards and High-level Meetings on Aid Effectiveness (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; CHS Alliance, 2020). Operationally, increased attention on how proximity to Western powers could exacerbate security risks in certain contexts encouraged reflection on attitudes towards major INGOs and UN agencies. The rise and recognition of donors outside the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) – so-called non-DAC donors such as Brazil, China, South Korea and Turkey – also highlighted biases and power structures within the international humanitarian architecture.

Though these influences are complex and only part of the picture, they help to explain why the localisation agenda gained traction when it did. The concept of a 'broken' humanitarian system was a prominent theme in debates leading up to the WHS, which stressed the persistence of an unjust distribution of power that often kept those most affected by crises furthest away from decision-making about how to respond to them.[6] In this context, values-based motivations are among drivers of the localisation agenda, which may be presented as the 'right' thing to do in recognition of the centrality of affected societies. This view of ethics is based on the desirable attributes of the position or goal (in this case the objective of localisation) instead of trying to make ethical decisions based on

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6   See for example Knox-Clarke (2015).

the anticipated outcomes. Since the WHS, critiques of inequalities in the humanitarian sector have also been heightened by repeated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during aid operations (including peacekeeping) and debates inspired by the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Most recently, calls to 'decolonise' aid can be seen as linked to but distinct from the localisation agenda in both conceptual framework and the range of associated approaches.

Therefore, while localisation is promoted by some as a way to fundamentally transform power in the humanitarian system, it has been criticised by others for not going far enough, for being too technocratic or for creating perverse incentives and adverse impacts. Many of these arguments reflect concerns about motivations behind the embrace of the localisation agenda and wider critiques of the colonial inheritances and continuing inequalities of the humanitarian system. Some have targeted the construction of the discourse, including the arguments that:

- the concept of localisation continues to place international actors at the centre, due to its implications of 'adaptation' to diverse national contexts (Barbelet, 2018; Fast and Bennett, 2020; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020; Pincock et al., 2020; Roepstorff, 2020);
- localisation debates have been driven by international actors (ICVA, 2018; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020; Robillard et al., 2020b);
- little attention has been given to 'the role of the "receiving" side in legitimising and transforming norms and practices' (Gómez, 2021);
- using the discourse of localisation is a way to avoid more difficult conversations about power and discrimination (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2019; Jayawickrama and Rehman, 2018, cited in Robillard et al., 2020b) and is counterproductive to meaningful change (Howe et al., 2019).

3.2   Understandings of localisation

There is no single definition of localisation and, as indicated above, the meaning and politics of this concept have been contested. Understandings of localisation have evolved since the 2016 WHS. In the dedicated workstream on localisation in the Grand Bargain, much energy initially went into trying to define and fix terms like 'local', 'national', 'localisation' and 'locally led response' (see Box 2). While there is no doubt about the importance and power of language – and, as outlined in the introduction, the problematic nature of some terminology associated with this agenda – these definitional disputes have subsequently been questioned as counterproductive (Els, 2018; ICVA, 2018; ICVA and HLA, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2020). The literature now widely acknowledges that what 'successful localisation' or 'locally led response' looks like is very much contextually dependent.

Box 2 Who or what is local?

In the period following the WHS and the signing of the Grand Bargain, discussions to determine what 'as direct as possible' meant for funding targets occupied a large part of the localisation space (OECD, 2017). The Humanitarian Financing Task Team invested in developing a 'Localisation Marker' (IASC, 2018), leading to the following definitions used for the global Financial Tracking System (FTS):

1. 'Local and national non-state actors: organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO'.
2. 'National and sub-national state actors: State authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level.'

The definitional approach to delineating the 'local' from the 'global' or 'international' has been criticised as creating analytical blind spots, for example by failing to recognise the hybridity of organisations in the humanitarian sector or the potential for elite capture of 'local' voice (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Barakat and Milton, 2020; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020; Pincock et al., 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a; Roepstorff, 2020). It has been argued that debates about who or what is local 'do not bring us closer to a clear, definitive or encompassing understanding of "local" humanitarian action' (Fast and Bennett, 2020) and the narrow focus on financing associated with these debates has been identified as an obstacle to the more comprehensive conception of localisation commitments and implementation (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Howe et al., 2019). In the context of forced displacement, the concept of 'local' creates problems as 'displaced people may or may not perceive their host populations as local and/or as agents that have the trust, knowledge, or legitimacy to respond appropriately to their needs' and host populations may have distinct needs or expectations of their own (Robillard et al., 2020b).

Recognising that what it means to be 'local' is relative and relational (Fast and Bennett, 2020) and conceptualising this as on a spectrum or continuum (ICVA, 2018) are ways of moving away from mechanistic definitions and static portrayals of dynamics that in reality are complex and fluid. The more flexible concept of 'multi-local' has also been proposed to reflect that 'the local in localisation is understood as multiple, comprising a range of locals, each of which tends to be a code for different, if interrelated, meanings and references' (Melis and Apthorpe, 2020). These understandings are better placed to take account of the power relationships and politics shaping humanitarian response.

One influential proposition has been the OECD conceptualisation of 'localising humanitarian response' as 'a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses' (OECD, 2017; see also Roepstorff, 2020). Elements of its language are also reflected in efforts to develop contextually relevant understandings of localisation, many of which also foreground the importance of independence (Ayobi et al., 2017; Featherstone, 2017; HAG and Civil Society Forum of Tonga, 2019; Wijewickrama et al., 2020). Some emphasise collective but varied approaches (ICVA, 2018; Howe et al., 2019; Robillard et al., 2020a) and/or distinguish work that is 'locally led' (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; see also Robillard et al., 2020a).

Others have chosen to identify key attributes rather than provide a single definition. These attributes often relate to power and decision-making, financing issues, operational inclusion and effectiveness, and quality and accountability (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Patel and Van Brabant, 2017; ICVA and HLA, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a; Robillard et al., 2020a). Localisation has also been expressed chronologically: 'A humanitarian response is considered localised when a local humanitarian responder is involved in the entire programme cycle: needs assessments, programme design and delivery and final review and evaluation' (OECD, 2017). There has also been a trend for literature to be framed more explicitly around complementarity (ICVA, 2018; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Barbelet, 2019; Eckley, 2020).

In institutional terms, localisation has been strongly associated with the WHS and the Grand Bargain, although the construction of these agendas has been contested and familiarity with the commitments they entail has varied (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018). Key agreements and commitments are summarised here, while implementation is discussed further below; understandings of how these agendas interlink is limited (Howe et al., 2019).

- **Agenda for Humanity:** Five core responsibilities identified through the WHS process, supported by joint and individual commitments made during the Summit.
- **Charter for Change (C4C):** Eight commitments that INGOs agree to implement in order to address imbalances and inequality in the global humanitarian system.
- **Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS):** Nine commitments aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of assistance.
- **Grand Bargain:** 51 commitments to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, emerging from the WHS; grouped into nine thematic workstreams, with the second workstream comprising six goals dedicated to 'More support and funding tools for local and national responders'.
- **Principles of Partnership:** Five principles that provide a framework for collaboration through recognition of local and national response capacity.

When contextually specific studies have sought not to establish a definition of localisation but to define localisation from the perceptions, understandings and practice of actors in a specific context, the results suggest that the 'ideal type' definitions of localisation given by policy literature do not match in practice. For example, research by the Localisation Demonstrator Country Mission in Nigeria found that local and national NGOs considered localisation to relate primarily to funding opportunities, while

international actors approached it as a strategy for increasing access to otherwise inaccessible areas or for the delivery of their own projects, although they also linked localisation to better outcomes for affected people (Localisation Workstream, 2020). Similarly, partial or pragmatic understandings of localisation were found in Van Brabant and Patel's (2018) research in Bangladesh, where they identified only 'limited attention' to power and related issues, as well as in the work of others.

Oppositional understandings of localisation have also been articulated, drawing attention to the impacts of localisation as a discourse, as indicated in the previous section. Others have highlighted operational implications, suggesting that localisation and related concepts obscure important differences between local and national agencies, including the role of nationalised INGOs (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a; see also Box 2); and that a clumsy application of this discourse has polarised attitudes in some contexts and thus hindered response (HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020).

3.3   Measurement efforts

Although there is much discussion in the literature about the frameworks and components of localisation, the evidence is weak in terms of measuring the degree to which progress in implementing these frameworks and components is achieved. Despite movement away from defining concepts and targets and towards understanding and measuring progress to enable more local humanitarian action (Els, 2018; Flint and Lia, 2018; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018), at present there remains very little literature aiming to articulate in a holistic way what success looks like or what might be the desired end point for all stakeholders in localised humanitarian response (Fast and Bennett, 2020). Tied to this, there is very weak evidence on what caused the (perceived) success or failure of programming against the stated goals. This data gap is not unique to analysis of localisation.

Measurement frameworks broadly reflect priority areas in the C4C, Grand Bargain and CHS reporting in the Humanitarian Accountability Report. These all detail the variety of initiatives that together make for a more localised response, and how these feed into an overarching level or progress against commitments and targets on localisation. While there is some variation in what is included, the areas outlined in Figure 2 are common.

Approaches to measuring localisation have been shaped by a small number of interventions that have then been adopted and/or adapted by others. Global Mentoring Initiative's 'Seven Dimensions of Localisation' (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018) was one of the first developed, and has influenced subsequent frameworks targeted at sector or country level such as HAG and PIANGO's 'Measuring Localisation Framework' (2019), the 'Accelerating Localisation through Partnership's Global Localisation Framework' (2019), and at the organisational level the Network for Empowered Aid Response's (NEAR's) 'Performance Measurement Framework' (NEAR, 2017) (see also Van Brabant and Patel, 2018). Some of these frameworks have been used to measure progress on localisation at a country level, or to conduct baselines or snapshots (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Bamforth et al., 2020; HAG and PIANGO, 2020; Wijewickrama et al., 2020).

Figure 2   Measuring Localisation Framework

Source: HAG and VANGO (2019)

These frameworks propose indicators and metrics that quantify and measure change. While they are intended to allow progress, these frameworks have been criticised for measuring change through siloed metrics, which could reduce the ambition for more meaningful change. An example of this would be counting the numbers of local actors attending coordination meetings instead of considering the degree to which they are able to influence debates and decisions (Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019). An initial focus on global-level actions and commitments has transitioned to more of a focus at the country level, as outlined in the vision document for the Grand Bargain, but also in the most recent C4C reports (C4C, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). The participation of local actors in policy discussions around localisation has influenced this process, in particular through the process of regional-level consultations on the future of the Grand Bargain in 2019 and 2020 (Els, 2018).

Measurement of funding to local actors has received especially sustained attention yet remains emblematic of the difficulties of accessing sound information even on high-profile commitments. Around the time of the WHS, a Local2Global Protection study argued that 'it is hardly possible to establish a single overall actual figure or percentage with a reasonable degree of certainty', which they considered 'a failure in transparency and accountability for the global humanitarian system as a whole' (Els and Carstensen, 2015). Major studies several years later found that comprehensive information on financing flows was unavailable, that some signatories to the Grand Bargain were still unable to report on the proportion of their funding that went to local responders and that most had not met the agreed target of 25% (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019). This is despite this target

having become, in the words of Fast and Bennett (2020), 'the default measurement for supporting "local" action'. This use of funding proportions as a proxy indicator for localisation as a whole is related to the lack of an articulated, holistic objective for localisation described above.

Some literature has analysed contexts in a comparative way against each other according to a 'localisation schema' – how 'localised' particular contexts are already (Howe et al., 2019; Robillard et al., 2020c). While this has been critiqued as reflecting the perspectives of international or regional stakeholders, instead of being driven from national or local contexts (Robillard et al., 2020c), most measurements or attempts to analyse progress **are empirically grounded in a particular country context** and engage extensively with local and national actors. Challenging the notion that quality of humanitarian response can be understood and evaluated according to standards that are uniform worldwide, there have been calls for localised approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Initiatives in this direction are yet to have significant impact on M&E norms.

3.4   Localisation efforts and strategies

Broadly speaking, efforts to support the localisation of humanitarian aid over the last five years have fallen into the thematic areas outlined in the measurement frameworks described above, with a notable clustering of initiatives around capacity, partnerships, funding and coordination, driven by the targets and metrics proposed in high-level commitments. These efforts have occurred at different levels, and largely fall in the category of initiatives rather than specific strategies.

This section focuses on exploring the evidence on how effective these efforts have been and good practice examples, rather a comprehensive summary of the types of action and initiatives taken. Localisation efforts will be discussed briefly according to scale, at four levels (recognising that these levels interact): at the sector, global policy or system level; at the country or response level, representing collaborative efforts with the potential to be more contextually determined; at the organisational level, in terms of policies or strategies of specific agencies; and at the project or initiative level in practice. In the literature surveyed there was little analysis geared towards understanding whether and how good practice is transferred from one context or level to another in terms of replicability and scalability. Consideration of this question in the design of future evaluations or research could help address this evidence gap over time.

3.4.1   Global system and policy levels

Localisation efforts at the global level have been driven by policy and standard commitments including the Grand Bargain, C4C and CHS. Efforts at the global system level have focused on creating or adapting processes, systems and mechanisms to articulate and meet these commitments. Evidence shows that this is contributing to progress in a range of areas, in particular slowly increasing funding to local and national actors, contributing to better quality partnerships and strengthening some investments in institutional capacities (Barbelet, 2019; Fast and Bennet, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; C4C, 2020; CHS Alliance, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

Progress towards meeting commitments has been identified as broadly supporting localisation of aid, but it is important to recognise that impact comes as part of a suite of activities and shifts that reflect the localisation objective. These include an increased focus on 'decentralising' decision-making systems and organisations across the sector in recent years – or relocating decision-making closer to affected people and responders – and strong localisation drive and agendas at the national level (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; ICVA and HLA, 2019; HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a). That is, not all factors that influence the extent of local leadership in a given response are the result of specific global commitments. Other system-level efforts include guidance by the Global Protection Cluster on how localisation can be integrated into the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, though the impacts of this are unknown (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019).

Despite this, and while localisation is now generally viewed as a core principle of humanitarian aid, it is not yet reflected widely, or adequately, across policy and practice efforts (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020; Robillard et al., 2020c). A range of structural and system reform requirements to better support localisation have been extensively discussed in the literature, including adapting the Grand Bargain, but there continues to be significant challenges in gaining traction on implementation, often due to required shifts in power, roles, business models and decision-making (Ayobi et al., 2017; Start Network, 2017a; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

Moreover, there is weak evidence as to how, or if, these global level efforts are contributing to more effective humanitarian responses and better outcomes for affected populations. In part, this is due to the challenge of linking global processes and reform with operational activities, objectives and outcomes during a response. The type of evidence being gathered about localisation during a response is focused much more on localisation enablers, challenges and barriers for operations, rather than about how these shape relevance, effectiveness and impact. Despite increasing insistence upon the need for localisation to be the starting point for a response to a crisis (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020), there are only pockets of examples where this approach has been employed and assessed (HAG and VANGO, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a).

3.4.2   Organisational strategies and approaches

When viewed at the organisational level, there is more evidence available on international agency approaches than on organisational approaches by national and local actors. To the extent that studies of the latter are available, these are primarily international actor analyses of how local and national actors have adapted ways of working around issues such as compliance, risk and partnerships to support international localisation priorities. There is less evidence that shows how local and national organisations have defined their own localisation organisational priorities – outside of specific partnerships – or of the impact of this (Wall and Hedlund 2016; Svoboda et al., 2018 cited in Robillard et al., 2020c; Wake and Barbelet, 2019). Other challenges in evaluating organisational strategies include the networked nature of some international movements and the trend for some international NGOs to present their affiliates as 'local' organisations (see Box 3).

Box 3   Organisational networks and localisation

The FTS definition of local and national non-state actors as 'organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country *and which are not affiliated to an international NGO*' (emphasis added) presents challenges to certain internationally affiliated organisations or networks such as the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and Caritas. Whether the national organisations associated with these networks ('National Societies', in the Red Cross/Red Crescent terminology) should be considered local has been a point of discussion. This debate has been made more contentious by the practice among some INGOs of 'nationalising' their chapters in some countries seemingly as a response to registration requirements, to maintain implementing roles, or to facilitate funding.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it has been suggested that certain internationally affiliated networks are positioned to maximise complementarity (Austin and Chessex, 2018; Barbelet, 2019). Barbelet (2019) found that complementarity between local and international actors tends to be increased in long-term and strategic partnerships. International networks that work with country-level counterparts that are independent and yet connected to them through the network tend to favour such long-term and strategic partnerships. However, there is a risk that complementarity is taken for granted within such set-ups, which could prevent both proactive engagement on localisation and critical examination of some of the negative power dynamics that localisation aims to address. The example of the Australian Red Cross, which has rethought and reshaped its practices through localisation commitments, suggests that complementarity can be deployed to great effect when there is sufficient investment and effort (see Ayobi et al., 2017).

A number of organisations have developed localisation strategies, policies or frameworks that seek to outline how localisation will be supported through their partnerships and programming, including Save the Children, Oxfam International, DanChurchAid, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). These have identified localisation drivers, specific organisational challenges and the nature of the shifts that are required (particularly around types of partnerships, quality of funding and capacity strengthening), but they are not widely replicated (Willitts-King et al., 2018; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a). As yet, there is not widespread evidence available of the impacts of these organisational approaches; however, existing indications strongly suggest that strategies that outline long-term and equitable partnership approaches will be most effective (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; C4C, 2020). The International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has undertaken a variety of activities to support localisation, including for example the National Society Investment Alliance (NISA),[7] extensive research and through

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7   'The National Society Investment Alliance is a pooled funding mechanism providing flexible multi-year financing and support for the development of National Red Cross and Red Cross Societies, strengthening their capacity to deliver relevant and effective humanitarian services' (available from NSIA: https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/national-society-investment-alliance).

revising business models such as the work the Australian Red Cross has undertaken (Ayobi et al., 2017; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). The Start Network has made localisation 'a foundational and non-negotiable principle' and has developed objectives and guidance for how this should be applied across their work (Start Network, 2017b cited in Patel and Van Brabant, 2017). This is likely to accelerate further, as identified in the future vision for the C4C (C4C, 2020).

Some organisations have also created specific teams, roles and positions to support and measure progress on localisation objectives and indicators such as World Vision, Oxfam and ICRC (Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Other organisational approaches have also focused on specific aspects commonly identified as barriers, such as provision of core or overhead costs and approaches to risk management. For instance, last year, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) changed its policy to allow local partners to begin receiving overheads as part of their contracts (CHS Alliance, 2020), although this is not yet an equitable share (see also Chapter 6).

3.4.3 Donor efforts and policies

Many donor efforts on localisation have fallen under Grand Bargain core commitments 2.4 and 2.6,[8] in particular through increasing funding contributions through a variety of pooled funding mechanisms at the country level and multi-year funding (discussed below). Donors have also supported: standalone multi-year localisation projects or initiatives that are organisation-, consortium- or partnership-based; large-scale research projects and reviews seeking to build an evidence base for localisation; and projects and programmes that have localisation objectives and activities as a core component.

Some donors have developed and implemented partnership and funding-related policies and requirements that include specific objectives to support localisation. This includes the European Union (EU)'s Humanitarian Implementation Plans, Spain's Humanitarian Strategy, Sweden's NGO Guidelines, the Netherlands' DRA strategy (see Box 4) (Els, 2018; C4C, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Generally, however, these have not featured specific and targeted localisation strategies, frameworks or policies that articulate overall desired outcomes for donors' humanitarian or development portfolios. As such, there is little available evidence detailing the impact (positive or negative) of adopted donor strategic approaches.

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8   Commitment 2.4: 'Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs'. Commitment 2.6: 'Make greater use of funding tools which increase and improve assistance delivered by local and national responders, such as UN-led country-based pooled funds (CBPF), IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and NGO-led and other pooled funds'.

> ## Box 4   The Dutch Relief Alliance strategy 2018–2021
>
> The following are actions that the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) has committed to in support of localisation in their strategy:
>
> 1. **More funding to local actors:** At least 25% of DRA funding will flow as directly as possible to local actors by the end of 2019 and by the end of the strategic period the DRA will aim for 35%.
> 2. **Efficient funding:** The DRA will focus on minimising transaction costs and ensuring funds flow as directly as possible to local actors in line with Grand Bargain commitments, while maintaining quality, strong risk management structures and accountability mechanisms.
> 3. **More capacity strengthening:** Local actors will be more strongly supported through capacity strengthening enabling effective and accountable humanitarian action. The DRA will aim for 5% to 8% of Joint Response budgets to be related to strengthening the capacity of local actors by 2021.
> 4. **Amplifying local voices:** The DRA will serve to amplify the voice and capacity of local actors in international fora, coordination systems and with other donors.
> 5. **Better partnerships with local actors in conflicts:** The DRA will continue to innovate around ways to support partners in conflicts through remote management and monitoring and negotiating and maintaining access.
>
> Source: DRA (2017)

Donors have supported a range of practices that support strengthened localisation more broadly in M&E, harmonised reporting, joint partner meetings with international and national partners, support for multi-year capacity strengthening, requirement of clear exit strategies and joint capacity assessments (Els, 2018; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Some donors have started to require evaluations or reviews of localisation-related objectives during responses and programmes, such as the DFAT/MFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Pacific, jointly developed by Australia and New Zealand, which requires responses to be assessed against local leadership criteria. Some donors, such as the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (former Department for International Development (DFID)) in Jordan and Syria, have also started to require the development of a clear exit strategy, including capacity support for handover to local and national actors in their multi-year funded partnerships (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).

Transparency is another area of potential donor influence. Local actors have expressed a desire for greater budget transparency from intermediaries (Development Services Exchange et al., 2019). They tended to find that consortia led by local/national organisations achieved greater transparency on budgets than consortia led by international organisations (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). A C4C study (2020) revealed that few country offices systematically shared C4C commitments with their partners, arguing that this failure 'shows a lack of transparency about the rights that local actors hold

in their relationship with signatory agencies'. As the 'lack of financial transparency is an impediment to more and better funding for national and local actors' (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019), donors could incentivise greater transparency.

3.4.4   Country and response level

Efforts have varied widely to try to address the characteristics, opportunities and challenges of greater local leadership and participation in context (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Howe et al., 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019). For donors, this has been a key challenge as there is no overarching strategy or guidance on how the Grand Bargain should be implemented at the country level for example (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). The literature review did not identify any instances where agreed strategic priorities for localisation in a particular country had been examined comprehensively by external research.

Countries that have stronger evidence on the progress of localisation efforts include: Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tonga, Uganda and Vanuatu. This has been due to a variety of factors, including a strong political push from government and other actors, crisis type and humanitarian needs, status as a Grand Bargain demonstrator country and the existence of popular mechanisms such as pooled funding, in addition to (explicit or implicit) decisions about where localisation efforts should be focused (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Localisation Workstream, 2019; C4C, 2020; CHS Alliance, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020; Oxfam, 2020). Localisation strategies have also been framed through the lens of resilience, for example in protracted crisis contexts such as the Regional Refugee Response Plan (3RP) for the Syria crisis and in Bangladesh, with strong evidence suggesting that preparedness and partnerships are key to supporting a localised response (Barbelet, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020).

Examples of national and local leadership – including by governments and by non-governmental actors – are growing. Evidence is emerging from the Asia–Pacific region about how strong government policy settings for international assistance during disaster responses are significantly shaping localised responses in countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Vanuatu (HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019; Wake and Barbelet, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020c). The creation of national-level localisation strategies, frameworks and roadmaps by actors such as local NGO fora has also been an important development; however, these have been limited in number. The Somalia National NGO forum, for example, has created a strategy that helped define what localisation means in context and influence system change (Els, 2018), and in Bangladesh the establishment of a localisation working group with the humanitarian coordination task team has led to the development of a workplan and vision to strengthen localisation in broader disaster response efforts (HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020). The national localisation frameworks created through the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships consortium project in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan provide a model for civil society leadership in the promotion of localisation (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019).

Funding mechanisms represent one area of focus in country-level localisation efforts, notably through pooled funding mechanisms (see Box 5). Coordination is another. Efforts in this domain have focused on increasing national and local actor participation and representation in international–national coordination forums such as clusters and Humanitarian Country Teams, such as the 'Localisation of Protection' project supported by the Global Protection Cluster and IRC. Some literature points to evidence around positive impacts such as increased visibility and access for national NGOs (Localisation Workstream, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; CHS Alliance, 2020; HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020). However, this is an output-led metric to measure participation and does not consider if or how this affects local and national actor decision-making ability, and there is little available empirical data on how this impacts effectiveness, quality and efficiency of a response.

More broadly, country-level initiatives are perceived as important in fostering collective action on national priorities, although – as mentioned above – understandings of their impacts or their relationships with other planning tools are limited. The C4C signatories are moving towards country-level planning with the first strategic country plan under development in DRC for 2021–2023 and country-level reporting in the most recent report (C4C, 2020). It will be important to monitor the negotiation and implementation of such efforts as they progress. Context-wide capacity-mapping approaches to better understand complementarity between national and international actors can also support better locally led action at the country level, for example Oxfam's approach in the Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis models (Barbelet, 2019).

Box 5 Pooled funding mechanisms

A variety of pooled funding mechanisms at the global and country levels have been a key initiative in support of increased funding to national and local actors and reducing earmarking. Pooled funding mechanisms, including country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), managed by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), and Start Funds have increased funding to local and national actors and supported localisation objectives by increasing national NGO representation in governance and decision-making at the country level (Poole, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Howe et al., 2019; IFRC, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; OCHA, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Bamforth et al., 2020; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Related strengthening of capacity and experience has increased organisations' ability to access other funding.

These mechanisms have managed to increase efficiencies, combine flexibility and rigour around accountability for donors, and in some cases have the benefit of designating administrative responsibility to the fund manager, relieving the burden on donors (OECD, 2017; ICVA and HLA, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). National NGO-managed pooled funding mechanisms, such as the SAFER fund in the Philippines, provide an alternative model for donors to consider in the future (ICVA and HLA, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Development funds, such as the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT), or blended humanitarian and development funds are increasingly being looked to as financing mechanisms that also support direct funding to local NGOs and address the gap between development and humanitarian activities (IFRC, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).

Implementation has achieved varying levels of success, however, and key challenges persist (Howe et al., 2019; OCHA, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Specific localisation strategies for individual funds are often lacking, but opportunities have been identified for longer-term funding windows (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Although there is potential for increased competition among national and international NGOs, this is not always offset by appropriate measures to address power imbalances, such as requirements for relevant capacity strengthening, prevention of 'pass-through' funding, lowering minimum grant amounts and revising weighting criteria in proposals for national NGOs.

Another issue is that pooled funds may continue to privilege already powerful actors. For instance, for the Somalia/Somaliland Humanitarian Fund a key challenge has been the lack of opportunity for NGOs to form direct relationships with donors, even when they meet due diligence expectations (Howe et al., 2019). A prominent recommendation suggested in the literature is the proposal to transition to national-level funds owned and managed by national and local partners (ICVA and HLA, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).

3.4.5   Project, initiative and activity level

In comparison with higher-level strategies, there is strong evidence in relation to the multiple initiatives and activities at project level. While these activities are disparate, they can be viewed collectively and over the long term; when gathered together they provide important, although not systematic, information about common success and enabling factors. Most initiatives focus on partnerships, capacity and funding areas, or a combination of these, and many have remained as pilot or one-off projects, never replicated at scale. Nonetheless, they have had significant impact at the internal organisational level (Start Network, 2017a; Poole, 2018; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Oxfam, 2020). The wide variety of activities points to tailored and partnership-oriented, rather than 'one-size-fits all', approaches (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2019; HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; C4C, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Over the last five years, research and analysis have consistently shown the benefits and contribution of sustained, contextually defined partnerships and capacity-strengthening initiatives in supporting localisation objectives. The narrative has shifted, with much of the literature highlighting the importance of long-term, locally relevant institutional capacity-strengthening and capacity-sharing approaches that move away from short-term, one-off training and initiatives where needs have been defined by international actors (Ayobi et al., 2017; OECD, 2017; Poole, 2018; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; HAG and VANGO, 2019; NRC, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; UNICEF 2019a; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

As a result, longer-term mentoring and accompaniment approaches that focus on capacity sharing are increasingly being adopted by agencies, with local actors able to set their own priorities and mutually determined indicators for measuring progress (see Box 6) (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Kraft and Smith, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Research also demonstrates that this allows for better opportunities for complementarity between actors and better preparedness. However, capacity-strengthening initiatives need to be implemented over a much longer period of time to fully realise their potential (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Start Network, 2017a; Barbelet, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Bamforth et al., 2020). There is evidence that quality partnership approaches can support broader localisation objectives. Key attributes of quality partnership approaches include: an aim to strengthen local leadership through policy development, contribution to overheads, funded partnership management, co-design of programmes, more flexible funding and reporting arrangements, and trust in local partners to manage parts of project planning and M&E (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; IRC, 2019).

Box 6   Long-term partnerships and capacity strengthening

Multi-year initiatives focused on strengthening equitable partnerships and capacity development in support of localisation have a strong evidence base around enabling factors and the benefits of supporting long-term, equitable partnerships. Key elements of such projects include policy and strategy development and planning, institutional strengthening, proposal and programme development, training on technical areas, development of response mechanisms and providing access to broader networks. Evidence highlights that these programmes support and enable overall local leadership and action when they have certain features: when they have a co-design process, a long-term lifespan and appropriate funding; when capacity assessments and strengthening are contextually prioritised by local and national actors and integrated into partnership and programme agreements; and when they include accountability measures for international partners (Emmens and Clayton, 2017; Start Network, 2017a; Willitts-King et al., 2018; IRC, 2019; NRC, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a; Robillard et al., 2020c;). Initiatives have also supported the development of locally designed capacity assessment tools, such as the NGO Forum in Somalia OCAT tool and the NEAR Organisational Capacity Assessment (Willitts-King et al., 2018; Barbelet, 2019). There are multiple examples of how such investments also strengthen local and national actors' access to funding (e.g. the Catholic Relief Service (CRS)'s work in the Venezuela regional crisis) and enable them to develop new funded partnerships (e.g. through the Bridge Builder and Shifting the Power initiatives) (Start Network, 2017a; IRC, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Local organisations can face challenges in retaining staff when funding falls or when international agencies 'poach' individuals from them. Acknowledging these issues, the IRC partnership approach is intended to minimise the risk of undermining local capacity by understanding current capacity before shaping IRC's role (Barbelet, 2019).

Many of these projects have worked through international–national consortia, or have encouraged the formation of local NGO consortia. For instance, the Oxfam Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) project in Uganda had multiple benefits, including shared hubs for accessing resources, shared learning and increased access to donors (Kraft and Smith, 2019; Oxfam, 2020). Key initiatives that have evidence of impact include: the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships programme, Islamic Relief's Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence (STRIDE), Oxfam's ELNHA project, the SHAPE Framework and Shifting the Power initiatives, the Syrian Humanitarian Action Project and the Bridge Builder Model through the work of NEAR and through donor-funded long-term institutional capacity support for governments (Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; Wake and Barbelet, 2019, Fast and Bennett, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Examples of joint initiatives include the UNHCR, UNICEF and World Food Programme (WFP) Partner Portal to support more efficient collaboration and partner vetting approaches (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020).

Despite this trend, many international, and national actors continue to report lack of long term and multi-year donor funding for capacity development and partnership management, and the need for more sophisticated and innovative approaches to this (Emmens and Clayton, 2017; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; HAG and VANGO, 2019; IFRC, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019). Commitment tracking against the Grand Bargain, C4C and CHS shows that progress is being made in this area. However, there remains significant collective under-investment in institutional capacity, highlighted as an area of weakness in progress reviews of Grand Bargain workstream 2 (Howe et al., 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2020).

International agencies have explored reconceptualising their role in humanitarian response as 'intermediaries', including through partnerships rather than as implementers. There are numerous examples of where this shift in roles, coupled with redefining partnership and capacity approaches, has enabled greater local leadership for partners, shared learning, increased access to institutional funding, engagement with broader networks, better-quality partnerships and stronger local and national positions (Kraft and Smith, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). For example, the Jordan Syria Lebanon forum and Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) intermediary role provides complementary skills and support, such as proposal writing and funding access, to local providers (Kraft and Smith, 2019). The role of the intermediary, however, remains unclear as they differ across diverse contexts and lack shared vision, with differing understandings of the role of intermediaries and lack of consensus on how the effectiveness of the role of intermediary should be measured (Howe et al., 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Some suggestions for managing intermediary roles have included funding a national intermediary, potentially in the form of a national NGO forum, which could manage compliance issues with local actors (Kraft and Smith, 2019).

3.5   Conclusion

In summary, the weak conceptualisation of the end goal of localisation and metric-led approach to measurement has meant that, overall, there is a relative scarcity of strategic approaches to conceiving of and implementing localisation (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Similarly, there is very little empirical evidence about the strategies and approaches that have been tested, and what the impact of these has been on humanitarian action and on the broader humanitarian system (Robillard et al., 2020c). Existing localisation activities have been reported on by agencies predominantly through global commitments progress tracking and, to date, most analysis has fallen under the framing of progress against these commitments. However, there is some research and external analysis related to specific localisation-related initiatives. Where there have been positive, measurable results, these remain standalone, rather than scaled up or tested in other contexts (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

The process of deepening and testing the normative conversations through stronger, more contextually and empirically informed understandings of the politics and power dynamics of localisation is therefore still ongoing. As Robillard et al. (2020a) point out, this gap in analysis has implications for the quality and outcomes of aid responses. These issues are explored further in the next chapter.

4   Implication and impact on quality and value for money of humanitarian assistance and outcomes

4.1   Impact and quality

There is an assumption that localisation can improve the quality and impact of humanitarian responses (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; IRC, 2019; UNICEF, 2019). However, very little generalisable evidence has tested these assumptions.[9] In some respects this can be understood, given that the indicators to measure localisation under the Grand Bargain focus on the act of localising responses, as opposed to the benefits of localised responses for people in crisis.

Where research demonstrates the value of local actors for more effective responses (Barakat and Milton, 2020), this was not verified or reflected in the literature reviewed. There seems to be little evidence of independent evaluations of the impact of localised responses (Ali et al., 2018). The findings here are in line with Howe et al.'s (2019) argument:

> The literature is replete with assumptions about the benefits and drawbacks of a localized response. Most reports are based on anecdotal evidence, describe lessons learned through the study individual projects, or are aspirational and normative in tone'

Anecdotal evidence suggests responses are strengthened with the involvement of local partners (IRC, 2019). For example, through contextual knowledge, language knowledge and understanding of complex dynamics, local actors can shape programmes to improve their relevance and appropriateness, making them more accountable to affected populations (see Box 7) (IRC, 2019; Barakat and Milton, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a; 2020c). However, once again, this is predominantly based on perceptions. The literature reviewed reaches the same conclusion of Ayobi et al. (2017):

> To date, no-one has measured the impact of localisation. Part of the research focused on understanding the potential impact and this report captures perceptions of impact that are consistently positive. Stakeholders expect that localisation will bring about greater effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity.

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9   For the purposes of the research, the research team considered the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact.

Box 7   Accountability to affected populations

Feedback from affected populations consistently suggests that people lack information about available services and how to access assistance, and are not adequately engaged in decisions that affect them. High proportions of people report not being empowered by aid and criticise its quality and relevance (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; GTS, 2019; Knox-Clarke et al., 2020). Those who could give their opinion were significantly more likely to say they had been treated with dignity (Knox-Clarke et al., 2020).

There is an opportunity to strengthen accountability to people affected by crisis *through* localisation, rather than treat the two issues as separate requirements of the humanitarian system (ICVA, 2018).

However, the difference in affected populations' perceptions of international and local actors, and perceptions of locally led responses, has not been adequately assessed. One study found that negative perceptions are more pronounced towards international actors (Wall and Hedlund, 2016); while another found that recipients of assistance were more concerned with how appropriate and responsive aid was, rather than who distributed it (Bryant, 2019).

There is some evidence that localised responses in some contexts have led to faster response times to get aid to affected populations, particularly where there are pre-existing relationships (IRC, 2019; Bamforth et al., 2020). A key challenge for local organisations is to deliver at scale. This can be partially addressed through partnership models, as demonstrated in the Tropical Cyclone Harold response, where local actors led the response with remote support from international counterparts (Bamforth et al., 2020; HAG and VANGO, 2019; see also Robillard et al., 2020a).

4.2   Value for money

Localisation is also presented in much of the literature as more cost-efficient (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; UNICEF 2019a; Robillard et al., 2020c), with agencies outlining perceived benefits such as 'reduction of costs related to implementation, staffing and management through all stages of humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery' (UNICEF, 2019a). There is a small pool of analysis in relation to cost efficiencies. A preliminary analysis of implementation of the Niger 2019 HRP of the child protection sub-cluster showed that 60% of funds were requested by INGOs to reach 36% of the population, while 17% of funds were requested by national NGOs to reach 29% of the population (UNICEF, 2019a). While this was cited as demonstrating a higher value for money (VfM) ratio, it only accounts for an economy analysis. When considering VfM, all four metrics – economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity – should be considered. There is no evidence to suggest that a comprehensive VfM analysis related to localisation or locally led action in specific contexts has been carried out.

The literature warns against looking at localisation as a way to save money as it leads to incentivising bad practices around cost sharing and partnerships (Manis, 2018; Roepstorff, 2020) or compromising the quality of the response. It was found that it costs two-thirds less to deploy national surge support staff than international staff (IFRC, 2019). However, local actors often have low budgets for safety and security, either for fear of these not being approved or to remain competitive by keeping costs low. This raises questions around whether the VfM justification for localisation results in perverse incentives to keep costs low, leading to compromises in safety, quality and sustainability. The lower costs of local NGOs compared to international NGOs are too often a result of lack of budgeted overheads, lower staff salaries and lower administrative costs (Howe et al., 2015; Els et al., 2016; Ayobi et al., 2017). While these issues are repeatedly raised in efforts to improve the quality of localised responses, they are yet to be adopted across actors, in part due to a limited joint position of donors, and due to the practices of intermediary organisations such as UN agencies and INGOs. Cost drivers of localisation can therefore perpetuate power imbalances in humanitarian responses, raising ethical issues, and become a barrier for strengthened sustainable localised responses. While an overhaul of the system of measuring VfM and its applicability to localisation may take time, some of the challenges can be addressed by considering all indicators of VfM alongside quality.

4.3   The role of localisation in strengthening the humanitarian–development–peace nexus

There is an assumption that localisation can present an opportunity to more effectively support the transition between or integration of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programmes. However, there is limited evidence to demonstrate this as the literature reviewed did not focus on the impact of localisation in operationalising nexus approaches. Local actors who deliver humanitarian assistance are less likely to distinguish between emergency, resilience and recovery programmes, and often deliver humanitarian, development and at times peacebuilding programmes, which brings opportunities to enhance connectedness and longer-term perspectives. They could, therefore, be central to supporting transitions or integrated approaches to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. (ICVA, 2018; IRC, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020a).

Development funding can supplement and build on humanitarian funding and programmes (see Box 8). One study found that local actors had greater success in directly accessing funding from institutional donors for development activities compared to humanitarian projects (IFRC, 2019). This is likely due to different funding cycles and timelines, with humanitarian funding largely short-term and project-based (ibid.). However, there is little evidence in the literature of good examples of development funding being used to build links to support local humanitarian responses and leadership. Furthermore, the IOB review 2009–2014 found that there was poor harmonisation between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, due to the separate delegation of budget responsibilities and capacity gaps, which may explain the missed opportunities to support local humanitarian action through development funding (IOB Evaluation, 2015). Where relevant and appropriate, donors should consider strengthening the blending of humanitarian and development financing.

> ### Box 8   Multi-year humanitarian funding and the nexus
>
> Multi-year humanitarian funding is one way for humanitarian donors to contribute to programmes with a longer-term focus, towards a transition from humanitarian to development programming. However, development funding can also go further, through supporting local humanitarian action with a view to transition or integrate with developmental approaches.
>
> The DRA committed to predictable and multi-year funding in its 2018–2021 strategy (DRA, 2017). While donor states have been reporting increased multi-year funding for humanitarian responses, this had not been significantly experienced by INGOs and UN agencies, and less so for local actors (IFRC, 2019).[10] As well as being predictable, multi-year funding contributes to organisational sustainability and has been linked to higher quality programme outcomes and greater effectiveness, particularly for local actors (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).

The response to Covid-19 has demonstrated the need for humanitarian–development nexus approaches, including in protracted crisis settings where systems are overburdened. Many local actors are already delivering a mix of humanitarian and development programming and they can potentially build on and adapt towards blended approaches (ICVA, 2020).

4.4   Conclusion, limitations and evidence gaps

The majority of the literature refers to the quality of partnerships with local actors, with very little evidence of the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of localisation for affected populations and humanitarian responses.

While the Grand Bargain metrics to measure localisation have focused on developing criteria to track progress in delivering on the commitment to increase support for the localisation of humanitarian responses, there is a gap in assessing the impact of localisation or integrating this as part of humanitarian evaluations. Performance of local actors focuses solely on financial compliance and risk management rather than impact (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018; Howe et al., 2019). Evidence is needed on how local humanitarian action, local leadership and complementary partnerships contribute to better humanitarian outcomes, including through developing an evaluation framework to understand this. Evaluating localised responses by applying the OECD-DAC criteria could be a starting point, including through localisation-specific questions, while considering calls to contextualise humanitarian impact evaluations beyond these global criteria.

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10   See also Chapter 3 and 4 on the role of intermediaries.

5   Drivers of change towards localisation

This chapter examines the drivers for localisation that are found in the literature. While the literature identifies some good practices or facilitating factors to enable better partnerships or complementarity, these are often caveated by the need to drive change at a more structural level in the humanitarian sector. This chapter focuses on the drivers for change and reform required to enable localisation.

The below drivers all relate to change in the formal international system. However, Robillard et al. (2020b) note that change in humanitarian responses also happens as a result of action outside of the formal international humanitarian system, stating: 'networks of partnership, cooperation, and capacity building among local actors, which do not depend on international resources, are real and important components of humanitarian action'. In that sense, change may be driven from influences outside of the formal international system.

5.1   Improving the quality, sustainability and efficiency of humanitarian response

Drivers of localisation tend to be linked to its perceived possible benefits. As outlined in Chapter 4, claims are made repeatedly that localisation improves the quality of humanitarian response, but we know the evidence base for this requires strengthening. However, improving the quality and sustainability of humanitarian responses is perceived as a significant driver of localisation (OECD, 2017; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Barakat and Milton, 2020; Roepstorff, 2020). In that sense the literature tends to see localisation as a solution 'to address deficiencies of current humanitarian responses and to provide answers to the challenges the humanitarian sector sees itself confronted with' (Roepstorff, 2020).

Other perceived benefits of localisation in terms of improving the quality and impact of humanitarian response are the drivers towards resilience, sustainability and links with development (OECD, 2017; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Barakat and Milton, 2020); as well as timeliness and improved accountability to affected people (OECD, 2017; Roepstorff, 2020). Another driver, as seen in the previous section, has been to lower cost and make humanitarian action more cost-effective (OECD, 2017; Manis, 2018; UNICEF, 2019a).

5.2   Access

Increasing the reach of humanitarian responses and ensuring access has also contributed greatly to driving localisation forward. Where international actors are unable to access populations (and vice versa), local actors are a means to increase coverage and reach, particularly in insecure areas, making it a significant driver (Dixon et al., 2016; Building Markets, 2018; Manis, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Roepstorff, 2020). Local actors' proximity to and greater understanding of local contexts, as well as their greater acceptance by communities, are seen as the main reasons behind their ability to gain and maintain access (OECD, 2017; Manis, 2018).

Access as a driver explains why the literature on localisation has focused on certain countries and crises over others. This is particularly true with the Syria conflict (Building Markets, 2018; Stoddard et al., 2019; Barakat and Milton, 2020). The most innovative and far-reaching examples of complementarity[11] (see Box 9) between local and international actors are indeed found where internationals have no access and thus are forced to rely on local actors to deliver assistance and services (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Barbelet, 2019). Barbelet (2019) argues that in situations where international actors have no choice, some of the power dynamics between international and local actors shift, as seen for instance in Myanmar, Somalia, parts of Sudan and Syria.

Box 9   Innovative complementarity in a situation of no access for international actors

In one context where international actors have no access to people affected by conflict, Oxfam and a collective of local NGOs have piloted an innovative form of financing through a rapid response grant. The Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF) provides competitive funding opportunities to support diverse local and national actors to be better equipped to lead humanitarian responses. By doing so, it promotes local and national humanitarian actors' leadership and supports these organisations to independently design and implement quality responses, as well as to increase their visibility and autonomy in responses.

An institutional donor provides funding to Oxfam and acts as the guarantor, but decisions are made by the HRGF 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. As part of the brokering role, Oxfam uses 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 one page long and 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. 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.

Source: Barbelet (2019)

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11   As per Barbelet (2019), complementarity is defined as 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.

Access as a driver of localisation links closely with the inability or unwillingness of international actors to face security risks and is perceived by some as being driven by the desire to transfer risk to local actors (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Howe and Stites, 2019; see also Chapter 6).

5.3   Covid-19

The debate on access is reignited by Covid-19 as the global pandemic has reduced the access, presence and proximity of international actors. The global pandemic has made localisation a necessity in many ways and it is argued by some as having the potential to fast forward change towards localisation in the humanitarian sector (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020; Bamforth et al., 2020; Barbelet et al., 2020; HAG and Vango, 2020; Pincock et al., 2020; Wijewickrama et al., 2020).

Evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on localisation is growing, based on case studies conducted in 2020 limited to specific countries (Fiji, Myanmar, Uganda and Vanuatu). In responses to Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO) found that travel restrictions 'allowed the government to better coordinate the response, which was more manageable with fewer new actors' (HAG and VANGO, 2020). Similarly, Australian Red Cross et al. (2020) claim that Covid-19 reduced the physical presence of international aid workers in the Pacific and as a result 'has considerably strengthened local leadership'. According to Pincock (2020), in the refugee response in Uganda international actors' inability to be physically present at the front line of the response has forced them 'to explore new mechanisms to support remote and participatory humanitarian aid delivery' (see also Betts et al., 2021).

Global restrictions on travel as a result of Covid-19 saw efficiency gains in communication across responses through the use of more informal means of communication, such as social media platforms, which have reportedly led to more inclusivity and are an entry point to address power dynamics (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020). However, caution is required to ensure power imbalances are not entrenched.

Covid-19 has driven more dialogue over localisation. Yet, it has not resulted in transformational change. In the case of refugee-led organisations in Uganda, funding has not necessarily flowed more to local actors as a result; as Pincock (2020) argues, 'donor governments have remained reluctant to directly finance RLOs [refugee-led organisations], partly due to concerns relating to risk and accountability'. Similarly, Wijewickrama et al. (2020) warn that the localisation agenda has not moved forward in Myanmar 'to the level that was possible given the opportunity'.

5.4   Leadership: donors, governments and more

Leadership by national government in countries affected by crises is also seen as a driver for localisation. Indeed, a number of national governments in the last few years have imposed localisation in disaster response. What is referred to as 'enforced complementarity' by Barbelet (2019) 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'.

Gómez (2021) argues that the rejection by states in Asia of international humanitarian interventions – including through denial of access – contributes to creating new humanitarian norms, reinforces the ownership element of localisation that grants states the right to accept or reject interventions, and contests liberal humanitarian norms. However, this enforced complementarity is criticised by Robillard et al. (2020a) who note that such decisions by national governments have led to the nationalisation of INGOs rather than localisation. Indeed, in order to get around government restrictions on international actors operating in-country, some international organisations are nationalising themselves, in other words registering as local organisations. This is particularly seen in countries such as India and Pakistan.

Beyond government, local civil society's advocacy for localisation also drives the agenda forward, as they construct their own understandings and vision for localisation (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Roepstorff, 2020).

Among international actors, the literature points to leadership on localisation as a necessity where policy directions are not clear yet on localisation. Featherstone and Mowjee (2020) argue that in the absence of clear policies and procedures to support localisation, the leadership of CBPFs is critical to ensure that the funds support localisation as an outcome. In their research, Featherstone and Mowjee (2020) found that 'the funds which had made the greatest progress in strengthening localisation were led by individuals that were passionate about it'.

Donor leadership is also argued to be critical for driving localisation forward. As Els (2018) argues, 'economic incentives set by donors are arguably one of the most effective ways to change behaviour among humanitarian actors'. Recommendations to advance localisation repeatedly call on donors to set the right incentives for change, including through holding international intermediaries to account on the equity and quality of their partnerships with local actors (Ali et al., 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

5.5   Grand Bargain commitments

The commitments on localisation as part of the Grand Bargain have been a driver towards localisation to some extent. As seen in Chapter 3, the Grand Bargain has led to initiatives and efforts to: increase donor allocations to CBPFs; investments in strengthening the capacity of local actors (albeit not systematically or well enough); and pushing direct-delivery INGOs to improve partnership practices (IFRC, 2019; Stoddard et al., 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

However, Van Brabant and Patel (2018) note that, too often, commitments made at global level do not translate into action or commitment in countries of operation, putting the pressure on local actors 'to argue, lobby, and sometimes campaign to get it on the agenda of the senior management of the country offices of international NGOs'. On a more positive note, the Grand Bargain commitments are used by local actors to negotiate better terms in partnerships and hold international actors to account (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

In the refugee sphere, UNHCR's 2013 community-based protection policy and the Global Compact on Refugees are also seen as policy commitments that have increased the drive towards working with refugee-led organisations and local actors, although policy commitments remain disconnected with practice (Pincock et al., 2020; Betts et al., 2021).

5.6   Conclusion, limitations and evidence gaps

Evidence on the drivers of change for localisation is challenging as they mainly link with the perceived benefits that localisation has for improving humanitarian responses. This also pertains to the difficulty of understanding how change happens in complex systems such as the humanitarian system. The literature seems to argue that change will only happen when it is a necessity or is forced upon international actors (Fast and Bennett, 2020). This explains why certain crises where access is problematic (including the Syria crisis and the context of Covid-19) are mentioned as drivers of localisation. In forcing change, donors are critical players in establishing incentives for localisation.

6   Challenges, risks and obstacles to localisation

The below challenges, risks and obstacles have repeatedly come up in the literature on localisation. While many initiatives have been launched to tackle these obstacles in the last five years (see Chapter 3), change has not happened on a wide enough scale to address them systematically. The research team recognises that some organisations have made progress towards tackling these challenges but argues that, based on evidence in the literature, challenges remain significant in inhibiting system-wide change to enable more local humanitarian action and local leadership. This is a continued source of frustration for local actors.

6.1   Risk management and upward accountability

It is widely acknowledged that donors have a low risk appetite, particularly for fiduciary,[12] legal and reputational risks. Alongside increased compliance and due diligence requirements, such attitudes are barriers to localised responses (Patel and Van Brabant, 2017; Els, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Stoddard et al., 2019; Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). While there is extensive discussion in the literature of perceptions of risk and analysis of risk appetite, only a limited number of studies provide evidence of the extent that these assumptions are likely to play out. of this. This section refers predominantly to those studies where there is a clear evidence base, and references perception-based reports where relevant.

Multiple, varied compliance and due diligence requirements across donors (including UN and INGO intermediaries) disproportionately burden local actors compared to INGOs and UN agencies. While internationals often have dedicated capacity to fulfil requirements local actors may not always have systems, resources or capacity to respond to such conditions imposed by international donors (Patel and Van Brabant, 2017). Donor-driven compliance mechanisms can be damaging. The high transaction costs involved can themselves lead to significant financial or operational risks for local actors who often receive minimal overheads or administrative support costs. This, coupled with high levels of competition for funding, can lead to distorted incentives to adopt poor financial, procurement and security management practices (Stoddard et al., 2019).

The focus on fiduciary and legal risks has led to a zero-tolerance approach to fraud, corruption and aid diversion, and the view that local actors are susceptible to higher risks than international organisations. This is partly due to perceptions of local actors as having low capacity combined with their proximity to communities, leading to increased vulnerability to pressure and bias. However, multiple reports questioned these assumptions, finding that both international and national organisations were susceptible to such risks (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Poole, 2018; Stoddard et al., 2019). Humanitarian

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12   Fiduciary risk is defined as 'the risk that money or materials are not used for intended purposes (i.e. fraud, theft, corruption)' (IFRC, 2019).

responses, particularly in insecure or conflict-affected areas, are predicated on a degree of risk. Even with optimum policies and controls in place, not all risks can be mitigated; therefore a level of risk must be accepted (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). A zero-tolerance approach to certain risks, and punitive measures when risks are realised, can lead to international and local actors downplaying the extent of the risk (Howe et al., 2019), precluding the opportunity for transparency and a solutions-oriented or risk-sharing approach.

With challenges around risk and attitudes to risk, as well as an inability to manage multiple funding portfolios going to multiple small organisations (Patel and Van Brabant, 2017; Ali et al., 2018; Manis, 2018; Howe et al., 2019; Metcalfe-Hough and Fenton, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020), donors often use intermediaries as a solution (IOB Evaluation, 2015; Ali et al., 2018; Howe, 2019; IFRC, 2019). However, the transfer of risk to intermediaries,[13] often UN agencies and INGOs, coupled with their interpretation of the risk appetite of institutional donors, has resulted in intermediary organisations imposing their own rigorous and often inflexible due diligence and compliance processes, primarily focused on fiduciary risk (Stoddard et al., 2019), which further transfers risk to local actors. One report's data indicated that new partnership management tools and processes by international organisations for local actors were introduced from 2015, and significantly increased between 2017 and 2018. It assessed that 'this was possibly in response to the Grand Bargain localization commitments or the more stringent regulatory environment that emerged over the same time period, or both' (Stoddard et al., 2019).

Perceptions of and approaches to risk management inevitably raise issues of power imbalances as international actors predominantly focus on the risks posed by partnering with local actors, rather than vice versa (Stoddard et al., 2019). This impacts partnership models (see Sub-section 6.3.2). Similarly, capacity-strengthening approaches further entrench these power dynamics: despite moves towards more sustained and participatory approaches (see Box 6), international organisations still largely determine local actors' capacity-strengthening requirements, and these predominantly focus on organisational capacity and the capacity to fulfil donor requirements (see Section 6.3). This focus on fulfilling the requirements of, and accountability to, donors can come at the expense of accountability to affected populations. Meanwhile, strong focus on organisational capacity can come at the expense of operational capacity,[14] undermining key justifications of a more localised response that is more relevant and focused on the needs of affected populations (Barbelet, 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019). This was found in Syria and Turkey, where donors and international intermediaries prioritised the organisational capacity of local partners over their operational capacity, effectively undermining their ablity to work to their strengths, including their proximity to and understanding of the needs of the local population (Howe and Stites, 2019).

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13   Risk transfer shifts liability and responsibility to the recipient if the risk transpires.

14   Operational capacity refers to the ability to carry out programmes and projects. Organisational capacity is related to decision-making, defined systems of governance, and management structures (Howe et al., 2019).

6.2   Risk transfer and risk sharing

The literature reflects the perception by some that there is a desire to transfer risk to local actors (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Howe and Stites, 2019). As de Geoffroy and Grunewald (2018) argue:

> One of the clear advantages to international actors of working through local actors in highly insecure areas that are inaccessible to international organisations is the fact that they are subject to fewer security constraints, or, in other words, they take greater risks. 'The localisation of aid often leads to the transfer of risk from international to national actors. This is one of the essential reasons for the localisation process globally, but it is rarely expressed explicitly.

The practice of transferring security risks introduces its own set of challenges. Local actors are often frontline responders and face higher security risks (Stoddard et al., 2019); however, transferred risks rarely come with support for overheads to mitigate them. Much of the literature found that funding for security management and risk mitigation is either unavailable or, to keep costs low, is not requested. Research cited in one report found that less than 19% of local actors reported a budget for risk management, including training and equipment, in their partnership budgets (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Local actors reported that the UN and some INGOs rarely meet overhead compliance and security costs (Stoddard et al., 2019). While some international partners provided support to help local actors mitigate risks, local actors are being asked to assume greater risk, with inadequate investment to manage it (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). By transferring risk in this way, a more efficient, effective localised response will not be realised (IRC, 2019). The Netherlands' recent humanitarian policy acknowledges the disproportionate burden of risk on local actors, and its commitment to improve risk-sharing[15] is an important step in rebalancing risk. This is all the more important given the findings of a recent study: that 'the humanitarian sector is characterised by "risk transfer" rather than "risk sharing"' (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). Some improvements have been noted, including increased dialogue on risk sharing (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

A shift towards strengthened risk sharing would require an honest dialogue with donors, including at senior political levels, about the level of residual risk donors are willing to accept while ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including who takes on what responsibility. This would need to include a transparent discussion of the zero-tolerance approach to risks (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). A risk-sharing approach is aligned with Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, and there are opportunities to have this dialogue through the Grand Bargain and Good Humanitarian Donorship Group (Stoddard et al., 2019). Such discussions could help break down structural and power imbalances between international agencies and local actors, while promoting complementarity as well as risk sharing. Donors' current lack of engagement around operational solutions to managing risks could mean innovative solutions are missed, for example social or peer-to-peer accountability systems (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020).

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15   Risk sharing requires all partners to share responsibility for managing risks among them, implying co-ownership.

6.3 Quantity and quality of funding, risk mitigation approaches

The low quantity of funding flowing to local actors is both a sign of the lack of progress on localisation and an obstacle to shifting the status quo (Els, 2019). Donors' channelling of funding through large INGOs and UN agencies reinforces the role of international actors as intermediaries (IOB Evaluation, 2015; IFRC, 2019). While this is seen by some as a solution to mitigate perceived challenges posed by localisation, it presents additional difficulties and perpetuates power imbalances.

6.3.1 Quantity and quality of funding to local actors and intermediaries

The quality and quantity of funding to local actors is affected by the mechanisms used by donors to cascade funding to local actors with very few examples of donors directly funding local actors. As such, intermediary funding mechanisms are increasingly playing a critical part in how donors try to further localisation efforts (see Box 5). Donor funding cascading through international intermediaries to reach local actors can be challenging as the nature of partnerships as well as the type of funding international intermediaries allocate to local actors both affect the ability of local actors to lead humanitarian responses. In addition, CBPFs are another channel favoured by donors, with the CBPF managing the relationship with the end user of the funding. However, these represent a very low percentage of overall humanitarian funding (IFRC, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020), at an estimated 2.8% of total humanitarian funding in 2018 (IFRC, 2019). Access to funding for specific types of organisations, in particular women-led organisations, tends to be challenging (IFRC, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Domestic resource mobilisation as a funding strategy is also limited for local actors (IFRC, 2019). National-level restrictions on local actors accessing international funding, including challenges to register legally, further compound their ability to access funding (IFRC, 2019).

CBPFs, Start Fund and IFRC undertake capacity, due diligence and risk management processes. CBPFs and the Start Fund have introduced tiered systems that determine the level of funding local actors are eligible for and the level of oversight applicable. These are reviewed under partner performance and/or regular due diligence processes (OCHA, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Pre-screening processes have also supported accessibility to pooled funds (Willitts-King et al., 2018).

These risk-management systems have built donor confidence (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). However, there are limits on how much these mechanisms can be scaled up without creating further risks. There are opportunities to build on this approach, particularly through harmonisation and shared due diligence, compliance and audit requirements across donors and intermediary funding organisations. A suggested platform to do this could be through the CHS. Agencies seeking CHS verification must comply with CHS commitments, which cover significant parts of several donors' due diligence requirements. Donors could build on this by collectively identifying key requirements for partners to meet compliance standards under CHS. This would result in cost efficiencies through having one compliance, monitoring and audit mechanism, but would require agreement and resources across donors to outsource this to a third party such as a certification body

(Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). There is an opportunity to learn from other Grand Bargain workstreams by harmonising and simplifying monitoring and reporting requirements, for example through a common reporting template, to reduce the burden on local actors (Els, 2018).

Localisation is further hampered by the lack of quality funding flowing to local actors.[16] The literature refers to the lack of unearmarked funding or sharing of core costs;[17] the inadequate coverage of security and compliance costs; flexible and longer-term funding not attached to short-term projects; and the lack of dedicated funding for increasing organisational capacity and organisational resilience (Cohen et al., 2016; Els et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2018; Building Markets, 2018; Christian Aid et al., 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019; IFRC, 2019, Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

Donors do not tend to monitor the added value of intermediaries or how these intermediaries partner with local actors, whether in terms of the quality of funding or the quality of partnerships.

6.3.2   Risk mitigation efforts and partnerships

Equitable partnerships are one avenue to mitigate some of the challenges around managing risks and increase the quantity and quality of funding to local actors. The move from a policing to partnership model was reported to be important: a practice of collaborative audits rather than reactive investigations, which build trust and mitigate disincentives to reporting and resolving problems (Howe et al., 2019; IFRC, 2019). Local intermediary partnerships can also be an effective model for risk mitigation. Two examples demonstrated instances where local intermediary organisations fulfilled compliance, proposal and reporting requirements, while also investing in the capacity of other local actors and building trust (Kraft and Smith, 2019).

Humanitarian response plans, when nationally driven and carried out in consultation with local actors, can give direction to partnership approaches. The Jordan Response Plan (JRP) and Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) are examples of this; they required international organisations to demonstrate how they will work in partnership with local actors to jointly achieve the objectives of the programme (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).

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16   One study contradicts this finding, stating: 'Local organisations generally feel that their international partners are responsive to their questions and concerns, treat them with respect and understand the context in which they work. Results are similar across all six countries. The local organisations surveyed – all of which currently receive funding through international aid agencies – also feel that the financial support they receive is sufficiently flexible and adequately covers project-related costs' (GTS et al., 2018).

17   A recent study by Save the Children Denmark and Street Child (2020) provides interesting insights on giving unearmarked funding to local actors: local actors spent an average of 85% of the funding on programming and 10% on core costs; actors achieved 95% expenditure against budget over three months even as the Covid-19 pandemic hit; and actors were able to conduct meaningful community consultations when planning for the grant, creating activity plans that met communities' needs. The study concludes that these findings 'start to challenge the perceived donor reluctance to trust national NGOs to plan and manage unrestricted funding' (ibid., 2020: 4).

Consortia are an increasingly popular partnership model for local actors to work with other local organisations or with international organisations. They are an opportunity to strengthen the interaction between local actors and donor representatives, which can build trust and facilitate a mutual understanding of requirements and constraints (Patel and Van Brabant, 2017). In Uganda, the formation of local consortia was cited as a donor requirement for local actors to access funding. Donors perceived this as a way to mitigate risks, reduce administrative costs, build efficiencies and simplify contract management. Rounds of funding cycles demonstrated stronger consortia, including synergies between consortia partners (Oxfam, 2020).

To strengthen joint approaches to security management, a partnership security framework has been suggested, including joint risk analysis and mitigation (Stoddard et al., 2019). One donor reported an introduced requirement for all INGO grantees and subgrantees to submit security plans, requiring that the INGO 'must explicitly cover their partner under their own plan' under grant guidelines. This was intentionally introduced to encourage strengthened shared security responsibility (Stoddard et al., 2019). While this would be a promising shift of the status quo, it should not become another burdensome compliance process.

6.4   Principled humanitarian action

Another key challenge to more localised responses is perceived concerns about the ability of local actors to uphold humanitarian principles (Els, 2018; Localisation Workstream, 2019; Roepstorff, 2020). However, there has been no systematic review of the degree to which humanitarian principles are more or less applied by local or international actors, and the implications of this in practice. Similarly to elsewhere in the review, these assumptions are largely based on perceptions, while the reality is often more complex and nuanced than acknowledged (Localisation Workstream, 2019). For example, there is evidence that local actors have organisational rules and policies relevant to independence and neutrality (Robillard et al., 2020c). Some local actors were reported to utilise principles to gain access and avoid diversion (Howe et al., 2019), while another report found that 91% of local staff acknowledged that adherence to principles improved the safety of personnel and operations (Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2016).[18]

International organisations' perceptions of where there may be tensions for local organisations' capability to implement humanitarian principles can be simplistic and raise challenges themselves (on this dynamic regarding faith-based actors, see Kraft and Smith, 2019). For example, one study found that international organisations felt their local partners' approach to community participation could leave them vulnerable to pressure not to uphold humanitarian principles (Howe et al., 2019). This raises questions around how much compromise of principles is due to programming approaches, and the extent to which principles should trump inclusive programmes seeking accountability to affected populations. These concerns are more pronounced where faith-based actors are implementing a humanitarian response, though the literature did not find evidence that this necessarily led to greater risks (Kraft and Smith, 2019).

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18   It is unclear if it the report is referring to national personnel in local or national organisations.

There were ad hoc findings related to local actors' 'mixed' knowledge of humanitarian principles and how to operationalise or interpret them (UNICEF, 2019b). For example, one study found that coverage, downward accountability and monitoring were perceived as indicators of a principled humanitarian response (Howe et al., 2019); while another found that impartial assistance was interpreted as equal distribution of aid as opposed to targeting based on need (Robillard et al., 2020c). While local actors need to navigate complex networks and local politics, which could compromise principles, the literature reviewed reflects one study's findings that 'there is not sufficient evidence ... to support the hypothesis that local and national actors are inherently less able to deliver a principled response than international actors are' (Robillard et al., 2020c).

International humanitarian actors also face challenges in upholding a principled response. One study reported local actors' concerns regarding the proximity of UN and INGOs to the government, undermining the neutrality and potentially the safety of local organisations if the conflict escalated (Bamforth et al., 2020). In Syria, worries that the Syrian government was manipulating responses were felt so strongly that 112 activists living in besieged areas wrote to the Emergency Relief Coordinator expressing concern that the UN had become 'a political tool of the war' (Els et al., 2016). These findings raise questions as to whether the difference in challenges faced between international and local actors is overstated, and whether there are other interests at play, for example using principles to legitimise international humanitarian actors and delegitimise local actors (Barbelet, 2019). Many scholars reportedly view principles as a reason to maintain power and control over responses, which some see as a manifestation of neo-colonial attitudes (Melis and Apthorpe, 2020).

Perceptions that local actors compromise humanitarian principles more than their international counterparts and are a barrier to localised responses are overly simplified. All actors working in conflict areas are working in complex environments, with security, fiduciary and reputational risks, and vulnerability to compromises. Risks change across actors, contexts and time. Detailed conflict analysis of all humanitarian actors is one way to mitigate these risks, while building trust, communication and participatory partnerships is another.

6.5   Trust

A dialogue on effective risk management, mitigation of risk and perceptions of risk is reliant on trust. However, the extent to which increased fiduciary and compliance measures translate to internationals' increased trust of local actors is unclear (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020). It is said that 'the most significant challenge in engaging with local actors on the Syrian response is lack of trust' (Wall and Hedlund, 2016). Meanwhile, Roepstorff (2020) argues that, in the response to the Rohingya refugee situation in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the lack of trust between international and local actors has intensified divisions due to conflicting views, interests and perceptions of 'self' and 'other' to find a common vision for advancing a more localised response. Indeed, the IOB review 2009–2014 found an imbalance between levels to which implementing partners are monitored, and trust towards them (IOB Evaluation, 2015). For local actors, this is more pronounced. One study found that local actors perceived increased donor requirements to be driven by mistrust rather than humanitarian outcomes, expressing

frustration at the perceived lack of awareness by international partners of the difficulties of operating in conflict areas (Howe and Stites, 2019). Trust needs to be built across all parties, requiring an open and transparent dialogue.

Subcontracting partnerships are more accurately described as top-down intermediary relationships. When presented as partnerships, they erode trust (see Box 10), perpetuate power imbalances and lead to the dissatisfaction of local actors (Wall and Hedlund, 2016). Lack of respect and transparency, as well as non-recognition of capacities and perceived misuse of power, are all cited as undermining trust and hence effective localisation (Christian Aid et al., 2019). Funding decisions and programme design are predominantly a top-down process, 'dictated' by international counterparts. Long-term partnerships have been found to allow more participation of local actors in funding decisions and programme design, therefore addressing some of the trust challenges (Ali et al., 2018). Such long-term approaches to partnerships could be further built on by establishing partnerships before crisis as part of preparedness and resilience efforts (Robillard et al., 2020b).

While not always be possible, equitable and principled partnerships are an entry point to build trust; transparency, participation and mutual respect will facilitate more effective partnerships. One study found that honest relationships, with open information-sharing, led to a higher likelihood of joint problem-solving (Howe and Stites, 2019). The presence of strong individuals within local organisations has been found to gain trust and build legitimacy, giving local actors greater ability to set agendas and address power imbalances (Barbelet, 2019). Trust and honest relationships can be built on by seconding individuals from well-renowned organisations to local organisations or establishing rosters of local actors to support local organisations in response. The challenge with this approach includes the ability to scale up such efforts, particularly in large-scale crises.

Box 10   Trust and humanitarian access

A driver towards more localised responses is the higher degree of access local actors often have, particularly in insecure areas. Access is reliant on established trust, networks and reputation within communities. Heavy compliance requirements and/or changes in donor commitments or policies, for example if programmes are delayed or changed, can erode trust between communities and local actors, potentially undermining access (Howe et al., 2019). Trust, and the nature of partnerships, can also lead to responses that are more accountable to beneficiaries, while building higher quality responses.

6.6   Capacity: lack of, perceptions, and capacity strengthening

Capacity has been a central theme in the localisation literature: local actors' perceived lack of capacity is widely cited as an obstacle to localisation (Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2016; Baker and Elawad, 2018; UNICEF, 2019), while evidence of international actors' (often inaccurate) perceptions around local capacity is itself widely referenced as an obstacle in the literature (Ali et al., 2018; Manis, 2018; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Barakat and Milton, 2020). Local actors' lack of capacity has been framed in terms of risks (humanitarian principles, fiduciary management) as well as their ability to absorb and manage funding. Their capacity limitations are also referred to in terms of their capacity to scale up (Barbelet, 2019). Lack of local capacity as an obstacle to localisation links closely to risk practices and the lack of funding for local actors, particularly for long-term organisational capacity strengthening.

Some literature frames the lack of local capacity as resulting from a lack of effective and systematic capacity strengthening, including dedicated funding for capacity strengthening (Baker and Elawad, 2018; Howe and Stites, 2019; UNICEF, 2019b; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). Capacity strengthening, according to the literature, remains ad hoc, is often lacking the adequate investment to make an impact, is short-term and ineffective because it is based on training and is top-down and uncoordinated (the same training is offered multiple times by different organisations to the same local actors) (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018; Christian Aid et al., 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019; Howe et al., 2019).

The capacity discussion also points to how localisation is hampered by the continuous undermining of local capacity through internationals' unfair recruitment of staff from local organisations (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018). The discrepancy in salaries between local and international organisations is singled out as creating unequal and unfair recruitment practices (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Ali et al., 2018).

The literature does not present evidence to substantiate statements regarding local actors' lack of capacity, and instead finds that the way capacity is defined by donors and international actors perpetuates power imbalances (Barbelet, 2019; Roepstorff, 2020). Definitions of capacity vary, and there is evidence that international actors tend to define capacity to their advantage (Barbelet, 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019). In addition, evidence shows that local capacity is not well understood and rarely mapped by international actors (Barbelet, 2019; Bryant, 2019). The lack of understanding of local capacity, including through defining capacity beyond compliance requirements and through more systematic mapping of local capacity, is a significant obstacle to localisation and complementarity (HAG, 2017; Barbelet, 2019). There is evidence that international actors rarely know where local capacity is and what types of local capacities exist (Building Markets, 2018; de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Barbelet, 2019). International actors' understanding of the capacity of local organisations and assumptions about what a partner should look like tends to exclude specific organisations, especially refugee-led and women-led organisations (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Pincock et al., 2020; Betts et al., 2021). Overall, the burden of evidence unfairly falls on local actors to demonstrate their capacity (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018).

6.7 Power dynamics and international actors' self-preservation

Power dynamics are at the heart of the localisation agenda and also one of its most significant obstacles. In its most basic form, power is an obstacle to localisation because it remains in the hands of international actors to decide who has capacity or not (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2020), what capacity counts (Barbelet, 2019; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020), who gets funding or not, what types of partnerships prevail and who can access coordination structures and strategic decision-making fora (Wall and Hedlund, 2016). As Roepstorff (2020) explains, the humanitarian system 'is often perceived as a neo-colonial, imperial and neoliberal enterprise where countries from the Global North unequally dominate and dictate the rules of the game'. This colonial domination continues to undermine local leadership. As Australian Red Cross et al. (2020) state:

> Pacific Islanders note a nervousness to step into leadership roles because of a fear that their leadership must resemble the model established by international approaches, and that they will not be supported by their international colleagues if they fail. Respondents spoke about a continuing colonisation of the mind, whereby they feel as if they are unable to match the expertise of expatriates, even when they know this is not the case.

Any domination and control by international actors reflects deeper sector-wide issues with racist and colonial underpinnings, which have crystallised into a saviour narrative in the sector (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020; Roepstorff, 2020). This is closely linked to international actors' need for visibility in order to access funding (Cohen et al., 2016; Emmens and Clayton, 2017). For international actors to keep their market share (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020), they must downplay the role of local actors in their reporting, media engagement and narrative (UNICEF, 2019a). The change required to support localisation runs counter to the interests of international actors, particularly in terms of maintaining and growing their funding base (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020;). As such, international actors can undermine progress on localisation due to self-preservation (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Robillard et al., 2020b).

The parameters of localisation as a reform agenda are set up by international actors who have power and influence. The lack of consensus on the ambition and objectives of localisation means that it can be defined in a manner that maintains the status quo (Fast and Bennett, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020b). International actors' self-serving interpretations of localisation can lead to decentralisation (giving more decision-making powers to international actors at country office level) and nationalisation (turning a country office of an international organisation into a national organisation) (Poole, 2018; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018). Local actors' lack of participation and influence on the localisation agenda further compounds who sets ambitions (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019). As Roepstorff (2020) argues, 'the localisation agenda runs the risk of becoming another method of domination and control, reproducing current power asymmetries and the marginalisation of actors at the periphery'. As HAG (2017) writes about localisation in Rohingya response in Bangladesh, 'the international localisation discourse has set up a combative dynamic that hinders the conversation at the operational level'.

All of the above can be seen in international actors' reluctance to move to more equitable partnerships (Barbelet, 2019). It is in their interests to maintain subcontractual partnerships as a means to an end (rather than as an end in itself), where harsh compliance is applied, costs are lowered, funding is of low quality and collaboration is project-based and short-term. Partnering with local actors within that framing maintains the dynamics of provider (the international actor) and beneficiary (the local actors) (Robillard et al., 2020c). This is particularly noted in reference to refugee-led organisations and their relationship with UNHCR and national governments, where refugee-led organisations are 'having to operate in ways that do not disturb the existing official or organisational balance of power' (Pincock et al., 2020). In the name of self-preservation, international actors are reluctant to give up space, decision-making power, control and visibility. Intermediaries' gatekeeping role, which undermines the visibility of local actors, results in a lack of direct engagement between donors and local actors (Ali et al., 2018; Howe et al., 2019). As interest in change is low, incentives are also not present to drive that change (Wall and Hedlund, 2016; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). As one report states, 'all of it is subcontracting … because donors allow it' (Els et al., 2016).

Self-preservation is translated as the maintenance of 'domineering presence and attitudes' (Brabant and Patel, 2018), crowding out spaces and thus undermining the ability of local actors to lead, influence and make decisions in humanitarian responses. This is also seen in some decision-making spaces, in particular coordination structures, which have been criticised in the localisation literature as being exclusive spaces where local actors' action and leadership is undermined through language (such as the use of English as well as jargon) and complex rules that prevent local actors from influencing decisions (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Barbelet, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020b).

Given the perception-based nature of evidence on risk, localised responses and lack of local capacity, challenges are often framed by international actors as reasons for not localising; instead these could be framed as incentives for transformation (Fast and Bennett, 2020). As Fast and Bennett (ibid.) argue: 'At present, incentive structures within the humanitarian system serve the status quo'. Perceptions of localised response including risk and that local actors cannot uphold humanitarian principles or lack capacity all fall into this category. As interests for self-preservation remain, incentives to change are either non-existent or ineffective. The literature particularly finds that there is a lack of a coherent strategy from donors to create the right incentives for change (Barbelet, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020).

More recently, the localisation literature has called for a political economy analysis[19] approach to localisation to ensure that efforts towards localisation do not replicate elitist and national-level power dynamics (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Fast and Bennett, 2020; Melis and Apthorpe, 2020; Pincock et al., 2020; Roepstorff, 2020). As Pincock (2020) argues in the context of refugee displacement: 'for those people who wish to improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian governance,

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19   A political economy analysis aims to inform development and humanitarian programming based on an analysis of political and economic process in society, including distribution and contestation of power, incentives, relationships and the rules of the game. It aims to understand how systems really work below the surface (see Mcloughlin, 2014).

the challenge is about more than just "bringing refugees in" to the localisation agenda; it is about understanding the interests and power relations that underlie inclusion, exclusion, and delegation' (Pincock et al., 2020).

6.8   Conclusion, limitations and evidence gaps

Issues of risk and risk management are predominantly perception- and attitude-based, leaving ambiguity as to the likelihood that these risks could play out. Where risks are identified, there is little evidence to suggest that donors and international intermediaries are willing to support effective mitigation measures, such as funding overhead costs, including for security management, systems and human resources to meet the risk threshold of donors. Stoddard et al.'s (2019) research is a good example demonstrating where risks are considered from a systems perspective, across the chain of actors involved in humanitarian delivery. Analysis of risk and costed mitigation measures should be embedded across the response and across actors involved in the delivery chain.

Undoubtedly there are risks to working in complex humanitarian environments. Further evidence is required to understand how risks play out across responses in practice, and the differential vulnerability and effective mitigation measures across the range of international and local actors.

Studies that track funding warned in 2015 of their inability to track how much funding was going to local actors, especially when going through intermediaries such as the UN and INGOs (see Els and Carstensen, 2015). Unfortunately, in 2019, the inability to track funding remained a challenge (Els, 2019). The lack of evidence and transparency on how funding goes through intermediaries, both in terms of quantity and quality, is itself an obstacle for localisation. An additional challenge for tracking funding to local actors has been the use of inconsistent definitions of who counts as a local or national actor as well as the lack of consistent approach to measuring funding transferred (ibid.).

The lack of more systematic evidence on the added value of local humanitarian action, local leadership and complementarity (impact on quality of humanitarian response) has also undermined advocacy efforts and evidence-based policy change. However, placing the burden of evidence on local actors – rather than international actors – to prove they are better placed to respond to crisis has also derailed investment in localisation and the changes needed to enable more local action and leadership. This is yet another example of how self-preservation and power dynamics are deeply entrenched in the humanitarian system.

Indeed, local actors continue to express frustration at the lack of change towards more localised responses. This includes partnership practices where: power imbalances continue to favour international organisations (Els et al., 2016; Christian Aid et al., 2019; Howe et al., 2019; Robillard et al., 2020); international actors undermine local actors (Howe et al., 2019); international actors fail to understand the complexity in accessing highly insecure areas (ibid.); there is lack of equal access to funding (HAG and VANGO, 2020); and inequalities remain in the way capacity is understood, assessed and strengthened (Ayobi et al., 2017; Building Markets, 2018).

The evidence on obstacles to localisation is perception-based but has created a strong consensus in the literature. These obstacles are repeated throughout the literature and evidenced through a systematic documentation of the attitudes of international actors towards local actors and their capacity as well as the experience of local actors. It creates a strong evidence-based narrative for understanding why change is not happening on a wider scale.

7 The role of donors and diplomatic actors in promoting effective humanitarian response through more local humanitarian action

Donors have a critical role in creating effective policies and incentives to support localisation (Ali et al., 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). At present, the literature points to donors' overarching lack of clear strategic and policy direction on localisation. It also highlights existing recommendations to donors and other actors based on emerging good practice and evidence that have yet to be implemented widely or systematically. The below recommendations draw on the analysis of the evidence in this report and also consider existing recommendations (see Appendix 1 for more details of existing recommendations in the literature). They are forward-leaning in nature and, where required, propose fundamental shifts in donor policy and practice based on the evidence.

However, these recommendations do not look beyond the realm of the feasible or current donor constraints. In its truest form, localisation requires an overall change of the humanitarian system to recentre it on a locally led aid model. The current literature does not offer a ready-made and tested approach to such an overall shift, although it points to how a different approach to understanding capacity, mapping local capacities and crisis response ecosystems as well as adopting the principle of complementarity could offer the beginnings of a more fundamental shift in practice to enable more local humanitarian action (Barbelet, 2019; Bryant, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2020). Localisation is not a programme that can be implemented; instead, it is a change in the way the whole aid system operates. It requires a complete shift in how assessments, planning and response design are done, including in how this all relates to people affected by crises. Shifting the system to a more bottom-up approach means problems are defined and analysed locally with the full understanding of the context, solutions are designed locally and informed by local voices and those affected by crises. This requires the international system to pause, listen and take account of what is already available and what could be done and to support an aid model that is 100% designed and informed by not only local realities or needs assessments but by the stakeholders in the local crisis response ecosystem. Such a shift cannot be solely based on evidence, but should be based on ethics and principles. It is a political choice rather than a technocratic one.

Within the current system and based on the findings of this literature study and an analysis of existing recommendations in the localisation literature, donors and more specifically the Netherlands, through the work of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should implement the following priority strategic recommendations:

- **Strategic recommendation 1: Collective donor approach.** Work collectively with other donors – for instance through the Good Humanitarian Donorship Group or the OECD – to develop a common vision. Test different collective approaches to incentivising partners, in particular UN agencies, to change their practice.
- **Strategic recommendation 2: Risk sharing.** Develop a risk-sharing agenda across donors and harmonise due diligence, compliance and audit requirements.
- **Strategic recommendation 3: Equitable, ethical, complementary partnerships.** Support and invest in the development of equitable, ethical and quality partnerships between international and local actors based on complementarity through, as a donor, monitoring, evaluating and incentivising intermediary actors based on the quality of their partnerships with local actors.
- **Strategic recommendation 4: Quality and quantity of funding.** Increase the quality and quantity of funding going to local actors, including through increasing funding to pooled funds, in particular those that focus on support to national and local actors, and considering non-UN pooled funds, especially where they are led and/or governed by local and national actors and where they blend humanitarian and development funding.
- **Strategic recommendation 5: Complementarity and capacity sharing.** Invest in coordinated and bottom-up capacity-sharing and capacity-strengthening efforts based on the principle of complementarity. This should be done through integrating capacity sharing as an objective of all partnerships and supported by a dedicated budget line for capacity sharing. Articulate a donor approach to systemically investing in long-term institutional capacity strengthening across development, peace, refugee, preparedness and humanitarian programming.

In addition to the priority recommendations, the study highlighted two actions to help improve understandings of localisation outcomes and opportunities:

- **Action 1: Link localisation with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.** Ministries such as the Netherland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should adopt a comprehensive strategy across its humanitarian, peace and development donor portfolio to support local civil society's role in local humanitarian action and leadership in crisis response, including through strengthening blending of humanitarian and development financing.
- **Action 2: Build evidence, evaluate impact and reshape the research agenda on localisation.** Donors and others with capacity to commission or produce research should invest in ways of measuring the impact of localisation on the quality of humanitarian responses and outcomes for people in crises. They should also invest in approaches to understand the perspectives of crisis-affected people on the relative advantages of the status quo and more locally led aid models.

The below provides a summary of findings and how to operationalise the five priority strategic recommendations above, as well as recommendations on building evidence, evaluating impact and reshaping the research agenda on localisation.

7.1   Strategic recommendation 1: Collective donor approaches

What the evidence shows: There are limited strategic approaches to conceiving of and implementing ways to strengthen localisation in donor policy and practice.

7.1.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Work collectively as donors to develop strategic approaches that outline desired impacts and outcomes for supporting locally led action across humanitarian programming, responses and portfolios to create the right incentives for change. Grand Bargain policy commitments should feed into these overarching strategic approaches to localisation, rather than defining them.
- Strategies should articulate the desired impact across donor programming, key objectives across portfolios and key targets and incentives for how it will be achieved in a range of areas, as well processes for measuring impact and accountability.
- Creating the right incentives for change will require rewarding international intermediaries for their partnership practices, for cascading quality funding to local actors, for risk sharing and for investing in bottom-up and coordinated capacity strengthening. This may require updating donor partnership frameworks to articulate clear policies on partnerships, funding, risks and capacity strengthening. Where such frameworks may not be open to being reshaped, for instance with UN agencies, donors should use collective diplomatic action to request more transparency, monitoring and evaluation.
- As diplomatic actors, engage UN agencies and other international actors to ambitiously define or strengthen the delivery of their localisation commitments. Promote opportunities to engage international development and humanitarian actors on localisation efforts and share learning and approaches.
- Implement localisation policies and guidance that provide clear direction and incentives for strengthening locally led action for international partners or intermediaries in the areas of: partnerships, funding and capacity sharing or strengthening (see additional operational recommendations and possible steps below). Ensure there is joint analysis, planning and implementation of strategies with local partners.
- Support and align with existing country-level strategies on localisation to support national and local actors in their efforts to drive localisation at the country level, and monitor and evaluate donor-funded efforts against these strategies.

7.2   Strategic recommendation 2: Risk sharing

What the evidence shows: Evidence shows that the range of assumptions about risk and localisation do not have grounding in empirical evidence, and that reorienting long-standing approaches to risk towards a risk-sharing model shows positive benefits. This requires consensus on the interpretation of zero tolerance and residual risk when considering risk sharing, with agreement on what is an acceptable level of residual risk.

7.2.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Engage in an honest dialogue at senior political levels and clarify the acceptable level of residual risk while ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including who takes on what responsibility.
- Develop a joint risk-sharing agenda across donors. This includes possibilities to align risk appetite, and through the discussion of harmonised due diligence measures in relation to CHS verification. This should be linked to discussions on approaches to trust and tolerance. An appropriate forum for coordinating risk sharing should be considered.
- Harmonise due diligence, compliance and audit requirements across donors, for example through one external compliance and audit mechanism. This could be outsourced, potentially through the CHS, for likeminded donors such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship Group.
- Similarly, harmonise and simplify monitoring and reporting requirements and timeframes across donors, for example through a common reporting template.
- Explore innovative operational solutions to managing risks such as social or peer-to-peer accountability systems.
- Ensure risk analysis and risk management is carried out jointly with local partners to assess and mitigate risks across all partners involved in implementing the response.
- Explicitly link, recognise and harmonise approaches to risk sharing in line with quality funding. Given the importance of quality funding for managing risk, ensure that donor approaches to risk are supported by cascading adequate funding for local actors to manage risk effectively. This requires specific and adequate funding for overhead costs for human resources and financial management systems, security management and risk mitigation.

7.3   Strategic recommendation 3: Equitable and ethical partnerships

What the evidence shows: Multiple initiatives and efforts have shown the benefits of investing in longer-term, equitable partnerships that support the needs and priorities of local actors. The role of intermediaries is important in supporting this shift and evidence shows that international actors need to be incentivised and made accountable to change their partnership practices.

7.3.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Support and invest in the development of quality partnerships between international and local actors. Monitor, evaluate and incentivise intermediary actors based on the quality of their partnerships with local actors.
- Support processes for national and local actors to report directly on partnership quality and effectiveness and use this assessment in funding decisions.
- Engage UN agencies and large INGOs in a frank dialogue on the quality of their partnerships and ensure a more systematic evaluation of their partnership practices.

7.4   Strategic recommendation 4: Quality and quantity of funding

What the evidence shows: Multiple initiatives have demonstrated the benefits of increasing quality funding to local actors, although funding to local actors has increased unequally in the system. The use of CBPFs seems to have addressed the desire of local actors to receive funding as directly as possible while managing the risk appetite of donors. Funding from donors continues to flow mainly through international intermediaries, which calls for a focus on the quality of partnership practices by these intermediaries (see Section 7.3). There remains a critical gap in terms of the quality, amount and duration of funding that local actors can access as well as transparency on how funding flows down to local actors.

7.4.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Make quality, long-term funding that covers core costs to local actors a mandatory requirement across funded programmes. Require intermediary actors to pass on multi-year funding to local partners. Consider resourcing partnership brokering and management components for both local and international actors.
- Where funding comes unearmarked, use diplomatic engagement to remind international actors of their Grand Bargain commitments, acting collectively through the Good Humanitarian Donorship Group. Request more transparency in reporting mechanisms (e.g. the FTS) on how funding cascades to local actors.
- Monitor, evaluate and incentivise intermediary actors – including collectively as donors – based on how much they pass on quality funding and on the quality of their partnerships. In particular, monitor the sharing of overhead costs, the passing on of multi-year funding, adequate funding for security and coverage of other risk-mitigating activities. Explicitly link funding requirements with commitments to risk sharing.
- Continue to increase funding to pooled fund mechanisms. In addition to UN-managed CBPFs, support national-level and nationally managed pooled funds such as SAFER; the NISA fund from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that is dedicated to capacity strengthening; and the Start Network Bangladesh Start Fund (and other Start Network funds as they mature). Support UN-managed CBPFs to explore increased national and local participation in their governance, including more widely in humanitarian coordination (i.e. Humanitarian Country Teams, CBPF boards).
- Explore in particular funds such as LIFT, which offer blended humanitarian development funds.

7.5   Strategic recommendation 5: Capacity sharing

What the evidence shows: Long-term capacity-strengthening efforts have been a key area of focus over the last five years and these initiatives have shown a range of significant benefits in practice for supporting locally led response. Yet, these efforts remain unidirectional, ad hoc, uncoordinated, lacking the right investment and often use ineffective approaches to capacity strengthening.

7.5.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Integrate capacity sharing as an objective of all partnerships, supported by a dedicated budget line for capacity sharing. Long-term institutional capacity strengthening should be based on local partner priorities. Both international and local partners should report on mutually defined measures of capacity sharing and progress.
- Require partners to show how they coordinate capacity sharing through, for instance, coordination systems and working with other international actors partnering with the same local actors
- Articulate a donor approach to systemically investing in long-term institutional capacity strengthening across development, peace, refugee and humanitarian programming, which shifts from capacity strengthening to capacity sharing. As outlined below, these should become integral components of disaster preparedness and resilience efforts before crisis. The STRIDE approach from Islamic Relief[20] would be an interesting initiative to consider further and replicate.

7.6   Strategic recommendation 6: Linking localisation with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus

What the evidence shows: The literature has very little evidence on good practices where localisation links with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Instead, perceptions in the literature describe the unique position of local actors who must respond to the changing dynamics of their context and are thus incentivised and able to support nexus approaches.

7.6.1   Operational recommendations and possible steps

- Ministries such as the Netherland's Ministry of Foreign affairs should adopt a comprehensive strategy across their humanitarian, peace and development donor portfolio to support local civil society's role in local humanitarian action and leadership in crisis response.
- Where development activities exist in countries hosting refugees or facing frequent public health or natural hazard-related disasters, disaster preparedness and humanitarian response capacity should be mainstreamed in civil society support strategies as part of development portfolios. Longer-term civil society funding should include capacity strengthening for disaster, humanitarian and refugee response.
- Disaster risk reduction investment should include building strategic partnerships between donors, UN agencies, INGOs, civil society and national disaster management authorities.
- Donors should consider strengthening the blending of humanitarian and development financing. Funds such as LIFT, which blend humanitarian and development funds, are increasingly being looked to as financing mechanisms that also support direct funding to local NGOs and address the gap between development and humanitarian activities.

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20   See Barbelet (2019).

7.7   Strategic recommendation 7: Build evidence, evaluate impact and reshape the research agenda on localisation

What the evidence shows: The localisation literature has lacked focus on measuring the impact of localisation on the quality of humanitarian responses and outcomes for people in crises. It has also lacked focus on the perspectives of people affected by crises independently of local actors as organised actors.

7.7.1   Operational recommendations and possible next steps

- Contribute to closing the evidence gap with a focus on evaluating and measuring how local humanitarian action, local leadership and complementarity impacts the quality of humanitarian responses and humanitarian outcomes over the long term.
- Ensure that the burden of evidence does not fall on local humanitarian actors. Equal evaluation should be carried out on the impact of international leadership, subcontracting partnerships and direct delivery by international actors.
- Invest similarly in assessing and evaluating the impact of localisation across the humanitarian– development nexus, in particular gathering evidence on the longer-term impact of undermining local response ecosystems on prevention of and recovery from crises.
- Ensure that localisation objectives are part of evaluations of both intermediaries and broader programmes and responses, including using national localisation strategies and frameworks as measurement where they exist. Consider how locally informed metrics of success should improve global evaluation measurement frameworks.
- Build the evidence on the impact of localisation from the perspectives of people affected by crises, integrating systematically in localisation research their perspectives and their experiences of different response models.

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Appendix 1 General recommendations found in the localisation literature

The literature highlights changes in practice and policy that international actors can implement to contribute to localisation. Donors can influence international actors to take up these recommendations through diplomatic action or by creating incentives to support the changes required. The below sections represent the main topics of recommendations in the literature. Note that, apart from where it is explicitly mentioned, the majority of recommendations focus on actions for donors, INGOs and UN agencies. Very few recommendations in the literature address local actors. Key recommendations are emphasised in bold.

Funding: increase access to quality funding for local actors to rebalance power dynamics

Local actors rarely have the power to negotiate the terms of their partnerships. As a result, improving policies to ensure the quantity and quality of funding to local actors is critical for localisation.

- **Increase the quality of funding going to local actors through donors**
- Donors, UN agencies and INGOs should extend the same quality of funding to local actors as they do to international actors, including multi-year funding, equal amounts of overhead funding and flexibility (see Ayobi et al. 2017; de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Christian Aid et al., 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019; Howe et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2019a).
- Donors should set clear policies on overhead costs for intermediaries and monitor their overhead practice (Ali et al., 2018).
- **Increase quantity of funding going to local actors**
- Increase overall funding going to pooled funds, including through OCHA, developing a better fundraising strategy to increase the percentage of pooled funding to 15% of HRP funding (Localisation Workstream, 2019; OCHA, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).
- Ensure pooled funds governance includes local and national actors in their governing boards (Ayobi et al., 2017).
- Support and learn from pooled funds that span the development–humanitarian–peace nexus and which have the mandate and flexibility to support local actors (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).
- Set up dedicated funds for local actors, including at national level, to replicate learning from LIFT or SAFER (Ayobi et al., 2017; Howe et al., 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Ensure that these funds are not only dedicated to local actors but also managed by them to give them decision-making power over allocations and redress some of the power imbalances in the system. Another initiative to be replicated is the UK's Small Charities Challenge Fund in South Sudan (Ali et al., 2018).

- Increase visibility of local actors in reporting, fundraising and media, and increase opportunities for direct dialogue between local actors and donors through systematic presence of local actors in donor meetings, for example market engagement meetings, yearly global local partners meetings with capitals, and yearly country-level local partners meetings (Ali et al., 2018; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Christian Aid et al., 2019; Howe et al., 2019).
- Support local actors in domestic resource mobilisation, including capacity strengthening (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018; Localisation Workstream, 2019).
- **Improve tracking of funding flows according to common sets of definitions and standards to hold Grand Bargain signatories to account**
- Invest in national-level tracking systems, such as JORISS in Jordan, to ensure drive and ownership by national stakeholders, including government, national civil society and people affected by crises (see Ali et al., 2018; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).
- INGOs and UN agencies should create better tracking systems within their organisations on how funding flows through them to local and national actors in a transparent and universally recognisable manner (see Els and Carstensen, 2015; Els, 2019).

Risk management: share risk and harmonise and reduce compliance requirements

- **Harmonisation and reduction of compliance, capacity assessments and reporting requirements (Building Markets, 2018; Localisation Workstream, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020)**
- Share and accept each other's risk assessments and capacity assessments (Ali et al., 2018; Barbelet, 2019; Localisation Workstream, 2019).
- Agree a minimum set of standards for assessments and reporting for all actors in a response or country, adapting them to the specific concerns of actors in that country as well as the specific challenges of the context (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018).
- Adopt lighter administrative processes to reduce access barriers for local actors (UNICEF, 2019a).
- Harmonise and simplify monitoring and reporting requirements through a common reporting template to reduce the burden on local actors (Els, 2018).
- **Shifting from risk transfer to risk sharing through building risk mitigation and risk ownership into contracts, including force majeure clauses (Howe et al., 2019; Stoddard et al., 2019; Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020)**
- Discuss and align risk appetite and tolerance (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020).
- Consider the use of risk financing, including anticipatory financing to manage operational risk. Involve and learn lessons from the private sector (ibid.).
- Promote joint approaches to security management through using partnership security frameworks, including joint risk analysis and mitigation (Stoddard et al., 2019).
- Increase funding for more advanced forms of monitoring and evaluation in inaccessible areas in order to strengthen trust between local and international actors (Howe et al., 2019).
- Inform the future of risk sharing based on specific country contexts and the perspective and challenges faces by local actors (Localisation Workstream, 2019).

- Take a holistic approach that recognises existing links between different risk categories (Schenkenberg van Mierop et al., 2020).
- **Donors should monitor and intermediaries commit to adequately cover costs associated with risks, in particular dedicating budget to safety and security provisions (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020)**

Partnerships: ensure equitable partnerships

- **Improve equity of partnerships based on complementarity**
- Partnerships based on equity should include fair budgeting, shared overhead costs, transparent budgets, capacity sharing and transparent decision-making processes (Building Markets, 2018; Howe and Stites, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020b).
- Audit, evaluate and dedicate learning and exchange on partnerships, including through independent partnership surveys, exit interviews, anonymous relationship audits, climate surveys and open feedback sessions (Ayobi et al., 2017; Robillard et al., 2020b).
- Commit to and monitor the implementation of the Principles of Partnership including through international actors systematically training their staff on the Principles (IRC, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a).
- Support consortium projects between UN agencies, INGOs and local actors (Localisation Workstream, 2019). Note that equity in consortium lies in the details of the set-up; where possible ensure that local actors are leading the consortium.
- **Adopt long-term strategic partnerships over project-based short-term partnerships**
- Develop a joint partnership framework, including by comparing and consolidating relevant Good Humanitarian Donorship principles and Grand Bargain commitments (Schekenberg et al., 2020).
- Consider multi-year partnership models that are not based on financial commitments, for example joint strategy planning, joint monitoring and capacity sharing (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019; Localisation Workstream, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a).
- Establish strategic partnerships before and after disasters and crisis response (Ayobi et al., 2017; Barbelet, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020a).
- Dedicate funding for partnership building. This would cover the cost of maintaining relationships and co-designing programmes. CAFOD, for instance, has adopted this practice (de Geoffroy and Grunewald, 2018.
- **Set a clear partnership objective of growing and strengthening local actors (Building Markets, 2018)**

Capacity strengthening: improve, coordinate and support systematic capacity strengthening

- **Increase and ensure dedicated funding for capacity strengthening in all projects and partnerships (Howe et al., 2019; Localisation Workstream, 2019; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2019)**
- Use development funding to support local and national actors' capacity and sustainability to respond in times of crisis (Localisation Workstream, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).
- Ensure that commitments to strengthen the capacity of local actors go hand in hand with funding overhead costs, recognising the critical contribution this makes to organisational capacity (Barbelet, 2019).

- **Improve the effectiveness of capacity-strengthening efforts**
- Ensure that capacity is shared both ways in partnerships (Robillard et al., 2020c).
- Outsource capacity strengthening to those who have the right skills and expertise, including considering local, national and regional resources before those at the international level (Ayobi et al., 2017; Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Christian Aid et al., 2019). This recognises that international actors may not be best placed or skilled to take on effective capacity strengthening.
- Harnessing local and national capacity will also contribute to longer-term and more field-based capacity strengthening that focuses on learning by doing and tests learning (Ayobi et al., 2017; Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020c).
- Capacity-strengthening efforts must be based on local actors' priorities and needs, rather than on the requirements of international actors (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019; Howe et al., 2019; Robillard et al., 2020c). This includes supporting local actors to strengthen their capacity around resource mobilisation and income generation, including through establishing income-generating activities (Christian Aid et al., 2019).
- Include capacity strengthening as part of disaster preparedness activities, building on the experience of Islamic Relief's STRIDE project (Barbelet, 2019; also see UNICEF, 2019a).
- Prioritise capacity strengthening that supports the sustainability of local actors and their graduation from intermediaries (Howe et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2019a).
- **At country level, ensure that capacity-strengthening efforts are well coordinated through a collective approach (Ali et al., 2018)**
- This can be done through coordination structures and systems or at sectoral level (Barbelet, 2019).

Addressing power dynamics

- **Build and support networks of local actors to increase their voice, collective action and advocacy (Barbelet, 2019; Localisation Workstream, 2019; Oxfam, 2020; Patel and Van Brabant, 2017; Robillard et al., 2020c). This recommendation calls for action from all actors, including local and national actors**
- **Ensure local actors' equal participation and influence in response systems, including coordination structures (Ayobi et al., 2017)**
- Practice from Vanuatu, where international actors can only participate in meetings if they have a local or regional counterpart with them, has been successful. Good practice also includes equal allocated floor time and shared agenda setting (ibid.).
- Use local languages as the first language of coordination meetings to support effective participation of local actors (UNICEF, 2019a).
- Include national NGOs in all Strategic Advisory Groups of clusters (ibid.).
- Decentralise decision-making centres to the subnational level to ensure decisions are made closer to operations and where local actors are more present (Barbelet, 2019; UNICEF, 2019a). Some lessons can be learned from this practice in DRC (Barbelet, 2019).
- Commit to local actors co-leading coordination clusters (Ali et al., 2018).

- As per complementarity in partnerships, localise coordination structures by adapting them to contexts. Reinforce, rather than replace, existing coordination systems to inform international coordination deployment (Barbelet, 2019).

Recommendations to address evidence gaps

The below are ideas for further study to address the evidence gaps identified in the literature. This study further confirms the need for these evidence gaps to be addressed.

- **The impact of localisation and working in equitable partnerships, particularly on the quality of humanitarian response and humanitarian outcomes for people affected by crisis, including evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of local actors (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018; IRC, 2019).**
- Local actors' adherence to humanitarian principles (Robillard et al., 2020a).
- The timeliness of local actors, with a focus on data about timing to mobilise staff and equipment (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).
- The perceptions and feedback of people affected by crisis of different delivery modalities (e.g. international actor direct delivery and delivery through partnership) (IRC, 2019).
- Roles and experiences of marginalised groups and non-traditional and informal actors in local humanitarian action (Robillard et al., 2020b).
- Supporting local research on localisation, including in local languages (ibid.).

Other recommendations to consider

- **Governments affected by disaster and crises** should strengthen local leadership in humanitarian action through reforming, enabling and regulating the **role of their relevant departments, including national disaster management authorities** (Localisation Workstream, 2019; Robillard et al., 2020b) and **decentralising** government coordination and **communicating** policies clearly (Robillard et al., 2020a).
- **For both national and international organisations**, consider and actively engage with **the diversity of local actors**, particularly women-led organisations (Localisation Workstream, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020; Oxfam, 2020; Robillard et al., 2020a; 2020b).
- International actors must **articulate clear localisation strategies and policies** (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; UNICEF, 2019; Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020).
- **Develop and adopt new approaches to surge capacity**, such as national and regional standby capacity (Ayobi et al., 2017), and remote surging approaches, learning from the experience with Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu and Fiji during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Allow local actors to **align salaries** and incentives alongside international actors and adopt **ethical recruitment practices** to avoid staff poaching (Ayobi et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2018; Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships, 2019; Fast and Bennett, 2020).
- **Map capacities** at country level to provide visibility for local actors and inform how international capacity can support and reinforce local capacity (Ali et al. 2018, Barbelet, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).
- Revise and adopt **a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of and approach to capacity** in the humanitarian sector (Barbelet, 2019; Howe and Stites, 2019).