ACCELERATING LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action globally.

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all those who invested their valuable time in the research process. Thanks in particular to the local and national NGO staff and volunteers who shared their views through this research in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan.

Front cover photo:
A refugee camp in Nepal, where many people are taking shelter after a devastating earthquake.

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List of Acronyms

CSO	Civil society organisation
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
ECHO	European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HR	Human resources
INGO	International NGO
L/NNGO	Local and National NGO
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme – a multi-agency consortium programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019) – to establish what operational elements of partnerships between local, national and international NGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches. In-depth consultations were conducted in three locations in four countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. Sampling was such that a wide diversity of local and national NGOs were invited to participate in the in-depth discussions to ensure different areas of thematic, geographic and other focuses were represented. In total, more than 350 NGOs were consulted for this research; 85% of which were local or national NGOs.

The findings reflect experiences from a rich diversity of local and national NGOs across four countries with very different humanitarian contexts, and provide valuable insights that can assist humanitarian organisations in ensuring partnership practices accelerate localisation of humanitarian action. Partnerships, were only perceived as genuine partnerships by around one-quarter of survey respondents, with international NGOs (INGOs) perceiving them as equitable more so than local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) by a small margin; 27% in comparison to 24% respectively. However, 80% of survey respondents believed these same partnerships to be 'very' or 'moderately' instrumental in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people in disaster response operations. One-third of survey respondents believe there is a better pathway to strengthen national and local NGO leadership in humanitarian action than through partnerships; the majority highlighted capacity building as an alternative approach. Understanding of localisation seems to be high, but clarity on the Grand Bargain commitments is low at only 22% of survey respondents who reported being 'very clear' on these.

The findings are relevant for NGOs already working, or planning to increase their work, through partnerships, as well as agencies funding humanitarian response – in particular signatories of the Grand Bargain – and those involved in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. L/NNGOs believe their own organisations have only limited influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and United Nations (UN) agencies.

The four core organisational capabilities which were identified as the most important for effective partnerships were: Project design, planning and management; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); Financial management and reporting; and Human resources (HR) management. Examples of partnership practices which are most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the report with relation to each of these four core organisational capabilities. Findings from discussions on the importance of coordination, fundraising, advocacy, capacity building and organisational development, and safety and security management in partnerships are also outlined. Core values and principles highlighted as the most important areas partners can add value in partnerships were related to: humanitarian principles, programme quality, trust and respectful behaviour, and accountability to affected population. Many examples of partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation reflect a lack of trust and respect.

The following areas were identified as areas where civil society organisations and national and local NGOs add value to partnerships, and they should start to, or continue to, play an important leadership role in these areas: HR management, advocacy and identifying capacity strengthening needs. International NGOs add value to partnerships by contributing fundraising capability, technical expertise and providing capacity strengthening support. Areas which all agencies add value included: project design, planning and management, MEAL, financial management, and coordination. These differences in added value helps to map the new roles that NGOs may play in humanitarian responses which are truly localised. Findings suggest longer-term partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs reflect partnership practices most conducive to localisation.

Eleven key recommendations emerged from the research including: Jointly review research findings and recommendations; Identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships; Review partnership

agreements; Assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors; Assess capacity building skills of international actors; Support organisational / policy development; Hold discussions around understanding of humanitarian principles; Invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction; Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding; Support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies; Support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable. More details are provided in the Conclusions and recommendations section of the report which you are urged to read.

Four country research reports are also available which give more details on the country-specific findings from Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan.

The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members will be testing these recommendations in a pilot phase; learning from which will inform Localisation Frameworks for Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan, and a global Pathways to Localisation report. The consortium is keen to hear from organisations and agencies with feedback or learning from their own experiences of implementing these recommendations.

Introduction

1.1 Background

The essential role of local and national actors in humanitarian response has long been upheld in the humanitarian sector's key standards and codes, such as the Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, Sphere standards, and the Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability (CHS). In recent years, the *Missed Opportunities* series of reports[1] has documented partnership experience with local actors in several humanitarian response programmes, providing insightful positions in support of the localisation of aid and humanitarian partnership. More recently, commitments to increase direct funding to, and improve partnerships with, local and national actors were predominant themes in discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, and in the Agenda for Humanity[2] (2016), the Grand Bargain[3] (2016), and the Charter for Change[4] (2015).

Since the WHS, hundreds of reports have been written on the subject of localisation – but very few on partnership practices in relation to localisation. Fewer still on the operational or practical partnership practices which can make up a partnership model. This research primarily focused on the capacities, resources and added value of each partner in humanitarian partnerships, rather than the relationship between partners. Partnership relationships have been studied in the *Missed Opportunities* series of research reports. Therefore, the key research question explored in this research is:

> **What operational elements of partnerships between NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster (effective, relevant, efficient, etc.) localisation of humanitarian action?**

The research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme, a multi-agency consortium – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund – programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019).

The research was conducted by an independent consultancy, Integrated Risk Management Associates (IRMA) through national researchers and guided by national steering committees and existing NGO Forums in the four programme focus countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium agencies have committed to piloting the recommendations that have been identified in the country-specific research reports.

This report summarises the key findings and recommendations from the four national research reports. The recommendations, while not necessarily relevant for all actors, nevertheless provide a guide that can help agencies identify and prioritise recommendations to pilot in operational practice, based on a comprehensive evidence base. At the very least, the findings and recommendations can be the starting point for conversations between partners.

1.2 Definitions

It must be acknowledged that there is no consensus in the humanitarian sector around the definitions of the key concepts under discussion here. The researchers adopted the following working definitions for the purpose of the research:

- **Local NGO or community-based organisation:** operating in one community or location within a country.
- **National NGO or community-based organisation:** operating across the whole country, but not outside.
- **International NGO (INGO):** operating in more than one country with country offices / country programmes.
- **Localisation**: local and national humanitarian actors increasingly empowered to take a greater role in the leadership, coordination and delivery of humanitarian preparedness and response in their countries.
- **Partnership:** the relationship between international humanitarian actors (especially international NGOs) and local and national actors (especially local and national NGOs), whereby the international actors work with, support and resource their local and/or national partners to design and implement humanitarian preparedness and response programming.

Research participants from local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) in in-depth consultations largely agreed with the definitions used by the researchers. Research participants emphasised the 'local ownership' of solutions to local needs as one of the key parts of any definition of localisation as highlighted in the quotation from a L/NNGO research participant in Nepal:

"There should be leadership from the same local place, an organisation from the same local place and decision-making capacity and rights to make decisions. All this for saying 'localisation'. ..."

Recent political changes in Nepal, designed to transfer power to local authorities, also appeared to influence participants' understanding of, and commitment to, the goal of localisation, thereby associating localisation of humanitarian action with wider governance issues.

Women collect sacks of grain to give to communities who have fled from conflict in South Sudan.
Photo credit: © Andreea Campeanu

The term 'L/NNGO' is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for local or national NGOs or community-based organisations. Where there were clear differences between what local or national actors were saying, these are highlighted. The term 'INGO' is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for these organisations and/or reflecting what L/NNGO reflect participants were saying about them. In many cases, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, United Nations agencies, and even in some cases donor or funding agencies, were called INGOs. Therefore, the terms 'INGO', 'international organisation', and 'international agency' are used inter-changeably in the report, and partnership practice examples and recommendations are relevant for INGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and United Nations agencies alike.

Methodology

The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach, including classic qualitative (systematic literature review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) and quantitative (survey) collection techniques. During the analysis phase, all sources of evidence were triangulated to identify and document convergent and divergent trends.

To guide the research, an analytical framework was developed that represented an idealised operating model of INGOs in humanitarian action. This framework was the foundation that directed the scope of the research, and included all the factors that contribute to an NGO operating model, i.e. an agency's capabilities and resources, values and principles, its unique identity ('added value'), as well as external factors. All the different research methods referenced this framework and thereby allowed cross-referencing and triangulation of findings for the research overall.

2.1 Research locations

The in-depth consultations as part of the research were conducted in three different contexts in each country – a total of twelve locations – identified in consultation with local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) conducted during the design phase of the research, and selected in close coordination with the National Research Associates and Programme Coordinators, and approved by the consortium Research Advisory Group. The goal of the overall sampling process was to capture diversity of humanitarian crises types (e.g. natural and human-induced), phases of humanitarian action (e.g. response, preparedness, recovery), urban versus more remote locations, and other relevant distinctions depending on the context (e.g. operating in Government-controlled and opposition-controlled areas in South Sudan). The 12 locations and the humanitarian situation in each, is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Research locations

Myanmar	Nepal	Nigeria	South Sudan
Sittwe, Rakhine State: Communal violence resulting in high levels of displacement.	**Dhading and surrounding districts:** Severely affected by 2015 earthquakes which triggered landslides, and resulted in destruction of homes, crops and infrastructure.	**Maiduguri, Borno State:** Protracted violence from armed insurgents including suicide bomb attacks resulting in high levels of displacement in camps and host communities. Humanitarian hub for the area.	**Wau, Wau State:** Protracted armed conflict and violence, resulting in high levels of displacement in camps and food insecurity. Humanitarian hub for the area.
Myitkinya, Kachin State: Armed conflict between military and armed ethnic organisations resulting in high levels of displacement. Restricted humanitarian access. Humanitarian hub for the area.	**Dhanusa and surrounding districts:** Heavy monsoon rains in 2017 triggered flash floods and landslides, and resulted in destruction of homes, crops and infrastructure, and temporary displacement.	**Jos, Plateau State:** Communal clashes and herder-farmer conflict resulting in high levels of displacement. Humanitarian hub for the area.	**Bor, Jonglei State:** Severe levels of armed conflict and violence, restricted humanitarian access, and incidences of flooding, resulting in high levels of displacement in camps and food insecurity.
Magway, Magway Region: Heavy monsoon rains and recurring floods resulting in temporary displacement, food insecurity and water shortage.	**Kathmandu:** Humanitarian and NGO hub.	**Abuja:** Humanitarian and NGO hub.	**Juba:** Humanitarian and NGO hub. Protracted armed conflict and violence resulting in high levels of displacement in camps in and around the city.

2.2 Quantitative: Survey

All actors (L/NNGO, INGO, UN or government partners and donors) were also invited to complete a survey. The survey was designed on Kobo Toolbox and also forms a baseline for the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* Programme. The survey was made available online and offline in English, Myanmar language and Nepali; for low-bandwidth environments, print and enter-in-document versions were also disseminated and shared in all languages. Altogether 168 respondents completed the survey from across Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan and beyond; 75% (126) of them representatives of local or national NGOs.

2.3 Qualitative: In-depth consultations

In each context, between 10 and 20 L/NNGOs were invited to participate in a focus group discussion; a total of 12 were conducted in the locations outlined in Table 1. A sample of L/NNGOs was selected to ensure diversity: to include at least one organisation with no experience of working in partnership with another NGO in humanitarian action, at least one women-led organisation, and organisations from different networks/consortia and/or focusing on specific marginalised groups (e.g. persons with disability, marginalised or excluded groups). A few L/NNGOs invited to participate in focus group discussions were existing or previous partners of one or more of the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members, but the majority were not. Therefore, the research findings are not a direct reflection of partnership quality of the consortium members and their partners.

Following on from the focus group discussion in each context, L/NNGOs that reported unique or interesting actions or partnerships and other relevant humanitarian actors – including INGOs, UN and donors – were invited to participate in key informant interviews; many who were requested for interview chose to complete the online survey instead of taking part in an interview. A total of 63 key informant interviews were conducted across the four countries. These included representatives from different organisational departments/divisions within eight L/NNGOs, nine INGOs, eight local government authorities, three UN agencies, and two network/federations. A total of 143 L/NNGOs were consulted through the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews in the four countries, including 26 women-led organisations.

2.4 Research Validation

The results of the research were affirmed through a validation process. Five research validation workshops were conducted in the capital cities of each of the four countries, plus in Wau in South Sudan. This allowed a large group of humanitarian stakeholders to discuss the findings, check for accuracy, provide feedback, and confirm that the preliminary findings and recommendations resonated with their realities. Further validation was conducted through meetings and email exchanges sharing the preliminary findings, and were an opportunity to reach out beyond those who participated in the research. In total, 166 representatives of 149 NGOs, United Nations (UN), government, and donor agencies were involved in the validation process. In total, over 350 NGOs were consulted for this research; 85% of which were local or national NGOs.

2.5 Research Limitations

Although a wide range of voices were captured through the research, given the focus on local and national NGOs, some key humanitarian stakeholders are underrepresented in the research: funding, government and UN agencies. However, this research will be shared with these stakeholders and dialogue on how the findings and recommendations relate to them, will be discussed.

Other challenges the research encountered include, amongst others: poor bandwidth environments, translation challenges, and difficulties in navigating Kobo Toolbox. While Kobo Toolbox is recognised as a powerful remote data collection tool, there was limited remote support for problem solving. It is also important to highlight that, this research was not intending to reach enough organisations to make the findings statistically significant; there are thousands of organisations operating in the four focus countries, and so the sampling strategy aimed to reach a representative and diverse sample to allow for some extrapolation and generalisation as presented in this report.

Despite those challenges, the research has succeeded in presenting the views and experiences from a rich diversity of NGO voices in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan especially from local and national NGOs, whose voices are often not heard clearly enough in research conducted by INGOs. The research provides valuable insights into partnerships and beyond that can assist all humanitarian stakeholders in designing and co-creating strategies to accelerate localisation of humanitarian action.

Findings

3.1 The position of local and national NGOs

When asked how well the international humanitarian system respects and promotes the role of local or national NGOs in managing and coordinating humanitarian response, only 29% of survey respondents answered 'good' – the other options being 'fair' and 'poor'. Over half of the survey respondents representing L/NNGOs (57%) also believed that their own organisations have only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and UN agencies. This lack of influence is felt most strongly by L/NNGOs in Myanmar and Nepal. See Graph 1 below for a breakdown of the responses.

Graph 1: Perception of influence on humanitarian decision-making

Perception of survey respondent's organisation to influence donors and UN agencies in decision making fora on national and local humanitarian response in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan

Legend: International NGOs, National NGOs, Local NGOs
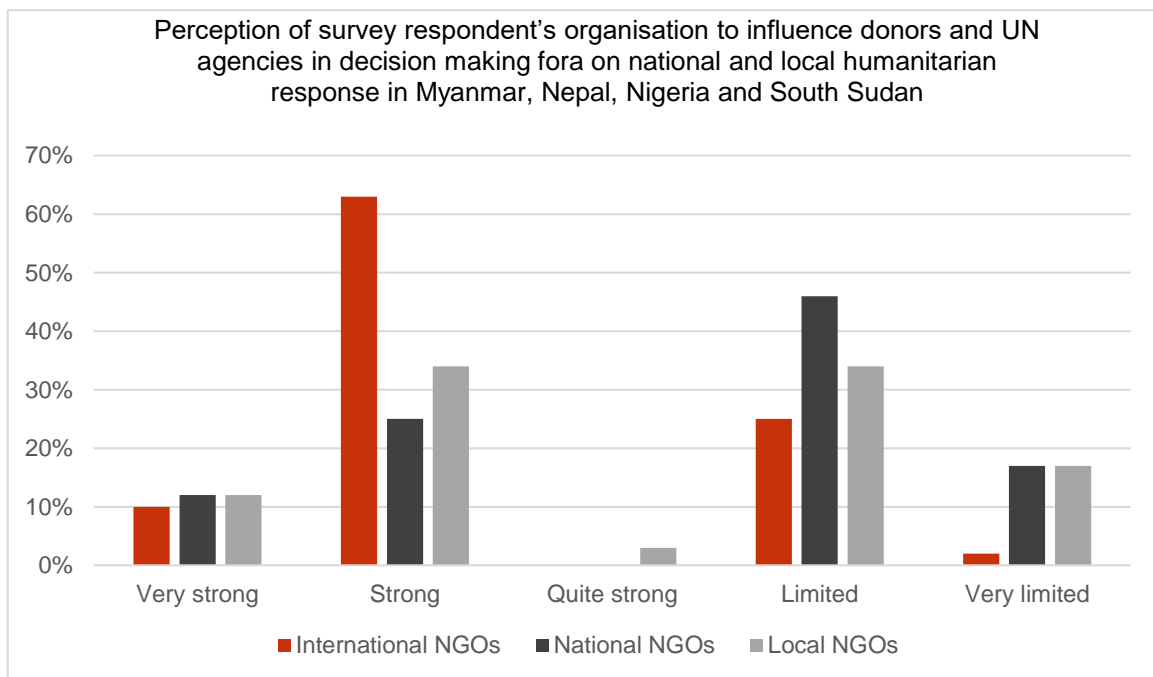
Survey respondents from all four countries believed the UN has the greatest influence on government and donor humanitarian funding decisions; 81% of survey respondents selected the UN in answer to this question in the survey (which allowed multiple responses), followed by 67% who selected INGOs. See Section 3.2 below on humanitarian coordination.

In all four countries, knowledge of the global debate and localisation agenda appears to be growing fast. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents reported confidence in explaining what 'localisation' means – saying they were 'absolutely confident' in explaining it to a colleague. Survey respondents in South Sudan reported more confidence than those in Myanmar and Nepal. However, knowledge and understanding of the Grand Bargain was very low across all four countries with only 22% of survey respondents saying they were 'very clear' on the Grand Bargain and its commitments; 12% of respondents said they did not know about the Grand Bargain 'at all'. Familiarity and understanding of the Grand Bargain was fairly similar across the 4 countries. Survey respondents who worked for international NGOs were far more likely to respond that their organisation's knowledge of the Grand Bargain was 'very clear' (40%) than national NGOs (13%) or local NGOs (20%). Indeed, only 5% of INGO respondents believed their organisation to have no knowledge 'at all'.

3.2 Participation in international humanitarian coordination

Although the majority of survey respondents reported attending humanitarian coordination meetings at least every quarter, there were quite significant variances across the scale of organisation and country. For example, 80% of local NGO and 72% of national NGO survey respondents reported attending these meetings at least every quarter in comparison to 95% of INGO respondents. Over 60% of respondents from Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan reported

consistently attending every meeting, in comparison to only 31% of respondents in Myanmar. The reasons given by those for not attending meetings regularly included meetings being conducted 'too far away' from them (40% of survey respondents who do not attend meetings), not knowing when or where the meetings are (20%), and having 'limited opportunity to contribute' (10%). See also 'Coordination' in Section 3.4 for findings from the in-depth consultations on this.

3.3 The quality of partnerships between INGOs and NGOs

The research did not set out to explore satisfaction with partnerships, nor attempt to analyse the effectiveness or sustainability of any partnerships mentioned. Nevertheless, the following findings are important considerations in discussions about INGO-L/NNGO partnerships and localisation.

Across the four countries, the majority of L/NNGO survey respondents (77%) said their organisation had experience working on a humanitarian response operation in partnership with an INGO. When asked to assess the quality of the partnership (using the definition in Section 1.2), local and national NGO survey respondents were more critical than INGO survey respondents. 24% of L/NNGO respondents qualified their partnerships as 'a genuine partnership', with an average of 35% saying the collaboration had 'many' or at least 'a few' qualities that reflect an equitable partnership. This is in comparison to 27% and 73% respectively for INGOs. A large majority (80%) of respondents thought that those same partnerships were 'very' or 'moderately' instrumental to meeting needs in the response operation.

For the majority of survey respondents, partnerships are the best pathway to localisation. However, close to one-third think there are better ways and identified alternative pathways to localisation; the majority of which centred around capacity development (without continued partnership). Other pathways suggested were advocacy, technical assistance, increasing direct access to donors, and 'learning by doing'.

3.4 Core Capabilities and Resources
What are the core capabilities and resources most important to partnerships?

Survey respondents were asked to identify the core capabilities and resources that were the most important to partnerships. Qualitative consultations were then used to elaborate on the results as participants in the in-depth consultations were requested to provide examples from their experiences of partnership practices that were most and least conducive to enabling localised humanitarian action against the top core capabilities and resources. The ranking varied across the four countries involved in the research, however, altogether four core organisational capabilities were ranked highest (in terms of frequency of mention) as being important for effective partnerships as follows:

1. Project design, planning and management

2. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

3. Financial management and reporting

4. Human resources (HR) management

Project design, planning and management shared first place with MEAL, with 62% of survey respondents ranking these core organisational capabilities as one of the top 5 most important to partnerships. Financial management and reporting ranked in third place, and Human Resources (HR) management in forth with its importance highlighted by over 50% of survey respondents. L/NNGOs were consistent in their belief that the financial management and reporting capabilities of their own organisation were crucial for partnerships, but INGOs in three countries (Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria) felt that their own organisation's financial management and reporting were an added value to partnerships, over their partner's capacity in the same area.

The following sections give more details of partnership practices which were deemed most and least conducive to localisation by the L/NNGO research participants under these top four organisational capabilities. Many practices, fit into more than one of the capabilities. Differences reflect the fact that local and national NGOs are not a homogenous group and have different levels of experience, capacity and frustration; as do their INGO partners.

3.4.1 Project design, planning and management

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ INGOs encourage L/NNGOs to design the project and budget themselves or they co-design and provide technical expertise on how to write a proposal and/or on technical issues (Myanmar, Nepal and South Sudan). ✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for project design and INGOs are responsible for monitoring implementation of the project plan. (Nepal and Nigeria). ✓ A steering committee with members from both partners is established, to guide project planning and implementation (South Sudan). ✓ L/NNGOs consult the local committees and groups about intended activities and budgets before communicating with the partner/donor (Myanmar).	✗ L/NNGOs are treated as sub-contractors, given tasks to execute but no role in project design or management (Nepal). ✗ L/NNGOs are not permitted to make changes in the project design/plan after the project is approved, even for people with special needs (Myanmar). ✗ INGOs make decisions on targeting / beneficiary selection that create tension in communities, affecting the L/NNGO's capacity to operate after the humanitarian crisis (Nepal). ✗ INGOs design the project alone, and the L/NNGO partner has no input in the design (Nigeria and Nepal).

3.4.2 Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Partners conduct joint monitoring visits to communities, providing opportunities for reflection together on progress, obstacles and required modifications (Nepal, South Sudan, Nigeria). ✓ Support provided to L/NNGOs to develop appropriate MEAL systems, to ensure that goals are realistic, and activities are aligned to achieve the intended results (Nigeria). ✓ INGOs provide MEAL training for L/NNGO staff (Nigeria). ✓ INGO acceptance that their L/NNGO partners can identify appropriate project indicators (South Sudan). ✓ Responsiveness by the INGO to the monitoring results shared by the L/NNGO (Myanmar).	✗ International agencies develop budgets with no costs for MEAL – see also: Financial management and reporting (South Sudan). ✗ INGOs provide templates for monitoring, telling L/NNGOs what to report on, and focusing solely on outputs (Nigeria). ✗ INGOs or donors visit communities alone, without L/NNGO staff, to collect data (Myanmar, Nepal) and/or produce monitoring reports without consultation with L/NNGOs (Myanmar, South Sudan).

3.4.3 Financial management and reporting

In response to the survey question 'What is the most important contribution an INGO can make through partnership to strengthen L/NNGO ability to lead humanitarian action and meet humanitarian needs?', the second most common answer (26% of survey respondents) included some element of funding or financial management support.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ INGOs encourage / allow their L/NNGO partners to design/develop project budgets (South Sudan), using an internal participatory approach (Myanmar),	✗ Lack of opportunity for L/NNGOs to participate in budget development (Nigeria).

before submitting to INGO/donor (Nepal).	× Budgets exclude, or do not cover, the indirect costs of implementing the project, e.g. taxes, insurance etc. (Nigeria, South Sudan).
✓ INGOs give L/NNGOs freedom to adjust the budget as they see fit (while respecting the total amount of funding available) (Nigeria).	× Budgets do not include a line for relevant L/NNGO assets such as computers and vehicles (South Sudan).
✓ Training and mentoring on financial management such as accounting, compliance, tax regulations and procurement (Nigeria) and on the use of accounting and financial reporting tools and processes (Myanmar).	× Delays in INGOs transferring funds, coupled with pressure to deliver to schedule, which can result in staff and volunteers subsidising activities (Myanmar) and/or delays in paying L/NNGO staff salaries which might result in staff leaving to work for INGOs or the UN (South Sudan).
✓ Regular but not unnecessarily complex financial reporting to international agencies, through which L/NNGOs gain practice (South Sudan).	× Lack of transparency about the INGOs part of budget (Nepal).
✓ Budgets include a line for L/NNGO overhead expenses (e.g. office rent, utilities etc.), and for the purchase of computers and office equipment (Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria) and other relevant assets (Nigeria).	× INGOs develop budgets that do not include funds for the institutional development of their L/NNGO partners (Nigeria).

3.4.4 Human Resources (HR)

Nepali L/NNGOs felt strongly about their own value added in HR management in partnerships, but this was not an area highlighted by INGO partners. Only in Nigeria and South Sudan did L/NNGOs rank HR management as a core capability which their own organisations add value in partnerships and INGO survey respondents agreed. Below are some partnership practices highlighted by research participants as most and least conducive to localisation.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Attempts to keep international agency and local/national organisation salaries and benefits within the same range (Nepal).	× INGOs dictate salaries of L/NNGO staff (Nepal) and/or set budget for staff without consultation with L/NNGOs, and so low that appropriate recruitment is impossible, or staff leave to work for INGOs or UN agencies – see also: Financial management and reporting (South Sudan).
✓ Provision of training on HR in emergencies to support disaster preparedness (Nepal).	
✓ INGO support to L/NNGO partners to develop appropriate internal procedures (Myanmar).	× INGOs interfere in the disciplinary practices of its partner (Nepal, Nigeria) including to influence whether a L/NNGO staff member remains or is dismissed (South Sudan).
✓ INGOs that allow NNGOs space to recruit according to their needs, including duration of contracts, staff profiles, salaries, etc. (all countries).	× INGOs 'poach' staff from L/NNGOs (Nigeria).
	× Over-reliance on the good will and funds of local staff (Myanmar).

In addition to the most highly ranked organisational capabilities for partnerships outlined in the sections above, other core capabilities were ranked reasonably highly by a number of survey respondents, or discussed at length by in-depth consultation participants. These were: coordination, fundraising, advocacy, capacity building and organisational development, and safety and security management. Technical expertise as a core organisational capability was not explicitly raised or discussed in detail in the in-depth consultations, but many examples of partnership practices conducive to localisation linked to areas such as capacity building, organisational development, and accountability to affected populations implicitly relate to some technical expertise. Examples of partnership practices that were most and least conducive to local and national NGOs taking a greater lead in humanitarian response are outlined below for these organisational capabilities.

3.4.5 Coordination

In South Sudan, discussions on coordination were largely around the formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and cluster system. Here, L/NNGO research participants highlighted their need to be invited to these cluster and other coordination meetings and their views listened to. However, perceptions of a lack of influence was seen across all countries with L/NNGO staff perceiving local and national organisations to have the least influence of all actors on government / donor humanitarian funding decisions. The majority of L/NNGO survey respondents also felt their organisations had only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence UN and donor agencies on local and national humanitarian response in humanitarian decision-making fora. See Section 3.2 related to these findings also. At the time of the research there was no national NGO membership of HCTs or very low representation: in Nigeria there were no national NGO members, only 2 national NGO members out of 24 in South Sudan's HCT, and 4 national NGO members out of 26 members in Myanmar's HCT. Perhaps as a result, L/NNGOs in South Sudan were keen to establish their own spaces – separate from the formal cluster system – for information-sharing and learning on humanitarian action. The following quotation from a research participant highlights some of the concerns.

> *"While local and national NGOs are theoretically involved in the cluster system/working groups, few feel enabled/empowered to actively participate given the dominance of international actors; not just in the sense of international agencies, but especially the number of expatriates/foreigners who attend/facilitate."*

In Nepal, humanitarian coordination mechanisms are led by the Government of Nepal, and supported by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is not present here. Humanitarian actors in Nepal are hopeful that the recent changes in government structure and new legislation may see changes, as demonstrated in the quotation from a research participant in Nepal below.

> *"With the enactment of constitution and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, the local mechanisms are getting more active, authorised and responsible in comparison to the national platforms."*

Regular attendance at humanitarian coordination mechanism meetings was reportedly the lowest in Myanmar compared to the other three countries included in the research. Here coordination was perceived and interpreted much more broadly by L/NNGOs than in the other three research countries. L/NNGO research participants in Myanmar value the contributions of many different actors in humanitarian action, including volunteers, civil society organisations (CSOs), government, military, networks, national NGOs, international NGOs, donors and private philanthropists. As such, their examples of partnership practices which are conducive to localisation highlight multi-stakeholder approaches.

Below are some frequently mentioned partnership practices related to coordination, highlighting there are actions INGOs and other international organisations can take to improve on the findings outlined above. The role of the OCHA and other stakeholders with influence in the HCT and cluster system is also clear here.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Partnerships in which international, national and local NGOs and community-based organisations all coordinate with each other, to ensure the greatest reach (Myanmar). ✓ Multi-lateral partnerships / networks approach to projects (Myanmar). ✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for coordination with the military present in the programme locations or access routes (Myanmar).	✗ INGOs' failure (deliberate or unintentional) to mention L/NNGO partners and their roles when participating in cluster meetings (South Sudan).

3.4.6 Fundraising

Overall, fundraising was not ranked among the most important core organisational capabilities of partnerships by survey respondents, but funding or financial management support was mentioned by one-quarter of survey respondents as the most important contribution an INGO can make through partnership to strengthen L/NNGO ability to lead humanitarian action and meet humanitarian needs. Furthermore, the availability of humanitarian funds was selected frequently by survey respondents as one of the most important resources in partnerships.

In all four countries L/NNGO representatives discussed their wish to access donor funding directly, without the INGO as an intermediary. They also all raised the issue of their organisation's financial sustainability and mentioned the lack of income-generating capacity of their organisations as an impediment to their development and sustainability. Research participants requested support from international partners for income-generating initiatives or investment in assets such as offices/meeting spaces that generate rental income. Many of the partnership practices outlined by research participants below are not directly related to partnerships but are in fact related to donor and funding agency policies and practices. However, they are outlined below to highlight the most frequently discussed issues and most are relevant for international agencies that fund humanitarian response partners.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs raise funds directly from national donors (Nigeria) and/or member organisations. ✓ National NGOs have a direct relationship with donors (and no INGO intermediary) (Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan). ✓ INGOs build L/NNGO's capacity in such a way that they can raise and manage larger grants (Nigeria). ✓ L/NNGOs raise funds through meeting space rental or construction of a guest house that is used for income generation, with support from international agency partners.	× L/NNGOs not able to fundraise from donors without using the INGO as an intermediary (Myanmar). × L/NNGOs rely only on their membership fees to fund activities (Myanmar). × INGOs that carry out high visibility actions that seem more about marking territory than ensuring aid reaches the most vulnerable. × A continued emphasis on humanitarian response especially by INGOs, instead of on disaster risk reduction (DRR). × Donors adding another tier in the architecture by engaging a private sector company as a 'contract manager' to engage with INGOs, who partner with L/NNGOs (Nepal).

3.4.7 Advocacy

Advocacy was not ranked among the most important core organisational capabilities of partnerships by survey respondents. But of those that did select it in their top 5 capabilities, 74% were national NGOs, suggesting that this is a more important capability for national NGOs than local or international NGOs.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs use their local presence, relationships and expertise to connect affected communities, INGOs and government (Nepal). ✓ National NGOs based in the capital partner with INGOs working in humanitarian response, contributing their specific experience to influence national government (Nepal).	× Uncoordinated advocacy at local/national and international levels. × Lack of acknowledgement that advocacy is an effective part of humanitarian action.

3.4.8 Capacity building and organisational development

Survey results on capacity building and organisational development are inconsistent across the four countries. However, in response to the survey question 'What is the most important contribution an INGO can make through partnership to strengthen L/NNGO ability to lead humanitarian action and meet humanitarian needs?', the most common answer contained some type of capacity building or organisational development support (46%). These were also raised frequently during in-depth discussions, often in relation to other core capabilities. During in-depth consultations, discussions related to capacity building / strengthening and organisational development / institutional strengthening, and these terms were often used interchangeably. The importance of when capacity building support is provided was also highlighted, demonstrated by the following quotation from an INGO research participant.

> *"The time for capacity building is before the disaster takes place…or ongoing in protracted crises. We need to relieve national / local partners of the pressure of learning whilst doing; implementing in the immediate aftermath of a disaster when financial and reputational risks are high, inhibits real partnership."*

It is fair to assume from the findings that there is a skills gap between reported capacity strengthening needs of L/NNGOs and provision from their INGO partners. It should not be assumed that people or organisations with expertise or experience in humanitarian operations have the necessary skills to be good trainers or mentors. Some internal assessment of capacity and organisational development skills is needed within INGOs, plus an assessment of the best approaches for effective capacity building.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs conduct capacity self-assessment prior to approval of funding by INGOs, to understand the L/NNGO's strengths, needs and gaps, and provide tailored support. ✓ The inclusion of a specific line/section for capacity building / organisational development in partnership agreements and budgets. ✓ INGOs provide a comprehensive package of training and mentoring in human resources, financial management, logistics, procurement, and policy/procedures development. ✓ International agencies show a clear intention to adopt an advisory, backstopping or secondary role once adequate capacity exists. ✓ INGOs support income generating activities that will boost L/NNGOs' financial sustainability – see also: Fundraising. ✓ INGOs support capacity building in DRR, to reduce vulnerability to disasters through local agency in disaster management.	× INGOs reluctant or unable to support L/NNGO partner's need for business creation / income-generating activities to improve financial sustainability – see also: Fundraising. × Capacity building that is reliant on project funding and therefore starts and stops with the project. × Training that is strictly limited to what is needed to deliver the project rather than what is needed to become a strong local humanitarian actor. × INGOs/donors will not allow the purchase vehicles for the operation that could continue to support the L/NNGO after the project ends (but are willing to spend the same or more on rental).

3.4.9 Safety and security management

The issue of safety and security management did not feature highly in survey responses or in-depth consultations. Local NGO survey respondents consider the added value of safety and security management capabilities of their partner more so than national and international NGO respondents. The majority of discussions around this topic came up when discussing access (or lack of access) to crisis-affected populations in remote or insecure locations. Survey respondents did not rank conflict and insecurity highly as an external influencing factor for humanitarian partnerships, overall just 10% did, which may explain the omission of safety and security management in discussions on partnerships.

However, the lack of mention of safety and security management is somewhat surprising given the research was conducted in two of the most dangerous countries for aid workers: South Sudan and Nigeria[5]. Safety and security

management is also featuring in an increasing number of discussions at international level around localisation. Some partnership practices related to safety and security management which were highlighted during in-depth discussions are outlined below.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs take the lead in coordinating with the local government and any military present, before travel to insecure areas (Myanmar). ✓ INGOs respect L/NNGOs' decisions on when security conditions exist, or do not exist, for specific actions. ✓ INGOs provide advice on security in the field to their L/NNGO partners (Nigeria). ✓ Training on security management is provided (Nigeria).	✗ INGOs insist on L/NNGOs filling in templates [on risk and security] that are just to fulfil their duty of care requirements, not for the L/NNGO with staff in the area and/or at risk. ✗ Staff have not been given adequate security training even though they are operating in high-risk areas.

3.4.10 Other core capabilities

Organisational capabilities not ranked highly by survey respondents, or raised by in-depth consultation participants were media, communications, and logistics management (other than in Nigeria). The connection between short, medium and long-term programming and funding was also not mentioned in in-depth consultations. This is interesting given the commitments to increase multi-year funding in the Grand Bargain in response to such a demand, and discussions raised by research participants on challenges of financial sustainability and project-based staff.

Commitment to gender equity and inclusion was not ranked highly as an added value to partnerships, or raised in detail during in-depth consultations. However, the findings are interesting: national NGOs ranked their own organisation's commitment to gender equity and inclusion nearly twice as often as international NGOs did theirs.

Humanitarian strategies / policies / guidelines was one of the most frequently cited organisational resources important to partnerships by survey respondents but rarely spontaneously mentioned during in-depth discussions.

3.5 Values, Principles and Standards
What values, principles and standards are most important to partnerships?

Survey respondents were asked to choose 10 values, principles and standards most important to partnerships which ranged from commitment to programme quality and humanitarian standards to organisation reach and preparedness, along with values such as flexibility and trust. Respondents could choose between their own organisation's added value or their partners for these. The top rated values were related to humanitarian principles, programme quality, trust and respectful behaviour, and accountability to affected population.

The majority of survey respondents (74%) ranked their own organisations or their partner's **knowledge and application of humanitarian principles** as one of the most important values. In contrast to the survey, in-depth discussion participants barely referred to humanitarian principles, and when they did, they rarely mentioned international standards such as Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), Sphere Standards, or the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. Instead, they mentioned other principles they consider key to humanitarian action, such as professionalism and stewardship of funds (South Sudan) and commitment, respect and volunteerism (Myanmar). These results highlights the need to discuss these local understandings of humanitarian principles in relation to international humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is vital that there is a common understanding of the principles and values which underpin humanitarian work and to ensure approaches are compatible.

The majority of survey respondents (74%) also ranked their own organisations or their partner's **commitment to programme quality** as one of the most important values. As with humanitarian principles and standards,

understanding varied on what 'quality' means, and the overwhelming partnership practice related to this was cost-effectiveness/efficiency, although timeliness and appropriateness were also mentioned.

While not featuring highly in the survey responses (less than one-third of respondents), **trust and respectful behaviour** was the most discussed value during in-depth consultations. Respectful attitudes and behaviours were voiced frequently as critical to good partnership in the in-depth consultations. Partnership practices mentioned as most and least conducive to localisation in relation to trust and respect are as follows.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Agreements on the full roles and responsibilities of both partners are documented (Myanmar). ✓ Transparency in all aspects of partnership (South Sudan). ✓ A pragmatic approach from INGOs that accepts L/NNGOs desire to lead on some aspects (Nepal). ✓ INGOs that are open to learn from the recommendations of L/NNGOs (Nigeria).	✗ INGOs pursue their own visibility and systematically fail to mention the partner (Nepal, South Sudan). ✗ INGOs do not share financial 'benefits' with their partners [such as unrestricted budget lines] – see also: Financial management and reporting (Myanmar). ✗ INGOs demand exclusivity agreements (e.g. L/NNGO is not allowed to partner with others for the duration of the agreement) (Nepal). ✗ International agency staff with attitudes of authority that make unreasonable demands such as demands for information in the middle of the night or other inconvenient times (Nepal). ✗ Directive, controlling approach by INGO.

Survey respondents also ranked **accountability to affected populations** as one of the most important values (61%), making it the third most important value. Some of the discussions around this value in the in-depth consultations were around flexibility to adapt or revise programme approach or activities based on feedback from the local population, and the suggestion that L/NNGOs are responsible for interaction with affected communities and that international agencies and donors should not consult communities directly (Myanmar). There was also some discussion around the challenge of working with organisations which do not accept the results of promoting accountability, e.g. complaints and feedback (Nepal, South Sudan).

The research generally identified a sense of dissatisfaction among L/NNGOs with international agencies in relation to behaviours and attitudes. Many of the partnership practices least conducive to localisation mentioned in relation to trust and respect, highlight examples of where international organisations have used power imbalances in their favour, shown a lack of respect, lacked transparency, and failed to recognise their partners' capacities. However, there were a number of positive examples of partnerships, as the quotation from a research participant demonstrates.

> *"Over the years we have worked with them we send in our annual report and we send in recommendations and they are quite open to learn. Every partnership ought to be like that…"*

By contrast to the themes above, **gender and inclusion** were only rated highly by a smaller number of survey respondents and remarkably little was said in in-depth consultations about the relationship between partnership practices, localisation and inclusion. One supposition could be that partnership practices relating to gender and inclusion are less important than other values and principles in localisation discussions in the four countries.

Differences across the four countries

Despite the overall trends described in this report, some unique characteristics and important differences surfaced from an analysis of the core capabilities across the four countries. A flexible and adaptable set of multiple approaches to localisation and partnership, tailored to each context, will emerge as conversations around localisation continue. These multiple approaches will need to take into account the contextual differences, priorities, and diversity of local actors and will ultimately result in different localisation pathways; frameworks for which the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium aim to develop through

this project. Below are some of the key differences across the four countries uncovered from the research.

- **Myanmar:** L/NNGOs have the most clearly differentiated set of expectations of what value INGOs and L/NNGOs should add to partnerships, and identify a greater number of capabilities that L/NNGOs add value to partnerships with. Research participants identified few overlaps of the core capabilities which INGOs add value to in partnerships compared to what L/NNGOs add value to. Partnerships are fledgling here.

- **Nepal (and Myanmar):** L/NNGOs highlight the importance of advocacy in partnerships which support localisation and their role in this, and INGOs operating in these countries agree this is an area L/NNGOs add value in. Although advocacy was highlighted as an added value which L/NNGOs bring to partnerships, INGOs there did not agree as unanimously as they did in Nepal and Myanmar.

- **Nigeria:** L/NNGOs, while fiercely independent, appear to have the greatest harmony with INGOs and recognise the value their INGO partners add to partnerships more than in the other three countries.

- **South Sudan:** L/NNGOs selected their own core capabilities that are important to partnerships the most similar to those that INGOs selected; the two sets of lists are nearly identical. It is possible that this illustrates how NGOs have grown together in a rapidly evolving and relatively recent crisis situation. South Sudan is also unique in that both INGOs and L/NNGOs agree that coordination an important capability which INGOs bring to partnerships.

Generally, the key resources highlighted by survey respondents as important to partnerships did not differ significantly across the four countries, and with few exceptions, values were largely the same.

3.6 External Elements
What are the key external factors that can affect partnerships?

Insecurity and/or conflict were discussed during in-depth discussions in three of the four research countries: Myanmar, Nigeria and South Sudan. In Nigeria and South Sudan, this was discussed in relation to challenges in accessing areas for humanitarian operations, and the advantage that L/NNGOs have over their INGOs partners in this regard. In Myanmar, L/NNGO participants explained how insecurity affects their operations because they need special government and army permissions to travel to some areas, and because if they seek official registration with the government they will not be welcomed in those areas. It is interesting then that safety and security management was not rated highly as a capability adding value to partnerships, see Section 3.4.9 on this.

The **role of government** was discussed very unevenly across the four countries. In some in-depth consultations, government capacity (and transparency) emerged as the most important external element affecting partnerships. This was very strongly linked to the themes of governance and legal status in countries where partnerships are affected by recent changes in legislation. For example, in South Sudan, recent legislation introduced new requirements for NGOs, regarding employment of nationals and asset registration. In Nepal, new legislation is aimed at strengthening the role of local government and reducing the presence of INGOs; although new developments suggest a trend towards shrinking the space for all civil society organisations, not just international ones. In Myanmar, despite Government of Myanmar legislation originally designed for development aid and not yet adapted for humanitarian operations, several NGOs mentioned maintaining communications with local and regional government as a practice that reinforces the legitimacy of their own role in humanitarian action. However, in Nigeria, the role of government was almost completely absent from in-depth discussions.

The **complexity of aid flows and funding arrangements** came under scrutiny in many in-depth discussions which adversely affects speed and access to humanitarian aid, and therefore affects partnerships for humanitarian response. Discussions included frustrations about the number of tiers funding passes through before reaching field level (South Sudan) and with regards to a large institutional donor contracting a private company to manage a large humanitarian programme which in turn contract INGOs for the work (Nepal). Research participants commented on the waste of resources that additional tiers of bureaucracy brings, and how it contradicts commitments to localisation.

Although not mentioned in survey responses, in-depth consultations uncovered a common sense of dissatisfaction and frustration of Nigerian L/NNGOs regarding the trend of INGOs setting up and registering national entities; a trend referred to as '**INGO nationalisation**'. The assumption of L/NNGOs was that the prime

reason for such a trend was so that INGOs could access funds available for local and national NGOs in the country, thereby competing with them.

3.5.1 Natural hazard versus conflict contexts
Are partnership practices different in natural hazard and conflict contexts?

The research methodology aimed to enable an analysis of the influence the humanitarian context – natural hazards versus conflict contexts – on partnerships. Survey results from the two countries with only conflict-related contexts (South Sudan and Nigeria) and the country with only natural hazard (Nepal) were compared. Note that this comparison leaves out Myanmar since there are on-going or recent major humanitarian operations related to both natural hazard and conflict contexts. The main differences that emerged are outlined below.

Survey respondents working for organisations operating in **conflict settings** highlight their own organisation's:

- Technical expertise more frequently than those in natural hazard settings (39% vs. 29%).
- Ability to connect short, medium and long-term programming more than twice as often as those in natural hazard settings (25% vs. 11%).

Survey respondents working for organisations operating in **natural hazard settings** highlight their own organisation's:

- Human resource management more often than those in conflict settings (57% vs. 47%).
- Advocacy much more often than those in conflict settings (43% vs. 30%).

Findings from in-depth consultations endorse these findings and provide additional insights.

In conflict settings, perceptions of **neutrality** were raised in relation to security issues, which were not mentioned in natural hazard contexts. For example, INGOs are required to work only with registered national NGOs in Myanmar, but some L/NNGOs do not want to register with the Government of Myanmar as that would reduce their acceptance by armed groups to work in certain areas. There are also risks for INGOs who, through partnerships, may be perceived to be contributing to advancing political agendas.

In conflict settings, **access** to crisis-affected populations was raised as an added value which L/NNGOs bring to partnerships with INGOs who are often restricted from going to certain areas. As long as safety and security management is well planned and resourced, this is a clear advantage of L/NNGOs over INGOs in conflict settings. This was not something raised in natural hazard settings, although the speed with which L/NNGOs can reach crisis-affected populations is not only impacted by insecurity, but also location, base and presence of L/NNGOs in the affected area, so is also relevant for natural hazard settings.

In protracted conflict or cyclical disaster settings, L/NNGOs feel the need for **additional resources to tackle underlying or associated problems**, for example investment in peace-building and/or disaster risk reduction (DRR). This may well be because they have witnessed many months/years of humanitarian operations which have responded to needs but not addressed root causes of the crises. In those environments, L/NNGOs commonly regarded capacity and organisational development as very important to them.

These challenges illustrate the need for context analysis and honest discussions between potential partners in conflict settings, to identify the most effective ways of ensuring aid reaches those who need it most while maintaining the safety of L/NNGO staff and volunteers and the upholding humanitarian principles.

Findings from the research that can be related specifically to natural hazards were sparser, however, L/NNGO research participants highlighted the following. Following disasters triggered by natural hazards, the core capability of **advocacy** gains importance, particularly for L/NNGOs. They see a clear role for themselves in advocating to local and national government to make resources available for those affected and to address structural causes of disaster risk. For rapid-onset natural hazards in particular, L/NNGOs noted that their local presence and knowledge were invaluable to the humanitarian operations.

Finally, in large-scale rapid onset disasters, as in the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, many L/NNGOs find themselves in **multiple partnerships** at once. Several L/NNGOs in Nepal resisted the pressure from potential INGO

partners to sign exclusivity agreements, instead encouraging each other to be assertive and selective, only choosing partners that would invest in organisational development and respect their independence. As large-scale rapid onset disasters triggered by natural hazards tend to mobilise funds more rapidly than conflicts and violence, the influx of INGOs and funds impacts partnerships in these settings.

3.5.2 Disaster management phase

The full cycle of disaster management includes phases of preparedness, DRR, response, recovery, and transition to longer-term development (linking back to preparedness and resilience building) or exit. In reality there is no clear cut transition from one phase to the next, and often the phases merge into each other and run concurrently. As such, there was no context within the research where it could be considered to be representing operations in just one of these phases. During in-depth consultations, less differentiation than expected was made between response and recovery, as examples of partnership practices that were most and least conducive to localisation spanned both. That said, L/NNGOs appear to value the transition from immediate response to increased stability and recovery, and want partners that are willing to recognise their comparative advantage in the recovery phase, giving them freedom to design programmes based on their knowledge of needs. L/NNGOs in the four countries regard the **recovery phase** as where they are best-placed to lead.

L/NNGOs noted that most capacity building and organisational development support provided by their international partners occurs in the period spanning **response-to-recovery** in natural hazard contexts, and the 'relative stability' phase(s) in conflict settings.

Much discussion was devoted to what happens when funding ends and INGOs exit. L/NNGOs pointed out that they still have ongoing development work in same communities and 'inherit' the experience of the response, whether good or bad. They expressed that if their views had been taken into account more in the earlier phases, there would be more sustained benefits for both the communities and their organisations **when funding ends**. L/NNGO research participants were particularly emphatic that partnerships in any phase that strengthen the L/NNGO for this transition and the INGOs' departure would be greatly valued, as they would be better prepared to respond – and attract funding for response – in the next crisis. In additional to organisational development activities that prepare them 'internally', having access to relatively unrestricted funds to use at their discretion, based on observed needs, was considered important for localisation.

3.5.3 Length of partnership

The majority of the partnership practices considered conducive to localisation outlined in this research were examples from **longer term partnerships** between INGOs and L/NNGOs although there were some good practice examples from shorter-term partnerships in South Sudan which focused on capacity strengthening. In South Sudan, the long-term partnerships highlighted by research participants explicitly and strategically aim to strengthen local leadership of humanitarian action through training and mentoring, policy development, contribution to overheads, and flexible funding and reporting arrangements. In Nepal, longer term partnerships were valued where they had originated from an immediate response together. As mentioned above, long-term partnerships are considered more conducive to localisation where advance warning of phase out or exit is provided.

L/NNGOs consider **medium-term partnerships** – between 2-5 years – conducive to localisation when they start with an in-depth institutional assessment and plans to address the gaps identified.

Research findings also suggest that **short, project-based partnerships** tend to be more transactional since due to the urgency to respond, there is limited room for negotiation. These 'partnerships' are often little more than sub-contracting arrangements and offer limited commitment to building genuine partnerships where power is considered.

This raises a clear challenge for INGOs and international humanitarian organisations to think beyond the (often) short timeframe of humanitarian programmes, partnerships and funding. The findings also point to a key role for long-term development programmes and funders to integrate disaster preparedness, including capacity strengthening of local/national agencies, into longer term programmes in hazard-prone contexts, enabling effective longer term partnerships to be built.

Conclusions and recommendations

In what way can INGOs and L/NNGOs use the findings from the research to foster, accelerate or enable a greater role for L/NNGOs in humanitarian programming?

In conclusion, L/NNGO and international agency representatives who participated in this research identified the added value which agencies bring to partnerships for humanitarian response as follows:

L/NNGOs	Both L/NNGOs & international agencies	International agencies
• HR management • Advocacy • Identifying capacity strengthening needs	• Project design, planning & management • MEAL • Financial management & reporting • Coordination (at different levels)	• Fundraising • Technical expertise • Providing capacity strengthening support

The capabilities and value-added outlined in the diagram above should be discussed openly and built on so that as much as is practicably possible is under the leadership of L/NNGOs. International, national and local organisations and agencies responding to, and funding, humanitarian crises now and in the future should use the findings and recommendations of this research to have frank and open discussions with their existing and/or potential partners/grantees about partnership practices which enable effective responses to the needs of crisis-affected people, while empowering local and national organisations to take a greater lead in the response by recognising their existing capabilities.

Internationally, international agencies and networks should also use their relationships with major donors and funding agencies to encourage them to evaluate current and new funding arrangements against localisation ambitions and commitments – most notably under the Grand Bargain – while considering for themselves a new role in which they do not necessarily operate as the direct funding recipient. Ultimately, capacity strengthening, planned phase out, and hand over strategies are also vital in partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs which are moving towards localisation, and so a focus on this is needed.

Communities come together to rebuild lives after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal.
Photo credit: © Christian Aid / Claudia Janke

The following are key recommendations for accelerating localisation framed in the context of partnerships informed by the findings of the research, relevant for all humanitarian actors and stakeholders, including NGOs and civil society organisations, UN and funding agencies, and government.

1. **Jointly review research findings and recommendations:** Humanitarian partners should have open and frank discussions together about the findings and recommendations of this research and draw up an action plan on how to address partnership practices which are not conducive to localisation, identifying milestones, targets, resources needed, and a monitoring mechanism. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnership* consortium agencies will be following this process and developing action plans for a pilot phase. See Annex 2 for a template which could be used. When entering into a new partnership for humanitarian response, consider the findings and recommendations from this research from the beginning.

2. **Identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships:** Humanitarian partners can identify where partnership practices which support localisation are restricted by external factors such as donor policies, conflict and the role of government, and identify actions which might reduce or remove these restrictions. An advocacy strategy or engagement plan might be useful for certain external factors, along with discussions with humanitarian stakeholders presenting barriers to localisation in-country.

3. **Review partnership agreements:** Partners should review their partnership agreements together, with a view to redressing the power imbalances inherent in many agreements and revising them to reflect longer-term collaborations and support through the full disaster management cycle rather than project-focused agreements.

   - Roles, responsibilities and added value of both partners should be outlined, not just those of the implementing partner.

   - Commitments and funding for organisational development and capacity development should be outlined, along with a strategy for meeting the needs identified by the L/NNGO partner themselves (or as a minimum identified through a joint assessment process).

   - Plans to shift power and decision-making should be included, through a phased approach if necessary.

   - Revised agreements could be the basis for a standardised template for partnership agreements developed through relevant NGO fora and/or working groups. These could ultimately replace agency-specific templates and be used by L/NNGOs as a negotiating tool when engaging with new partners.

4. **Assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors:** L/NNGOs should assess their own capacity and organisational strengthening needs – with support from international partners and/or NGO fora – and develop action plans for addressing these needs. These capacity strengthening plans can be used in conversations with existing and new partners to request the tailored technical expertise and support needed. They should be used to ensure similar training is not duplicated by multiple international partners and is tailored to the needs and increasing levels of capacity. Preferences on the modality of capacity strengthening should be outlined, e.g. learning events, in-person or online training, mentoring, accompaniment or work shadowing, simulations and learning by doing. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme is aiming to support L/NNGOs to conduct capacity self-assessments using formats such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) self-assessment.

5. **Assess capacity building skills of international actors:** It should not be assumed that people or organisations with expertise or experience in humanitarian operations have the necessary skills to be good trainers or mentors. As such, international agencies should assess their own internal capacity to provide capacity strengthening support to their partners. Based on the results of this internal assessment, actions should be taken to address weaknesses, review staff training/mentoring skills (and attitudes), review and edit job profiles etc. Efforts should be made by INGOs to coordinate on capacity strengthening, avoiding duplication and working together to build capacity, particularly where they share partners. Additionally,

mapping of local training capacity in-country should be conducted and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning identified. The most effective approaches for capacity strengthening should be identified in consultation with partners as outlined above, and an honest assessment of whether such methods would be more effective if outsourced to specialised training providers should be conducted. A mentoring or coaching scheme could be established, identifying mentors in-house or through networks of peers.

6. **Support organisational / policy development:** International agencies should support their local partners to develop a basic set of organisational policies that meet their organisation's needs and requirements of potential donors, and are not only relevant for specific projects. These might include policies related to finance (including management, reporting, procurement) and HR (including safeguarding, inclusion, recruitment) as well as thematic strategies such as disaster management as requested / required.

7. **Hold discussions around understanding of humanitarian principles:** The research suggests humanitarian principles and accountability are extremely important in humanitarian partnerships, but language – and potentially understanding – differs. Values mentioned by L/NNGOs such as cost-effectiveness, relevance, and volunteerism should be discussed in relation to international humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; to reach a common understanding of the principles and values which underpin humanitarian work and are founded in International Humanitarian Law.

8. **Invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction:** International organisations and donor agencies should (continue to) plan, develop and fund disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes in hazard-prone areas. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction, including peace-building, should also be mainstreamed into development programmes, building on L/NNGOs' longstanding presence, strengthening their capacity for humanitarian response, and supporting them to establish close coordination with relevant local government and other local disaster management stakeholders.

9. **Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding:** All stakeholders to have open dialogue about the fact that localisation is a process and, in the short-term at least, realistically INGOs and UN agencies may continue to be the gatekeepers for large funds from institutional donor agencies while they build strategies and trust in new systems which enable them to fund L/NNGOs directly while still being accountable to the people the funds come from: taxpayers. Commitments made in the Grand Bargain enable all stakeholders to hold these donor agencies to account, and frank discussions about progress and challenges will be vital.

10. **Support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies:** International organisations and donor agencies should identify ways to support local and national NGOs to build up relationships between, and understanding of, donor agencies and L/NNGOs.

    - International organisations should ensure L/NNGO staff join key meetings with relevant donors, and that reports and conversations with these donors highlight the role of the L/NNGO partner.

    - Relevant agencies can run training for L/NNGOs on donor policies, expectations, proposal and reporting templates etc. and support them to understand, plan for, and meet due diligence and compliance requirements. Donor agencies themselves could run these training events as a route to meeting prospective future grant holders.

    - NGOs could conduct mapping to identify funding agencies that are open to funding L/NNGOs directly (or might in the near future).

    - INGOs can identify good practice examples of donor agencies which provide the flexible and direct funding needed to L/NNGOs while funding a key support role of INGOs for technical expertise, capacity building and communications. These can be shared widely.

- Further efforts should be made to establish/increase pooled humanitarian funds which are accessible for L/NNGOs and can be used for small and large scale disasters.

- International agencies should share reports submitted to donors with their partners for transparency and learning purposes.

11. **Support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable:** Project-based funds, staff contracts and capacity strengthening support create a real barrier for L/NNGOs to retain competent staff with good experience, invest in organisational development, and maintain presence in communities where they focus.

- International agencies can support their L/NNGO partners to develop resource mobilisation plans. International agencies should support the development and implementation of such plans as much as is practicable either through capacity strengthening support and technical expertise and/or directly with funds.

- Support for the establishment of income-generating activities has been mentioned by L/NNGOs throughout this research and international partners should consider supporting this. As with capacity building skills however, it must not be assumed that international agencies already have staff with the skillset required to establish such schemes, and outsourcing to specialist organisations might be more effective.

- International agencies could support L/NNGOs to calculate a set of justifiable overhead rates to be used in future budget development with partners. This might include funds to retain key staff for low-intensity project activities between project-based funding, key assets required (e.g. laptops and vehicles), and/or contributions to office rent and running costs. Where donor policy does not allow overhead costs of local partners to be included in project budgets, international agencies should consider sharing the administration budget line commonly allowed.

- NGOs should have honest conversations about what costs are eligible and which are not, and whether this is due to donor policy or organisational policy. Discussions on costs and budget lines which are reasonable and allowable should be open and honest to ensure a clear understanding between partners.

The recommendations here are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are offered to stimulate open discussion, provide an evidence base for dialogue, and support decision-making processes of humanitarian stakeholders. This research has confirmed a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst L/NNGOs in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan related to their partnership experiences with INGOs and other international agencies in recent humanitarian crises. It is vital this is taken seriously and used as a catalyst to review operating models and partnership approaches with a view to improving partnerships. L/NNGOs must be part of, or lead, this review process, along with the communities they represent. Ultimately, stronger partnerships and increasing leadership by local and national humanitarian actors is expected to reach crisis-affected people in the most effective manner possible.

The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members will be reviewing the research findings and recommendations with their local and national humanitarian response partners in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan and beyond; learning from which will inform the development of four national Localisation Frameworks and a global Pathways to Localisation document. The consortium is keen to hear from other organisations who have already implemented any of these recommendations and/or are willing to pilot them. The more agencies that share practical learning or feedback on these recommendations the better. This will strengthen the evidence for what operational elements of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

Annexes

Annex 1: Key references and more reading

Key references

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Annex 2: Template for action plan to assess progress on, and pilot, research recommendations

Recommendation from research	To be piloted? *(yes/no)*	If yes…					If no…	
		Milestones *(how will you know progress has been made?)*	**Indicator** *(how will you know the recommendation has been met?)*	**Action** *(what needs to happen?)*	**Responsibility** *(who will be the main focal people for this?)*	**Resources** *(are any additional resources needed? Who will cover these?)*	**Why not?**	**Any potential advocacy messages to external stakeholders?**