

LOCALIZATION EXAMINED:

An ICVA Briefing Paper

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A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Through this briefing paper, ICVA aims to help improve NGO understanding of localization by exploring its evolution, opportunities, challenges and future trends, and the impacts of these in terms of strengthening principled and effective humanitarian action.

This briefing paper is based on a review of documents as well as ICVA's participation in ongoing localization-related evaluations, research, working groups, workshops and dialogues. It has been informed wherever possible by the inputs of operational local, national and international NGOs in ICVA's diverse NGO membership. This paper is intended to help inform a balanced understanding of localization in order to prompt further discussion and action, recognizing that the positions of individual NGOs do vary. Therefore, this should not be taken as a comprehensive NGO position on the topic.

Additional ICVA explainers on the [Grand Bargain](#), the [New Way of Working](#), the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and [The World Bank and Refugees](#) can be found on ICVA's website.

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1. LOCALIZATION IN A SNAPSHOT

“Aid must be as local as possible and as international as necessary.”

– Ian Ridley, Senior Director, World Vision International (speaking on behalf of International NGOs in closing remarks of the World Humanitarian Summit Global Consultation, Geneva, October 2015)¹.

The Evolution of Localization

The term ‘localization’ began to be used widely in humanitarian contexts in the lead up to the [2016 World Humanitarian Summit](#) (WHS) and has since become one of the most widely discussed topics in the humanitarian sector. Through the WHS, many humanitarian actors, particularly local, national and international NGOs, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), led the call for the international humanitarian system to commit to becoming more inclusive of local and national actors. Publications such as [Localizing Humanitarianism](#), the [Missed Opportunities Series](#), the [2015 IFRC World Disasters Report](#) and [Localizing the Response](#) aimed to inform global debate on the crucial role national and local actors play in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people.

The processes leading to localization are not new. Discussions on increasing funding and resources to local actors have been ongoing in humanitarian circles since the early 2000s, when donors acknowledged that a whole-of-society approach may be needed². In 2007, ICVA and other members of the Global Humanitarian Partnership advocated for more inclusive and complementary approaches to engaging local and national NGOs in humanitarian action through the [Principles of Partnership](#) (PoPs). The principle of Complementarity stated that *“Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance*

Localization is the process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action, while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner.

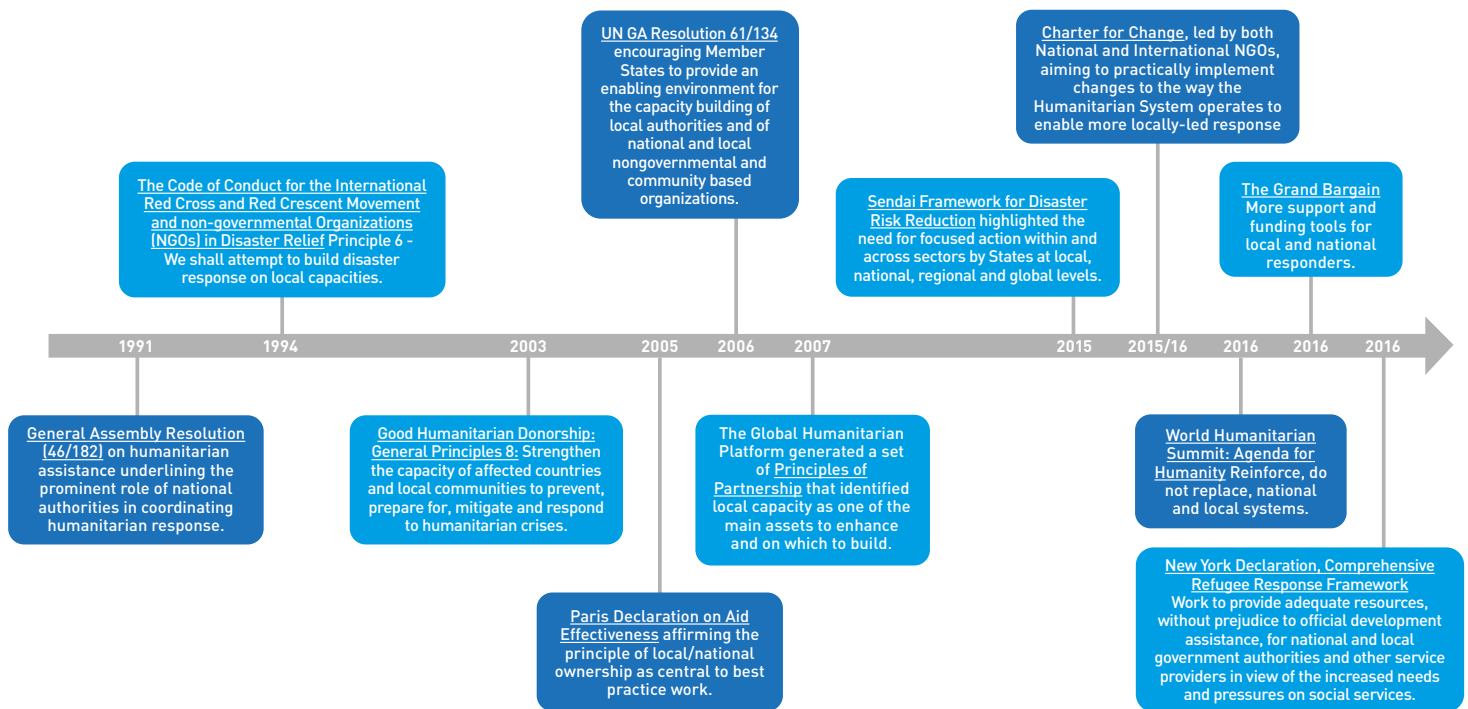
and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response.”

After more than a decade of UN-led humanitarian system reform, localization has emerged as a system-wide goal due to the convergence of a number of factors, including:

- stronger, better-connected and more diverse local and national actors, including both government and non-government actors;
- increasing humanitarian need, combined with critical funding shortfalls;
- efforts to promote closer interface between humanitarian, development and peace action to address complex and protracted crises (see ICVA’s paper on [The New Way of Working Examined](#));
- efforts to find ways to better include people affected by humanitarian crises in the design and delivery of humanitarian action.

Localization combines the possibility of efficiency and accountability gains, and of financial, political and power-balance shifts, into a call to action. Agreements such as the [Charter for Change](#) and the [Grand Bargain](#) have attempted to institutionalize this within collectively-set, time-bound and action-oriented agendas.

The Evolution of Localization in International Policy:



Why Localization?

The need for localization has been widely agreed by humanitarian actors, yet the reasons why are not always clearly articulated. The following are some of the main reasons why localization has been so widely supported:

1. Strengthening inclusion of, accountability to, and acceptance by affected populations

Localization helps ensure decisions by humanitarian actors are made closer to the communities they serve. This, in turn may help humanitarian actors better reflect the needs and goals of these communities. Furthermore, when organizations are established, led and staffed by people close to, or part of, affected communities, they may also be more accountable to these communities and better able to support in their protection³. With governments and non-state actors increasingly questioning the role of international actors, strengthening partnerships with local and national actors may be a way to increase acceptance of international support, particularly by communities themselves.

2. Increasing resilience through linking preparedness, response and recovery efforts

Localization helps ensure emergency preparedness, response and recovery are locally relevant, ongoing and

embedded within local community life. Strengthening local and national actors may be particularly important in countries facing regular or annual disasters and displacement, leading to better crisis management over time and helping build more resilient communities. With climate change and population growth contributing to the increasing frequency and impact of disasters, this local capacity will be important to meet growing needs.

3. Enhancing the speed, quality and scale of humanitarian response

Localization may help strengthen the ability of locally based humanitarian actors to respond more rapidly and to maintain adequate capacity, which will also increase the quality of the assistance they provide. A more localized approach to international support, particularly surge support, will allow international actors to reinforce local efforts and help scale these efforts effectively, reducing the chance that local and national actors will be overwhelmed or marginalized by the international response. Localization may also enable local and national actors to better prepare and respond to larger numbers of small-scale crises, many of which do not trigger international attention.

4. Adding value through improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action

With the humanitarian system facing increasing funding shortfalls every year, the efficiency argument for localization remains central to its broader acceptance. Localization can help reduce costs related to implementation, staffing, transaction and management through all stages of humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery. Aid effectiveness is also linked to localization, as humanitarian programming is likely to be more targeted, with less waste and duplication, when led by organizations in which decision-makers understand crisis-affected communities, speak their language and have a solid grasp of the local context.

5. Promoting diversity, innovative and contextual approaches

Localization may promote contextual approaches to how humanitarian action is planned and delivered, shaped by factors, including local traditions, culture and values alongside international principles, norms and standards. These approaches may not always resemble the version of humanitarian action understood by international actors, but these varying features may also make local humanitarian action effective and provide a fertile ground for innovation to find new ways of addressing increasing needs.

“ICVA and its membership, other NGOs and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement have joined us in calling for the humanitarian system to move away from a centralized, command and control, one-system-fits-all approach to an ecosystem of diverse actors, where frontline responders receive adequate and timely resources.”

– Melissa Pitotti, ICVA Director of Policy, 2016

2. LOCALIZATION TODAY: BETWEEN PRINCIPLES AND PRAGMATICS

Despite its common usage in recent years, the process of localization has many different interpretations which include:

- providing more direct funding to existing national and local actor;
- empowering affected people as humanitarian actors themselves;
- increasing decision-making power at operational levels;
- better linking international action to national and local realities;
- investing in partner capacities;
- opening up space for participation in coordination mechanisms;
- reducing administrative barriers to accessing international funds.

This diversity of interpretations may explain the widespread acceptance of localization and its continued relevance as a process of change in the humanitarian sector. Importantly, it shows that to most humanitarian actors, localization is more than simply replacing international actors or systems with local or national equivalents. Instead, **localization creates an opportunity to critically examine and improve the structure and functionality of the entire humanitarian system.**

Principles and Localization

“This is why the current move to “localization” in humanitarian policy is so important to get right. Social movements inspired by humanitarian principles from the ground up are often profoundly creative and resilient. But old problems in development run deep in humanitarian action too: the risks of capture and suppression. Localization will not be real if it is a power shift captured by elite civil society alone. And many conflicts have the suppression of social movements as one of their core objectives. This means that even when national and grassroots humanitarian action blossoms, it will still need complementary international action by organizations like the ICRC. Sometimes access is only granted to neutral, impartial and independent organizations who have the support of international law and interested States.”

- Hugo Slim, ICRC⁴.

Concerns have been raised by humanitarian actors about what localization may mean for principled humanitarian action, particularly in conflict settings. Some concerns include that localization may weaken protection aspects of a response, or may be used as a way to keep international actors from engaging, particularly in situations involving rights violations⁵. In some contexts, local and national NGOs may be more exposed to pressure from governments or other actors, or be forced to assume additional risks that international actors transfer to them⁶, or may be too close to a conflict to deliver principled and effective humanitarian assistance⁷. Recent research by International Alert into [Partnerships in Conflict](#) found that international actors are often unaware of the extent of the challenges their local partners face and that strengthened approaches to partnerships are needed in these settings.

In fact, realizing principled humanitarian action is challenging for all actors. Local and national actors, as international actors, need to find their own ways of balancing practical and principled approaches in order to best serve people in need. In bringing perspective to this discussion, some proponents of localization advocate taking a ‘whole-of-response’ approach to principled humanitarian action; one which acknowledges the challenges different actors face and aims to ensure the overall response is as principled as possible⁸.

Different Means, Same End

From a humanitarian-ethics standpoint, it can be argued that for humanitarian assistance to continue have legitimacy under international humanitarian law, it must remain specifically and narrowly focused on meeting urgent needs⁹. With this legitimacy being threatened on a daily basis, it is perhaps more important than ever to uphold international laws and principles, even if they often represent ambitions rather than reality. There is a potential risk that localization could dilute the relevance of international laws, erode principles, blur boundaries and contribute to shrinking humanitarian space. In this view, localization should not be prioritized, but rather be treated as simply one more tool in the humanitarian toolbox¹⁰.

Most national and local NGOs want to be included in decisions regarding international interventions and in the reshaping of the humanitarian system overall, but they do not appear to want international actors to completely withdraw. However, some actors have taken a more polarizing view of localization, advocating that in some cases it may be necessary to replace international actors with national actors in order to end or reverse existing power imbalances¹¹. Such an approach, however, may simply serve to replicate at national level many of the existing flaws in the humanitarian system as it stands. There is also a risk that if international actors become too disconnected from humanitarian action they may reduce their advocacy, donor engagement and fundraising. Local efforts alone may struggle to fill this gap. Beyond the money, there is also the potential of reducing the international community’s efforts to pressure governments to prevent and mitigate the underlying factors that generate humanitarian need.

Complementarity and Context

All humanitarian actors, particularly NGOs, need to consider what localization means in their operational contexts and determine how these processes can strengthen principled and effective humanitarian aid. In practice, this means:

- a. understanding the **different roles and comparative advantages** of a diverse range of local, national and international actors;
- b. **working in a complementary fashion** to reinforce the capacities of the actors best-placed to provide assistance, before, during and after a crisis; and
- c. **strengthening local and national actors** wherever possible while recognizing that **sometimes international action may still be preferable or necessary**.

Areas of complementarity and context are being considered by a range of actors, including by the ICRC, which has committed to [striving towards meaningful complementarity](#) in 2018. To do this they aim to unpack what complementarity of local, national and international action actually means in practice, what localization means in terms of protection and prevention of IHL and human rights violations, and the applicability of humanitarian principles to a wide range of local actors. Many INGOs

have contextual localization as a pillar of their operational policy. For example, a recent learning paper by World Vision on operating in [fragile and conflict affected regions](#) focuses heavily on strengthening local action.

It is important to acknowledge that almost all resources currently available on how localization intersects with humanitarian principles and international law were published by, or on behalf of, international actors. Therefore diverse views may not be fully represented.

Strengthening Local Narratives on Localization

The World Humanitarian Summit national and regional consultations provided an opportunity to include the inputs of many local and national actors in global dialogues. Since then, numerous localization-related dialogues, workshops, evaluations and projects have been initiated by a wide variety of actors, at national, regional and global levels. In countries including Somalia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines, national NGOs and NGO Fora are leading in championing localization in their context. Regional-level processes are gaining traction in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. Overall however, at global level it can be seen that discussions remain dominated by the perspectives of international actors, often speaking on behalf of their national and local partners. Localization will be more effective if the voices of local and national actors are further amplified at national, regional and global levels. A number of networks of local and national actors are actively working to do so.

[Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network \(ADRRN\)](#) is a network of local and national NGOs in Asia region, working to promote localized and innovative approaches to disaster risk reduction, response and resilience.

[Alliance for Empowering Partnership \(A4EP\)](#) is a new network of locally grown organizations and global activists that aims to support the existence and growth of independent, sustainable and accountable local and national organizations, particularly in aid-recipient countries.

[Coalition of African NGOs \(CoAN\)](#) brings together NGO representatives from Western, Southern, Eastern and Central Africa to share ideas, experience and knowledge in shaping the response to humanitarian and development challenges; disaster displacement and conflict.

[Network for Empowered Aid Response \(NEAR\)](#) aims to work towards restructuring the global response to human, economic and environmental challenges so that actions to address these are locally driven and owned, and promote equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships.

[The Pacific Island Association of NGOs \(PIANGO\)](#) is a network of national-level networks that aims to strengthen and build the capacity of the civil society sector in the Pacific, including in humanitarian coordination and response.

Localization is also promoted by national-level NGO Fora in many countries.

From Commitments to Action: The Pragmatics of Localization

Two years after the World Humanitarian Summit, **the humanitarian sector as a whole has accepted the need for more localized action and is engaging actively in realizing this, although often in very different ways.**

Within and between NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, donors, the UN and others that have committed to localization, a large number of localization projects are now underway. Progress is varied and there is disagreement between stakeholders on how localization should best be realized

and who should decide. There is need to create space for critical feedback, joint learning and reflection that includes discussion of localization processes between international and national and local NGOs, their partners and donors. Importantly, there is widespread interest, particularly by local and national actors themselves, in seeing less talk and more action on localization.

For a regularly updated list of projects aimed at strengthening localization, visit the [Localization page](#) on ICVA's website.

3. LOCALIZATION IN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The Grand Bargain

Since the World Humanitarian Summit, localization has often appeared synonymous with the Grand Bargain commitment to provide [more support and funding tools for local and national responders](#) (workstream 2)¹².

The workstream aims to promote and facilitate the implementation of localization commitments, under the guidance of the Swiss Government and the IFRC, who are co-conveners on behalf of all Grand Bargain signatories. The [Workstream Plan 2017-2019](#) is available online. Activities include: sharing information, tracking progress against commitments, encouraging engagement of NGOs and other actors, leading country missions to demonstrate implementation, sharing guidance, and coordinating research projects. Bi-monthly workstream conference calls are open to participation by Grand Bargain signatories and invited partners¹³.

Progress on Localization in the Grand Bargain

Independent reports, based on data from the signatories' self-reporting, have been published annually since the adoption of the Grand Bargain and provide analysis of the progress signatories have made on their commitments. The [Year One Independent Report](#) found that almost half of the signatories were engaged in the localization workstream in some way, making it one of the most active. Among the commitments made to localize aid, signatories reported most progress had been made on providing multi-year funding to improve institutional capacities of local actors (73 percent reported activities), whereas least progress had occurred on channeling 25 percent of funding as directly as possible to local and national responders (34 percent reported activities).

The [Year Two Independent Report](#) made more critical observations, with the localization workstream scoring quite poorly in terms of measurable progress, despite the fact that 89 percent of signatories reported engagement in the workstream. A number of challenges were highlighted, including that signatories were starting from different baselines and lacked a shared vision of localization. Tensions between signatories regarding definitions and too much focus on the 25% 'as directly as possible' target had resulted in a lack of collective focus on other commitments. Some workstream members feel the report does not properly discuss the different aspects of localization work in areas other than financing, and that better means of reporting on these areas will be needed in future. At the 2018 Grand Bargain Annual Meeting, ICVA,

Interaction and SCHR delivered a [joint NGO Consortia statement](#) which highlighted the work these consortia are doing to strengthen action on Grand Bargain Commitments at national and local levels.

Demonstrator Countries for Localization

Localization workstream members have selected three 'demonstrator' countries, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Iraq. The workstream conveners are planning interagency missions to these countries to focus in more detail on understanding progress of localization-related work at national and sub-national level. Participation in these missions is currently being called for from the members of the Workstream and the planned mission dates are September 2018 for Bangladesh, November 2018 for Iraq and January 2019 for Nigeria.

Mapping Localization Research and Evaluation

In November 2017, IFRC and Switzerland convened a workshop to produce an initial mapping of localization-focused research projects taking place around the world¹⁴. This mapping is included in the [workshop report](#). A series of dialogues and teleconferences are ongoing to continue to focus on localization research projects, in order to identify synergies, gaps and opportunities for collaboration; discuss mutual objectives and use of outputs; and ensure sharing and learning of process and outcomes. The report of the [second workshop](#) which took place in February 2018 is also available online.

Accountability Within the Grand Bargain Workstream

By committing to the Grand Bargain, signatories have opened themselves to be held accountable by their peers and other signatories. It is also implicit they should be accountable to the local and national actors that are the focus of the workstream and the communities all humanitarian actors are serving. Such accountability mechanisms have so far not been widely discussed within the workstream. Nevertheless, some local and national NGOs have begun to try to hold donors, INGOs and UN agencies to account for their localization commitments, including by conducting reviews of localization practice during responses, for example in the [Bangladesh Rohingya Refugee Response](#) and in [Somalia and Somaliland](#).

Challenges in Defining ‘Local and National Actors’

The Grand Bargain set specific targets and timeframes for increased funding to national and local actors without clearly defining who they are. Since then, much effort has been spent to develop broad consensus on which organizations should be considered local and national. In early 2018 a [Definitions Paper](#) was published and adopted by the Grand Bargain Workstream. It defines ‘local and national responders’ and what the term ‘as directly as possible’ means in practice. Although this could be considered a standard definition, it has been acknowledged this is based on compromise and that further review and discussion may be needed, particularly around engaging local actors themselves in setting these definitions. In the debate around definitions, some national NGOs continue to raise their particular concerns related to the status of established INGOs which register as national NGOs according to the legal frameworks of a host country. This is now a preferred or necessary approach for INGOs in

many countries, driven by a range of factors including government regulations and NGO laws, fundraising, visa requirements, and cost-saving. In some countries these discussions extend beyond fundraising to include participation in coordination mechanisms and access to other opportunities^{15,16}.

Not all actors are convinced of the importance given to definitions. A 2017 paper by Local2Global Protection [‘Can Grand Bargain signatories reach the 25% target by 2020?’](#) highlighted the risk of using these to potentially ‘game the system’, becoming overly prescriptive or excluding certain actors completely. An alternative to the definitional approach runs along the lines of ‘local is as local does’, maintaining that it is not the place of those outside a context to decide if an organization is local or not. Rather, this should be contextually determined on a case-by-case basis by those engaged in, and more importantly affected by, a crisis or response. This is not new thinking and, even as far back as 2001, UNHCR was proposing a more situational, realistic approach to such definitions¹⁷.

The Charter for Change

In 2016, the [Charter for Change](#) presented the first attempt to provide a holistic view of localization. The Charter was broken down into eight commitments reflecting changes that would need to be made by international NGO actors to better localize aid. It was signed onto by 34 INGOs and has since been endorsed by over 200 national NGOs. The commitments were originally intended to be realized by May 2018, although progress has not been clearly achieved in all these areas and signatories continue to work towards these targets. The 2018 Charter For Change Progress Report [From Commitments to](#)

[Action](#) provides a recent update based on self-reporting by signatories. The report provides a reasonably positive view of progress against the commitments and suggested the charter may be evolving into a platform for local and national coordination, dialogue and advocacy on localization-related issues. The report also includes a brief analysis of real-world progress in an operational setting in the Bangladesh Rohingya response, highlighting challenges to actually delivering on commitments during a complex, sudden scale-up of a major response.

WHS Agenda for Humanity

After two years, the WHS Agenda for Humanity has largely taken a back seat to the Grand Bargain, despite the fact that it includes a far wider range of commitments by many more diverse actors. Nonetheless, many stakeholders continue to report on their progress towards these commitments. A summary of these was recently published in the [Analytical Paper on Local Action](#) prepared by a consortia of NGOs and based on self-reporting data.

The paper highlights successes and challenges faced by various actors and makes recommendations related to strengthening or developing new funding mechanisms and facilitating local actor engagement in country-level humanitarian coordination. It also recommends a focus on internal communications within larger organizations and highlights the need for internal reforms to prevent resistance to adaptation.

4. DONOR ENGAGEMENT IN LOCALIZATION

Donors and the Grand Bargain

For a number of years many donors have been implementing changes to their policies that may support localization and following the Grand Bargain, collective efforts appear to have increased. Some donors participate in the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream, some are launching or reshaping funding packages to meet their Grand Bargain Commitments. Recent summaries of progress by a number of donors towards localization are contained in the paper [On the road to 2020: Localization and the Grand Bargain](#), (pp. 4-5) and the evaluation by Charter for Change members and the NEAR network, [Highlights and Ways Forward](#).

Good Humanitarian Donorship

The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) group, an informal network of 42 humanitarian donors, also has a Localization Workstream. According to their [concept note](#), the GHD planned to develop and agree an Operational Best Practice on supporting and funding local and national responders by June 2018. In March 2018, ICVA and the Government of Australia convened a meeting between the GHD initiative and national and international NGOs and NGO Fora to discuss localization progress and challenges. The discussion highlighted successes and challenges from both NGO and donor perspectives and clarified to NGOs that for many donors progress was taking place, although different humanitarian donors were taking different paths in their efforts to support local and national actors.

Challenges for Donors

For some donors, the challenges associated with increasing funding to local and national NGOs are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. These challenges tend to be either: a) legislative issues regarding who is eligible to receive funds from a certain donor; b) administrative and capacity issues involved in delivering many small grants rather than fewer large grants via intermediaries; or c) related to concerns over risk management and accountability. Despite progress by some donors, direct funding to national and local non-government actors by many of the largest donors, such as ECHO and OFDA, remains particularly challenging. The terminology in the

Grand Bargain was changed from 'directly' to 'as directly as possible' for this reason. The result of such challenges is that international intermediaries continue to play a necessary role for these donors. The role of intermediaries is not only played by INGOs and the UN. Private sector fund managers are being engaged by some donors to manage funding allocations on their behalf. The implications of this trend in terms of localization may warrant further attention by NGOs and these stakeholders do not tend to be actively represented in most humanitarian dialogues.

Country-Based Pooled Funds

Increasing funding to Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) is a common way for donors to meet their localization commitments. Operationally, these funding mechanisms provide some clear advantages, as they were initially established to implement large numbers of small grants within a local context. Analysis has shown that access by local and national actors to CBPFs increased from one percent in 2006 to 10 percent in 2014¹⁸ and 23 percent in 2016¹⁹. [UNOCHA reported](#) that the CBPFs in Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen allocated 26-40% of funds to local and national actors in 2017. CBPFs are also facing challenges though and with UNOCHA, which manages the funds, facing staffing and resource pressures there is growing concern that there may be a push to consolidate CBPFs into a smaller number of projects, with larger individual values. This has been a recent topic of conversation at the [Pooled Fund Working Group](#) and ICVA uses its seat to ensure at least one national NGO representative has a voice in these discussions at global level. Some NGOs and donors are also looking towards alternatives to CBPFs, for example the START Fund's [NGO-led fund in Bangladesh](#) is a multi-donor pooled fund directly accessible to local and national NGOs.

Non-Traditional Donors

Localization has also provided an opportunity for other donors to engage in the humanitarian space. Foundations such as [Bill and Melinda Gates](#) specifically focus on funding to strengthen local and national 'first responders', while the [Hilton Foundation](#) has championed the need for philanthropy to better understand and support localization.

5. MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF LOCALIZATION

The majority of the focus of localization has so far been on funding, perhaps at the expense of other aspects. More holistic approaches to understanding and measuring progress on localization are being explored. These acknowledge that although funding is important, localization should be viewed as a much broader set of factors. The

eight commitments in the [Charter for Change](#) were the first attempt to break down its complexities into tangible areas that can be independently considered in programme development and evaluation. Since then, other approaches to breaking down localization into measurable dimensions have been developed and are currently being implemented.

7 Dimensions of Localization

In 2017, a paper by Global Mentoring Institute titled [The Start Fund, Start Network and Localisation: current situation and future directions](#) aimed to conduct a baseline review on the fund's contributions to the localization agenda and develop recommendations for the future. One of the key elements was to break down what localization meant to NGOs by identifying seven distinct dimensions of localization, derived from analysis of the Grand Bargain and other sources. Variations of this framework have been used as a tool to evaluate localization in responses in Ethiopia, the Marawi Crisis in the Philippines and the [Bangladesh Rohingya Refugee Response](#). These examples are outlined as appendices to a recent paper by the same authors, [Localization in Practice](#), which expands on this framework by introducing detailed indicators and practical recommendations for organizations. This paper also prioritized the seven dimensions to reflect their relative importance to localization as follows: Relationship Quality, Participation Revolution, Funding and Financing, Capacity, Coordination Mechanisms, Visibility, and Policy Influence.

Intention to Impact

In 2018, The [Humanitarian Advisory Group](#) published a research paper titled [Intention to Impact](#) which outlines

a detailed approach to measuring localization across six areas: partnerships, funding, capacity, coordination and complementarity, policy influence and visibility, and participation. This approach has recently been used to develop a framework for tracking progress on localization from [A Pacific Perspective](#). Pacific humanitarian actors sought to define the indicators that would show whether progress towards a locally-led humanitarian system was occurring, to inform the development of a framework for measuring localization in case-study countries across the next three years.

Perspectives from the Field

A survey by [Ground Truth Solutions](#) of local partner organizations providing humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, and Uganda focused on their relationships with international partners. The assessment was based around three themes: the quality of the relationship, financial support and capacity strengthening, all three of which were seen to have a bearing on localization. The research approach broke each of these three categories down into a number of sub-categories, giving a total of 13 separate areas of rating. Further research and analysis using this approach is planned.

The Principles of Partnership

Discussion of quality of partnerships between national and international actors is central to localization. The [Principles of Partnership](#) (PoPs) which have just celebrated their 10th anniversary, help ensure partnerships are based on the principles of equality, complementarity, transparency, results-orientation and responsibility. The PoPs may provide another tool to measure progress on localization. The localization team in the Global Protection Cluster [Child Protection AoR](#) have developed an approach

to systematically reviewing partnerships according to the PoPs and will be releasing a partnership assessment tool in the near future. Over the past few years, the IFRC and ICVA have worked with UNHCR as part of the High Commissioner's [Structured Dialogue](#) process to mainstream a practical approach to using the PoPs. More work can still be done to develop and implement practical tools to assess and strengthen principled partnerships.

6. LOCALIZATION IN CONTEXT

Localization is not taking place in isolation. It is influenced by, and in turn has impact on, other processes of change underway within the humanitarian sector. The following

Shrinking Space for Civil Society

A much-discussed trend amongst NGOs is the shrinking, or changing, space for civil society action. Identified as an almost global issue, this has significant implications for local humanitarian action by NGOs. [NGO Engagement with Host Governments](#) was the theme of ICVA's Annual Conference in 2017, highlighting the increasing importance of this topic to humanitarian NGOs. Despite these concerns, the interface between localization and shrinking civil society space has yet to be discussed widely, particularly related to how local and national actors may be coping with more restrictive government policies or increased military action.

PSEA and Safeguarding

The public challenges NGOs and UN Agencies have been facing recently regarding their approach towards the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by their staff have resulted in strengthened safeguarding systems. This has already had flow-on effects at national level in some countries, but the impacts of these changes in the context of localization have yet to be unpacked. Local and national actors have largely been left out of the focus despite the fact this may hamper their ability to receive funds from partners and donors. ICVA recently conducted an [assessment of current NGO practices and challenges](#), which included consultations with local NGOs and NGO Fora on their specific considerations.

Cash Transfer Programming

The use of cash transfer programming (CTP) in humanitarian assistance is gaining popularity, however cash based programming can be particularly challenging for local and national organizations as these mechanisms tend towards greater scale rather than local diversity. The need for better linkages between cash and localization are acknowledged but not yet explored in detail. The latest [State of the World's Cash Report](#) highlights the lack of understanding and investment in localizing cash-based programming, with only 28% of surveyed practitioners

areas are shaping the way localization commitments are translating into local and national-level action.

believing that local and national actors were appropriately involved in cash coordination.

Gender and Localization

Recently there has also been increased discussion of better linking gender with localization, in part following recognition of the lack of a gender-focus within the Grand Bargain as a whole. This has been highlighted recently in papers including Care International and Action Aid's paper [Not What She Bargained For](#), which includes specific recommendations related to the localization workstream. A number of publications specifically deal with gender and localization, including [A Feminist Approach to Localization](#), [Gender and Localizing Aid](#) and [Promoting Localized, Women-led Approaches to Humanitarian Responses](#). The new [IASC Gender Handbook](#) also consistently reinforces the need for effectively engaging local actors.

Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

Most local and national actors who deliver humanitarian assistance are also closely linked to development, and at times peacebuilding activities. In many ways, localization is central to the idea of a humanitarian-development-peace nexus and, as discussed at ICVA's [2018 Annual Conference](#), local and national actors may not consider this to be a 'new way of working' at all. Responding to a humanitarian crisis may require local organizations to transform "from development actors by day, to humanitarian actors by night²⁰." With appropriate preparedness and support this can be well managed, saving lives and protecting long-term development goals. To support localization, requirements of donors and partners working in this nexus need to be better understood. A number of NGOs have recently published reports on their views on working in the nexus, with a range of implications for localization, including MSF's [Emergency Gap Series](#), and Save the Children's [Perceptions and Attitudes on the NWOW in the Horn of Africa](#).

7. NEXT STEPS FOR LOCALIZATION

People at the Centre

Along with localization, one of the key messages of the WHS was to place 'people at the center' of humanitarian action. The two areas are closely linked as the legitimacy of local and national actors comes, at least in part, from their ability to represent local communities. Localization can be seen to be founded on the principle of subsidiarity²¹, where the value of all external assistance should be measured in terms of its positive impact on the needs and capacities of the community. Despite this, most work on localization remains focused on organizations, rather than on how the role of affected communities themselves can be strengthened. While it is implicit that local and national actors will be, in many cases, better able to engage their local communities and promote accountability, this may

not always be the case - particularly in [conflict settings](#). It is important that localization does not become a proxy for promoting genuine accountability and participation. There has been increasing discussion of the need to better understand the links between localization, community engagement and accountability to affected populations, particularly within the Grand Bargain and the [CDAC Network](#). The recent Grand Bargain Annual Meeting highlighted that localization has still not been closely linked to community engagement and accountability to affected populations. Ground Truth Solutions has begun work on [Tracking the Grand Bargain from a Field Perspective](#), which includes gathering feedback from both affected people and local organizations.

Local Diversity

Localization discussions primarily consider local and national actors as NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and governments. However, it can be argued this does not go far enough to recognize the true diversity in size and type of local and national actors engaging in humanitarian space. A 2016 paper published by [Local to Global Protection \(p.14-15\)](#) explores who could be considered a local actor, arguing that local organizations may include, but not be limited to, faith-based organizations, diaspora groups, local private sector, and organizations formed by community members themselves.

- **Faith-based organizations and networks** often take a very active role in localization as their consortia or alliance models and strong links to local communities lend themselves to this approach. A 2017 forum in Sri Lanka titled [Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need: The Role of Religious and Faith-Based Organizations](#) discussed the unique contributions to localization that could be made by local faith-based actors working in humanitarian settings.
- The role of **diaspora** was heavily discussed at the WHS and since then there has been move towards creating networks of diaspora groups to strengthen their role in humanitarian action. One leading example is [Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination \(DEMAC\)](#), which is working with Sierra Leonean, Somali, Syrian and Nigerian diaspora communities in Europe to explore their approaches and capacities as providers of humanitarian aid and improve their coordination with humanitarian systems.

- In the humanitarian space, the **private sector** is often thought of in terms of major logistics companies or corporate funding or foundations. Less attention is given to local private sector, which is often interwoven with civil society and communities. In some countries, Chambers of Commerce have been at the forefront of natural disaster response efforts. Projects that are taking a localization-based approach to strengthening the role of private sector include the [Asia-Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management](#), which brings national private sector and NGO actors together; and the [Asia Preparedness Partnership](#), which has brings together government, NGO networks and private sector networks at national level in six countries. A recent paper by MSF on engagement with the private sector highlighted some [trends and concerns](#) that may call for further consideration by humanitarian actors.
- The role of **Community Based Organizations**, formed and led by disaster or crisis-affected people themselves, may also be central to localization. These organizations may not exist in pre-crisis phases or may change their form, activities and leadership during these times. Understanding better how local community based organizations can be strengthened in preparedness, response and recovery may become key to truly placing people at the center of humanitarian action. Recent work on survivor-led response by [Local to Global Protection](#) and the START Network is testing new approaches to putting affected communities themselves in the driving seat of their own response and recovery.

At Local Level, Size Still Matters

Within the national context, size and location of an organization remains important. What is local enough at one time, may not be so at another. NGOs operating within the country they were founded in may be broadly considered as local actors when viewed by international partners, but in some settings, operations based in a capital may be too removed from a crisis to be considered truly local. NGOs that grow and begin to take action outside their home communities may, over time, lose connection and legitimacy within the local environment. Thinking of local as a continuum, not as an either-or definition may help to ensure larger, established national NGOs do not 'crowd-out' smaller, more local organizations.

Local Leadership

Recognizing and strengthening local leadership may be a critical factor for the success of localization. Leaders play a key role in galvanizing community support, developing locally-owned systems and innovating in new ways of applying international best practice to local settings. The [Asian Local Leader's Forum for Resilience](#) is one

Role of Governments

Engagement with local and national governments is central to localization and although governments are often grouped with other actors under the catch-all 'local and national actors', this does not acknowledge the unique role and responsibility of governments in humanitarian action.

“Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.”

- General Assembly Resolution 46/182

To understand localization it is necessary to consider the role of governments as separate, yet linked to, the role of humanitarian actors. Governments set regulations, control access and operations, and, in all but the most extreme of cases, lead in coordination of humanitarian efforts. Importantly, governments also make the decision on whether to call for international humanitarian assistance following

example of an NGO-led initiative that is highlighting local leaders who are demonstrating how this is possible. One key challenge for humanitarian actors broadly is how to work with local NGOs and communities to better promote gender and [diversity in leadership](#).

Preserving the Uniqueness of Local and National NGOs

Some NGOs express concern that localization could become a process of 'globalization in disguise', highlighting that local processes are often not formal and are based on unique advantages that cannot always be reflected or captured in broad policy. In general, localization discussions tend to focus on building local and national capacities to match international systems and processes, rather than on adapting international structures to local contexts. Local, by its very nature, is specific to a certain district, country, culture or region and so efforts to find commonalities and set benchmarks run the risk of erasing some of the very advantages these actors have. The [More Than the Money: Localization in Practice](#) paper by Trocaire and Groupe URD examines this in more detail.

a crisis. As government capacity increases, it generally becomes less likely they will call for formal international assistance and more likely they will encourage other types of support arrangements. This has the potential to drive localization processes forward, perhaps faster than expected.

Overall, localization is likely to bring new opportunities and challenges for the engagement of NGOs and other humanitarian actors with governments. Greater complementarity of efforts between national and international actors may help to strengthen overall advocacy efforts and improve humanitarian access and effectiveness. Local and national NGOs are usually registered under different government agencies to international actors. They maintain different relationships and have different types of access compared to international counterparts. Local governments themselves are also emerging as more empowered actors in some humanitarian settings and themselves have different structures, mandates and responsibilities to national-level government agencies. Local governments may lack the resources to effectively implement policies or even compete for resources with non-government actors.

Addressing the Key Issues

Risk Management

Improved management of risk is central to localization, as it is key to increasing donor trust in local and national partners, potentially resulting in greater funding, over longer periods of time, with reduced oversight burdens. One of the arguments for the use of intermediaries - such as international NGOs, fund managers or UN Agencies - is they are better able to manage risk compared to local and national actors²². However, proponents of direct funding to local actors argue that often international intermediaries simply pass on risks anyway and that if international actors continue to perform this function, there will be no incentive to truly transfer responsibility and control²³. ICVA is currently working with members of the [IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team](#) to work on the issue of system-wide risk management, risk transfer, and risk sharing, including by mapping existing studies and developing key messages that could serve as the basis for discussion with donors.

Effectively Strengthening and Retaining Capacity

Lack of capacity is regularly flagged as a key challenge to localization, yet many local and national actors ask why past capacity building projects have not yet shown results. One particular criticism is that partners focus on technical and individual capacities, rather than organizational and administrative capabilities such as financial and human resources management. To sustain capacity, local and national actors should be able to decide what capacity strengthening they need and how this will be provided. Some organizations and donors are advocating for capacity building to be funded separately and additionally to both overhead costs and project funding. Organizations such as the [Humanitarian Leadership Academy](#) advocate developing locally-relevant approaches to capacity sharing as a means for strengthening local actors. A recent article [Investing in Syria's Future Through Local Groups](#) highlights the need to focus on developing local capacity and funding local actors during and immediately after conflict, as these groups are already engaged in providing humanitarian services.

For local and national organizations to maintain capacity during an emergency, the recruitment processes of international actors remain a key factor. Some work has been done on processes for managing recruitment of national NGO staff by the UN or INGOs during emergency response, including aspects such as notice periods, compensation payments and salary scale-matching. However the 2018 [Charter for Change](#) report highlights

that this area is not being prioritized by INGOs and challenges to progress remain in operational settings.

Flexible and Sustainable Financing

One of the central challenges for localization continues to be a lack of long-term, flexible funding for core costs to local and national NGOs, which limits their ability to invest in capacity development and organizational sustainability. Research, such as [Provision and Conditions of Core Costs for Local/National Humanitarian Actors](#) has found that equitably covering overhead costs of local and national NGOs would contribute to efforts to localize funding and also strengthen the capacity of local actors. CBPFs have been highlighted as one systematized approach to ensuring local and national actors benefit from the same conditions as international actors. In 2017, the Near Network published a paper on provision of [core financing](#) to local and national NGOs, calling for minimum commitments of unrestricted funding towards administrative costs. ICVA is supporting work through a number of the Grand Bargain Workstreams to strengthen multi-year, unearmarked, flexible funding, particularly to local and national NGOs.

Understanding the True Value (and Cost) of Localization

Although work around funding is central to localization, measuring the added-value of non-monetary aspects of localized humanitarian aid may perhaps be even more important. Understanding the real value-add of localization will require new approaches to valuing community preparedness, calculating savings due to increased local capacity to prepare and respond, measuring the positive impacts of stronger local leadership, and developing a better understanding of the other less-tangible contributions that local actors bring to humanitarian action. NGOs should also remain alert to any unforeseen or opportunity costs associated with the localization process that have yet to emerge.

The Willingness of INGOs and Other International Actors to Change

In the future, international actors may take a very different role in relation to humanitarian action. Some international NGOs, and networks, particularly those which have engaged heavily in localization, such as the [START Network](#), [Action Against Hunger](#) and [Oxfam](#), have recognized this and are in the process of implementing widespread restructuring processes to try and become more nationally- and locally-led and responsive. Overall however, processes of change

within international organizations are often slow. It was discussed at the second [Grand Bargain Annual Meeting](#) that the Eminent Person should convene high level actors and engage them to ramp-up their political commitment towards localization.

Even when high-level commitment exists, the operations of international actors at national level may not always reflect these. This may be indicative of 'trickle-down' effects in a changing policy environment, where new

approaches have not yet been mainstreamed throughout systems, or of different approaches and understandings of localization, or the fact that these approaches are competing with other organizational change priorities. For localization commitments to be turned into action, changes in organizational culture must take place at national level, which will require the full support of management, including Country-Directors and Humanitarian Programme Managers.

HOW DOES ICVA SUPPORT NGOS IN LOCALIZATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

As a diverse NGO network, with 40 percent of members originating outside Europe and North America, issues related to localization have long been fundamental to ICVA's efforts to promote principled humanitarian action and stronger partnerships for all NGOs. From facilitating local and national NGO participation in regional and international policy dialogues and operational coordination mechanisms to advocating for increased support for local responders, including better access to financing, ICVA continues to actively work to promote a nuanced approach to localization in line with the interests of its diverse membership.

- **Promoting NGO voices at the regional and global level.** This advocacy support is particularly useful for national NGOs that cannot maintain an office in regional or global humanitarian hub. On selected issues and processes, ICVA supports travel of national NGO representatives to engage directly with donors, host governments and UN agencies. ICVA continues to advocate for additional seats at the table in various dialogues, so national and local NGOs can join other actors and contribute their diverse perspectives.
- **Regional Representation.** ICVA's Regional Representatives in Africa, MENA and Asia work to engage directly with NGOs and NGO networks in the regions, ensuring better alignment between global, regional and national perspectives.
- **IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team (ICVA is Co-chair).** The IASC HFTT brings together NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the World Bank to work towards: closing the funding gap, promoting more efficient and effective financing

(in line with the Grand Bargain), addressing systemic issues related to contractual arrangements and risk transfer, exploring the humanitarian-development nexus in protracted settings, and improved transparency of aid flows.

- **Less Paper More Aid:** This key initiative that ICVA is championing could have a positive impact on localizing aid, including simplifying and harmonizing donor reporting requirements, making partner capacity assessments more inter-operable, and harmonizing UN agency approaches towards NGOs.
- **Learning Stream on understanding the humanitarian system.** Most webinars and reports are available to all local and national NGOs, providing concise and focused analysis of key developments and trends in humanitarian affairs.
- **ICVA NGO Fora Support Programme.** Structured and ad-hoc support to national NGO Coordination Fora to help them with a range of topics including strategic planning, governance and membership, along with providing tailored operational support. This project is specifically aimed at strengthening fora supporting national NGOs.
- **Briefing Papers.** In June 2016, ICVA together with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) developed a briefing paper on the importance of [Localization in Humanitarian Practice](#).

To receive information on any of the above, NGO representatives can contact ICVA at: secretariat@icvanetwork.org

8. RECOMMENDED READING ON LOCALIZATION

There has recently been an abundance of writing on the topic of localization. Here are ICVA's top picks to gain an in-depth understanding of the current state of the localization

discourse and how localization talk is being turned into action. For a more comprehensive and regularly updated list, visit ICVA's website www.icvanetwork.org/localization.

Top 5 reads: Understanding Localization

1. [On the Road to 2020: Grand Bargain Commitment to Support National and Local responders](#) (Trocaire, 2018): A recent and very thorough summary of the current state of progress of a range of stakeholders and overall landscape in regard to localization, with a focus on the Grand Bargain.
2. [Understanding the Localization Debate](#) (Global Mentoring Institute, 2017): The Global Mentoring Institute has a rich body of work on the topic of localization, including this 2017 piece on which examines in detail some of the arguments for, and challenges to, localization.
3. [Localization and Locally Led Crisis Response: A Literature Review](#) (Local2Global Protection, 2016): A very comprehensive review of localization published just after the WHS, which also discusses some challenges of supporting localized humanitarian action and suggests ways of overcoming these.
4. [Localisation of Aid—Are INGOs Walking the Talk](#) (START Network, 2017): This publication from the Shifting the Power project examines whether INGOs are living up to their own promises to localize humanitarian aid. The report looks at current opportunities, challenges and good practices in relationships and calls for improved partnerships between INGOs and local and national NGOs.
5. [Emergency gap: The challenges of localised humanitarian aid](#) (MSF, 2016): This paper analyses the role of national and local actors in humanitarian action based on MSF's experiences in areas within conflict affected countries. It highlights constraints and challenges that confront these actors when delivering humanitarian assistance, especially in situations of internal armed conflict and contends these limitations have been largely ignored by localization discussions.

Top 5 reads: Implementing Localization

1. [Local Humanitarian Action in Practice](#) (Humanitarian Leadership Academy and British Red Cross, 2017): This collection of case studies, led by the British Red Cross and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, highlights successes and challenges faced by local humanitarian actors, drawing on the real-world experiences of ten national and local humanitarian organisations.
2. Notes from [Breaking Down the Silos Webinar Series: Good Practices and Tips from the Field on Working with National and Local Actors](#) (Global Cluster Coordinators Group, 2017): Published as a summary of a panel discussion examining best practices to localize during the early recovery phase, this document provides international coordination actors with a clear list of specific and actionable recommendations for improving operational coordination with national governments and NGOs.
3. [IFRC Policy Brief: Localization - what it means and how to achieve it](#) (IFRC, 2018): This paper, based on the IFRC's experience convening the Grand Bargain Workstream, presents some key lessons learned and recommendations for strengthening localization.
4. [Localization in Practice: Emerging Indicators and Practical recommendations](#) (START Network, 2018): This report was commissioned by the START Network's Disasters and Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP) Learning Project to contribute to learning on best practice for localization, and to move forward the discussions through a series of specific recommendations.
5. [Highlights and Ways Forward](#) (Charter 4 Change, 2018) A concise summary by the five NGOs which are both Grand Bargain and Charter 4 Change Signatories, and the NEAR Network, highlighting specific achievements for different stakeholder groups plus overall challenges and recommendations.

Online Localization Resource Database. Through the ICVA website www.icvanetwork.org/localization NGOs can easily access regularly updated resources related to localization, including links to recent publications, projects and evaluations.

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- 11 Humanitarian Aid International. [As Local as Possible, As International as Necessary: HAI Position Paper on Localisation](#)
- 12 See [ICVA’s The Grand Bargain Explained Paper](#) for more information on the Grand Bargain workstreams. Other workstreams also contribute to supporting the aims of localization, such as commitments to include aid recipients in decision making (workstream 6), increase collaborative multi-year planning and funding (workstream 7), reduce earmarking of donor contributions (workstream 8), and harmonize and simplify reporting requirements (workstream 9).
- 13 Although participation was originally restricted to Grand Bargain signatories only, the conveners have recently invited non-signatory participants representing local and national actors, including NGOs, the private sector and government.
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