Conclusions

Key outputs:
This programme has enabled, and helped to accelerate, localisation. The action filled a gap and responded to an increasing demand among humanitarian actors for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) commitments on localisation to become a reality in field operations. No in-depth or practical discussions on localisation had been part of local or national dialogue on humanitarian action in the 4 countries until the project launched. In these countries there were no localisation working groups or platforms, until the project established the National Steering Committees (NSC). These were recognised as a particularly effective way of promoting local ownership of the project.

One of the greatest impacts of the project is that it brought humanitarian stakeholders together to increase understanding, and galvanise action for nationally and contextually relevant localisation. Further national events are critical, highlighted in the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream global meeting and likely to feature in the Workstream’s 2020-21 Action Plan. Further, it has been highlighted that there is a need to document and share best practice case studies of local and national NGOs (L/NNGO) effectively leading humanitarian response. To date, these examples are limited, and could be effective in shifting perceptions on L/NNGOs capabilities.

Thanks to this project, a global framework for localisation (Pathways to Localisation; A framework towards locally led humanitarian response in partnership-based action) now exists for INGOs and donors to action and measure themselves against, and for L/NNGOs to hold them to account. National Localisation Frameworks developed primarily by L/NNGOs are already enabling local and national actors in Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan to demand changes. A short practical guidance note is now part of the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream Action Plan (Partnership practices guidance note) which includes evidence-based recommendations from research on partnership practices, also available thanks to the project (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships: Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action globally).

Tools and evidence from the project have been welcomed by a wealth of humanitarian stakeholders. One large INGO said: “Through the process of developing our new global strategy...the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships research helped us to define what good partnership looks like; i.e. how we can fully leverage the opportunities that local partnerships offer." A large institutional donor said that the partnership guidance note “...is the only one that I am willing to push internally. Thanks to your team for putting together something coherent”.

Sustainability:
Now is an opportune time to push for progress on localisation. The consortium agreed to support and fund an additional 5-months of the project, until 31st March 2020. Budget includes for all full-time project staff (global Programme Manager and 4 national Programme Coordinators), limited activities, and an external evaluation and learning review. See Annex 6
for the evaluation and learning review report. It will also enable the consortium to identify donors interested in supporting a phase 2.

The multi-stakeholder actions being supported through the additional 5-month project period will ensure momentum catalysed by the project is not lost. The NSCs are taking forward the national localisation frameworks in-country with donors, UN agencies, international NGO (INGO) partners, and government authorities, and are aiming to transition into national localisation working groups or platforms with the addition of government, donor and UN representatives, to sustain momentum. In Nigeria, the government is considering taking responsibility for actioning and monitoring progress of the Nigeria Localisation Framework. Similarly, in Nepal, efforts are on-going to ensure government endorsement and ownership of the Nepal Localisation Framework.

To ensure robust sustainability of the programme results, there is a critical need to invest in capacity and institutional strengthening for L/NNGOs so that a vibrant and diverse local civil society is capable of managing funds received directly, and taking leadership of humanitarian action (see ‘donor practice’ below).

**Donor practice:**
ECHO staff agreed from the outset that implementation of this first Enhancing Response Capacity (ERC) action on localisation should also contribute to useful learning for ECHO’s practice. Lessons were recorded in quarterly progress meetings with ECHO, which included the following:

1. The delay between donor pre-selection and contract signature created a tension between the original design and national NGO ownership and ideas which evolved rapidly during that delay. The approach would need to respond to this tension, and in some ways it did, allowing for funds to adjust to evolving priorities. However, as L/NNGO structures became more prominent, their aspirations also changed as evidenced in the learning review.

2. Donor conditions need to be adjusted to allow for localisation in practice. ECHO contracts require direct line management of all staff funded by the action, and between the FPA partner signing the contract and any sub-contractor. ECHO’s agreement to allow matrix management arrangements between the global Programme Manager and national Programme Coordinators created a positive message in support of the localisation agenda by starting to break the conventional top-down approach, in support of putting L/NNGOs in the driving seat with national staff.

3. However, donor contractual conditions worked against the localisation approach because consortium implementing partners in-country were obliged to directly line-manage the national Programme Coordinators. This meant that salaries had to be increased in line with that INGO salary range, rather than maintained at a more competitive local rate, and this initially slowed programme implementation.

4. The Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) process needs to allow for deeper and broader outreach to L/NNGOs to design projects. Two months between HIP launch and proposal submission is not sufficient. This was raised with ECHO and subsequently ECHO allowed for adjustments to be proposed during inception phase to foster greater local ownership of the project. However, as the budget and national Programme Coordinator was managed by an INGO rather than a national NGO some L/NNGOs attending the inception workshops saw this as contradictory.
5. ECHO's mutual enthusiasm for the participation of local NGOs from remote areas was reflected in a specific budget line but unfortunately this was reduced before contract signature. Localisation programmes of this kind require significant budget to ensure the safe and meaningful participation and ownership of L/NNGOs in such projects. During implementation of the action, budget for annual Global Steering Group (GSG) meetings in Europe was reallocated to support in-person meetings for NSCs.

6. ECHO budgets do allow for a measure of flexibility across and within budget headings and this supported some critical adjustments allowing, for example, separate research validation and pilot design workshops, increased outreach to L/NNGOs through the research, and reallocations for NSC meetings. This helped ensure local leadership of the action.

Evidence-based recommendations for donors include:

- Review and adopt good practice from donors which provide flexible, direct and multi-year funding to L/NNGOs (including a % for institutional development).
- Develop a set of justifiable and allowable budget lines which support L/NNGOs, including specific line items for overheads and institutional development.
- Request INGOs to include their local partners in meetings and other correspondence with ECHO staff.
- Donors coordinate on compliance and due diligence requirements and harmonise procedures.
- ECHO run training specifically for L/NNGOs on donor policies, proposal writing and compliance.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned through the action include the results of the research outlined in the research reports (see Annex 1 for the global report) and summarised in the Interim Report. However, a reflection on the project and its place within the broader humanitarian sector enabled through an independent evaluation and learning review funded by the consortium, outlined further learning which is shared below. See Annex 6 for the evaluation and learning review report.

1. A well-functioning national steering committee, an intact consortium, and an institutional lead agency providing support to this project, were fundamental to managing relationships, allowing inclusion, leveraging influence and funds, and ensuring effective implementation of the project. However, the transition from an active project management and implementation role at project start up, to a supporting and mentoring role once NSCs were established, required reflection and adjustments by the INGO consortium members. INGOs will need to envisage a different role for themselves in a humanitarian sector which is genuinely locally-led, and this starts with roles, responsibilities, power and decision-making in actions like these.

2. The NSCs were an extremely effective mechanism for ensuring the impact of the project by stimulating discussion, supporting engagement, and scaling outreach of the action with a broad range of local actors. It is important to ensure that, through the process of accelerating localisation, such national NGO steering/working groups are not replicating power imbalances at the global level at the national level. These existing and emerging
national structures, should support representation and consultation of a diverse range of L/NNGOs, and rigorous inclusion methods in programme delivery are critical to ensure this happens. In this action, membership of NSCs was carefully considered to ensure a representative range of organisations steered the project. There is increasing advocacy to ensure that women-led organisations are involved in localisation discussions and dialogues. It is also important to be vigilant about the extent to which dialogue on localisation at national level is commandeered by a small number of prominent individuals or national organisations rather than a representative and inclusive mix of local and national stakeholders.

3. Implementing modalities are as important as the project objectives. Meeting ambitious project aims related to the localisation of humanitarian aid are not possible if implementation modalities remain embedded in traditional power imbalances all along the funding chain. The most successful localisation programme – a programme aimed at empowering local leadership through partnerships – would need to reflect, in its design process, operating modality, structures, staffing and ways of working, the central ambition itself.

4. The engagement of local NGOs beyond consortium member’s partners at project design stage was challenging as there were limited mechanisms to support such conversations. However, future localisation initiatives at least in the four programme countries, can be guided by the NSCs which are aiming to transition into national localisation working groups or platforms in the countries. Ensuring other actors or initiatives co-design and consult such groups will be crucial for future such projects (and something ECHO can encourage their partners to do).

5. Flexibility and responsiveness to feedback are key to enable changes and adaptations in the programme to reflect changing contexts. The consortium recognise the value in being given flexibility by ECHO to make budget reallocations and repurpose budget lines as needs were better understood and evolved. However, further flexibility will be needed in future localisation projects to enable local and national actors to advise and steer other changes as relevant.

6. In order to enable local actors to engage in the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and Grand Bargain commitments, and localisation, there is a need to continue supporting them in understanding the bigger picture, the rules of the industry, what can and what cannot realistically be done, in a more open way in order for them to navigate and jointly transform the sector.

7. While interest in, and understanding of, the Grand Bargain commitments has increased, it is still largely understood as a commitment to routing 25% of humanitarian funds to local actors. This narrow understanding of the Grand Bargain results in challenges in improving humanitarian action in a realistic and effective manner. This lack of understanding is true for all relevant stakeholders, including staff of international NGOs, UN agencies, donors, government, and local and national NGOs.

8. Inception workshops noted the increasing demand for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) commitments to become a reality in field operations. There was no established humanitarian operational model between L/NNGOs and INGOs, and this project planned
to address this in part. This flagship programme heralded and tackled the need for practical implementation of the WHS and Grand Bargain commitments.

9. Further discussions are needed on complementarity between local/national and international actors, and how this approach ensures humanitarian action is ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary’.

10. More investment in capacity strengthening and institutional development is needed if donors are to entrust funds directly to L/NNGOs, particularly at a time when donor counter-terrorism measures and other factors are making due diligence even more strict.

11. Support is needed to Grand Bargain signatories who have less experience of working in genuine partnerships with local actors than the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships consortium members are. Real progress will be made when these agencies also make significant changes to their operational practices. It seems large direct implementation INGOs are aware of this need and are starting their journey to partnerships which provides an opportunity to ensure new partnerships are equal.

12. Continued advocacy and coordination is necessary to maintain the momentum that the project has started on highlighting the need for L/NNGO representation in key humanitarian coordination mechanisms such as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and clusters. Linked also to point 6 is a need to orient L/NNGOs on the formal UN mechanisms: e.g. the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) and different elements of this. As a small contribution to this, the consortium included a one-page summary of how localisation could be integrated into the HPC developed by the Global Protection Cluster into an annex of Pathways to Localisation.