



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



CONFERENCE REPORT

Translating commitments to action

ICVA Annual Conference and side events
26 to 28 March 2019, Geneva

#ICVAConference2019



Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2. SESSION OVERVIEWS	4
Session 1	
Short of change: the state of play in the humanitarian sector	4
Session 2	
Looking beyond the bargain: localisation and where to next?	6
Session 3	
Let's Ex-Change!	10
Session 4	
Change Re-Actions	12
3. FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND NEXT STEPS	15
4. SIDE EVENTS FROM 27 to 28 MARCH	17

Acknowledgements

A special thanks and gratitude to the Australian Permanent Mission's International Development Fund (IDF) and to Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for their support to ICVA's Annual Conference. ICVA is grateful to its membership, Board and partners for dues, other contributions and in-kind support.

We would also like to thank the following governments and organisations for supporting this event:

- European Union
- German Humanitarian Assistance
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Netherlands
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida
- Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

ICVA acknowledges the long-standing commitment and support of the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), its staff and the Canton of Geneva for ICVA's Annual Conference to be held in Geneva.

1. Executive summary

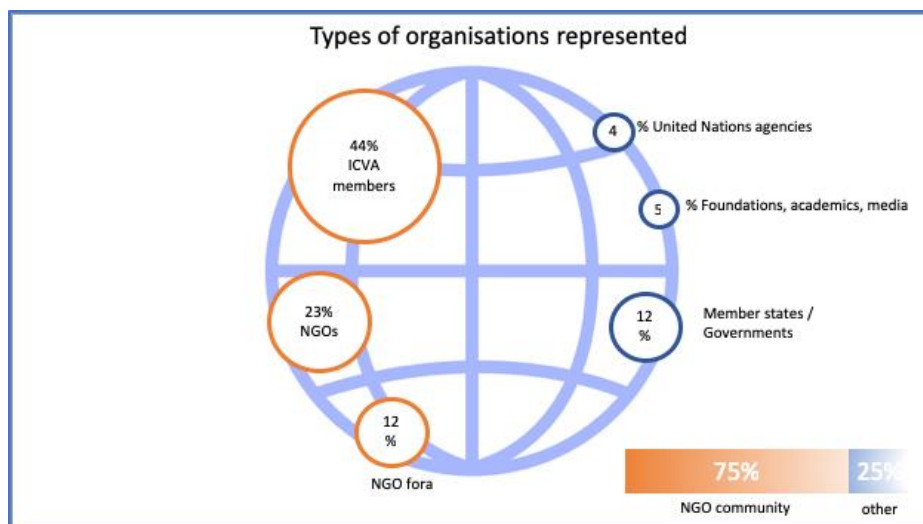
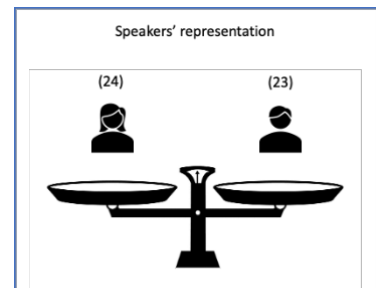
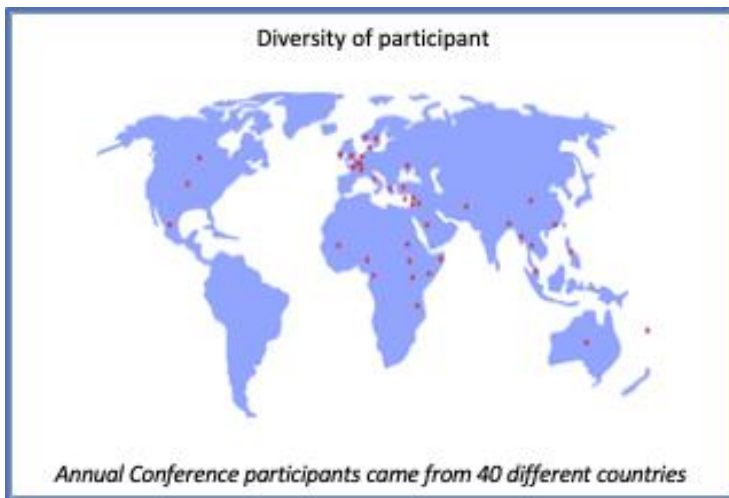
Over the past few years, we have seen an intense and unprecedented speed in which the political and social environment around us has changed, and continues to do so. At ICVA's Annual Conference, participants looked at phenomena such as closing civic space, attacks on multilateralism, populist and antagonistic movements which have impacted the working environment humanitarian actors grapple with day-in day-out. These disruptions, coupled with the effects of intensified refugee, displacement and migration scenarios, climate change and its adverse effects on already vulnerable populations, have become an overriding concern for humanitarian values, principles and operations.

At the conference, we heard from academics, think-tanks, civil society, governments, donors, Foundations, media, UN and international organisations that the humanitarian system is not complacent and is attempting transformation through organisational and system-wide change. There was however, a sense of impatience on the rate of change taking place, especially when translating the various commitments made in the past couple of years into action – the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain and the New Way of Working stemming from it, the New York Declaration – the Global Compacts for refugees and migration, Climate change Summit to name a few.

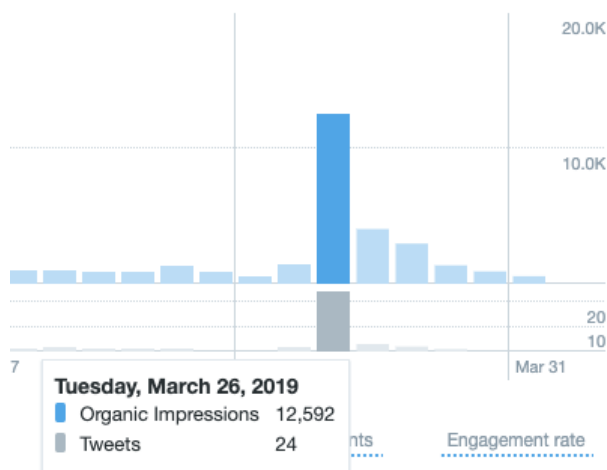
We also heard from our NGO partners, that at country and local levels, change is already taking place in the way we engage with communities, in the way we work in challenging conflict and complex environments when taken out of our comfort zone and, sometimes, in reaction or in response to evolving crises. There was a call to get away from traditional top-down, policy to practice approaches to change.

This years' conference had 29 speakers sharing their perspectives with almost 200 participants from 126 organisations based in over 40 countries in the Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Central and North America and the Middle East and North African regions.

Diversity of participants and speakers



Social media engagement



#ICVAconference2019



183 results



159 K social media reach



1244 interactions



360 shares



884 likes

2. Session Overviews

Session 1: Short of change: the state of play in the humanitarian sector

A setting the stage of changes in the humanitarian sector and how NGOs need to adapt.

Mr. Paul Knox-Clarke, Head of Research, ALNAP

Dr. Wolfgang Jamann, Executive Director, International Civil Society Centre

Ms. Emele Duituturaga, Executive Director, Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisation (PIANGO)

Ms. Sarah Noble, Director of External Relations, The New Humanitarian

Moderator: Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, ICVA

As stated by Paul Knox-Clarke, the current challenge is to do more with less. In recent years, the humanitarian sector has become better at its core business of saving lives. The frequency, intensity and duration of emergencies have increased, the sector has to deal with diverse and increased partnerships, different ways of working (the triple nexus) and the expectations by communities, the public, donors, governments alike to deliver effective and efficient humanitarian assistance have also increased. However, the operational space is shrinking, crises are evolving, new emergencies are appearing such as Ebola and Europe's migration crisis and the funds available to respond to this evolving environment have decreased.

This challenge is also applicable to humanitarian journalism. Sarah Noble noted that the journalistic duties of educating and holding power to account are difficult to maintain when there are only a few independent voices present. With humanitarian crises on the rise, the result is a decline in quantitative and qualitative media coverage despite there being an increased desire of the general public to receive information about humanitarian crises. The latter also leads to another question: whose voices do the public get to hear? The international or national NGO voices? Or the voices of affected communities?

The general public's increased desire to receive information is also accompanied by the sentiment that the world system is failing. Dr. Wolfgang Jamann highlighted that the CIVICUS monitor indicates that 70% of people surveyed, do not trust institutions and systems. He highlighted the example in 2018 where the Global Compacts for Migration and on Refugees were used by radicalistic movements as counter-productive rhetoric against migrants and refugees. There is a brighter side too, as many begin to feel antagonised and pushed in extreme directions and towards radical viewpoints, people themselves have started to

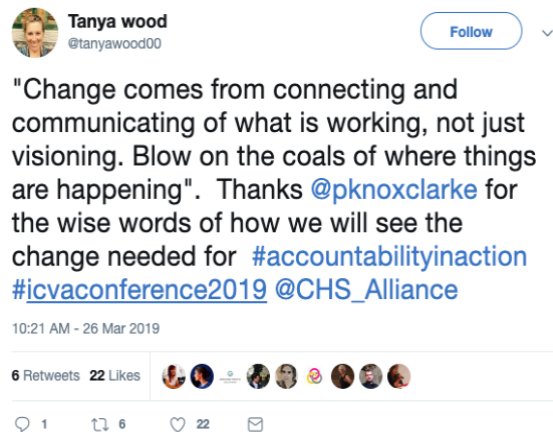


demonstrate in the streets and raise their voice on issues such as privacy and technology and climate change for example.

Emele Duituturaga stressed the impact of man-made crisis: climate change that is causing new kind of crises such as the rising of sea-levels and ocean temperatures, increasing intensity and frequency of cyclones. The increasingly disastrous effects on the Pacific have led local actors to take ownership and leadership on themselves together with governments, private sector and multilateral organisations on disaster risk management, instead of waiting for “disaster tourists” to come-in. Most often people work on resilience without working on addressing the root causes. The way partnerships work right now - local organisations are viewed as a contractor not as an equal partner. The Pacific is a clear example of where commitments to action are taking place at a local-level. The localisation agenda is set by the communities for the people of the Pacific, owning their own research, needs assessments and actions and putting people at the centre in terms of serving needs and accountability.

While there is no magic bullet or recipe for how successful change can happen to translate commitments to action, a few points were highlighted by speakers as food for thought:

- **Trust-building:** we should focus more on how to build trust, to listen and to engage communities, leaders and people. It’s not just about vision, leadership and control – these will fall into place, once there is trust in place.
- **Leadership:** leaders were called upon to act courageously to change the existing “rule of the game” and humanitarian community was called upon to stand together and work collectively to uphold humanitarian principles. Leadership is not about top-down approaches, it is locally-led and it’s about problem-solving, learning from each other and doing it better.
- **Accountability:** change is happening at local levels and accountability should be to the communities we work with. We need to be better at sharing what has worked well and how it can be improved for different contexts instead of propagating top-down policy approaches.
- **Partnerships:** There needs to be a power-shift and a deeper understanding of what true partnerships really mean for each other, what each side wants out of the partnership and how we broker power.



Session 2: Looking beyond the bargain: localisation and where to next?

A conversation on how some of the positive outcomes of the Grand Bargain initiative can be taken forward through the lens of localisation.

Ms. Sema Genel Karaosmanoğlu, Chair, NEAR Leadership Council

Mr. Husni Al-Barazi, Founder, Big Heart, Syria

Mr. Sean Lowrie, Director, START Network

Mr. Michael Mosselmans, Member of the Charter4Change Coordination Group

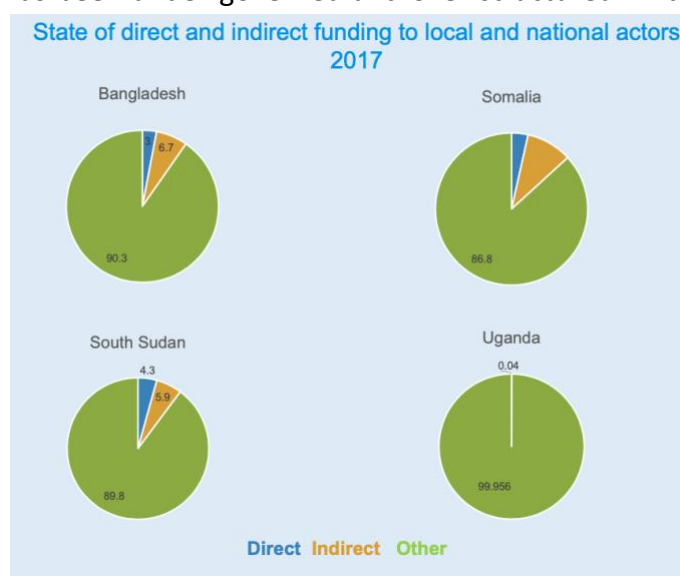
Co-Moderators:

Mr. Barnaby Willitts-King, Senior Research Fellow, Humanitarian Policy Group/Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

Ms. Anita Kattakuzhy, Humanitarian Policy Adviser, Local Leadership, Oxfam

One of the main outcomes that gained momentum following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 was the Grand Bargain (GB). Two-years on, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) carried out two independent reviews of the GB and some of the questions being asked are What next for the GB in 2020 – will it change or fizzle out? Has the focus on core commitments made any difference? The GB process has been under-governed and over-structured – has that changed?

While the localisation agenda is far greater than the GB alone, the Panel aimed to use the localisation workstream as a lens to discuss how the Grand Bargain commitments are being translated into action. The Co-moderators presented findings of four country-based case studies carried out by the ODI and the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) in South Sudan and Somalia and by OXFAM and Development Initiatives in Bangladesh and Uganda on how international assistance flows reach national level. There were five shared learnings from both studies:



There were five shared learnings from both studies:

1. **Direct flows are fractional** compared to the overall. We are not close to meeting our targets. Data from the halfway mark shows no evidence in significant shift in financial flows. Only 10% of funds in Bangladesh goes to local/national actors.
2. **Partnerships are still driven by visibility and long-standing relationships.** However, conversations are happening and shifts in relationships at national level are taking place.
3. Primary blockers: **Short-term funding cycles and trust.**
4. **Capacity strengthening** is still central – while many may not like the term, in order to build local and national partner capacities. The current approach is not effective as its short-term, project-based and partner to partner.

5. **Transparency** is intimately linked to financial tracking, however funding flows are not very transparent. Partner capacity assessments and evaluation materials are not shared enough to learn from them and need to invest more in a culture of transparency.

Sema Genel Karaosmanoglu representing NEAR introduced the localisation performance measurement framework which broke down localisation into six components: Partnerships, Funding, Capacity, Coordination/Complementarity, Policy Influence and Participation. Each component has indicators and can be used for planning and to measure progress. As a tool that can be used by all actors – national and international NGOs, the UN, donors, researchers and others, the framework will be able to measure the **quality of partnerships**. Some of the Charter4Change NGOs are looking at using the tool. Of the 200 NEAR members, 21 of them responded to how they valued the framework and 90% indicated that capacity is the most important, 86% partnerships and funding, 50% participation and complementarity 48%. There needs to be a shift in the mentality of investing in a vibrant local and national civil society that outlasts external actors.

In the case of Syria, Husni Al-Barazi from Big Heart Syria, comes from a business sector background and highlighted the importance of **risk tolerance** and **sharing of risk**. Banks and financial institutions have a higher risk-appetite than traditional donors do. Credit cards have a default rate of 8%, department stores have defined a margin of 5% risk on staff, and this does not include the risk of shoplifting by customers. However most donors do not factor-in risk when providing financing NGOs in the humanitarian sector. International NGOs and donors alike speak of partnerships, however it is more about shifting the risk and burden to local and national actors.



There needs to be a broader conversation on how the risk burden to NGOs can be shared, especially to local NGOs who are not aware of the risk they take on with funding and who's staff are on the front-lines in conflict contexts. A key question raised is how can one handle duty of care under such circumstances? Learning from Iraq and Somalia operations show that most local partners fail after one-two years. In one example cited on Iraq, only 3% of implementing partners lasted the three-year project cycle. In Syria, not even 7% of localised financing is available to actors and Big Heart, after many international audits, still struggles to get funding.

Think Global, Act Local was a recurring theme during the discussion – START Network Sean Lowrie highlighted how the START Fund is a pooled-fund mechanism owned and operated by civil society. It acts as an aggregator – a single entry point for donors to channel funds. While decisions on allocations are made at a global level, the selection process for projects and funding happens at national level. There was a call to donors and partners alike to a shift from

the old-fashioned business model of being reactive to crises to a business model that responds to shifts in risk.

A need to have more **innovative** ways of **dealing with crises** from the on-set of crises was stressed. Governments have access to many mechanisms e.g. Parametric insurance policies such as in Senegal - insurance policies against drought. NGOs need to be able to access other credit mechanisms e.g. a loan that could respond to slow developing crisis and present the government with a bill with evidence to cover the costs. Such funding should be allocated by local committees, by organisations with local staff. Localisation is a means to an end, it makes systems more effective, enabling people in crises to make their own decisions, in turn, the system also improves.

Accountability and Compliance to commitments made on localisation was another key factor raised during the discussion. Michael Mosselsmans representing Charter4Change



indicated that of their 35 signatories to the C4C, there has been a progress in the ability to measure funding flows to the local-level. Direct funding to local organisations is a must and compliance is critical. The Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) promoted respect and dignity where survivors and communities led their own responses. In the Philippines, the Palestine, Myanmar, Kenya, Haiti, Sudan, funds were channeled through local organisations and they controlled and lead their own responses.

One of the ongoing challenges is staff poaching and salary imbalances. Original commitment included compensation measures, while it was a great plan on paper, it did not work in practice. Now some are exploring options of ethical recruitment policies. Another challenge for national NGOs is donor funding provided for projects alone without any funding allocations for before or after a project cycle. This essentially means that the organisation does not have any way of covering ongoing costs for administration, staff, premises, governance, overheads etc.

Partnership agreements need to address the **issue of power** – most of the reforms taking place in the humanitarian (and multi-lateral) system is top-down-driven. The humanitarian system does not seem to be conscious of this yet. START Network is working with lawyers on the topic of risk, and the risk that consumes NGOs is bureaucratic and structural and it lies in reforming the way we work on partnerships and contracts. Reform needs to be a bottom-up

approach to ensure that local civil society diversity, capacities and knowledge are taken into consideration when we look at power dynamics.

The Government of Switzerland and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) as the co-conveners on the Grand Bargain Workstream on Localisation shared their reflections on the discussion and the plans of the workstream for 2019. There's a high awareness level of the localisation agenda and the debate is louder than before, especially at policy-level. There is a clear demand to **engage in evidenced-based examples** at country-level. Demonstrator missions had taken place in Bangladesh and Iraq and another to Nigeria on lessons learned for incorporation at the policy level on localisation. Many issues need further discussion, especially related to risk sharing and management, quality of partnerships, power dynamics and multi-year investments in local actors.

The discussion highlighted some key recommendations, things that need to move and are moving forward:

- On **ownership**, more national-local ownership of the localisation agenda where collaborative approaches are worked-on to hold donors and International NGOs accountable to commitments, especially to the Principles of Partnerships and this could happen perhaps through networks.
- On **Risk**, benchmarks are required to be set and managed. NGOs themselves need to drive this discussion forward, and provide real data and evidence so that donors too can improve their risk appetite.
- On **Financing**, let's create a culture of investment where funding is not limited to projects and there's an investment in local actors – this is what we should leave behind. More needs to be unpacked on alternative financing. NEAR is doing a lot of research on Islamic finance, matched funding etc.
- On **Accountability**, donors can accelerate change and the status-quo needs to be shifted. Organisations are working to create a tiered due-diligence system with scales for NGOs and for donors.
- On **Change**, we are changing the tires of the car as it moves and we are trying (and doing) it!



Session 3: Let's Ex-Change!

A dynamic session sharing experiences of change and how organisations and initiatives are translating commitments to action (Round robin session)

- **Ms. Mia Marzotto**, Translators Without Borders (TWB)
- **Ms. Yessenia Soto**, CIVICUS
- **Mr. Hugh Macelman**, OECD
- **Ms. Perveen Ali & Ms. Sweta Madhuri Kannan**, UNHCR
- **Ms. Mervat Shelbaya**, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)
- **Ms. Christine Knudsen**, Sphere
- **Ms. Monica Noriega**, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- **Mr. Said Alhudzari**, MERCY Malaysia
- **Mr. Angus Urquhart**, Development Initiatives (DI)
- **Mr. Jeremy Rempel**, ICVA
- **Ms. Claudia Janet Valverde**, FM4 Paso Libre

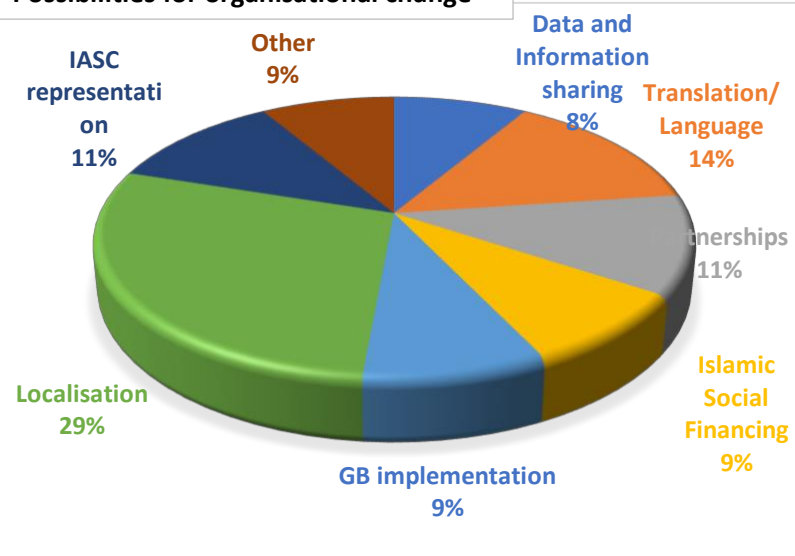
This dynamic session saw participants gather in small groups around actors who shared experiences of translating commitment to action (see [speaker bio](#) for more information on topics covered). With discussions ranging from language barriers and child protection issues to Islamic Social Financing, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) reforms, the Grand Bargain workstream progress and the Global Refugee Forum; participants took away the following main challenges, possibilities for organisational change and political and bigger picture questions that impact their work when translating commitments to action.



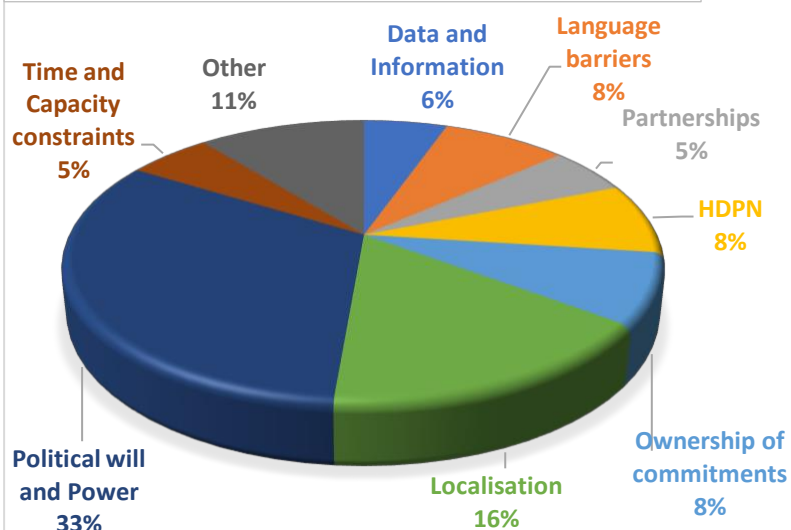
Many are the challenges to translating commitments to action: time and capacity constraints to engage in processes, language barriers, ownership and Nexus-related issues. Yet the largest obstacle by far was the **lack of political will and power**. Political instability, populist and divisive political agendas, counter-terrorism, and increasingly restrictive and risk-averse compliance measures inhibit effective humanitarian action in general and localisation in particular. Correspondingly, on **localisation**, the gap between the complex, top-down driven processes and the realities on the ground is growing and was sighted as challenging to bridge.

Localisation was also perceived as the most **achievable** for **organisational change** when translating commitments to action. Above all, it is through localisation that the voices of affected communities are reverberated, through which local actors are able to take on ownership and leadership. Participants indicated that diverse, **bottom-up approaches and systems** need to be put in place for more **equitable partnerships**. Local and national representation at the IASC and Humanitarian Country Teams was also viewed as a clear change that

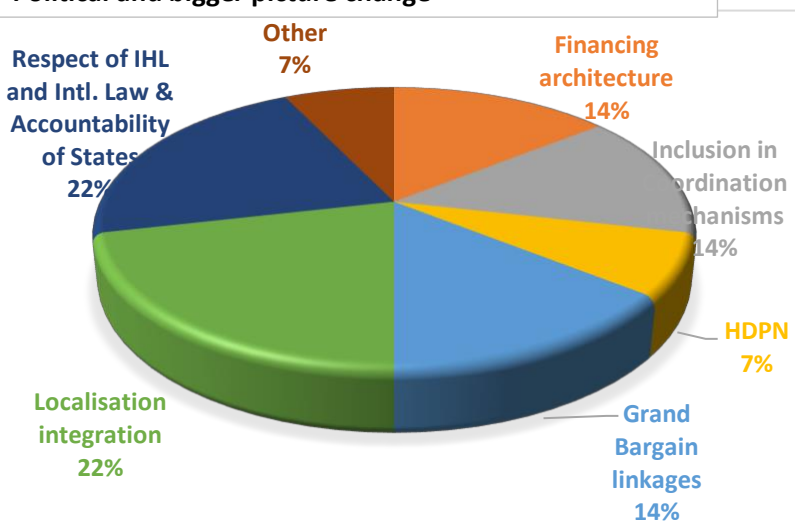
Possibilities for organisational change



Challenges to translating change into action



Political and bigger picture change



can take place in order to ensure **diverse voices** being **represented at policy and decision-making** levels. Related to the amplification of local voices is the recognition of existing language barriers and the need for the **incorporation of language trainings** so as to allow meaningful participation of local actors and **accountability to communities**.

The lack of political will and the importance of emphasising the localisation agenda are noticeably predominant within the political and bigger picture questions. Questions related to **states responsibility and accountability**, respect of **international and humanitarian**

law demands to transform the supply-driven system into a demands-driven one, to connect country-level realities to global policy discussions and to implement organisational change strategies that install longer-term flexible funding and greater inclusivity for all.



Session 4: Change Re-Actions

A moderated Q&A session on the actions required to translate commitments into reality

- **Mr. Mark Lowcock**, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator
- **Mr. Filippo Grandi**, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- **Mr. David Donoghue**, Co-facilitator for SDGs and New York Declaration, Distinguished Fellow at Overseas Development Institute
- **Dr. Shaheen Kassim-Lakha**, Director, International Programmes, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- **Ms. Mayumi Endoh**, Deputy Director, Development Co-operation Directorate, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Throughout the day's proceedings, NGOs, academics, think tanks, UN, donors and others shared their perspectives on the challenges and obstacles faced by different actors at different levels (global and country-level) and best practices and lessons learned when translating commitments to action. The final panelists shared some of the



reactions to these perspectives and actions their organisations and constituencies could take forward to support the humanitarian community, especially the NGOs.

On the two main challenges identified by speakers and participants, Filippo Grandi highlighted how the **localisation agenda goes hand-in-hand with political will**. Power shifts are largely driven by economic incentives and if we want to shift the power and the rhetoric, we must provide more evidenced-based arguments to support this. In Bangladesh, the impressive response by local actors to the Rohingya influx was also made possible due to the enabling environment provided by the Government. However, localisation faces multiple challenges on the ground. The recurrent surge practices of the international emergency response system, prevents local actors from taking leadership. When the surge capacity fades out, local responders are left to pick-up the pieces and continue as if it's business as usual.

UNHCR stressed that channelling funds at the local level is not only a priority but a necessity. One of the recurrent themes in the localisation discussion was the **risk transfer to NGOs**, especially local and national actors. UNHCR announced during the conference that an **overhead allowance of 4%** will be provided to **national NGO partners to cover operational costs including risk mitigation**. Senior positions will also be created to look closely at the issue of **risk management in 15 of 20 UNHCR operations**.

The refugee organisation allocates \$1.3 billion to 880 partners, of which around 660 are local and 70% of yearly contracts are done on time. Mark Lowcock stressed that NGOs are the bedrock of humanitarian response and that the **Country-based Pooled Funds are meeting the 25% target** and are able to finance more than 800 local NGOs, both for response and capacity building, particularly in terms of fund management.

While partners want to see **predictability and flexibility**, donors put pressure to ensure further controls making the system cumbersome and complicated for NGOs to access. While multi-year, flexible and un-earmarked funding is a priority for some donors, the prevailing direction unfortunately is the opposite. Even though some of the donors are not signatories to the Grand Bargain, Mayumi Endoh noted that multi-year financing is definitely on the agenda, but more needs to be done to encourage donor members to take this path.



Our [#ICVAConference2019](#) side meetings end today after 3 days of discussions [#localisation](#) [#GrandBargain](#) [#TripleNexus](#) Highlights include [@RefugeesChief](#) announcement of 4% overhead allowance for national NGO partners. Looking fwd to seeing this commitment translated into action!



11:00 AM - 28 Mar 2019

1 Retweet 8 Likes



1



8



Aid is under threat and the push for scaling-down humanitarian funding is becoming easy rhetoric when it does not affect the citizens of the OECD/DAC members. Both Mayumi Endoh and Mark Lowcock appealed to the humanitarian community to work together to **communicate positive and compelling stories** to institutions, particularly to the general tax-paying public to motivate them and to demonstrate how their money is saving lives. Civil society has a key role to play in this aspect and OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) **civil society dialogue framework** encourages better interaction between donors and NGOs.

Shaheen Kassim-Lakha highlighted that in the US, **anti-terrorism laws and cross-border financial transactions** are increasingly becoming an **obstacle to funding at local levels**. Furthermore, the **propensity to funding** is closely linked with **evidenced-based effectiveness**. While Localisation and climate change is a priority for the Hilton N. Conrad Foundation, the Hilton Humanitarian Prize, one of the world's largest annual humanitarian awards presented to non-profit organizations, tries to address some of the issues on alleviating human suffering. Philanthropies will be closely analysing the **lessons learned from the traditional humanitarian system** and **peers** on how best to support as local as possible.

On the **Political front**, David Donoghue emphasised that the rise of the **impact of civil society** has been acknowledged by the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and that it offers **new opportunities** for local actors due to its multi-stakeholder nature. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, it would be important to highlight what we have **achieved since the New York Declaration**, when translating commitments to action.

The GCR is also a practical application of the New Way of Working. Fifteen countries have accepted to apply the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) as the modus operandi of working with NGOs, refugees and communities.



It is also important to **demonstrate** that there are **new resources and opportunities** in the search for solutions. This will build confidence in donors and host governments, the latter often being reluctant, to make, obtain and monitor pledges. NGOs **play an important role** in keeping the **pressure and momentum on governments** around the world to deliver on their commitments.

A question was raised on the **independence of the United Nations agencies** and on the credibility and **accountability of the UN Security Council** in **upholding the norms of International Humanitarian Law and International Law** since World War II. While there have been many failures in the existing UN system, without the **agreements, resolutions and funding of member states**, more lives would be lost.

Is the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus dangerous for humanitarian aid and upholding humanitarian principles? It was reiterated that the victims of humanitarian crises must be **protected from the short cycles of humanitarian response** and that only an agenda of inclusion can improve the situation. It is important that **world leaders renew their commitment to leave no one behind** in their quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and work towards **addressing root causes** and the **impact of climate change** on the most vulnerable populations.



3. Food for thought and next steps

Five key take-aways from the day's proceedings were shared by Ignacio Packer:

1. **Introspection and leadership:** The level of impatience to see change in the sector is understandable. As pressure affects performance, this impatience should keep on translating itself in a constructive and influential manner. You have to change yourself to change the rest - our ability to contribute to solve problems starts with our own personal ability to be more inward-looking. A small dose of introspection goes a long way towards achieving personal growth, and this translates into better leadership. Positive deviance has to become the norm. We must increasingly build on what is working and support such initiatives. We have to make sure that those "leading" or those with influence on change are not in some way separate from the system.
2. **Local to global:** We must also recognise that change occurs in a series of small steps. We heard from NGO partners, that at country and local levels, there is more change happening than we know, or hear. We can be inspired from these changes and take them global, and get away from the traditional top-down approach to change as we know it.
3. **Accountability to people:** Over the past years, we have seen an increased focus on accountability. The majority of aid programmes are run without understanding how people of concern feel about them. We continue with funding, operational and strategic decisions without better listening to people. Today, it is still rare that we hear directly from those affected about whether needs are being met. Whether they have been consulted. Whether they are being adequately protected.
4. **Economic incentives:** Better understanding of and influence on the political economies of donor behaviors are key while also better understanding evidenced-based change and influence of our own behavior as NGOs. We must better appreciate and influence the bureaucratic constraints, risk calculations, and political realities that determine the

freedom to maneuver and act collectively upon it. The donor models and the systemic incentives that they in turn create must change at a faster rate. Accelerating change relies greatly on donors. Resource control means operational influence. Shifting power centers in the field—and driving towards coherent response rather than turf competition—will be difficult, as long as donors predominantly route humanitarian funding through the same small group of intermediary agencies.

5. **Values of humanity to maintain indignation and refuse the unacceptable:** While populist leaders stand in opposition to commitments made, the humanitarian community should stand together and work collectively to uphold the humanitarian principles. This profound ideological divide anchored around trust inequality is providing ample ground for nationalism, protectionism and insurgent grassroots movements. Divergent levels of confidence within populations about the future signal a continued underlying rot in the structure of many of our societies. People shift their trust to the relationships within their control. Trust is more local. The discussions are out there, beyond our sector and we should engage in them and contribute to the positive change we want to see in the future.

As a follow-up to the Annual Conference and taking the lessons learned from the discussions throughout the AC week, ICVA will explore some of these themes through its Learning Stream on [Navigating Change](#) in partnership with PHAP.

ICVA's plans for the longer term:

1. ICVA is committed to the humanitarian principles and the principles of partnership. In 2020, ICVA will bring for discussion within its membership whether ICVA should remain a trusted broker between actors to share views and convene; or evolve towards a stand-alone lobbying body.
2. In our fast-changing landscape, the value of ICVA will evolve. ICVA will continue its strategic focus on outreach and alliances with networks at global, regional and local level. Within and outside of the humanitarian sector.
3. For ICVA, modernising the humanitarian business model means embracing local voices to inform global and regional policies and translating policies into local action. ICVA will continue getting closer to the fast shifting power centers.
4. ICVA is expanding its networks and potentially the range of issues it is engaging in. Expanding and diversifying can be seen as progressive on the one hand, while on the other hand may risk spreading the organisation's limited resources too thinly and/or diluting the unique value ICVA brings. Both the traditional and emerging aspects of ICVA's work will be re-examined by its membership in 2020 and choices made for the strategic plan 2022-2024.
5. While ICVA does reach out to the local level, in the coming years, ICVA will need to choose the degree to which it conduits for this global-local dynamic or if ICVA will increase its development with regionally focused strategies tailored for their specific needs and priorities.

4. Side events from 27 to 28 March

How can Philanthropies better support locally-led humanitarian response?

On 27 March, the Social Sector Accelerator, with support from ICVA and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, consulted with NGOs on the how best can philanthropies engage in locally-led humanitarian response. Participating NGOs were keen to get a better understanding of the foundations' functioning and strategies and how to gain access to them and considered networks such as ICVA key in playing a "connector" role.

The consultations stressed the importance for philanthropies to learn the lessons from traditional donors, noting philanthropies themselves have their own bureaucratic systems, to review the 60's model of philanthropies and that impact on returns in the humanitarian sector takes time and to expectations of having quick gains to show a board of directors may be futile.



Michael Mosselmans @michaelmoss44 · Mar 27

Rawaad #WHAF tells #ICVAconference2019 a role for philanthropic foundations can be to invest in the gap in the system where local humanitarian actors do not have access to core institutional long term multi year funding and support for overheads



2 5

NGOs requested to focus more on risk and burden sharing, investing in innovation and on long-term financing and planning for core institutional support. A request was made to philanthropies to be flexible in order to fund areas where traditional donors lag such as strengthening governance and organisational structures. The current incentive structures only look at coverage and funding, however, once local agency is put at the centre, collaboration and coverage will naturally increase.

A call was made to philanthropies to go beyond the traditional funding role of donors and be an influencer, advocator and connector to the public and especially governments. It was suggested that philanthropies to look at humanitarian assistance not as a funding model, but as model of giving. Finally, NGOs reminded that a shift needs to take



place in the current accountability cycle – instead of being accountable to donors, we should be accountable to communities and that they should be put at the centre of the funding cycle.

CIVICUS and ICNL session on trends and drivers on closing civil society space: On 27 March, a diverse group of NGOs joined in this meeting, co-hosted by CIVICUS, ICNL and ICVA to examine the state of the continuously closing civil society space and to exchange their views and concerns. It was acknowledged that there is a need for greater solidarity and interaction between human rights and humanitarian actors through the implementation of responsive strategies, which can empower local civil society actors, facilitate dialogue and establish rapid response support. ICVA will explore further on “How do NGOs navigate shrinking civil society space?” via its [webinar](#) on 20 June. This is the second webinar of ICVA-PHAP’s [Navigating Change Learning Stream](#).

UNICEF consultations with NGOs: This side event co-hosted by UNICEF and ICVA on 27 March discussed the partnership between UNICEF and NGOs in humanitarian settings. With children being disproportionately affected by humanitarian crisis, there is a strong collaboration between UNICEF and the NGO sector for better results for children. However, there are also many challenges and they were discussed during the meeting, together with some potential solutions. NGOs called upon UNICEF to put in place a clear and efficient mechanism of ongoing exchange and collaboration with NGOs to improve humanitarian partnership and intervention. ICVA conducted a scoping study on NGOs’ perceptions of strengths, challenges and ways forward of the current UNICEF partnership with NGOs. Access the study [here](#).

Evidence of a changing humanitarian landscape? National NGO perspectives:

On 28 March, the Australian Mission in Geneva and ICVA co-hosted a face-to-face meeting with NGOs and donors. Three national NGO perspectives on the impact of climate change, the importance of local leadership and ownership in humanitarian responses and the arrival of new NGOs illustrated the state of change of the humanitarian landscape and underlined the importance of donor-NGO relationship being horizontal – not vertical.



The Grand Bargain annual independent report 2018: contribute to the analysis: On 28 March, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) facilitated a meeting with NGOs and NGO fora at country-level to contribute to the analysis of the independent report for 2018. Feedback from NGOs indicated that the Grand Bargain (GB) remains too bureaucratic, lacking in adequate and visible leadership with a high transaction cost for all signatories. However there was a general consensus that it continues to act as a lever for change in important areas such as localisation, participation, cash among other and provides a platform for cross-dialogue between donors, UN and NGOs which was considered extremely valuable. While important progress has been made on the localisation agenda, it is one of the most challenging areas of change envisaged in the GB, with obstacles among some INGOs

pertaining to fear of competition, changes in roles and down-scaling operations still remain. Given the institutional and system-wide change process required to achieve the GB commitments, it was envisaged by all that a further 2-3 years is required to fully realise the outcomes of the GB process.

NGO fora workshop – NGO networks and localisation:

On 28 March, representatives from NGO fora and other networks participated in a discussion in which they shared their interest areas, such as the need to better understand the transitions or links between humanitarian and development, and key concerns, mainly with regards to funding and coordination. Localisation being relevant to each country and context, they agreed that networks should focus on its definition and on the strengthening of coordination at field level to help shift decision-making from the capital to the local level.



Conversations held at the ICVA Annual Conference and its side events are maturing. Some of the discussions are changing. Others such as the relation between trust, inequality and power, thorny issues of all, still need engagement to be addressed. ICVA will continue to connect, convene, support, analyse and explain, influence and advocate for local expertise, practice and lessons learned to be integrated into global policy frameworks.