



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

CASE STUDY

Strengthening the Localization Agenda in Yemen

2024

Context

Today, the humanitarian system is characterised by ever growing humanitarian needs, often in complex crisis contexts, yet resources to address these needs remain vastly inadequate¹. One of the solutions set forth by humanitarian actors to try and address this significant challenge can be found in efforts to improve the participation of local and national actors in humanitarian decision-making and response, “the localization agenda”². These actors are often the first responders to crises possessing invaluable knowledge affected communities and relationships with local authorities essential for effective responses. Their proximity to humanitarian crises positions them as the most effective agents for delivering timely and efficient responses.

Since 2015, Yemen has endured conflict, internal displacement, economic breakdown, and the destruction of infrastructure and public services. Despite the worsening humanitarian situation, humanitarian assistance to Yemen has declined³. However, aid actors, including local and national organizations, continue offering support amidst the incredibly challenging conditions and limited funding.

In response to these challenges, ICVA, with support from the Hilton Foundation, launched a two-year project in 2021 aimed at supporting locally led humanitarian action. This initiative seeks to advance the localization agenda in several countries, including Yemen, by supporting the generation of evidence-based insights into progress made in localization efforts.

What ICVA and NGOs did

ICVA partnered with the Humanitarian Action Group⁴ (HAG), the Tamdeen Youth Foundation⁵ (TYF) and the Itar Foundation for Social Development⁶ (Itar) to support a network of 45 Yemeni Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with their “Initiative for the Localization and Optimisation of Response Mechanisms in Yemen”⁷. Recognizing the need to assess the current status and impact of localized humanitarian action in Yemen, TYF sought technical assistance from ICVA.

¹ See for example <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137972>

² See for example <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/localization-landscape-report>

³ See for example <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/joint-statement-yemen-humanitarian-situation-and-funding-gap-enar>

⁴ The Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) is an independent partnership of experienced humanitarian practitioners and policy makers committed to promoting excellence in humanitarian practice. See more - <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/>

⁵ The Tamdeen Youth Foundation is a Yemeni NGO. Its work focuses on humanitarian response, humanitarian aid, local development, climate action, peacebuilding, youth and women empowerment, and good governance. It started as a voluntary initiative and became a legally registered organization in 2013. See more - <https://tamdeen-ye.org/en/about/1>

⁶ The Itar Foundation for Social Development is a non-governmental organization founded in 2011 with a mission to empower Yemen civil society by enhancing partnership, accountability, capacity, impact, and influence.

⁷ The initiative aims to empower local Yemeni organisations so they can effectively contribute to the humanitarian response.

“After eight years of humanitarian response, we needed this research on localization to measure progress on localization so we can better plan for and improve the response”. **Jameel Abdo, The Tamdeen Youth Foundation**

The initiative received technical support from ICVA and HAG to implement a framework and tools for conducting localization baselining⁸. Developed by HAG and the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations⁹ (PIANGO), these tools offer a comprehensive approach¹⁰ to measuring localization progress in a holistic way but required adaptation to suit the Yemeni context.

Local ownership of the research methodology was prioritised to ensure relevance and replicability within Yemen’s complex operational setting.¹¹ Itar, the lead researcher, conducted 63 research-related consultations with the local and international stakeholders between late 2021 and mid-2022, after coordination with the Yemeni authorities.¹² Following consultations, a self-awareness survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews were conducted by ITAR. The data analysis led to the production of a draft report, reviewed by TYF, the CSO network, ICVA, HAG and international NGOs. All the localization framework domains were relevant, with some small adaptations to the policy influence and advocacy domain to include visibility, and to the capacity domain to include institutional efficiency.¹³

Following consultations, a self-awareness survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews were conducted by ITAR. The data analysis led to the production of a draft report, reviewed by TYF, the CSO network, ICVA, HAG and international NGOs.¹⁴

The baseline report revealed that uneven progress in localization efforts within Yemen’s humanitarian response. Recommendations were made to advance the localization agenda in Yemen further, including establishing dedicated structures, promoting localization in existing response and coordination mechanisms, enhancing local and national actors' participation, and facilitating capacity sharing.¹⁵

Published in February 2023, the [baseline report](#) was launched during the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (UNOCHA) annual [Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week](#) in April 2023. Over 70 participants joined the session led by ICVA, which highlighted adaptations for complex operational settings like Yemen, Ukraine, and the Pacific, and emphasized the report’s utility in developing and monitoring localization strategies.¹⁶ TYF also presented the report to UNOCHA in country and the Yemeni authorities¹⁷.

⁸ HAG, PIANGO, 2019, [Measuring Localization: Framework and Tools](#).

⁹ The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations strengthens and builds the capacity of NGOs and the civil society sector in the Pacific region through giving the sector a voice in policy formulation and strengthening its member umbrella organisations in Pacific countries and territories.

¹⁰ The framework looks at localization under seven priority areas: Partnerships, Leadership, Coordination and Complementarity, Participation, Policy Influence and Advocacy, Capacity, and Funding.

¹¹ Interview with TYF.

¹² From internal documents.

¹³ See [baseline report](#).

¹⁴ Interview with TYF.

¹⁵ See ICVA’s Annual Report 2022 <https://www.icvanetwork.org/annual-report-2022/>

¹⁶ See <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2023/02/ICVA-Bulletin-in-English-April-2023.pdf>

¹⁷ Interview with TYF.

Results and impact

The localization baseline conducted in Yemen stands as a success in navigating an extraordinarily complex operating environment, characterised by political fragmentation, diverse sources of authority, intricate research authorisation protocols, and limited data availability from government and international sources.¹⁸ Furthermore, the concept of localization relatively new to local actors, necessitating extensive efforts to raise awareness and foster understanding on localization throughout the research process. The outcome of this endeavour is the first localization progress report for Yemen, developed by and for local organisations. This achievement not only signifies a milestone in local capacity-building but also establishes the groundwork for independent localization progress monitoring in the future, with minimal external technical.¹⁹

From a knowledge reach perspective, ICVA's monthly bulletins have an average readership of 5,300 individuals. Since February 2023, the report was downloaded 609 times. TYF also promoted the baseline report using its own national and international networks.²⁰

The impact of the localization assessment is evident in its role in shaping several localization strategies within Yemen. The Humanitarian Country Team²¹ in Yemen is finalising a Localization Strategy that prominently incorporates findings from the Yemeni CSO network's localization baseline.²² The draft Strategy commits to directing a significant portion of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders, addressing critical gaps in funding data.

Furthermore, following the baseline process, CSO network, led by TYF, has developed its own Localization Strategy, reflecting a grassroots commitment to advancing localization principles. The engagement of the government, which sought the CSO network's support in understanding and developing a localization strategy, underscores the growing recognition of the importance of localization within Yemen's humanitarian landscape.²³

"Now, this localization concept is requested by all in the coordination of the humanitarian response". Jameel Abdo, The Tamdeen Youth Foundation

Looking ahead, the Yemeni CSO network's localization initiative aims to implement its Strategy, fostering collaboration between local and national actors, including ICVA. This initiative is crucial for enhancing the humanitarian response, empowering local actors, and nurturing sustainable and equitable partnerships.

"Localising humanitarian action in Yemen is vital for enhancing the humanitarian response, empowering local actors, and fostering sustainable, fair, and transparent partnerships". Jameel Abdo, The Tamdeen Youth Foundation

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Interview with TYF

²¹ The Humanitarian Country Team is led and chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator. Its overall goal is to ensure that inter-agency humanitarian action alleviates human suffering and protects the lives, the livelihoods and dignity of people in need.

²² According to draft Strategy document seen.

²³ Interview with TYF

Lessons learned

Reflecting on the journey, several lessons have been learnt. Challenges encountered in data collection underscore the need for robust strategies to overcome logistical hurdles, especially in contexts with limited data availability and geographical constraints.

Difficulties were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting face-to-face exchanges with potential implications on data quality. Strategies to minimise data collection challenges should be factored in the research methodology.

The complex operating environment in Yemen can make such research processes not only difficult but risky. For all actors involved in the research, and local and national actors, it was important to have a good understanding of the localization agenda and to be consulted at all phases of the research, from initial research presentations to methodology development, data collection and document review. This provided them with reassurances about the purpose, content, and potential impacts of the research. Moreover, meaningful participation of local and national actors throughout the research project is paramount for building trust and ownership, mitigating risks, and maximising the impact of research outcomes.

Finally, the success of the localization baseline research in Yemen shows the significance of co-ownership and co-creation with local stakeholders, fostering awareness, skills development, and sustained progress monitoring in the pursuit of localization objectives.



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