

# Report

## **LOCALIZATION GOOD PRACTICES**

Good Practices from IASC Task Force 5

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February 2023

# LocalizatiON good pRACTICES

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January 2024

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## Introduction

The work of the Interagency Standing Committee Task Force 5 on Localization seeks to strengthen the engagement and leadership of local and national actors in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and humanitarian response.

This report supports the continued commitments of the [Grand Bargain](#) and is one of the deliverables of Task Force 5 on Localization and its work:

**Engagement:** Operationalizing the IASC guidance on the engagement and leadership of local actors in humanitarian coordination including by: (i) delivering on benchmarks for the engagement of local actors in humanitarian coordination structures (including through setting targets in various operations, where possible), (ii) reporting annually on progress made in the meaningful engagement of local actors in coordination structures (including reporting on progress against agreed targets set at the country-level), and (iii) Compiling good practice on the participation, representation and leadership of local actors in coordination mechanisms (including women-led organizations) and approaches to engage affected populations in humanitarian response.

**Capacity Sharing:** Agreeing on minimum standards/arrangements to strengthen the sharing of capacity and risk management between international actors and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

**Resourcing:** Supporting efforts to increase and channel more direct funds to local NGOs including by (i) advising on concrete steps to be taken to strengthen the channelling of funds to local NGOs, particularly women-led organizations (including in complement to Grand Bargain efforts and agreed targets); (ii) Reporting annually on progress in getting funds to local NGOs, and (iii) Stepping up advocacy with donors, United Nations agencies and INGOs on increasing direct funding to local partners.

This report, a summary of successful approaches collected from members of the task force, shares good practices on the participation, representation, and leadership of local actors in coordination mechanisms (including women-led organizations), along with approaches to engage affected populations in humanitarian response. Case studies were selected based upon a set criterion; they can be read in more detail [here](#). See [Acknowledgements](#) for a comprehensive list of contributors.

The good practices showcased in this report were identified and documented using a template<sup>1</sup> that utilized the 2021 IASC Guidance on Localization, which supports efforts to strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup> The original draft of this good practice template was developed by the Knowledge Platform for Emergencies and Resilience (KORE) team in the Office of Emergencies and Resilience of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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meaningful participation, representation, and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors within IASC humanitarian coordination structures. As such, this summary and the accompanying case studies seek to promote knowledge-sharing and inspire progress and positive change regarding the meaningful participation of local actors in humanitarian coordination platforms.

The purpose of this summary is to shed light on the breakthroughs and innovative approaches of local actors in strengthening their role in coordination, leadership, and decision-making processes. The Task Force has noted that challenges and barriers to localization are frequently discussed, while there is less visibility regarding how local actors have managed to achieve concrete results. These good practices serve as an inspiration to achieve more through great collaboration and meaningful partnerships with international actors.



## General Findings

Localization is the increased investment in and prioritizing of the role of local actors, with the aim of improving humanitarian action. Local actors are often first on the scene and offer invaluable insights into context-specific challenges and solutions. They are familiar with and able to mobilize local networks, while offering “greater access to affected populations, hence contributing to a more effective, efficient, and sustainable humanitarian response with an enhanced accountability to affected populations.”<sup>2</sup> Despite a commitment to placing national organizations in leadership roles and investing in their strengthening, humanitarian actors are still finding it a challenge to implement this goal. According to the IASC Results Group on Operational Response, the international humanitarian system has failed to increase funding, capacity development, and equitable and meaningful partnerships and participation for local actors. Contributors to this summary indicated that often international actors have a more positive view of progress in localization than do local and national actors seeking recognition and visibility for their work.

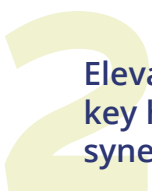
In order to right this disparity and achieve more equitable results, members in different contexts came to some of the same general conclusions.



### Strengthening local-level coordination enhances overall consultation with local communities and increases contextual decision-making for all parties.

For instance, in [North-East Nigeria](#), after a Boko Haram attack, partners in the local coordination group were able to maintain a small team to jointly continue delivering assistance without having to wait for international actors to engage. They worked with community leaders to ensure that the assistance was distributed.

Locally led action allows for quicker access and close relationship with affected communities, especially in hard-to-reach areas. In addition, local leadership can assist with the prepositioning of supplies, as was done in [the Philippines](#), which can save lives in an emergency.



### Elevating and engaging local actors in coordination platforms assists in conveying key humanitarian principles in a way that is relevant to local actors, thus creating synergy in reaching collective results.

Many of the case studies describe various means of increasing the leadership and participation of national/local actors within coordination platforms. When this approach was successful, as in [Yemen](#), [Nigeria](#), and [Cameroon](#)) it assisted in developing principled and meaningful partnerships with local actors and strengthening their capacity, while also improving their access to funding oppor-

<sup>2</sup> “Strengthening Participation, Representation and Local Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms,” IASC, July 2021, [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-07/IASC%20Guidance%20on%20Strengthening%20Participation%2C%20Representation%20and%20Leadership%20of%20Local%20and%20National%20Actors%20in%20IASC%20Humanitarian%20Coordination%20Mechanisms\\_2.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-07/IASC%20Guidance%20on%20Strengthening%20Participation%2C%20Representation%20and%20Leadership%20of%20Local%20and%20National%20Actors%20in%20IASC%20Humanitarian%20Coordination%20Mechanisms_2.pdf)

tunities. In this way, increasing leadership (discussed in more detail below) also lowered barriers that local actors face to participation. Local and national actors are able to assist in translating and contextualizing key knowledge documents, simultaneously increasing their knowledge about humanitarian work and ways to access resources.

**Integrating monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) practices is important to accurately survey the localization landscape, identify barriers, and ensure that goals are met.**

In [Bangladesh](#), the WASH Cluster adopted a technical, evidence-based approach surveying international and local/national actors from the outset of its localization commitment. It found that the top three constraints that local/national actors faced were funding (by far the most onerous), partnership, and technical capacity.

In this case, the cluster set out to conduct a capacity needs assessment and facilitate learning between local organizations and with international actors. Building on the data collected, members of the cluster developed a strategy for elevating local/national actors into leadership of the cluster while providing funding and capacity strengthening to support this new role.



## Improving Delivery of Cash and Voucher Assistance: The Case of Myanmar

Since the beginning of 2021, in the wake of a military coup in [Myanmar](#), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) country office faced an increasingly challenging operational environment. Adapting quickly, UNFPA had to find innovative ways to ensure the provision of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to vulnerable women and girls.

To overcome the operational hurdles it faced in partnering with some of its regular international non-governmental partners, and ensure the continued delivery of CVA, the UNFPA Myanmar country office in 2021 launched an expression of interest for grants to local women-led organizations or civil society organizations (WLOs/CSOs). Several of the WLOs/CSOs were already delivering cash assistance to small numbers of beneficiaries as part of their programming. To build on the localization opportunity, UNFPA Myanmar strengthened the WLO/CSO's distribution capacity. This included an orientation on CVA, alongside capacity building on more traditional aspects of UNFPA programming.

Beneficiaries are directly impacted by uninterrupted CVA delivery and the fact that it is now implemented through local actors who are deeply embedded within the local communities. The women and girls are very familiar and comfortable with these organizations, reducing barriers.

Community-based and market-based delivery mechanisms are fast and economical means of delivering products (e.g., those needed for menstrual health and hygiene) and should continue to be used in humanitarian interventions.

**"I feel secure and empowered that I have money in my hand for hospitalization and safe delivery."**

—*Esther, a 28-year-old CVA beneficiary from Kachin, Myanmar*



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## Localization Good Practices

Members identified several practices that consistently elevated the work of national and local partners sustainably in different coordination platforms, such as within the Humanitarian Country Team, Clusters, and country coordination bodies. These practices are described below, with an explanation as to how they were implemented.

1

**Actively advocating for advancing the localization agenda at various levels starting with and among program partners, coordination body members, donors and member states to ensure buy-in for the localization agenda.**

As found in the [Bangladesh](#) fieldwork, local actors often must advocate with various stakeholders, including donors, governments, INGOs, and UN agencies to raise awareness about the key opportunities and challenges linked to their role. They emphasize the shared responsibility among all stakeholders to ensure that local actors are meaningfully involved in leadership and decision-making processes. Members indicated that such advocacy helps in raising awareness among other agencies and organizations about the benefits of localization and to check whether such organizations are not only privately committed to the goal, but also can act as public advocates.

2

**The establishment of a joint localization task team within sectors, such as between the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the Education Cluster, is one model that works to advance the localization agenda in humanitarian settings.**

This approach, used in [Afghanistan](#), can be replicated in contexts with humanitarian pool funding. It allows INGOs to access funds and then sub-grant to local and national NGOs. INGOs, including UN agencies and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT), can advocate for more access to funding for national NGOs (for example, reserving half of the funding available for national NGOs). Combining this approach with increased participation by local NGOs in local leadership and coordination roles can help entrench their involvement and also provide opportunities for growth. Other models for including local and national actors in the coordination structure are discussed throughout this report.

3

**Outreach, trust-building, and capacity strengthening can increase local and national participation in humanitarian coordination bodies. Active recruitment as part of this multi-pronged approach may be needed.**

In 2023, 34 out of 68 members of the [Palestine](#) WASH Cluster were local and national actors, including local NGOs, academia, community-based organizations, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and national Palestinian governmental authorities active in the WASH sector. Half of the strategic

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advisory group members (SAG) members are local and national actors, five out of 11 WASH focal points are local and national actors in specific geographical areas, and five national authorities lead on a various themes. The Palestinian Water Authority leads on water and sanitation in the community; the Ministry of Social Development on household WASH facilities; the Ministry of Education on WASH in schools; the Ministry of Health on WASH in health care facilities; and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics conducts national assessment and monitoring.

To achieve such a significant level of local participation, the WASH Cluster Coordination Team has engaged in a number of integrated activities since 2019.

- ▲ Proactive outreach to local and national actors: The Palestine WASH Cluster conducted an exercise to identify non-cluster partners involved in the WASH response, visited them one-by-one, and convinced them to join the coordination platform.
- ▲ Trust-building with local and national actors: The cluster performed continuous bilateral outreach to promote the understanding that the cluster exists to support local and national actors, and not the other way around.
- ▲ Capacity needs assessments for cluster partners: The cluster then developed a National Partners Capacity Building Program that delivers annual training to local partners.
- ▲ “Focal points” roles assigned to local partners: The Palestine WASH Cluster has 11 focal points in different areas, five of them from local organizations.
- ▲ Access to data and standard operating procedures ensured for local and national actors.
- ▲ Peer-to-peer support mechanisms created between international NGOs and local and national actors.
- ▲ Advocacy for funding for local NGOs: The Humanitarian Response Fund added a 10 per cent bonus to projects submitted by local and national actors and projects involving national partnerships.

## 4 The inclusion of both government organizations and humanitarian coordination actors is an important component of successful localization.

While governments may not prioritize localization, they are a critical component of any locally led effort. In [Sudan](#), coordination was conducted with local authorities, who trained local youth groups in WASH implementation alongside private sector engagement. Previously, limited coordination between communities and local authorities resulted in missed opportunities. In [North-East Nigeria](#), a coaching model built trust and coordination with government actors.

## 5 Utilizing inclusive methods of communication and locating meetings in accessible, safe buildings or online meetings are important ways of levelling the field for local and national actors, easing their participation.

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Holding meetings in local languages, translating materials, being mindful of local holidays and observances, and ensuring that facilities are accessible for those with disabilities or offer child-care if meetings are held during times where children are not at school are all ways to ensure greater participation from local and national actors, especially WLOs and organizations representing marginalized groups. Members in [Cameroon](#) and [Bangladesh](#) found that simply holding hybrid meetings or holding meetings in the local language dramatically increased local participation in coordination meetings.



## Creating Structures that Amplify the Voices and Contributions of Marginalized Groups: The Case of Somalia

In 2022, during the drought response in [Somalia](#), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supported the identification of groups facing heightened risk of being excluded from humanitarian assistance. OHCHR advocated for a structural change within the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that would strengthen the inclusion of minorities and other marginalized groups in the HCT decision-making process and humanitarian response. The initiatives considered age, gender, and diversity, and included persons with disabilities, youth groups, minorities, and marginalized groups. OHCHR built on its existing civil society initiatives aimed at following up on Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations related to inclusion of minorities and other marginalized communities in the development and humanitarian spheres, recommendations of treaty bodies, and Somalia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

OHCHR identified the needs by reframing the humanitarian response through a human rights lens, to support cluster leads and marginalized groups. In that context, OHCHR mapped available information on minorities in support of the HCT to tackle exclusion and strengthen inclusion in the humanitarian sphere. OHCHR also provided capacity building and mentorship for the National Disability Agency (NDA) (which promotes and advocates for disability rights in the development and humanitarian spheres) and was able to mobilize resources for the organization. In 2022, for the first time in Somalia, the HCT extended a rotating membership to a minority rights organization, thus assisting in amplifying the voices of affected communities and implementing the localization agenda. The result was a direct link and increased communication between humanitarian and protection actors and the affected communities.

OHCHR also joined with the Protection Cluster to activate three working groups on disability inclusion, minority rights and inclusion, and protection of civilians. It also embarked on advocacy on inclusion, leveraging the UPR recommendations. This included coordinating with 27 CSOs, some representing marginalized groups, to launch a UPR Task Force. This Task Force sought to strengthen advocacy on the implementation of UPR recommendations accepted by the Federal Government of Somalia. Separately, OHCHR supports CSOs that have organized themselves into eight clusters constituted along thematic priorities, with one cluster focusing on humanitarian response and development. Through 2022, OHCHR together with the civil society clusters focused on reviewing the recommendations and the link with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and developing a platform of dialogue and engagement with related ministries of the Federal Government of Somalia and parliamentary committees.

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## Encouraging Leadership

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Increasing local and national organizations' leadership responsibilities through clear and agreed-upon processes results in increased visibility for local and national organizations, strengthens their leadership capacity, and improves their representation.

In 2019, the [Nigeria](#) Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CP AoR)—led by the Government of Nigeria, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, and UNICEF—reached a consensus with other members that a national NGO should co-coordinate the group. A Terms of Reference was drawn up that stipulated in part that applicants should represent national NGOs and be active in CP AoR coordination mechanisms

Through a competitive, open, and transparent process, national NGO Grow Strong Foundation was selected. This was the first time a national NGO had been selected to co-coordinate the CP AoR mechanism in Nigeria. After Grow Strong Foundation's term as co-coordinator elapsed, another national NGO co-coordinator, Goal Prime Organization Nigeria, was elected in August 2022. This effort was supported by a localization innovation fund established by Nigeria Humanitarian Fund. The national NGO co-coordinator was able to apply for funding to support its role leading the humanitarian body.

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**“The selection of a local or national NGO co-coordinator needs to be conducted in a transparent and open manner. The process should not be left to only cluster / AoR lead agencies. All members need to be involved in the development and validation of terms of reference for the co-coordinator and the process needs to be competitive to provide an opportunity to all local members of a cluster or AoR a chance to apply if they meet the qualifications.”**

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## Elevating Women-Led Organizations

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Numerous barriers prevent WLOs from playing leadership roles in humanitarian coordination. These include structural barriers, patriarchal norms, lack of organizational visibility, limited access to resources, and the absence of opportunities to build skills and gain experience. Key takeaways that emerged from members' experiences are:

- ▲ One way to break down barriers that exist for women without their communities is to create cross-regional sharing spaces where larger numbers of WLOs can share experiences and learn from one another.
- ▲ Increased visibility through the creation of one leadership role can lead to other opportunities.
- ▲ Building relationships and clearly defining roles and responsibilities at the outset of a new co-coordination role is critical to a successful ongoing partnership.

- ▲ Funding, in particular, is critical to strengthening WLOs—and this needs to include organizational costs (overhead, communications, staffing).

In [Somalia and South Sudan](#), Trócaire implemented a 14-month project to support WLO participation in sub-cluster groups. The project included ongoing coaching and accompaniment by Trócaire, which quietly supported WLOs in sub-cluster meetings when they faced certain barriers, such as patriarchal social norms that sought to limit the WLOs' leadership. It also included modest funding for the WLOs.

**“WLOs can conduct meetings in local languages, expand reach, enhance a contextualized approach and ensure that the knowledge and operational experience of local actors are brought into the coordination and response. Financial and technical support to local WLOs is necessary to foster meaningful participation and leadership in GBV coordination mechanisms and other decision-making spaces.”**



## Approaches to Involve Affected People in Humanitarian Response



Local and national actors should be brought into humanitarian response early on, participating alongside UN and INGO operations. The earlier their participation, the smoother the transition in shifting operational responsibility.

Localization in the Food Security Sector in [Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar](#) includes advocating for and strengthening the capacities of local and national NGOs in the Rohingya refugee response from the start of the crisis. While there is no official localization strategy, steps taken include active participation and reporting by local and national actors within the sector, co-leadership in the camp and coordinating bodies, and capacity strengthening that incorporates training and field visits that highlight local actors. Local and national actors are included in creating the Joint Response Plan, which acts as a fundraising document. As a result, 17 out of 54 active partners of FSS conducting food security or livelihoods interventions in 2022 were local or national NGOs.



It is possible to incentivize funding for localization by prioritizing partnerships with local and national actors and advocating for funding dedicated towards the localization objective. National partners can participate in sub-granting processes and priority-setting for greater inclusion and capacity-strengthening.

One of the most challenging but important aims of the localization agenda is increasing the quality and quantity of funds that are available to local and national actors. Previously mentioned was one strategy of prioritizing local grantees by adding bonus points to any program proposal submitted by a local NGO. By including local partnerships in food security and livelihoods project proposals in [Somalia](#), United Nations/Cluster Lead Agencies (UN/CLAs) and Resource Partners were able to incentivize greater localization.

The result was that, in 2022, the Food Security Cluster was able to increase the percentage of the Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF) allocated and channelled to local actors. Out of a \$13 million total allocation to the Food Security Cluster, \$4.2 million—translating to 32 per cent of the total funds—were channelled to local NGOs. Moreover, UN/CLAs did not compete with NGOs for any SHF standard or reserve allocations in 2022. National partners also participate in the panel that scores projects applying for pooled funds. In this case, sub-national leads nominated active national partners rather than handpicking them, which is more transparent and prevents charges of cronyism.

The FSC has been able to progressively increase the number and quality of partnerships with local actors over the past years. In 2022, approximately 94 per cent of the Cluster Lead Agencies implementing partners are local actors or organizations (in the case of the FAO, they comprise 100 per cent and for the World Food Programme 87 per cent). Local and national actors co-chair and co-lead FSC coordination at both the national and sub-national levels.

## Participants in Localization Good Practice Interventions

Country and Sector	Local Actors (if mentioned)	International Actors
Afghanistan Child Protection	Village of Peace Organization for Afghans (VOPOFA), Social Humanitarian Assistance Organization (SHAO), Save the Children, and Children in Crisis/ Street Child (CIC), Afghan Women's Educational Centre (AWEC), Organization for Community Coordination and Development (OCCD), Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation - (AABRAR), and Citizens Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR)	UNICEF, Save the Children International
Bangladesh Food Security	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) as NNGO Co-Coordinator with 17 other NNGOs	World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)
Bangladesh WASH	WASH Coordination and Humanitarian Bangladesh members	UNICEF
Cameroon GBV		
Myanmar CVA	Over 20 WLOs/CSOs	UN Population Agency (UNFPA)
Nigeria Child Protection	GOAL Prime Organization Nigeria, Grow Strong Foundation, Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development	UNICEF

Nigeria WASH	Lindii Peace Foundation (LPF), GoalPrime Organization Nigeria (GPoN), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR)	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), ECHO, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF)
North-East Nigeria Food Security	State Emergency Management Agency, Ministry of Agriculture	Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)
Palestine WASH	Palestinian Water Authority, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestine Hydrology Group	UNICEF
Philippines SHR	Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and select Local Government Units	UNFPA
Somalia and South Sudan GBV	Women for Change (WFC), Active in Development Aid (ADA)	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
Somalia Participation	Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, National Disability Agency, and various CSOs	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Sudan WASH	Environment Initiative (Envi) Sudan, local authorities	UNICEF
Yemen Education	SOUL, Al Awn Foundation, Yemeni Development Network for NGOs (YDN)	UNICEF, Save the Children



