

Anti-racism & Localisation Community of Practice

Theme 6 - You Can't Localise the Global

September 2025

*In its simplest form, **local** means belonging or relating to a particular area or neighborhood.*

Resources

An open letter to International NGOs who are looking to 'localise' their operations, signed by 146 local and national organisations, this letter concludes by asking that "you work with us, not against us. We need to be supported, not competed with, and certainly not replaced". This in the face of a humanitarian sector where international organisations are increasingly trying to "localise" their operations and secure domestic funding as traditional western donor funding diminishes.

In a candid report on humanitarian financing, **IASC Definition of 'Local' and 'National Actors' - a barrier to achieving Grand Bargain localisation commitments**, the Alliance for Empowering Partnership asserts that a loophole added after consultation has left the IASC definition open for INGOs with national offices in the Global South to qualify for the 25% funding committed for homegrown local and national actors.

The **Localisation re-imagined: Regenerating the polyculture of humanitarianism** article by Arbie Baguios argues that attempts to "localise" the humanitarian sector is having the consequence of "fitting the round pegs of local actors into the square holes of the international humanitarian system", compelling local and national actors to conform to formal humanitarian processes and norms in a way that might stifle local solutions.

Key takeaways:

Below is a collection of key takeaways from CoP members discussing this theme in the NiE sector, along with practical strategies to navigate these challenges. Please note, they do not necessarily represent the views of any specific organisation or the Global Nutrition Cluster. Further, we acknowledge that the resources shared and CoP discussions are currently exclusively in English.

1 Members found the open letter from 146 local and national NGOs both compelling and disturbing. If this power imbalance was true in 2020, the situation has likely worsened today with the funding crisis. Are international actors (IAs) becoming even more exploitative and extractive?

2 The NEAR Network has recently sounded the alarm on INGOs withdrawing from their localisation commitments in a report: <https://www.near.ngo/-ingo-accountability-review>

- “NEAR has also witnessed deeply concerning and disappointing practices across the INGO community. Bad practices below stem from NEAR’s observation, secondary sources (e.g. media reporting), and – most concerningly – from silence from many INGOs:
 - Retreat from public leadership on localisation
 - Recentring inward: prioritising institutional stability over commitments
 - Withdrawing from shared risk
 - Political self-censorship”

3 The funding crisis has pulled back the facade. There is a sense of desperation from INGOs, we see many staff cuts, forgetting commitments and exploiting resources. The approach feels very private sector–cutting costs and acquisition–strong parallels with big multinationals acquiring local capacities and resources; their playbook on exploiting resources, rooted in colonialism.

4 A number of advocacy roles among international actors are being tweaked/restructured to be resource mobilisation teams, applying more sophisticated approaches to acquire domestic funding.

5 Shared observation from Northern Yemen: international actors are preferring to implement some projects alone rather than partner with local and national actors (LNAs), because of the shortage of funds.

6 When traditional donors are pulling back, where does the localisation conversation fit into the agenda? What is the accountability of the donors?

7 Thinking more broadly, what problems that are caused externally are we asking LNAs to solve internally?

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How we define a local or national actor matters.

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The IASC definition of an LNA, in addition to government authorities, includes: "Organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated".

- Post consultative process with LNAs, the IASC added the footnote: "A local actor is not considered to be affiliated merely because it is part of a network, confederation or alliance wherein it maintains independent fundraising and governance systems".
- This was diluted, as "many international confederations, who have country offices and INGOs with national offices in the Global South, wanted their national offices to qualify for the 25% funding commitment for the local/national actors".

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Due to the IASC loophole added post consultation we have seen examples of international actors (IA) trying to make their operations "local" or confederating their offices to not miss out on funding earmarked for local and national actors.

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Shared example: INGO based in the US with offices in 3 countries, registering the country offices under new names, creating new websites for them, but keeping the same logos and email addresses and keeping leadership from the INGO on their boards.

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Shared example: 20 years ago an INGO reregistered as a local organisation in Indonesia, new Indonesian name and branding. Today when that INGO wants to work in Indonesia, they go through this organisation, which is very much operating as an Indonesian organisation. Even the board appears fully Indonesian.

- What was the incentive of this INGO to "localise" their offices rather than supporting existing homegrown Indonesian organisations at the time?

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How we define direct funding matters.

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The IASC definition of "as directly as possible" from the consultative process was: "Funding channelled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by national and local responders."

- Post consultative process with LNAs, the IASC added: "Funding to a single international aid organisation (including a federated/membership organisation) that reaches a local/national actor directly from that one intermediary."
- This allowed for sub-granting of funds to count towards the target of "at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible by 2020", further benefiting international actors.

15 The current effort from international actors seems to be the search for sub-grantees to count as “localisation”.

16 There is a push for more blended-funding mechanisms, in some cases in an effort to better support local and national actors. Currently, country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) account for approximately 6-7% of the whole humanitarian “pie”. But even now, behind closed doors international actors are fighting to keep the percentage of CBPFs ring fenced for LNAs to a minimum.

17 **Definitions matter for measuring progress on localisation.**

18 Example, previously USAID was not using the IASC definition, using a different definition of a local partner, even including “locally established partners (LEPs)”, locally registered organisations with continuous operations in the country for at least five years, with at least 50% local staff. Full definitions on page 8 here: [METRICS MATTER How USAID counts “local” will have a big impact on funding for local partners](#) This calls into question if USAID was accurately reflecting its progress on localisation.

19 **LNAs are being pressured to fit into international systems.**

20 For example, the global insistence of keeping development and humanitarian separate, international actors struggling to know how to implement the humanitarian-development-peace nexus while LNAs have always been doing “The Nexus”.

21 Often LNAs have “development” in the name and they do emergency programming, as needed, in addition to their more development programming.

22 **IAs need to stop trying to localise the global.**

23 International actors need to change, need to ask what is our role? How can we better support LNAs? How can we be more efficient?

24 When IAs are sub-granting to LNAs, especially women-led organisations, how do we make that funding more flexible and predictable? What about risk sharing? What about overhead costs? What about resourcing them to strengthen their own capacities?

25 How can we shift from IAs *using* LNAs to IAs supporting and resourcing local solutions?

