

# LOCALISATION IN PROTRACTED CRISES AND FRAGILE SETTINGS

November 2023



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

The Australian Red Cross (ARC) commissioned this research project with financial support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) conducted the research and prepared this report in partnership with GLOW Consultants (Afghanistan and Pakistan), inSights (Bangladesh), San May Thu (independent consultant, Myanmar) and Shedrick Singip (independent consultant, Papua New Guinea [PNG]). The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily those of the ARC or the Australian Government.

**Research team:** Madeline Baker, Eranda Wijewickrama, Josie Flint, Atarah Senn, Idha Kurniasih (HAG); Saeed Ullah Khan, Zaki Ullah, Aaftab Ullah (GLOW Consultants); Suman Ahsanul Islam, Nahid A Siddiqui (InSights); San May Thu (Independent Consultant, Myanmar); Shedrick Singip (Independent Consultant, PNG)

**Graphic design:** Jenny Moody, A&J Moody Design

**Editing:** Campbell Aitken

The research team would like to express sincere thanks to the local communities, National Societies of Red Cross and Red Crescent, national government representatives, non-government organisations, and other research participants in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and PNG for their time and contribution to the research.

**Cover and back cover photos:** Australian Red Cross

---

Throughout the report the following symbols are used to identify international and national actors



International



National

---

# CONTENTS

---

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Terminology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>7</b>
About this research	7
Findings	9
Recommendations	12
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Section 1. Operating in complex contexts</b>	<b>19</b>
Localisation in complex crisis settings	19
The case study contexts	23
Country overview – Afghanistan	25
Country overview – Bangladesh	28
Country overview – Myanmar	31
Country overview – Papua New Guinea	35
Country overview – Pakistan	38
<b>Section 2. Approaches to supporting locally-led response</b>	<b>41</b>
1. The core: partnerships and principled assistance	41
2. Risk and compliance	44
3. Funding	47
4. Organisational strengthening and capacity sharing	51
<b>Section 3. Understanding impact</b>	<b>53</b>
1. Local partner organisational and technical capacity and leadership	53
2. Facilitating international actors to continue providing assistance	56
3. Community impact	57
4. Response coordination and efficacy	57
<b>Section 4. Looking to the future</b>	<b>60</b>
Recommendations	60
Guiding questions to support effective intermediary approaches in complex contexts	63

# ABBREVIATIONS

---

AHF	Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund
AHP	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
ARC	Australian Red Cross
ARCS	Afghanistan Red Crescent Society
BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DREF	Disaster Response Emergency Funding
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LIA	Local Intermediary Actors [Myanmar]
LNINGO	Local and National Non-Governmental Organisation
MRCS	Myanmar Red Cross Society
NAHAB	National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHN	National Humanitarian Network [Pakistan]
NSA	Non-State Actor
PHF	Pakistan Humanitarian Forum
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGRCS	PNG Red Cross Society
PRCS	Pakistan Red Crescent Society
SoD	Standing Order on Disaster
The Movement	International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement
UN	United Nations
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

# TERMINOLOGY

---

Key terms used throughout the report are defined below.

**Complex emergency:** A humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict, and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency.<sup>1</sup> The report uses the term 'complex settings' to refer to the diversity of humanitarian contexts in the five case study countries – including to cover protracted crises and fragile contexts.

**Fragile settings:** These can be countries, cities, regions and communities that suffer chronic instability, conflict and violence, trapping large numbers of people in a cycle of desperation and poverty.<sup>2</sup> Fragile states lack the ability to govern effectively and to develop strong relations with communities. They may be affected by multiple forms of violence.<sup>3</sup>

**Host and Participating National Societies:** Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are referred to as host (or operating) National Societies in their own countries and as participating National Societies when they participate in international operations.<sup>4</sup>

**Intermediary role:** An organisation, network or mechanism acting as an intermediary between donors and local implementing organisations through provision of funding or other support. This includes international intermediaries such

as the United Nations or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), national organisations, pooled funding and network mechanisms. Intermediaries also play a critical role in supporting local leadership and effective response.<sup>5</sup>

**Localisation:** A process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision-making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better meet the needs of affected populations.<sup>6</sup>

The terms 'localisation' and 'locally-led humanitarian action' are used throughout this report to emphasise the importance of recognising and respecting local humanitarian action, and that humanitarian action needs to be owned and led from the ground up. The researchers recognised that contextualisation and translation of the term 'localisation' were important to capture nuances as well as similarities and differences across contexts.

**Local/national non-state actors:** Local/national NSAs are organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and not affiliated to an INGO. This includes unaffiliated local and national NGOs (LNNGOS) and civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in the aid recipient country in which they are headquartered, working in multiple subnational regions, and local NGOs/CSOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid recipient country.

---

1 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UN OCHA, [Civil-military guidelines & reference for complex emergencies](#), 2008

2 World Vision, [Fragile Contexts: The world's most dangerous places](#), 2022

3 DFAT, [Framework for working in fragile and conflict-affected states](#), 2011

4 ICRC, [Policy on ICRC cooperation with National Societies](#)

5 HAG, Glow, CoLab, InSights, [Bridging the intention to action gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2021

6 HAG developed this definition in partnership with the ARC and other partners, through consultations with humanitarian actors in the Pacific, particularly LNNGOs (see Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Fiji National University, Humanitarian Advisory Group, [Going local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific](#), 2017)

**National and sub-national state actors:** State authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief at local or national level, including local/national government agencies, ministries, departments and bodies.<sup>7</sup>

**Principled aid:** Aid defined and delivered by humanitarian actors in accordance with core humanitarian principles based on needs and vulnerabilities of affected people.

**Protracted crisis:** A situation in which a large part of the population is acutely vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian assistance over a prolonged period. In many cases, this period becomes so long that the emergency is the normal situation.<sup>8</sup>

7 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UN OCHA, Definitions Paper: IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group, 2018

8 Danish Refugee Council, Emergency Typologies, 2023

Photo: ARC



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The humanitarian response in Ukraine has exposed the limitations of the localisation agenda in protracted crises and complex contexts. Despite the existence of armed conflict since 2014, recognition of the strength of Ukrainian civil society, and the humanitarian sector's stated intention to support locally-led response, only 0.003 per cent of tracked funds for humanitarian responses in Ukraine were estimated to have gone directly to local organisations in the three months after the Russian invasion.<sup>9</sup> By end of 2022, this had risen to 1.2 per cent, but as of July 2023, the percentage had dropped again to 0.3 per cent – drastically below the agreed localisation target of 25 per cent.<sup>10</sup> In 2023, the proportion of direct funding to local/national organisations in Syria was 5.7 per cent; in Yemen, it was 3.4 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Whilst these figures suggest that the localisation agenda is struggling to gain traction in protracted crises and fragile contexts, they also reveal the scope to learn and achieve greater impact.

Localisation has been a core commitment of the international humanitarian community since the first Grand Bargain was agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Enabling responses led by local/national NSAs in complex crisis settings has been particularly challenging, and catalysing change has been slow. In the context of increased reliance on local actors to implement assistance, in particular where international actors' access to communities has reduced, the effective role of intermediary actors in supporting locally-led response is critical.

## ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This study is the result of a partnership between Australian Red Cross (ARC), Humanitarian Advisory Group, and national researchers in five

case study countries. ARC commissioned the research to capture insights into localisation approaches and the role of intermediaries in supporting locally-led response in complex crisis settings. The research gathered evidence from five complex crisis contexts: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan and PNG. It explored approaches to support locally-led humanitarian response being used by intermediary actors with local/national NSAs, as well the broader impacts of these practices. The study builds on recent work undertaken by ARC and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, including on complementarity and localisation in armed conflict.<sup>12</sup>

---

9 Stoddard, A, Harvey, P, Timmins, N, Pakhomenko, V, Breckenridge, M and Zwarno, M, Enabling the local response: Emerging humanitarian priorities in Ukraine March-May 2022, Humanitarian Outcomes, June 2022, p. 16; ACAPS, ACAPS Thematic report : Ukraine - Perceptions of localisation in the humanitarian response, 16 June 2023

10 UN OCHA Financial Tracking System data, as of 31 July 2023. Includes funding to national NGOs/CSOs and local NGOs/CSOs. See <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/234/recipient-types/2022>

11 Financial Tracking System data, as of 31 July 2023. Includes funding to national NGOs/CSOs and local NGOs/CSOs. See UN OCHA <https://fts.unocha.org/global-funding/recipient-types/2023>

12 Australian Red Cross, Localisation and Complementarity in Action: the Work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Myanmar and Bangladesh, 2020

## Why now and what for?

This is a key time to reflect on emerging intermediary practices with respect to locally-led humanitarian response in protracted crises. Knowledge about how humanitarian intermediaries can support localisation in their programming is growing, and resources to guide reflection and learning are available. In addition, while more is becoming known about specific challenges that arise in protracted crises, intermediary approaches to supporting localisation in these settings have been less thoroughly explored than in the disaster response context. Building evidence about tested and adapted approaches, and an understanding of their impacts, is critical to enable intermediary actors, their local partners, and donors to improve their policy and practice. This report contributes new knowledge by identifying challenges, good practices, and opportunities for intermediaries to enhance locally-led response in complex crisis settings.

## What's emerging in relation to localisation in protracted crises and fragile settings to inform intermediary practice?

- ▶ **The importance of shared localisation goals.** Bringing humanitarian actors together with a shared localisation goal is a key challenge, but also a critical way to support effective approaches and impact.
- ▶ **Principled aid is a mutual issue.** Partnerships and provision of principled aid require complex political and ethical decisions. Local/national and international actors continue

to struggle to deliver principled aid whilst supporting localisation in complex settings. Perceived independence plays an important role in determining trust and relationships in complex contexts.

- ▶ **Risk and compliance requirements** are more stringent in complex crisis settings and affect local/national partners disproportionately.
- ▶ **Funding shifts.** In protracted and complex settings, direct funding to local/national partners may reduce and short-term project-based funding may increase.
- ▶ **Reduced focus on local/national partner priorities.** Complex crisis settings demand increased focus on technical accountability and minimum standards, which limits the time and attention given to local and national partner priorities, such as capacity sharing and strengthening leadership.

## Understanding intermediary approaches in complex settings

This study drew on existing models and literature to explore, understand and develop a framework for intermediary approaches to supporting locally-led response in complex settings.<sup>13</sup> The framework centres partnership and humanitarian principles and contains three domains of intermediary practice that are critical in complex crisis contexts – risk and compliance, organisational strengthening and capacity sharing, and funding. The report presents findings and recommendations categorised according to the areas outlined in the framework.

---

13 PIANGO, HAG, [Measuring localisation: Framework and tools](#), December 2019; NEAR, [Localisation performance measurement framework](#), 2019; HAG, Glow, CoLab, InSights, [Bridging the intention to action gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2021

## Framework for understanding the intermediary role in complex settings



## FINDINGS

Findings are presented in relation to **approaches** and **emerging impacts**. The approaches and findings outline evidence emerging in practice in the areas of focus under intermediary roles.

### Approaches

The findings show that intermediary actors are implementing a range of practices in complex crisis settings in order to support locally-led response.

#### 1. Principled aid and partnerships



**Key challenge:** Partnerships and the provision of principled aid require complex political and ethical decisions. Local/national and international actors continue to struggle to deliver principled aid whilst supporting localisation in complex settings.

#### Approaches to address this challenge:

- ▶ Working with local partners to understand what shapes principled aid
- ▶ Creating stronger and more effective and equitable partnerships

- ▶ Building trust to support stronger partnerships and enable the delivery of principled aid
- ▶ Defining the specific complementary roles and abilities of each partner in supporting principled aid.

**It is commendable to observe these principles outlined in written documents. However, we must critically examine the actual partners we are engaging with and providing opportunities to. (Local NGO representative)**

#### 2. Risk and compliance



**Key challenge:** Risk and compliance requirements are higher in complex and protracted settings and affect local/national partners disproportionately.

#### Approaches to address this challenge:

- ▶ Using risk-sharing instead of risk transfer practices (as is common practice currently)
- ▶ Providing overhead costs for local partners to resource risk management and/or security
- ▶ Building in contingency funding options for emerging risks (including worsening security)

and access factors and increasing compliance requirements)

- ▶ Designing adaptable financial and compliance risk processes
- ▶ Working with donors, intermediaries and local/national actors on collaborative and equitable risk planning
- ▶ Supporting partners to meet compliance and due diligence requirements and exploring due diligence 'passporting'.

**The humanitarian supply chains from donors to intermediaries to local actors (us) require many compliance requirements, all of which essentially accumulate and dump most risk to the local actors both unintentionally and intentionally. (Local NGO representative)**

### 3. Funding



**Key challenge:** In protracted and complex settings, direct funding to local/national partners may reduce and short-term project-based funding may increase.

#### Approaches to address this challenge:

- ▶ Increasing use of and facilitating access to country-based pooled funding and similar mechanisms (such as START Network)
- ▶ Providing more flexible funding (including more unearmarked funding)
- ▶ Designing flexible financial processes and policies (including greater opportunities to accommodate variances based on emerging needs and contextual factors)
- ▶ Offering rapid funding processes and unrestricted funding
- ▶ Enabling direct funding relationships for local actors with donors
- ▶ Covering overheads/core costs.

**Donors should provide adequate funding to local NGOs, ensuring that funding is flexible enough to allow for local decision-making and adaptation to changing circumstances. (Local NGO Representative)**

### 4. Organisational strengthening and technical capacity sharing



**Key challenge:** Protracted and complex settings demand increased focus on technical accountability and minimum standards and reduce time and focus on partner priorities of capacity sharing and strengthening leadership.

#### Approaches to address this challenge:

- ▶ Institutional strengthening
- ▶ Implementing adaptable support processes.

**We have to build the institutional capacity, second line leadership of partner organisations, focus on due diligence, focus on financial management, capacity, [and] procurement as an institutional strengthening process. (Donor representative)**

### Emerging impacts

The research produced evidence that suggests several impacts, both positive and negative, are resulting from intermediary approaches in complex settings. These impacts relate to broad shifts in humanitarian response resulting from the practices that intermediaries and donors have implemented, and how these affect NSAs.

The examples of approaches used by intermediaries were small in scope, mostly at the organisational or project level, and not strategic or coordinated enough to result in significant impact at scale.<sup>14</sup> The greatest impacts identified were on local partner organisational and technical capacity. This suggests that greater consideration could be given to achieving change in other impact areas in supporting locally-led response.

14 This is replicated in challenges that continue to be identified in other literature and for the localisation agenda more broadly: Start Network, [Five reasons why the 'localisation' agenda has failed in the past - and four reasons why things may now be changing](#), August 2016; ARC, HPG & HAG, [Protecting people in locally led disaster response](#), March 2019; ARC, [Going local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific](#), October 2017.

Findings from this research suggest four broad areas of impact emerging from intermediaries' localisation approaches.

### **1. Local partner organisational and technical capacity**

Investment in organisational and technical capacity has strengthened the leadership roles, financial sustainability, risk management and technical skills of local partners. In some cases, localisation approaches increased pressure on national and local organisations to meet compliance and due diligence requirements. This suggests that intermediaries and donors should invest more strongly and widely in organisational strengthening in high-risk and high-volatility contexts, where local organisations are increasingly implementing programming and bearing the greatest risk.

### **2. Facilitating international actors to continue providing assistance**

An increase in partnership-based approaches – both in contexts where this has been required, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, but also in Bangladesh, Pakistan and PNG, where localisation practices have been adopted – has enabled international actors to continue providing assistance to affected communities. International actors' preference to create or expand their

existing partnerships with larger NGOs that meet risk and compliance needs can create competitive dynamics amongst LNNGOs, which can derail trust and undermine localisation initiatives.

### **3. Community impact**

Localisation approaches can facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex crisis settings. Effective approaches to risk management, principled aid and flexible funding have contributed to the design and implementation of more effective and contextually relevant programming. Strong partnerships with local/national actors allowed for nuanced approaches to principled aid, reflecting on common challenges that could be tackled during the co-design process.

### **4. Response coordination and efficacy**

The research uncovered positive examples of the impacts of localisation on response coordination and efficiency, including facilitating engagement and decision-making of local actors in coordination forums, such as in the Humanitarian Country Team in Myanmar. It also revealed opportunities for National Societies to strengthen coordination with local actors and the challenges they face when their auxiliary role to governments – in particular contexts – can lead to mistrust.

*Photo: Sharharyar Afzal on Unsplash*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

## Partnerships and principled assistance



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Co-create partnership frameworks that support local and national non-state actors over multiple years, and can accommodate adjustments to the often-sharp changes in context associated with protracted and fragile settings
- ✓ In each setting, join with other intermediaries and local/national actors to prioritise localisation objectives and integrate them into governance, operating procedures, and monitoring and evaluation processes

### Donors

- ✓ Create a long-term strategy that fosters civil society engagement as a pillar of humanitarian assistance
- ✓ Support the strengthening of evidence and learning about the impacts and outcomes of supporting locally-led response in specific contexts

## Risk and compliance



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Broker agreements for tailoring compliance requirements with donors and local partners and refine and promote related policies and processes
- ✓ Explore due diligence 'passporting' as a means to simplify compliance processes and reduce repetitive requirements for partners.

### Donors

- ✓ Work with partners to design and pilot approaches that support sharing (rather than transferring) operational risk between international and local organisations and donors
- ✓ Make more dedicated resourcing available for better managing risks and taking on specific compliance aspects within partnerships. Provide local/national actors with equal or higher overhead percentage (compared to intermediaries to ensure adequate resourcing for risk management and security)

---

## Funding



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Develop a range of options to enable quality funding for local and national partners in protracted and fragile settings. Consult local/national organisations in developing these options and ensure they are visible to donors
- ✓ Provide institutional support to facilitate the inclusion of local organisations in pooled funding mechanisms

### Donors

- ✓ Review internal processes for direct funding and pathways for direct as possible funding (such as pooled funds) to increase the diversity of organisations that can access funding
- ✓ Establish key features of quality funding as standard practice in protracted and fragile settings, including ensuring local and national partners receive support for overheads and core costs, unearmarked funding, and flexible terms

---

## Operational strengthening and capacity sharing



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Develop partnership approaches that map out complementary roles for intermediaries and local/national actors in supporting localisation in complex and protracted settings
- ✓ Diversify partnerships with local actors and adapt partnership processes so that small grassroots organisations can strengthen locally-led response
- ✓ Provide long-term, flexible investment in the organisational capabilities of local/national actors to enable them to manage risks and compliance needs (focusing on systems and process strengthening rather than individual donor needs)

### Donors

- ✓ Require evidence of how intermediaries have sought to diversify partnerships with local actors and adapt partnership processes so that small grassroots organisations can strengthen locally-led response

# INTRODUCTION

---

The localisation of humanitarian action in complex contexts has gained increasing attention in recent years, with donors, intermediaries and local actors highlighting the increasing challenges they face in delivering humanitarian assistance in these settings. Progress on localisation in these contexts has been slow; to accelerate change, we must learn how to overcome the key challenges and create greater impact.

Many of the frameworks and approaches for conceptualising and measuring the roles of actors in localisation are more easily applied and explored in disaster responses.<sup>15</sup> This includes when they have been based on experiences in countries that also experience conflict, or where disaster and conflict, criminality, or social unrest interact – also known as ‘complex emergency’ settings.<sup>16</sup> However, it is important to recognise the dynamics that may create additional challenges for localisation in complex crisis settings. A range of contextual factors distinct to complex settings includes the role of the state (government or de facto authorities), legal and financial frameworks dictating funding and ability to maintain a physical presence, access conditions for both international and local non-state actors (NSAs), protection and inclusion issues, and political and security considerations.<sup>17</sup> The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) has remained a key actor in most complex contexts while continuing to prioritise locally-led response approaches, thereby offering important insights on how to promote

localisation even in difficult environments.

More is becoming known about how intermediaries can be effective in supporting locally-led response in humanitarian action, and guidelines, policies, practice notes and research to guide reflection and learning, particularly for disaster response, are plentiful. However, approaches to and the impacts of localised practices in complex settings have received little research attention relative to disaster response settings. Donors, intermediaries and local actors continue to identify a lack of knowledge in this area as a barrier to learning and adaptation. This research was designed to fill that gap.

## About this research

Australian Red Cross (ARC) commissioned the research to capture insights about intermediary approaches in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea (PNG). The project was delivered by Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) in partnership with GLOW Consultants (Afghanistan and Pakistan),

---

15 VANGO, PIANGO and HAG, [localisation in Vanuatu: demonstrating change](#), January 2019; CSFT, PIANGO and HAG, [Localisation in Tonga: Demonstrating change](#), June 2019; DSE, PIANGO and HAG, [Localisation in the Solomon Islands: Demonstrating change](#), 2019; FCOSS, PIANGO and HAG, [Localisation in Fiji: Demonstrating change](#), September 2019; Pujiono Centre and HAG, [charting the new norm? Local leadership in the first 100 days of the Sulawesi earthquake response](#), March 2019; NIRAPAD and HAG, [Elevating evidence: Localisation in the 2019 Bangladesh flood response](#), April 2020; HPG, Islamic Relief, and ODI, [Localising emergency preparedness and response through partnerships](#), April 2019

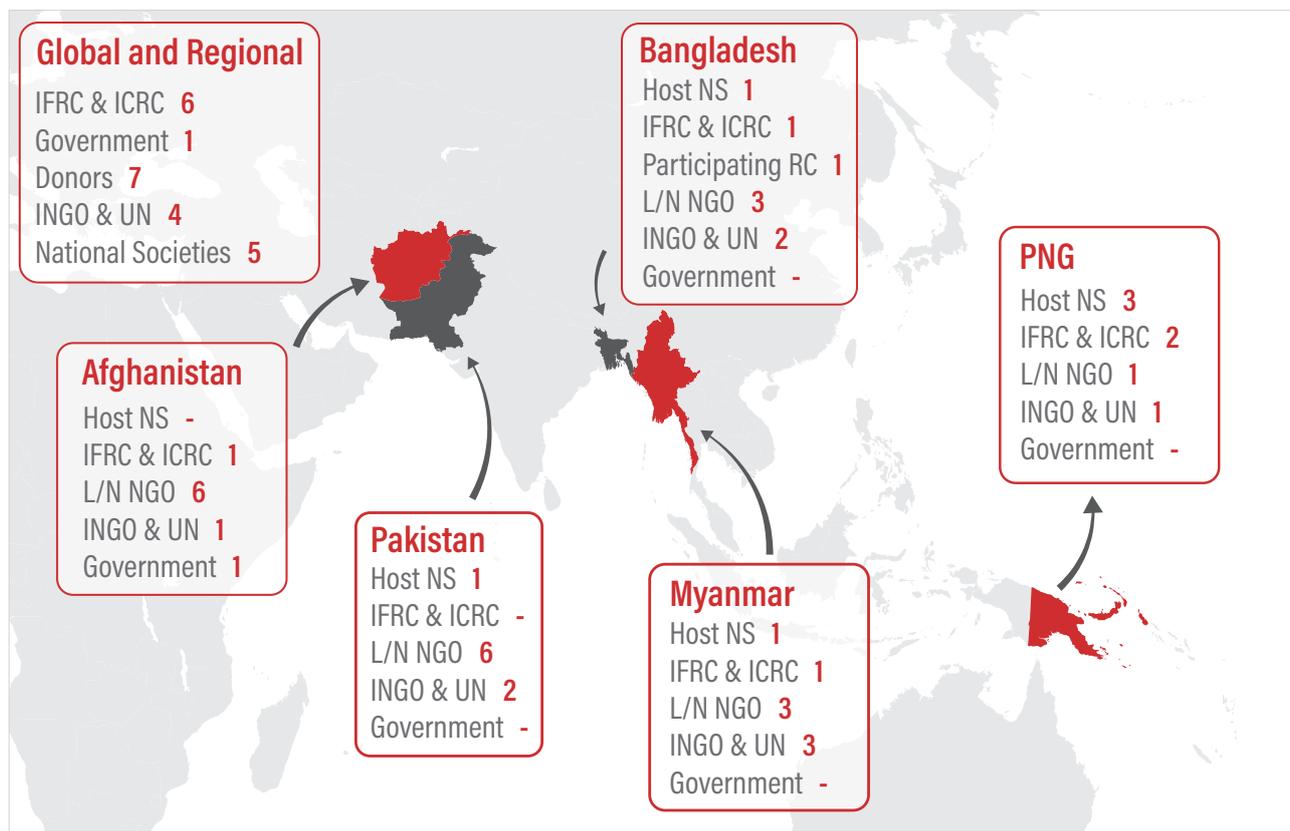
16 HPG, ODI, Glow and HAG, [Covid-19: Implications for localisation A case study of Afghanistan and Pakistan](#), June 2021; HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, [Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar](#), December 2020; HAG and Nirapad, [When the rubber hits the road: Local leadership in the first 100 Days of the Rohingya crisis response](#), December 2017

17 ARC Localisation and complementarity in action report, p. 3

INSIGHTS (Bangladesh), and independent consultants San May Thu (Myanmar) and Shedrick Singip (PNG). A diverse range of local and international stakeholders, including National Societies in the five countries, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), ARC, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and institutional donors were involved in the study, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overview of research participants groups at the country and global level.**



## Research focus

The research sought to capture the range of localisation approaches or initiatives being employed in protracted and fragile (complex) crisis settings. It was also designed to examine the impacts of localised approaches and how intermediaries and donors can most effectively support localisation in the aforementioned contexts. By identifying the key assumptions and events that determined the roles of intermediaries, this report contributes new

knowledge that can be used to strengthen locally-led response in complex settings.

The research explored intermediary practices in the five contexts to capture learning and reflection for broader application in the humanitarian sector, including practices used within the Movement. It built on and complemented recent work undertaken by ARC and other members of the Movement.<sup>18</sup> The study's insights will inform the design of a new

<sup>18</sup> ARC, Localisation and complementarity in action: the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Myanmar and Bangladesh, 2020; IFRC, Localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent: National society development building capacities for crisis management, resilience and peace, 2021

partnership between ARC and DFAT. The findings may be used to inform intermediary, donor and local/national NSA approaches that can be adapted and implemented to suit complex settings.

## Report structure

The report starts with the methodology used in the study in order to enable readers to understand the scope and limitations of the research. It also presents the research questions and the analysis framework used to shape the collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

Section 1 provides insights into the practical realities of operating in and trying to promote localisation within complex settings. This section also helps to situate the research within the broader literature on localisation and evidence from similar or other complex environments. It also provides more information on the operational environment and localisation

situation in each of the five case study countries, as well as information on the presence of Movement members operating there.

Section 2 describes the various localisation approaches employed by intermediaries and donors to support local and national non-state humanitarian actors, including Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and PNG.

Section 3 unpacks the impacts of intermediary approaches to strengthening localisation on local and national non-state humanitarian actors, including practical examples.

The final section presents practical recommendations and guiding questions for effective approaches to strengthening locally-led responses in protracted settings, as well as questions to guide intermediaries in their thinking about and approaches to supporting locally-led response.

*Photo: Farid Ershad on Unsplash*



# METHODOLOGY

The study combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Greater focus was placed on qualitative data that yielded more nuanced insights and facilitated a deeper understanding of the context. Data collection occurred between April and July 2023. Qualitative data was collected in key informant interviews conducted in the five focus countries, complemented by global and regional interviews, and supplemented with a desk review of relevant literature. Quantitative data gathered through an online survey enabled estimation of the proportions of humanitarian sector employees holding specific perspectives on various aspects of localisation.

A validation workshop, involving the national researchers and ARC representatives, was held during the analysis phase to test and triangulate initial findings. Figure 2 shows an overview of research methods; Figure 1 shows an overview of the research participants at the country and global levels.

**Figure 2: Overview of research methods**



## Localised research approaches

Partnerships were central to this research, enabling a collective contribution that can more effectively drive positive change in the humanitarian system. In conducting this study, HAG collaborated with its existing national research partners, including GLOW Consultants (Afghanistan and Pakistan), inSights Bangladesh, San May Thu (independent consultant, Myanmar) and Shedrick Singip (independent consultant, PNG). This approach enabled careful contextualisation of methods and tools to local contexts and research participants. Our national researchers led in-country data collection, ensuring appropriate and ethical approaches to working with local/national organisations and other stakeholders, and lent their knowledge and expertise to analysis, development of findings and peer review.

## Data analysis

To organise and analyse the data, the team drew on existing models and literature to develop a framework (Figure 3) appropriate to localisation in complex crisis settings.<sup>19</sup> The framework centres on the importance of partnership and humanitarian principles, and reflects existing domains of localisation practice that analysis of the data identified as critical in crisis contexts. (Key terms are defined in the Terminology section earlier in this report.)

<sup>19</sup> PIANGO, HAG, [Measuring localisation: Framework and tools](#), December 2019; NEAR, [Localisation performance measurement framework](#), 2019; HAG, Glow, CoLab, InSights, [Bridging the intention to action gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2021

**Figure 3: Framework to understand and analyse intermediary approaches in complex contexts**



Using this framework, the research sought to answer the following questions.

1. What localisation approaches or initiatives are intermediaries and donors using to support local/national non-state humanitarian actors, including Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, in protracted and complex crises?
  - a. What is different about localisation in protracted and complex crisis settings?
  - b. Given these differences, how do intermediaries and donors approach localisation?
2. What impacts are local/national non-state humanitarian actors (including Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies) experiencing in complex crisis settings as a

result of intermediary (including Movement partners) and donor approaches to strengthen localisation?

3. How can intermediaries and donors support or strengthen locally-led responses most effectively in protracted and complex crisis settings?

## Limitations

**Context dynamics and interpretation:** Whilst there are common factors, each context is unique and different approaches to localisation have been utilised. The research investigated approaches that intermediary and local actors reported using to overcome the challenges and limitations of operating in complex crisis settings. It also examined commonalities between contexts in relation to the role of intermediaries and the impacts of locally-led approaches, providing a foundation for future research. Overall, however, more data is needed on effective localisation approaches in complex crisis settings, particularly with respect to outcomes.

**Representativeness:** The stakeholders who engaged in the study were primarily from the Movement, local and international NGOs (INGOs) and donors; national governments had minimal engagement. The views of the participants do not represent all humanitarian actors operating in the case study countries. The survey participants were not evenly spread across the five selected countries. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh had greater representation than Myanmar and PNG, partly due to the data collection timeframe coinciding with Cyclone Mocha (Myanmar).

# SECTION 1. OPERATING IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

This section provides an overview of key issues for the localisation agenda in complex settings, based on existing literature. It also introduces the countries featured in this study, whilst Box 2 provides a summary of policies for and attitudes to localisation in the Movement.

## LOCALISATION IN COMPLEX CRISIS SETTINGS



**Politically sensitive challenges can limit the willingness of humanitarian actors to develop shared localisation goals in complex contexts.**

Localisation can be difficult to define, and setting country-wide commitments and localisation goals can be hard. However, sector-wide goals have been set for locally-led response in disaster contexts such as the Bangladesh flood response, and in Indonesia, the Philippines and the Pacific region.<sup>20</sup> In protracted or conflict settings, resistance to articulating shared localisation goals or desired outcomes can be strong. This was illustrated by ACAPS research in Ukraine, which found that ‘No two organisations surveyed (UN agencies, INGOs, or NGOs) gave the same definition of what localisation is or what it should look like in Ukraine, and some definitions provided contradicted each other’.<sup>21</sup> ACAPS also noted that this ambiguity contributed to

‘misunderstandings and unmet expectations among both international and local responders’.

This is also a challenge for international organisations, who continue to grapple with how they define localisation and what it means for the way they work – particularly in complex contexts.<sup>22</sup> While progress has been quite uneven among international intermediaries, organisations such as Trócaire<sup>23</sup> and CAFOD<sup>24</sup> have made greater progress towards shifting how they work in partnerships by embracing the values of localisation. Similarly, the Movement has reaffirmed its commitment to a locally-led model of response by placing, through the Seville Agreement 2.0, the National Societies at the centre of any emergency response.<sup>25</sup>



**Partnerships and the provision of principled aid require complex political and ethical decisions.**

Struggles for state power increase the incentives to instrumentalise aid.<sup>26</sup> Political and conflict dynamics mean that all partners need to consider affiliations that may support or compromise effective assistance. Often, agencies must make difficult decisions about the best ways to provide assistance or secure access. Ultimately, advocacy on behalf of affected communities may be muted in situations where aid organisations fear deregistration or expulsion.<sup>27</sup> The challenges and complexity of these decisions can place

20 For example, in Bangladesh, the [Humanitarian response plan for Cyclone Amphan \(2020\)](#) integrates specific localisation targets under each cluster to be tracked by the Localisation Technical Working Group. In the Philippines, the [Flagship Initiative](#) is also placing greater priority on locally-led approaches as part of the reform priorities

21 ACAPS, [Thematic report : Ukraine - Perceptions of localisation in the humanitarian response](#), 2023 p. 4

22 HAG, Glow, CoLab, InSights, [Bridging the intention to action gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2021

23 Trócaire, [Partnership and Localisation Strategy 2021–2025](#)

24 CAFOD, [Grand Bargain annual self-reporting exercise](#)

25 IFRC, [Seville Agreement 2.0](#), 2022

26 Alterman, B, [Aid and conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen](#), CSIS, 16 August 2018; de Haan, A & Warmerdam, W, The politics of aid revisited: A review of evidence on state capacity and elite commitment, in S Hickey, K Sen & B Bukonya (eds), [The politics of inclusive development: Interrogating the evidence](#), 2014, pp. 259–278.

27 Featherstone, A, [The state of play: Localisation and state leadership of humanitarian action](#), May 2021

enormous pressure on partnerships between international and local/national NSAs, which may have very different perspectives on the most effective way forward.



**Both local/national and international actors continue to struggle to deliver principled aid whilst supporting localisation in complex settings.**

Decisions and practices related to principled aid are challenged in complex crisis settings. Humanitarian principles have a long association with conflict settings and with the Movement, although principled frameworks have also been adopted by many actors in the humanitarian sector.<sup>28</sup> Despite their centrality to formal humanitarian practice, the principles and their uses have been questioned.<sup>29</sup> Perceived problems related to the ability of local actors to uphold humanitarian principles have played a part in concerns about localisation or how it should be implemented, but no systematic evidence related to these assumptions exists.<sup>30</sup> All local/national and international actors continue to struggle to deliver principled aid, but the risks and considerations that manifest for local/national actors tend to differ and be more

challenging – most often due to their proximity to the contexts and issues. However, this proximity to communities is also considered one of the most important strengths of local/national actors operating in complex settings.

**The local NGOs expect in their organisational principles and in their hearts to respect the humanitarian principles and prioritise the people most in need. It's a complex world and it is hard to follow the humanitarian principles day by day. ... and there is no one size fits all [solution] but they are being adhered to as best as is reasonable [with]in the context. (Global Donor Representative)**



**Risk and compliance requirements are more stringent in complex settings and affect local/national partners disproportionately.**

Security, reputational, legal, financial and operational risks are heightened in complex contexts. Moreover, local/national partners operating in insecure environments bear greater responsibility than international actors for managing risk, particularly if there has been a reduction in access for the latter.<sup>31</sup> Much more complex risk management processes are

- 
- 28 The principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality were affirmed in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991. These principles also informed the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, agreed in 1994, and are often also affirmed by individual organisations; see <https://www.ifrc.org/our-promise/do-good/code-conduct-movement-ngos>. Other principled frameworks have been adopted by many actors in the humanitarian sector, such as Do No Harm, Good Humanitarian Donorship, and the participation of affected communities in decision-making. Many of these frameworks also speak of the 'humanitarian imperative', which the Humanitarian Charter (part of the Sphere project) defines as the belief that 'action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict', and states that nothing should override this principle. *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter And Minimum Standards In Humanitarian Response*, 2018 edition, p. 28.
- 29 The principle of neutrality, loosely defined as not taking or favouring a side, has repeatedly been the target of concerns that unreflexive approaches can 'blind humanitarians to right and wrong'. See <https://odihpn.org/publication/neutrality-principle-or-tool/> The ability of the humanitarian system to uphold the principle of impartiality, which specifies that aid should be accorded on the basis of greatest need, has also been questioned. See <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/7/12/three-challenges-for-humanitarian-impartiality>
- 30 A similar perception exists in relation to humanitarian, and protection and inclusion standards – evidence shows there is a need to better understand the complementary role of all actors in complex settings. See: Featherstone, A, *The state of play: Localisation and state leadership of humanitarian action*, May 2021, p. 18.
- 31 OECD, *Managing risks in protracted and transitional contexts: The price of success?*, 2012; Metcalfe, V, Martin, E, Pantuliano, S, and HGP, *Risk in humanitarian action: Towards a common approach?* p. 4; HPG, ODI, Glow and HAG, *Covid-19: implications for localisation A case study of Afghanistan and Pakistan*, June 2021; HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, *Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar*

instituted in partnerships, and a heightened focus on compliance and due diligence by donors and intermediaries. Often, few local partners are perceived to be able to meet compliance requirements and avoid risks.<sup>32</sup> The use of remote management strategies in highly insecure environments reduces risks to international staff but may increase them for national staff and local partners. These impacts, identified clearly during discussions about access and security in the 2010s, were re-energised in the 2020s by the COVID-19 pandemic and greater attention to the differential risks faced by national and international staff members and organisations.<sup>33</sup> There is general recognition that aid providers, including donors and intermediaries, 'should be prepared to accept higher levels of risk when needs are critical'.<sup>34</sup> Yet even when this principle has been agreed upon, compliance regimes remain burdensome and inflexible and local/national actors bear a disproportionate risk burden.



**In complex crisis settings, direct funding to local/national partners may reduce and short-term project-based funding may increase.**

Funding may become more available in some complex contexts; for example, in Ukraine, 87 per cent of the humanitarian appeal was met in 2022, and the increased funding facilitated a rapid influx of international actors.<sup>35</sup> However, in other complex crisis contexts, funding falls short of needs by a long way. For example, in

Yemen, only 52 per cent of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) was funded in 2022, while the corresponding figures for Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo were 43 per cent and 33 per cent respectively.<sup>36</sup> The impact on localisation varies significantly depending on the funding scenario, but across the board the amount of funding for local/national actors to advance localisation is very small, and well below the Grand Bargain target.<sup>37</sup> Increased funding may encourage international organisations to become more operational and work toward short-term project-based funding. Too little funding may reduce funds available to local/national organisations and enforce a continued focus on project-based work.



**Complex crisis settings demand increased focus on technical accountability and minimum standards and reduce time and focus on partner priorities of capacity sharing and strengthening leadership.**

In complex settings, time restrictions can be important drivers of decision-making. Whilst this may also be true in disaster contexts, the added obstacles and elevated risks in complex settings often increase the time pressures on decision-making about priorities. Many international actors seek partnerships with local/national actors with existing strong organisational and compliance capacities. The time for partnership brokering or meaningful agreements about long-term capacity goals is consumed by urgent project work.<sup>38</sup>

32 Metcalfe, V, Martin, E, Pantuliano, S, and HGP, *Risk in Humanitarian action: Towards a common approach?*

33 *ibid.*, p. 4; HPG, ODI, GLOW and HAG, *Covid-19: implications for localisation – a case study of Afghanistan and Pakistan*, June 2021; HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, *Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar*

34 UK Innovation Hub, Humanitarian Outcomes, *Enabling the local response: Emerging humanitarian priorities in Ukraine*, June 2022

35 UN OCHA, *Financial Tracking System: Country summary Ukraine*, 2022; Noe, N, *Localizing the international humanitarian response in Ukraine*, September 2022

36 UN OCHA, *Financial Tracking System: Appeals and response plans 2022*

37 Metcalfe-Hough, V, Fenton, W, Saez, P, and Spencer, A, *The Grand Bargain In 2021: An Independent Review*, June 2022

38 HAG, 'Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan', 2023 (forthcoming)



### Perceptions play an important role in determining trust and relationships in complex contexts.

Complex crises often present situations in which stakeholders express strong and conflicting sentiments. This means disagreements and misunderstandings can erode trust and relationships between stakeholders and, importantly, local communities. Even humanitarian actors making decisions based on the principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality can be interpreted by other parties as being partisan or unfair. There have been broader discussions taking place around how to apply humanitarian principles in complex crisis situations and what it means for humanitarian actors.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, the practical challenge for international as well as local and national actors in maintaining their image as independent actors while also delivering on their mandates is a difficult one – especially when perceived independence or neutrality can be different quite different and varying (see Box 1).

### Box 1. Walking a fine line in complex contexts

The war in Ukraine has underlined how humanitarian actors face immense complexities in working within their mandates. The meeting between the ICRC President and the Russian Foreign Minister in March 2023 generated negative backlash in Ukraine, which then, due to misunderstanding and misinformation, led to calls to boycott funding to both the ICRC and Ukraine Red Cross.<sup>40</sup> It also resulted in Ukrainian Red Cross staff and volunteers facing threats in their own communities.

The *New Humanitarian* quoted the Director of the Kyiv city organisation of the Ukrainian Red Cross as saying, ‘They just heard the words Red Cross and that was it – we were all traitors and our volunteers were getting guns pointed at them’.<sup>41</sup> This also highlights that local/national actors (and their staff) often have to deal with more severe consequences, due to actions of their international counterparts – not only at a political level, but at a community level.

39 Slim, H, [You don't have to be neutral to be a good humanitarian](#), August 2020, *The New Humanitarian*; Craze, J, [Why humanitarians should stop hiding behind impartiality](#), August 2022, *The New Humanitarian*

40 *Ukrainska Pravda*, [Ukrainians call for Red Cross boycott](#), 26 March 2023

41 Hyde, L, [Evacuation challenges and bad optics: Why Ukrainians are losing faith in the ICRC](#), 2023, *The New Humanitarian*

Photo: ARC



## THE CASE STUDY CONTEXTS

This study explored approaches to localisation and the impacts of locally-led practices in five case study countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and PNG. The countries featured in this study are diverse in terms of operational contexts and challenges, factors influencing locally-led NSA responses, as well as the scope and scale of humanitarian needs. In Myanmar, increased operational and security risks for local partners due to conflict and instability and reduced access for international actors, along with a highly volatile context vulnerable to shocks, emphasise the need for effective and appropriate approaches to supporting locally-led response. In Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover in 2021 initially created greater access for humanitarian actors

(previous dual control by the government and Taliban meant access was constrained), but the operational context continued to deteriorate, initially due to sanctions (for which exemptions were worked through eventually) but mostly due to interference from the Taliban, including bans on women working in NGOs and UN agencies.<sup>42</sup> Bangladesh and Pakistan have long-term refugee and displaced populations, coupled with the impacts of disasters, including major floods and cyclones. Sporadic conflict between communities in PNG has also been compounded by widespread drought and disasters such as earthquakes. National Societies, supported by other Movement partners, are implementing humanitarian programming in each of these contexts. Box 2 provides an overview of the Movement and its focus on locally-led action.

### **Box 2. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and locally-led humanitarian action.**

The Movement formally supports the localisation of humanitarian action, with a long history of National Society leadership prior to the localisation agenda emerging from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Beyond the movement itself, IFRC has played a leading role in furthering the localisation agenda at a global level (including previously as a co-chair of the Grand Bargain localisation workstream).

The new Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (referred to as the Seville Agreement 2.0) adopted at the 2022 Council of Delegates sets out the coordination responsibilities for the components of the Movement. This agreement emphasises that international efforts within the movement must “acknowledge and strengthen the central role of National Societies in their own countries”.<sup>43</sup> The agreement also looks to consolidate the national society development processes within the Movement to collectively contribute to placing (host) National Societies at the centre. This work includes strengthening National Societies’ capacity,<sup>44</sup> including research on complementarity with partners in responding to humanitarian crises.<sup>45</sup> It also includes giving National Societies access to more targeted support,<sup>46</sup> as well as flexible funding through the IFRC-managed Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) and National Societies Investment Alliance.

42 HAG, ‘Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan’, 2023 (forthcoming)

43 IFRC, *Seville Agreement 2.0*, 2022

44 IFRC, *Localisation of Humanitarian Action in the Red Cross Red Crescent: National Society Development Building Capacities for Crisis Management, Resilience and Peace*

45 Australian Red Cross, *Localisation and complementarity in action: The work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Myanmar and Bangladesh*, 2020

46 This includes through interventions such as the *Red Ready Programme* as well as setting up assessment processes such as Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification and Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment for National Societies to identify their capacity gaps

## National Societies

The National Society in each country works with its Movement partners and other local and international humanitarian actors. National Societies' objectives differ according to crisis type. Appendix 1 summarises how National Societies are responding in each country context. Movement partners have sought to strengthen locally-led action through a range of approaches, including building core capacities and increasing access to funding for direct programming.

## Australian Red Cross and localisation

In recent years, ARC has undertaken significant shifts in policy and practice to support locally-led responses from the National Societies it supports, particularly in the Asia-Pacific (e.g. working closely with the PNG and Myanmar National Societies to support institutional strengthening). It has also led research on effective localisation approaches more broadly, including [Going Local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit for purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific](#) (2017), [Local response in a global pandemic: A case study of the Red Cross response to Tropical Cyclone Harold during COVID-19 in Vanuatu and Fiji](#) (2020), and [Double Disaster: a case study of the CVTL response to the 2021 floods during COVID-19](#) (2022).

During the research, it became clear that the countries could be divided into two groups based on events and dynamics and the ways they were perceived and interpreted. During data collection (April–July 2023), Afghanistan and Myanmar were high-volatility, high-concern settings, characterised by rapid and drastic changes in operational contexts, difficult humanitarian negotiations with authorities, and strong donor attention (especially in the case of Afghanistan). Interviewees were often direct and detailed when

speaking about the complexity of challenges in these settings and the ways that aid organisations and CSOs had sought to navigate them. In contrast, Pakistan, Bangladesh and PNG were often described in terms of high-familiarity, slow-burn dynamics. In comparison with Afghanistan and Myanmar, interviewees spoke in less forceful terms about the difficulties they faced and the lessons that can be drawn from their experiences. This report describes approaches and impacts from both groups to inform future learning.

*Photo: ARC*



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW – AFGHANISTAN



Population size: **43 million** in 2022



People in need:

- Current figure: **24.4M** (Women 22%; Persons with severe disabilities 8.3%)
- Projected figures: **28.3 M** (2023) (Women 23%; Persons with severe disabilities 8.3%)



Humanitarian aid in 2022:

- Total incoming funding: **US\$629,871,772**
- 2022 % allocated directly to L/N actors: **0.09%**
- National NGOs/CSOs: **620,554**
- Red Cross/Red Crescent Organisations: **18,063,675**

### Key Humanitarian Crisis Timeline (in the last 5 years)

#### ● 2018

- Drought hits more than two-thirds of Afghanistan (22 out of total 34 provinces) with around 10.5 million people severely affected.

#### ● October 2020

- Escalated fighting between the Taliban and Afghanistan government forces results in more than 40,000 Afghans being displaced.

#### ● August 2021

- International military forces complete withdrawal as Taliban complete take-over of the country.
- Suspension of direct international development assistance.
- Economic crisis - freezing of US\$9.5 billion in central bank reserves, loans and the sudden suspension of direct development aid.

#### ● September 2021

- Taliban suspends secondary education for girls beyond grade six.

#### ● June and September 2022

- Two major earthquakes cause loss of lives and property damage in Paktika and Kunar provinces respectively.

#### ● May - August 2022

- Severe flooding (including unseasonal flooding) results in 670 deaths with thousands of people displaced and homes damaged.

#### ● December 2022

- Taliban issues ban on women attending universities.
- Taliban issues ban on women working in national and international non-governmental organisations.

## Humanitarian context

Within a protracted crisis context, the political upheaval in and following August 2021, when the Taliban came to power, complicated humanitarian work in Afghanistan severely. Moreover, the compounding and rapid effects of global sanctions, the devaluation of the Afghani, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and harsh

drought conditions have increased demand for humanitarian assistance. Over half of the population (approx. 22.8 million or 55 per cent) are said to be in crisis or emergency levels of acute food insecurity. Drought is expected to increase food insecurity and drive negative coping strategies.<sup>47</sup> Recent political changes and follow-

<sup>47</sup> IFRC, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarian Crises Operation Update Report No 3 (6-Month Update) Emergency Appeal No MDRAF007', 18 December 2021

on effects have forced most local organisations in Afghanistan to shift their long-term development programs to meet immediate humanitarian needs.<sup>48</sup> With strict sanctions applied, donors have redirected most long-term funding through UN agencies and INGOs. The current contextual dynamics are likely to retard progress on localisation.<sup>49</sup>

## Key approaches to localisation and impact

Funding is one of the key approaches to support localisation in Afghanistan. Overall direct funding to local and national actors has reduced in Afghanistan since 2021 – particularly because global sanctions have forced most development funding to be redirected as humanitarian funding to UN agencies and INGOs. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF), the country-based pooled fund (CBPF) managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), has been an important conduit in getting more funding to LNNGOs. The AHF is one of few exceptions where there has been an increase in funding to LNNGOs, with the absolute value and the percentage allocated growing between 2020 (USD 6.1 million, 8.3 per cent of direct allocations) and 2022 (USD 56.5 million, 20.7 per cent of direct allocations).<sup>50</sup>

## Challenges

Some key limitations in progressing to localisation are:



Lack of adequate and predictable funding for LNNGOs, especially for core costs, capacity building and long-term programs. Many donors prefer to fund international actors in order to transfer risk and responsibilities within current sanctions and complex operating environment



Lack of equitable and transparent partnerships between international and local actors. Many international actors impose their own agendas, standards and procedures on local actors with insufficient consultation or recognition, a problem that has worsened since August 2021



A notable increase in risk transfer from donors to intermediaries and from intermediaries to LNNGOs as legal (through sanctions), access and security challenges increased. These transfers, especially to LNNGOs, often took place without adequate resourcing for effective management



Many local actors have poor access to coordination platforms, information systems and advocacy spaces due to language barriers, security constraints or limited resources. Networks such as ACBAR have tried to play a more active role in connecting various stakeholders for greater coordination and advocacy.

48 HAG, *Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan*, 2023.

49 Ibid.

50 HAG, *Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan*, 2023 citing OCHA, Country Based Pooled Funds Data Hub

## Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the country

The Movement has a longstanding history of responding to humanitarian crises in Afghanistan caused by conflict, displacement, natural disasters, climate change, food insecurity, and COVID. International partners in the movement have been supporting the Afghanistan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) to develop as a strong and independent National Society that can provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population.

The Movement works with various organisations to implement its humanitarian work in Afghanistan. Some of the main partners are:

- ▶ The ARCS, the main implementing partner of the Movement in Afghanistan
- ▶ The ICRC, which functions as a co-convenor of the Movement in Afghanistan
- ▶ The IFRC, which supports the development and coordination of the ARCS and other National Societies working in Afghanistan
- ▶ Other National Societies, which provide funding, technical expertise, staff deployment, and program support to the ARCS and other partners in Afghanistan.

51 IFRC, [Afghanistan Country Plan 2023](#)

52 IFRC, [Afghanistan Operational Update – May 2023](#)

## The Afghanistan Red Crescent Society

Within the context of restrictions and limitations faced by all humanitarian actors, ARCS has continued to play a significant role in providing assistance and support to affected communities. The main objectives of the ARCS are to provide resources and assistance to local and national responders and foster strong collaboration and coordination among international and local actors by ensuring accountability and transparency in aid delivery. There are currently 34 National Society branches, over 2400 National Society staff and 30,000 National Society volunteers. The IFRC has a strong relationship with ARCS, providing support for responses to multiple crises.<sup>51</sup> Their operation provides services including livelihood, health, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).<sup>52</sup> In addition, ICRC has a strategic partnership agreement with ARCS that defines roles and responsibilities in delivering humanitarian assistance and how ICRC aims to strengthen the capacity and autonomy of the ARCS as a National Society.

*Photo: ARC*



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW – BANGLADESH



### Key Humanitarian Crisis Timeline (in the last 5 years)

- **2017**
  - Following escalation of violence and targeted attacks, more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees from Rakhine State, Myanmar cross the border into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
- **2017**
  - Government of Bangladesh begins relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char island.
- **March 2023**
  - **Piloting of Repatriation Process** of Rohingya Refugees.
- **14 May 2023**
  - **Cyclone Mocha** 2.3 million people were at risk, including 960,128 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char Island.



Population size: **169 million**



People in need: **1.52 million**



Humanitarian aid in 2022:

- Total incoming funding: **US\$644 million**
- % allocated directly to L/N actors: **0.24%**
- National NGOs/CSOs: **1,550,223**
- International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement: **26,188,820**
- Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies: **400,000**

### Humanitarian context

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world, with diverse religious and ethnic groups.<sup>53</sup> The country is prone to natural and climate-induced disasters, including earthquakes, landslides and droughts. Escalation of violence in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 triggered a mass displacement of the Rohingya population, leading to the development of the world's largest refugee camp, known as Kutupalong, in Cox's Bazar. The estimated 1.24 million refugees in Kutupalong have faced multiple crises, including monsoon floods and

COVID-19. In Cox's Bazar, the Government of Bangladesh and the Inter-sectoral Coordination Group lead the Rohingya humanitarian crisis response. Recent initiatives to relocate Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char (30,000 have already been moved), and particularly the pilot project for repatriation back to Myanmar, have created further challenges and generated criticism from aid actors.<sup>54</sup> The crisis in Cox's Bazar, particularly with the onset of COVID-19, opened a unique space for implementing localisation commitments,<sup>55</sup> including more reliance on local and national networks and increased consultation with local organisations.<sup>56</sup>

53 IFRC, 'IFRC Country Plan for Bangladesh in 2022', 2022

54 OHCHR, [Bangladesh must suspend pilot project to return Rohingya refugees to Myanmar: UN expert](#), June 2023; HRW ["An Island Jail in the Middle of the Sea" Bangladesh's Relocation of Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char](#), June 2021

55 Community Empowerment for Rural Development, 'Charter 4 Change: [Localisation of Humanitarian Aid](#)', no date; IASC, ["The Grand Bargain"](#), 2023. This includes through large-scale initiatives, such as the selection of Bangladesh as a demonstrator country for the Grand Bargain Workstream 2, organisational partnerships and projects through platforms such as the Start Fund Bangladesh and NAHAB and research initiatives

56 HAG, UN Bangladesh, NIRAPD, UK Aid, ["Elevating Evidence: Localisation in The 2019 Bangladesh Flood Response"](#), 2020

## Key approaches to localisation and impact

Bangladesh has continued to make progress on the localisation agenda, driven in part by the government's interest and engagement on this topic. In addition, priorities on localisation were integrated into key documents and coordination mechanisms such as the Standing Order on Disaster (SoD, revised in 2019) and flood and Cyclone Amphan humanitarian response plans, while a Localisation Technical Working Group was formed and integrated into the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team. However, the progress made on localisation more broadly in Bangladesh has been slow to translate to changes in the Cox's Bazar response.

National actors with strong presence and capacity, such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), have continued to play important roles within the humanitarian coordination and response of the Rohingya context, including by influencing policymaking.<sup>57</sup> The NGO Coordination and Support Cell, the Cox's Bazar Civil Society Forum<sup>58</sup> and National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh (NAHAB), have been advocating for localisation in the context of the Cox's Bazar response and contributing to increased visibility and leadership.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, START Fund Bangladesh has become an important mechanism for providing funding to qualifying local recipients, including for anticipatory action.

## Challenges



With many international actors responding to the population movement crisis in Bangladesh, obstacles to localisation remain. These include power differences between local and international organisations, difficulty in increasing and maintaining the role of local and national civil society, lack of funding, capacity support, and community participation in the response.<sup>60</sup>



Major donors are still constrained in partnering directly with national and local NGOs.<sup>61</sup> Most donors (and international actors) often fund a small number of large national NGOs, who receive the major share of direct (or direct as possible) funding.



There is little transparency in funding relationships, including with respect to INGOs sharing budgets with local partners, or LNNGOs having influence in financial decision-making. LNNGOs representatives feel only a very few INGO partners consult or inform them of these plans and decisions.<sup>62</sup>



The operational context within the Rohingya response has created questions around how localisation can and should be applied in refugee contexts – including the need to involve more Rohingya community members and organisations in shaping and delivering work (government restrictions limit these options).<sup>63</sup>

57 Khan, A and Kontinen, T, '[Impediments to Localization Agenda: Humanitarian Space in the Rohingya Response in Bangladesh](#)'. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7 (1): 14, 2022

58 Wake, C and Bryant, J, '[Capacity and Complementarity in the Rohingya Response in Bangladesh](#)', 2018

59 NAHAB, '[Localisation Roadmap of NAHAB](#),' 2017

60 Wake, C and Bryant, J, '[Capacity and Complementarity in the Rohingya Response in Bangladesh](#)', 2018

61 [Mission Report Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream Demonstrator Country Field Mission to Bangladesh](#); September 2018

62 inSights, [Base Line Study: Understanding, adoption, adaptation, and implementation of Localisation for the Australian Humanitarian Partnership Bangladesh Consortium members and partners and affected communities in Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, December, 2021](#)

63 Humanitarian Policy Group, '[Capacity and complementarity in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh](#)', 2018

## Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the country

The BDRCS is one of the leading humanitarian organisations in Bangladesh. The IFRC, ICRC and 10 participating National Societies (American, British, Canadian, Danish, German, Japanese, Qatar, Swedish, Swiss and Turkish) support and work alongside BDRCS.

Several coordination mechanisms operate in Bangladesh, such as program coordination

meetings for participating National Societies and bi-weekly participating National Society country representatives' meetings with IFRC heads of delegation. Under the Agenda for Renewal, country coordination team meetings also convene regularly, attended by BDRCS, IFRC and all in-country participating National Societies, plus ICRC.

### The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

The BDRCS is the largest national humanitarian organisation in the country. A network of 82,472 life members, 8,091 Red Crescent Youth volunteers, and 74,020 Cyclone Preparedness Programme volunteers help BDRCS respond rapidly to disasters, crises and pandemics.<sup>64</sup> The SoD recognises BDRCS as a statutory body of the state that works as a subsidiary company of the government, via participation in the Inter-Ministry Disaster Management Coordination Committee, Disaster Management Committees at the national and local level, and other related committees. It has a branch in each of the 64 districts, and four branches in metropolitan areas. BDRCS objectives focus on risk reduction and emergency response, including awareness building, volunteer mobilisation, early warning dissemination and search and rescue. An IFRC and BDRCS joint statement (2018) on humanitarian responses in Cox's Bazar emphasised their commitment to localising aid through support for national and local development.<sup>65</sup> Since the influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, the BDRCS has played an important role in supporting these communities, including through their youth and volunteer networks.<sup>66</sup>

64 IFRC, [Bangladesh Country Plan 2022](#)

65 IFRC, [Red Cross Red Crescent: Cox's Bazar Statement](#), 15 February 2018

66 IFRC, [Bangladesh: Population Movement](#)

Photo: ARC



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW – MYANMAR



Population size: **53,798,084 million**



People in need: **17.6 million**



Humanitarian aid in 2023 (as of November 2023):

- Total incoming funding: **US\$400.2 million reported to FTS (400,181,375)**
- % allocated directly to L/N actors: **1.05%**
- National NGOs/CSOs: **4,237,994**
- Local NGOs/CSOs **1,208,215**
- International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement: **37,317,184**

### Key Humanitarian Crisis Timeline (in the last 5 years)

#### 2017

- Military operations and targeted violence kill thousands and displace millions of Rohingyas (also triggering mass exodus to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries).

#### February 2021

- Military coup deposes democratically elected government while elected officials are arrested or go into hiding. Civil disobedience movement begins.

#### 2021 onwards

- An estimated 1.5 million people are displaced, more than 3,450 killed, and 21,500 arrested in military attacks and oppression.
- Military government introduces new restrictive registration laws for NGOs, begins targeted attacks and harassment of civil society actors, and places further restrictions on access to communities to deliver aid.
- As government restrictions on aid sector increase (including denying visas - new or extension - for international staff), international actors move some operations to neighbouring countries and ramp up cross-border support.

#### May 2023

- Cyclone Mocha affects approximately 5.4 million people in Chin, Magway, Rakhine, and Sagaing states.
- Military government rescinds approvals for international organisations to deliver aid to people affected by Cyclone Mocha and suspends travel authorisations.

## Humanitarian context

In addition to the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Myanmar is facing a multifaceted political, socio-economic, human rights and humanitarian crisis stemming from the military coup d'état in February 2021. Following the military junta's violent suppression of the anti-coup protests, clashes between the military and resistance forces are increasing on multiple fronts.<sup>67</sup> The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for Myanmar estimated 17.6 million people (one

in three members of the population) will require humanitarian assistance in 2023 – a dramatic increase from the 1 million people in need in 2021. The 4.5 million people with severe needs targeted<sup>68</sup> for life-saving humanitarian support are mainly in rural conflict-affected areas. As of 24 April 2023, the estimated total displacement population within Myanmar was over 1.8 million. Of these, more than 1.4 million<sup>69</sup> were newly displaced after the military coup.

67 ACAPS, Briefing Note, 'Myanmar: Post-Coup Humanitarian Situation', 2023

68 OCHA, 'Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 (January 2023)', 2023

69 UNHCR, 'Myanmar UNHCR displacement overview - 24 Apr 2023', 2023

The humanitarian space is shrinking in Myanmar as the military-established State Administrative Council increasingly restricts humanitarian access to conflict-affected parts of the country. The situation deteriorated when existing travel authorisations for humanitarian organisations – including the UN, INGOs and LNNGOs – in Cyclone Mocha-hit Rakhine were suspended in June 2023. Bureaucratic impediments such as banking restrictions and mandatory registration requirements for international and local humanitarian organisations severely limit their operations. Due to access restrictions and operational challenges, the response in much of Myanmar has become heavily localised, with local/national CSOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and diaspora organisations who are able to access communities through their grassroots networks, are fundraising, coordinating and providing emergency relief alongside the formal humanitarian coordination system.<sup>70</sup> However, local and national organisations continue to struggle to maintain (and upscale when necessary) their support to communities without sustainable funding.

## Key approaches to localisation and impact

Context changes since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 and the military coup in 2021 have reignited localisation discussions. International actors have to greatly rely on local NGOs, CSOs and CBOs, while shifting to remote management modalities and ways to respond to the rapidly changing context and deteriorating operational conditions. Local and national actors have created networks for more effective and strategic coordination and to push forward the localisation agenda.<sup>71</sup>

One marker of progress on localisation in coordination is that six national humanitarian organisations, including the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) and women-led organisations, became members of the Myanmar Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in 2022 (a few national organisations gained observer roles in 2016). The Local Intermediary Actors (LIA) network, Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network and CSOs have advocated for greater recognition and investment in locally-led response in the UN humanitarian coordination architecture. As a result, at the

70 DEMAC, 'Diaspora Organizations and Their Humanitarian Response in Myanmar', 2022

71 Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network, 'Positioning Paper on Localisation and Intermediary Role by Myanmar Civil Society', 2022

*Photo: Alejandro Rugama Unsplash*



country level, in June 2023, the HCT began implementing recommendations from the 2022 Peer-2-Peer review for more fit-for-purpose humanitarian coordination architecture, which include developing an HCT Localisation Strategy and workstream and committing to exploring avenues for more equitable partnerships.<sup>72</sup>

## Challenges



The reach and impact of traditional humanitarian models are constrained by the restrictions and immense bureaucratic challenges the regime imposes, which hasn't been recognised sufficiently.<sup>73</sup>



A power imbalance between international actors and local/ national actors relegates local/national actors to 'implementing' rather than 'decision-making' partners, not fully involved in design and management decisions.



Partnership-based discussions to develop physical, financial and cybersecurity risk management strategies are not occurring sufficiently.



Financial sustainability remains an ongoing challenge for the humanitarian community (only 42.8 per cent of the humanitarian response plan was funded in 2022, and 28.3 per cent of the 2023 plan as of November) but also more so for local and national actors who continue to face major disruptions in accessing funding and resources to maintain operations.<sup>74</sup>



Capacity-strengthening support has less focus on governance and sustainability of local/ national actors and more on how to comply with and report on stringent requirements.<sup>75</sup>



Global commitments to localisation are often not translated at the country level as national leaderships are not well-equipped and capacitated to embed localisation in their country programs and build partnerships.<sup>76</sup>

## Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the country

The MRCS has long been a key humanitarian actor in Myanmar. Armed conflict and violence have kept ICRC active in Myanmar for more than 30 years. IFRC has continued to work closely with MRCS and other Movement partners in the country to coordinate activities and support MRCS's development. As of 2023, 20 participating National Societies have provided bilateral support to MRCS, which coordinates their work through regular meetings with IFRC and ICRC and information sharing with participating National Societies.<sup>77</sup>

72 OCHA, 'Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 (January 2023)', 2023

73 Paul, H, Stoddard, A, Czwarno, M, Breckenridge, M, and Naing, A, 'Humanitarian Access SCORE Report: Myanmar Survey on the Coverage, Operational Reach, and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid', 2023

74 OCHA, 'Financial Tracking System'; Watt, J, Balkhi, M, 'Myanmar crisis: recommendations on aid delivery in a changing humanitarian landscape', InterAction, 2023

75 Global Mentoring Initiative and RAFT Myanmar, 'Localisation in Myanmar: Supporting and Reinforcing Myanmar Actors Today and Tomorrow', An independent review commissioned by the HARP Facility, May 2022

76 KII interviews 2, 4 & 5

77 IFRC, 'Myanmar Country Plan 2023

## The Myanmar Red Cross Society

The MRCS is the country's oldest humanitarian organisation; it obtained official national status under the IFRC in 1946. Today, MRCS has a network of around 10,000 active volunteers nationwide and 500–600 staff in its headquarters, 330 National Society branches and 17 supervisory committees in all states and regions in Myanmar.<sup>78</sup> MRCS's activities centre around climate, disaster and crisis, healthcare and migration responses, which are supported by IFRC and participating National Societies.<sup>79</sup> ARC's support to MRCS in 2023 has focused on National Society development and financial sustainability, disaster and epidemic preparedness, mainstreaming of protection, gender and inclusion, and strategic communications.

The role of MRCS is to provide humanitarian services to vulnerable people while acting as the auxiliary of the state in accordance with the Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles, as per the MRCS Law 2015.<sup>80</sup> Despite a challenging environment, MRCS continues to adapt its operations to provide support in critical areas such as emergency first aid and ambulance services; access to basic health services, mental health and psychological support; food and essential household items; and multi-purpose cash.<sup>81</sup>

Informed by the findings of the January 2022 Organisation Capacity Assessment and Certification, MRCS plans to focus on strengthening institutional capacity through branch development and decentralisation to equip local volunteers to respond to emergencies such as Cyclone Mocha, with remote support from headquarters.

78 KII interview 7

79 IFRC, [Myanmar Country Plan 2023](#)

80 MRCS, 'The Myanmar Red Cross Society Law 2015', 2015

81 IFRC, [Myanmar Operation Update - September 2021](#)

*Photo: Isabel Retamales on Unsplash*



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW – PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Population size: **9,949.44 million**



People in need: **over 500,000**



Humanitarian aid in 2023 (as of November 2023):

- Total incoming funding: **US\$7,898,623**
- International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement: **US\$375,134**

### Key Humanitarian Crisis Timeline

#### ● 1970s onward

- Resurgence and continuation of fighting and warfare with the increase of intertribal contact after independence in 1975.

#### ● 2021

- Tribal violence in Enga, Hela and Southern Highlands provinces displace 30,000 people.
- December – Certain parts of the country experienced king tides that flooded communities and displaced approximately 53,000 people.

#### ● 2022

- Tribal and election-related violence displace 15,000 people in Enga, Hela and Southern Highlands provinces, with more than 25,000 children unable to attend school.
- May and October – incidents of election and non-election-related ethnic and sexual-based violence reported in the upper and lower highlands provinces.

#### ● 2023

- Up to 150 people killed in tribal violence in Enga province
- 14 August - Mt Bagana Volcano Eruption, 3,303 persons displaced.

## Humanitarian context

Situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire, PNG is highly susceptible to natural hazards, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, river and coastal flooding, landslides and droughts.<sup>82</sup> Civil unrest and tribal fighting, migration and internal displacement have worsened conflict over the last 20 years.<sup>83</sup> Regular tribal violence has continued to increase and is difficult to manage in more remote regions of the provinces. Furthermore, climate change has resulted in rising sea levels submerging smaller islands and atolls, giving rise to climate migrants. Saltwater intrusion contaminates drinking water sources, causing severe dehydration and

waterborne diseases.<sup>34</sup> In 2021, COVID-19 pushed PNG's health system to the brink, and like the rest of the Pacific region, local and national partners had to lead the response. This paved the way for more locally-led initiatives in PNG; local and national partners found themselves with greater autonomy, influence and funding.<sup>84</sup> It also highlighted that international agencies could provide remote support to local partners successfully if trust existed. It is uncertain whether developments in localisation will persist as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ease.

82 National Disaster Centre PNG, [Emergency and Disaster Management and Disaster Risk Reduction in Papua New Guinea](#)

83 ICRC, 'Tribal Violence in Papua New Guinea', 2022

84 Jirauni, J, Kenni, L, Abraham, S, Flint, J, Tarpey, F, Roche, C, 'A Moment in Time: COVID, Localisation and the Pacific', 2020

## Key approaches to localisation and impact

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the need for the humanitarian sector to change the status quo by giving more responsibilities to local partners to implement programs whilst creating an environment of learning and accountability to maximise impact and sustainability. However, as restrictions have eased, the progress made on localisation has waned (similar to other countries); more needs to be done to develop a shared understanding of localisation within the country and its desired outcomes. The Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) has continued to push localisation priorities within its programming.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, church networks play an important role in promoting localisation initiatives – particularly in more remote areas and islands. Church-based NGOs and leaders need to be at the centre of decision-making on priorities and areas of focus during planning and response, as well as leading the design and delivery of COVID-19 messaging campaigns.<sup>86</sup>

Within the Movement, the Red Ready Program continues to prioritise localisation initiatives, with IFRC providing technical support, standardised global materials and funding to the PNG Red Cross Society (PNGRCS).<sup>87</sup> Recent assistance includes support for community-based engagement and activities, humanitarian advocacy and capacity, and learning about environmental sustainability and climate-related preparedness.<sup>88</sup> The Red Ready Program targets the ongoing scale-up and capacity building of volunteers in disaster risk management, first aid, WASH and other key areas, supported by both IFRC and ICRC.

## Challenges



Localisation in PNG has been debated in the humanitarian sector since the Grand Bargain. However, within the country localisation has mostly been considered a foreign idea, and because of this, there is a lack of understanding about how it can be implemented and its likely impacts. This has stifled the localisation movement and approaches within PNG.



While locally-led initiatives are being implemented in PNG, a clear and coordinated approach is needed to elevate them for learning and replication.

## Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the country

The PNGRCS is PNG's National Society. The Movement Partners (IFRC, ICRC, ARC) supported PNGRCS to scale up and build capacity in the areas of health, disaster management, communications and organisational development, including assisting communities affected by tribal fighting in Enga, Hela and Southern Highlands provinces.

85 HAG and Institute for Human Security and Social Change – La Trobe University, [Risk Communication and Community Engagement in the AHP COVID-19 Response in Papua New Guinea: Evaluation and Learning Report](#), 2023; HAG, Institute for Human Security and Social Change – La Trobe University and COLAB, [COVID-19 Pacific and Timor-Leste preparedness and recovery NGO partnership: Final evaluation report](#), 2023

86 Hoatson, L, [PNG C-19 Outbreak: 2020-2022 CAN DO Evaluation](#), 2022; HAG and Institute for Human Security and Social Change – La Trobe University, [Risk Communication and Community Engagement in the AHP COVID-19 Response in Papua New Guinea: Evaluation and Learning Report](#), 2023

87 IFRC, [PNG Country Plan 2022](#)

88 IFRC, [PNG Country Plan 2022](#)

## The PNG Red Cross Society

The PNGRCS was established through an Act of Parliament – the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society Incorporation Act – in 1976, and was officially recognised as an auxiliary to the Government of PNG in the space of humanitarian support. It was recognised by the ICRC in 1977, and admitted into the IFRC the same year. The PNGRCS has 12 branches, 21 National Society staff and over 850 National Society volunteers. Its strategic priorities are climate and environment, disasters and crises, health and wellbeing, migration and displacement, and power and inclusion. IFRC, ICRC and ARC are PNGRC’s key partners, with engagement ranging from strategic and operational coordination to capacity development through funding and technical support.<sup>89</sup>

The PNGRCS is a member of the PNG National Disaster Management Committee, comprised of almost 42 organisations involved in the disaster management space (IFRC and ICRC act as observers when needed<sup>90</sup>). Regional branches coordinate with the respective Provincial Disaster Coordinators to deliver humanitarian support to conflict or protracted communities (as declared by the National Disaster Management Office).

89 IFRC, [PNG Country Plan 2022](#); ICRC, [PNG Red Cross and ICRC sign Partnership Agreement](#)

90 IFRC, [PNG Country Plan 2022](#)

*Photo: Shutterstock*



## COUNTRY OVERVIEW - PAKISTAN



### Key Humanitarian Crisis Timeline (in the last 5 years)

#### ● 2022

- 33 million people affected by floods in 94 districts during the 2022 monsoon season.

#### ● March-May 2022

- Heatwaves - Pakistan experienced some of the highest temperatures recorded in the past 60 years.



Population size: **240,214,335 million**



People in need: **20.6 million**



Humanitarian aid in 2022:

- Total incoming funding: **US\$401,792,886**
- % allocated directly to L/N actors: **0.9%**
- National NGOs/CSOs: **US\$4,000,195**
- International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement: **US\$7,205,130**
- Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies: **US\$171,292**

Photo: ARC



## Humanitarian context

Pakistan is the world's fifth most populated country and has a complex humanitarian background. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts are common; they frequently cause severe human and material losses, displacing populations, and damaging infrastructure and livelihoods. The 2022 floods in Pakistan alone affected 33 million people.<sup>91</sup> Pakistan also suffers from border conflict with Afghanistan; an estimated 5 million people have been displaced from these areas over the past decade.<sup>92</sup> Conflict between Pakistan and India exacerbates insecurity in the sub-continent. In addition, the country is currently hosting an estimated 2.1 million documented (1.4 million Proof of Registration Cardholders and 840,000 Afghan Citizenship Cardholders) and further 775,000 undocumented Afghan refugees.<sup>93</sup>

Policy changes have affected the humanitarian context in Pakistan. In 2013, the Government of Pakistan enacted tighter restrictions to manage INGOs, including a stricter visa policy for international aid workers. It also mandated a 'no objection' certificate for staff from international organisations to travel to areas categorised as restricted.<sup>94</sup> This policy gradually changed the way INGOs operated in Pakistan, with one of the most visible changes an increase in locally staffed organisations.<sup>95</sup>

## Key approaches to localisation and impact

Pakistan has developed strategies to promote localisation in humanitarian response by focusing on engaging and empowering local actors. Some of the key approaches include localisation working groups facilitating coordination and dialogue between local and international actors such as the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum (PHF), National Humanitarian Network (NHN), NEAR and START

Network. Several funding mechanisms exist, such as the Pakistan Humanitarian Pooled Fund and the START Fund Hub, which prioritises support for local organisations.<sup>96</sup> These initiatives have brought increased investment in programs that enhance the organisational and technical capacities of local and national NSAs. They also enable direct funding to local and national NSAs, improving resource efficiency and effectiveness, reducing dependency and facilitating direct flow of funds to the local level.

## Challenges

-  Strict funding requirements and reporting procedures may limit the ability of local actors to implement innovative and context-specific approaches.
-  Ensuring aid delivery adheres to humanitarian principles is a challenge in regions where local actors have political or social affiliations or political figures attempt to influence or shape how aid is delivered.
-  Earmarked funding still remains a critical issue, reducing flexibility and adaptability in response, and reducing opportunities for local and national NSAs to access resources.
-  Small local organisations receive insufficient recognition and support, and consequently face barriers to accessing funding, resources, and platforms for collaboration and coordination.
-  Complex registration processes, such as obtaining no objection certificates and charity registration, can prevent local, national and international actors from operating freely and responsively. Often, these bureaucratic processes create significant delays in commencing and delivering work.

91 Caritas Australia. 'Pakistan Flood Disaster Affects More Than 33 million People', 2022

92 HAG, GLOW, 'COVID-19: Implications for Localisation, a Case Study of Afghanistan and Pakistan, HPG Working Paper', 2021

93 UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan 2022*, 2022

94 HAG, GLOW, 'COVID-19: Implications for Localisation, a Case Study of Afghanistan and Pakistan, HPG Working Paper', 2021

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

## Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in the country

The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PCRS) is the host National Society and one of the key actors within the country. IFRC, ICRC and PRCS collaborate with UN agencies, government entities, LNNGOs, international NGOs, and donor agencies to enhance coordination and resource mobilisation for effective response. IFRC, ICRC, PRCS and participating National Societies also collaborate to provide emergency humanitarian assistance in Pakistan, such as the provision of healthcare facilities in conflict-affected areas, medical supplies and training, and capacity-building programs for PRCS and local actors. In addition, ICRC engages in advocacy and dialogue to promote humanitarian principles and protection of civilians. Three participating National Societies present in Pakistan (the German, Norwegian and Italian Red Cross) support PRCS, but PRCS also receives support from other societies, including the British and Canadian Red Cross.<sup>97</sup> IFRC supports PRCS in coordinating and information sharing with all in-country partners during a response.

## The Pakistan Red Crescent Society

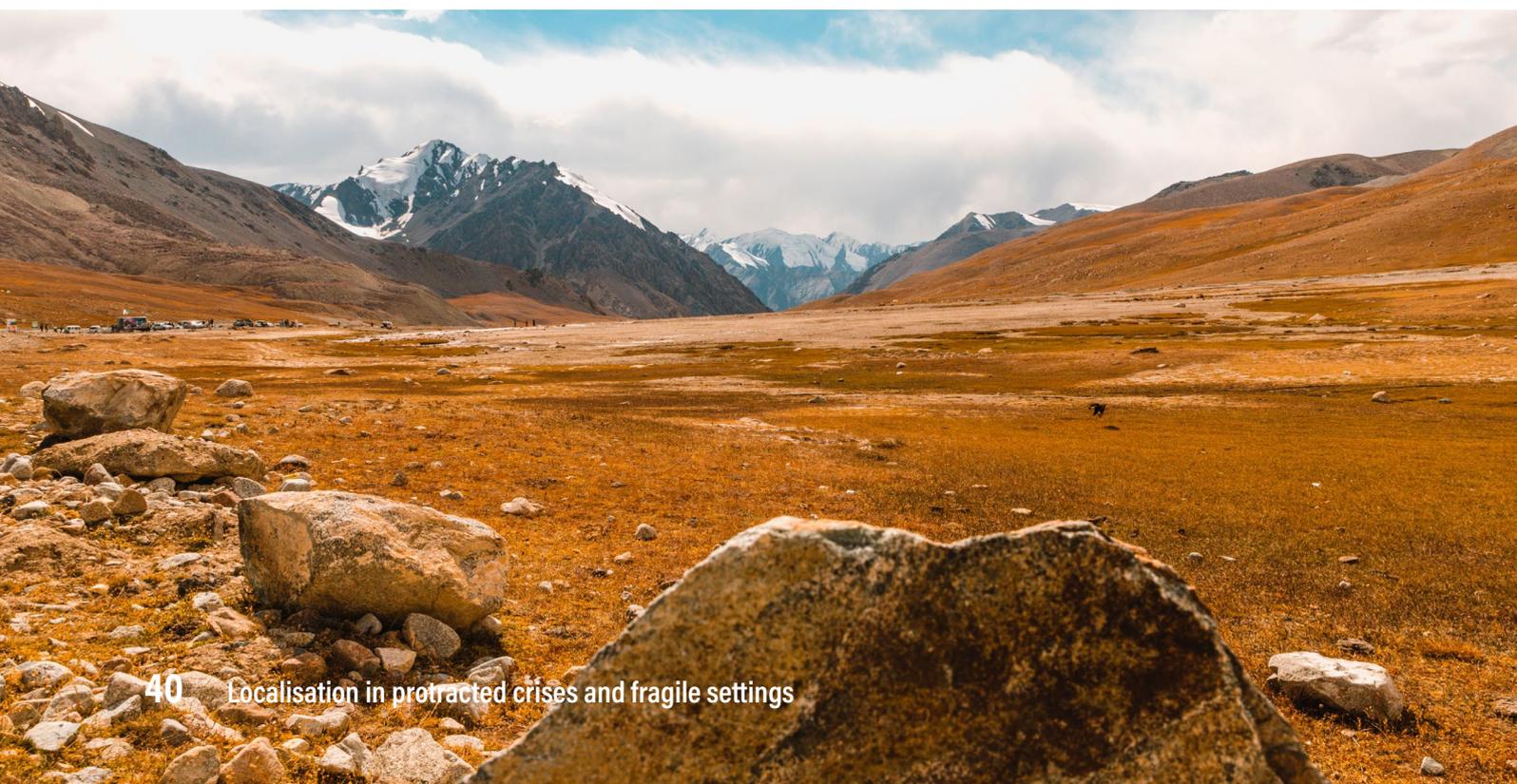
The PCRS has 60 National Society branches, 664 National Society Staff and over 2900 volunteers; it aims to reach 2.2 million people in need in 2023. Pakistan faces several natural hazards and has high violence rates. At present, ongoing emergency responses focus on the provision of WASH, shelter and livelihoods, protection and disaster risk reduction. ICRC assists PRCS in providing emergency humanitarian assistance in Pakistan. The IFRC provides technical support and mentorship to PCRS, which assists in strengthening the knowledge, skills and organisational development of local and national NSAs, and enhancing their impact in humanitarian response. ICRC and PRCS participate in coordination mechanisms with other humanitarian actors for effective response.<sup>98</sup> ARC supports PCRS when an appeal is made through IFRC for funds and capacity support.<sup>99</sup>

97 IFRC, [Pakistan Country Plan 2023](#)

98 IFRC, [Pakistan Country Plan 2023](#)

99 Interview 17

*Photo: Aq Dill on Pexels*



## SECTION 2. APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING LOCALLY-LED RESPONSE

This section contains positive and constructive examples of approaches that intermediaries have tested or implemented to support locally-led response in complex settings. Humanitarian actors can draw inspiration from these examples, learn from them and replicate or adapt them as needed.

Partnerships and principled assistance are presented as central approaches to supporting locally-led response in complex crises, and as foundational to trust. This is followed by an analysis of humanitarian actors' localisation approaches in three key areas: risk and compliance, funding, and organisational strengthening and capacity sharing.

The approaches are interrelated; any change in one area will have an effect (positive or negative) on others. For example, unfeasibly high compliance expectations have widespread flow-on effects throughout humanitarian policy and practice cycles. They influence the amount of funding that local/national organisations receive, the organisations invited to establish partnerships, the technical support they receive, the security arrangements for their staff, their ability to shape response priorities, their autonomy and institutional viability, collective choices about advocacy, and ultimately the quality of humanitarian aid.

### 1. THE CORE: PARTNERSHIPS AND PRINCIPLED ASSISTANCE



#### Challenge statements

- Partnerships and provision of principled aid require complex political and ethical decisions.
- Local/national and international actors continue to struggle to deliver principled aid whilst supporting localisation in complex settings.

The research uncovered many examples of obstacles to partnerships in the complex case study contexts. These included different perspectives on the role of humanitarian principles in decision-making, and how to balance it with the opportunities and risks that are created in such situations.<sup>100</sup>

**You are saying that being impartial in this is the principle. What about the overarching principle which is to support the people in need? Because that's the one you end up violating by being so focused on these**

**principles. On the ground, it's messy and difficult and sometimes I fear that insisting on these [principles] actually creates or heightens the risks for local partners. (International actor in Myanmar)**

Actors point to trust in partnerships as crucial to navigating conversations and decision-making in complex crisis contexts. However, 35 per cent of local/national actors who responded to our survey identified a lack of trust in local actors as an ongoing challenge to promoting localisation – more than any other issue (Figure 5).

<sup>100</sup> Interviews 7, 22, 27, 41, 64 & 65

**Figure 5: What do you see as the most persistent challenge to promoting localisation in complex and fragile crises?**



## Approaches adopted to overcome these challenges

Across the five countries, there were examples of intermediaries adapting existing processes or testing new ways to build trust and work with local partners to deliver principled aid. This is particularly the case in Myanmar and Afghanistan, which, given their operational contexts, pose the most pressing and critical issues.

**Working with local partners to understand what shapes principled aid.** Intermediaries are increasingly engaging their local partners to understand local perceptions of principled assistance and to articulate effective, principled and localised approaches and initiatives.<sup>101</sup> Actors reinforced that these approaches need to be adapted to the specific dynamics that influence locally-led response at a country level, and the operational environment.

**It's a complex world and it's not one size fits all.<sup>102</sup>**  
(Global level representative)

In Myanmar, intermediary actors provided examples of working with partners to identify and ameliorate the risks associated with principled aid. This included agreeing on the

most appropriate methods to collect and protect confidential data on vulnerable groups, and how to provide impartial assistance without information about needs.<sup>103</sup> It also included carefully assessing the challenges and implications of working with authorities to gain access to communities, and the need to better understand the implications of principled neutrality for their ability to assist. In Bangladesh, this involved working closely with local partners to understand their risks, priorities and knowledge in relation to the provision of impartial aid with host communities and Rohingya communities. National Societies provided examples of other Movement intermediary partners, such as IFRC and ICRC, being important allies in supporting principled aid decisions and discussions.<sup>104</sup>

**Creating stronger and more effective and equitable partnerships.** Strong, long-term partnerships founded on joint decision-making and two-way accountability support better planning and navigation of the complexities of principled aid and building trust. Many participants identified trust as a critical precondition to discussing and approaching principled aid.<sup>105</sup> This is particularly the case in Myanmar, where intermediaries have reduced their direct implementation role and are working more through partners. Local and intermediary actors asserted that partnership processes such as developing strategies and agreeing on partnership principles and ways of working had been critical to progress on localisation.<sup>106</sup> Co-designing programs and joint decision-making on focus, scope and objectives enabled partners to use complementary knowledge, expertise and skillsets to actualise principles such as neutrality and impartiality, and critically interrogate the operational and reputational implications for local partners.<sup>107</sup>

101 Interviews 3, 6, 7, 19, 20 & 57

102 Interview 11

103 Interviews 60, 62–65

104 Interviews 5, 16, 38, 39 & 61

105 Interviews 2, 11, 22, 28 & 47

106 Interviews 15, 29, 31, 48, 52, 57 & 63

107 Interviews 3, 27, 30, 57–59

### Building trust to support stronger partnerships and enable delivery of principled aid.

Trust-building processes and initiatives are important, particularly when trust between international and local partners has eroded. Intermediaries highlighted that investing in interpersonal relationships and connections, as opposed to a singular focus on compliance, established greater trust in partnerships, but needed to be balanced through two-way accountability and transparency between partners.<sup>108</sup> Several participants mentioned attempts to build more trust with the HCT in Myanmar through greater local actor representation and influence in decision-making.<sup>109</sup> Other initiatives, such as indirect cost sharing agreements, had also promoted trust between partners, resulting in an increased sense of equity and decision-making power.<sup>110</sup> National Societies noted an increase in trust with Movement partners because their leadership and visibility in projects were prioritised, and they were included in decision-making on technical advice and funding.<sup>111</sup>

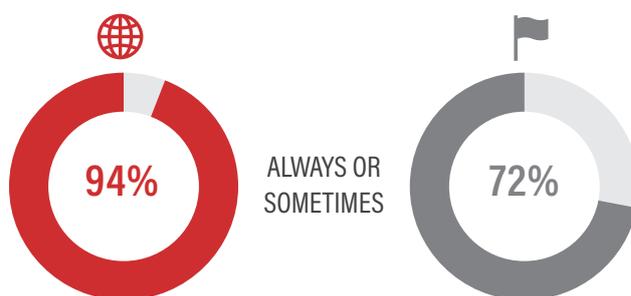
**Ultimately, trust is an outcome that emerges from the combined efforts of all stakeholders involved. It plays a vital role in facilitating localisation initiatives. When trust is established, local actors feel empowered and supported to take on responsibilities, make decisions, and contribute to the overall success of the project.**  
*(International actor in Pakistan)*

### Defining the specific complementary roles and abilities of each partner in supporting principled aid.

Intermediaries and local partners highlighted instances of discussions about partners' roles, capabilities and challenges in supporting principled approaches resulting in greater common understanding and appreciation.<sup>112</sup> In Afghanistan, local actors

provided examples of their international intermediary partners supporting liaison and negotiation with de facto or government authorities on issues of needs-based and impartial humanitarian assistance.<sup>113</sup> This allowed for broader recognition that whilst certain and specific factors shape and influence local actors' ability to engage with and uphold humanitarian principles, doing so is an issue that all actors face, including donors. This was also reflected in the survey, in which most local and international actors identified difficulties in upholding humanitarian principles alongside localisation commitments (Figure 6), but recognised that the challenge is comparatively greater for local/national NSAs (Figure 7).

**Figure 6: Does your organisation find it challenging to uphold humanitarian principles whilst implementing localisation commitments in complex and fragile contexts?**



**Figure 7: Do you think it is more difficult for local and national actors to uphold humanitarian principles in complex and fragile crises?**



108 Interview 62

109 Interviews 58, 64

110 Interviews 8, 13, 57, 60 & 63

111 Interview 36, 37, 48 & 50

112 Interviews 12, 14, 18, 38, 47 & 63

113 Interview 31

## 2. RISK AND COMPLIANCE



### Challenge statement

- Risk and compliance requirements are higher in complex and protracted settings and affect local/national partners disproportionately.

Risk and compliance in complex crisis contexts are some of the greatest challenges in supporting locally-led response, with significant flow-on effects to other areas. This was reflected in the research, with participants confirming that risk and compliance combined to form a significant roadblock to localisation. In contexts such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, operational complexities deepened as sanctions (particularly in Afghanistan) and financial transfer system challenges (banking system collapse in Afghanistan; informal transfer systems are used in both Afghanistan and Myanmar) increased risks and compliance requirements for both intermediaries and their local/national partners.

Most local actors highlighted that compliance and due diligence requirements continue to be prohibitively complex for them, with many giving examples of inflexible donor practices. Precious resources must be devoted to meeting these requirements, and unfortunately they, rather than effective partnership practices or programming, shape the ways of working in partnership between intermediaries and their local/national NSAs. Risk is mostly transferred to local actors, who face the greatest threats to their safety and security.<sup>114</sup>

**Humanitarian supply chains from donors to intermediaries to local actors (us) require many compliance requirements, all of which essentially accumulate and dump most risk to the local actors both unintentionally and intentionally. (Local actor in Myanmar)**

### Approaches adopted to overcome this challenge

**Using risk-sharing instead of risk transfer practices.** Risk sharing can be understood as 'reasonable sharing of the burden of preventative measures and reasonable sharing of responsibility for materialising risks', and is a key aspect of current Grand Bargain commitments and reporting.<sup>115</sup> Across the five contexts, intermediaries reported risk-sharing approaches that can be learned from and scaled up. However, some actors did not recognise these as risk-sharing approaches or were unable to point to examples, highlighting that there remains a gap between thinking and practice.<sup>116</sup> Approaches reported included:

- ▶ Sharing financial risks. Several intermediaries reported absorbing financial risks as a result

<sup>114</sup> Interviews 5, 10, 21, 27, 28, 31, 39, 60, 63 & 64

<sup>115</sup> Risk Sharing Platform, Government of Netherlands, ICRC and InterAction, [Risk sharing framework: Enhancing the impact of humanitarian action through improved risk sharing](#), 2023; see also Government of Netherlands and ICRC, [Risk sharing in practice: Success stories, enablers, and barriers to risk sharing in the humanitarian sector](#), June 2022, and Metcalfe-Hough, V, Fenton, W & Manji, F, [The Grand Bargain in 2022: Independent review](#), June 2023

<sup>116</sup> Interviews 3, 20, 37, 50 & 60; see also Government of Netherlands and ICRC, [Risk sharing in practice: Success stories, enablers, and barriers to risk sharing in the humanitarian sector](#), June 2022

of increased compliance requirements from donors (particularly in contexts such as Afghanistan, where sanctions have been placed on funding provided to the country). For example, partnership agreements stipulated that any repayment of donor funds found to be misused, including loss and damages, would be repaid by the intermediary.<sup>117</sup>

- ▶ Supporting partners engaging in collective risk management. Some intermediaries reported supporting partners to engage in coordination and joint mechanisms with other local/national partners to discuss and plan risk-sharing approaches.
- ▶ Developing a risk-sharing framework. Through an international coalition led by intermediaries, a sector-wide risk-sharing framework was developed that sets out best practice standards and approaches, including in complex crisis settings.<sup>118</sup>

#### **Providing overhead costs for local partners to resource risk management and/or security.**

Some intermediaries stipulated set amounts for overhead costs for risk management systems, processes and staff. Many research participants regarded this as critical and opined that it should be standard practice in intermediary and donor policy for all complex settings, particularly when international actors lack access or intermediaries are not implementing directly, as in Afghanistan.<sup>119</sup>

**Building in contingency funding options for emerging risks.** Participants gave positive examples of partnership agreements between local actors and intermediaries, including default contingency funding options for large-scale and significant risks. For example, two local partners in Afghanistan identified increased operational

and safety and security risks arising from the ban imposed on female employees, and needed to renegotiate salaries and additional funding from their international partners to manage them.<sup>120</sup>

**Designing adaptable financial and compliance risk processes.** Several donors and intermediaries reported adaptable and flexible approaches to managing due diligence and compliance requirements. In Myanmar, intermediaries reported successfully advocating to donors for adapting compliance requirements around the storage of physical documents when offices were moving frequently, digital storage, and cancelling field visits due to safety risks for partners. Complex crisis settings require additional effort, time and resources to manage risks. Participants gave examples of jointly agreeing on capacity support for risk management.<sup>121</sup>

**The compliance requirements would be, in nature, dangerous for them because they would be asked for beneficiary data, geographical locations, in Myanmar, they are asked to keep documents for five years that could put the local actors in danger. (Donor representative)**

#### **Collaborative and equitable risk planning.**

How risk is perceived, prioritised and framed is increasingly being reconceptualised in partnerships. Participants reported concerted (though not widespread) efforts to move away from risk transfer and/or aversion and demand driven by compliance and move towards partnership processes that allow for open discussion about the intersection of risk and supporting locally-led response. Many partners recognised this as a crucial step in moving towards a more nuanced discussion of the opportunities to better support local actors, and

117 Interviews 2, 49, 51, 59 & 60

118 Risk Sharing Platform, Government of Netherlands, ICRC and InterAction, [Risk sharing framework: Enhancing the impact of Humanitarian action through improved risk sharing](#), 2023

119 Interviews 27–31. This is improving across the donor and intermediary landscape more broadly; for example, see [Development Initiatives and UNICEF, Indirect costs for local and national partners: A mapping of the current policies and practices of UN agencies and INGOs](#), June 2023

120 Interviews 27 & 28

121 Interviews 7, 31, 49, 62 & 65

more effective humanitarian response.<sup>122</sup> When donors have sufficient personnel in countries experiencing complex crises, such discussions with intermediaries and local partners have facilitated an understanding of risk mitigation and supported continued funding. For example, discussions facilitated ongoing donor funding during the coup in Myanmar in 2022, which caused many other donors to withdraw.<sup>123</sup>

### **Supporting partners to meet compliance and due diligence requirements and exploring due diligence ‘passporting’.**

Many intermediaries reported an increased focus on this in recent years to support localisation efforts. Due diligence is cumbersome and time-consuming and required for each new funding application. Some intermediaries have supported collaborative processes or streamlined their assessment processes. This includes the work done by Charter for Change members to create a common tool for due diligence review – that will require local/

national actors to only go through single a review with one of the partners.<sup>124</sup> This approach has also been used in Afghanistan by the UN and other actors by using AHF qualification as a benchmark for local/national actors to be considered eligible for funding. Local actors, such as social movements and community organisations, continue to lack support to meet compliance requirements in order to receive funding.<sup>125</sup> The establishment of local intermediary networks has been an important means of managing compliance requirements (see Box 3).

**This is not the time for a long list of due diligence which many of us, even INGOs, would not be able to meet. We have advocated quite strongly on a number of fronts. I have seen that for donors that are based in country, even the UN donors, they have been more flexible ... They have been quite open to changes. So flexibility is very important in this protracted situation. (Donor representative)**

### **Box 3: Myanmar Local Intermediary Actors Network**

Myanmar LIA is a local network consisting of 14 LNNGOs working in disability, humanitarian response, and development. This network was established primarily to enable peer sharing and capacity strengthening with local CSOs to promote localisation. Capacity-strengthening activities focus on project cycle management, finance, accounting, monitoring and assessment. The network also functions as an independent platform to avoid conflicts of interest and interference from donors in pursuing a localisation agenda. LIA gives at least 50 per cent of its funding to downstream partners. To preserve its independence, LIA does not accept funding from donors who seek to change its operating mechanisms. Donors also have to use LIA-specific localisation indicators when designing their programs. This practice expands the opportunity for local direct funding and eliminates some of the challenges local and national actors face in meeting onerous compliance processes.

**What are the advantages? Local direct funding and compliance. Most local CSOs do not pass due diligence/compliance requirements. That is where LIA can come in. [The LIA] took care of standards/requirements/compliances. Similar but different accountability and transparency guidelines are practised by members of LIA. By consolidating all those guidelines, we create common LIA guidelines. (Local actor in Myanmar)**

122 Interviews 11, 22, 27, 47 & 64

123 Interviews 59, 60, 62, 64 & 65

124 Solis M, *Due diligence passporting – a possible solution to a locally-identified challenge*, September 2023

125 Interviews 2, 5, 6, 27, 31, 49, 64 & 65

### 3. FUNDING



#### Challenge statement

- In protracted and complex settings, direct funding to local/national partners may reduce and short-term project-based funding may increase.

Interviewees reported a reduction in their direct funding in the context of fragility, and any funding they received was focused largely on short-term projects. This constrained their ability to implement programming and retain staff.<sup>126</sup>

#### Approaches adopted to overcome this challenge

**Increasing use of and facilitating access to country-based pooled funding and similar mechanisms.** In recent years, pooled funding has become a favoured intermediary mechanism. In complex crisis settings, pooled funding offers specific benefits to local/national actors, including simpler management of compliance requirements. Local actors in the case study countries highlighted how intermediary partners had facilitated access to these mechanisms.<sup>127</sup>

#### Box 4: Country-Based Pooled Funds

Country-based pooled funds offer an important pathway for local and national actors to receive funding, even in contexts where donors are reverting to fund international intermediaries more (particularly the UN) as a means of transferring risk management responsibilities. Localisation is a secondary aim for CBPFs (the primary goal is meeting humanitarian needs). Therefore, CBPFs in several countries have been making considerable gains in working more with local/national actors, including providing greater opportunities for local/national actors to be part of governance structures.<sup>128</sup>

The table below shows how CBPFs allocated funding to LNNGOs in 2021 and 2022.<sup>129</sup>

	2021 Total Funds	% 2021 Funds that went to National NGOs	2022 Total Funds	% 2022 Funds that went to National NGOs
Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF)	USD 165 Mn	18.0%	USD 283 Mn	21.6%
Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF)	USD 20.9 Mn	31.9%	USD 24.7 Mn	30.5%
All CBPF	USD 1.03 Bn	26.2%	USD 1.23 Bn	27.7%

126 Interviews 18, 28, 49, 60 & 62

127 Interviews 10, 11, 12 & 61

128 UN OCHA, [Country-based Pooled Funds Global Guidelines](#), 2022. HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, [Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar](#), December 2020

129 UN OCHA, [Country Base Pooled Funds Data Hub](#)

**Providing more flexible funding.** Some intermediary representatives reported that donors have been increasingly flexible or have introduced flexible funding processes for local actors.<sup>130</sup> The State of the Humanitarian System Report highlighted that ‘donors shifted to more flexible funding in 2020 to respond to COVID-19, but by 2021 much of this flexibility had receded’, and that while unearmarked funding rose to \$3.4 billion in 2020, it fell well below 2018 levels by 2021.<sup>131</sup> While most earmarked funding has traditionally been humanitarian,<sup>132</sup> unearmarked funding has risen in popularity in recent years, including in protracted settings (see Box 5). Movement appeals have also supported flexible funding to National Societies, and partners such as ARC and IFRC have worked to reduce earmarking of funds in Pakistan and Myanmar.<sup>133</sup>

**Box 5: Flexible funding practices support context shifts in Afghanistan**

In December 2022, the interim Taliban authority passed a directive banning Afghan women from working in NGOs. This impaired the operation of LNNGOs, with UN Women reporting that 94 per cent had fully or partially halted operations due to the ban.<sup>134</sup> Two intermediary actors in Afghanistan reported working with local partners to adjust funding practices so that women workers’ salaries could continue to be paid. This enabled the partners to retain staff and continue to deliver assistance.<sup>135</sup>

**Designing flexible financial processes and policies.** The ‘how’ of transferring funds is consequential in complex crisis settings, in which additional restrictions on foreign funding often apply. Intermediaries reported increasing flexibility through steps such as adapting financial authorisation and control processes and policies, and using secondary bank accounts if the local partner’s primary bank account was not functioning.<sup>136</sup> In Myanmar, some intermediary and donor actors use national bank accounts to enable direct transfer of funds to local actors, removing the difficulty (and cost) of currency conversion for local actors. The UN OCHA-managed Myanmar Humanitarian Fund has increased its flexibility in providing funds when delays occur in project timeframes or implementation. Agreeing on feasible and practical parameters for budget variance amounts is also critical, with examples provided of flexibility on this, and of the problems that zero budget variance approaches pose. Intermediaries must also consider issues such as ceilings for funding envelopes when transferring funds, because the need for multiple transactions due to low ceilings complicates an already complex compliance environment.<sup>137</sup>

**If it weren’t for some actors and a few INGOs in Myanmar facilitating local actors in using hundis [a form of remittance instrument to transfer money from place to place] etc., they would be stuck because they wouldn’t be able to receive the funds. (Donor representative)**

130 Interviews 14, 29, 48, 61 & 63

131 ALNAP, The State of the Humanitarian System, 2022

132 OECD, Earmarked funding to multilateral organisations: how is it used and what constitutes good practice?, 2020

133 Interview 19

134 ACAPS, Thematic report - Afghanistan: Analysis of localisation challenges, February 2023

135 Interviews 27 & 28

136 Interviews 9, 57, 58, 60, 62–64

137 Interviews 27, 39, 59, 62 & 64

### Box 6: Flexible funding within the Movement

The Movement has increasingly sought to provide more flexible funding in complex settings, in alignment with IFRC's commitment under the Grand Bargain to provide 25 per cent funding allocations to local and national actors. It does this through adapting processes and systems as part of its large-scale mechanisms, such as the National Society Investment Alliance and the DREF. The National Society Investment Alliance is a pooled funding mechanism that supports the institutional capacity of National Societies operating in complex contexts. The DREF's application process was designed to be easily accessed by National Societies through an online application process. In 2022, National Societies directly received and managed 51.6 million Swiss francs, which accounted for 86 per cent of the total allocation. The funding also facilitated locally-led humanitarian action by incorporating dedicated training for National Societies and IFRC delegations in the standardised DREF training package. It has also established a collection of lessons learned on an operational learning platform, which allows National Societies to gain insights from previous operations.

Offering rapid funding processes and unrestricted funding. Mechanisms to support rapid funding to local/national actors becomes more important when there are stringent compliance and due diligence requirements. In Myanmar, intermediaries reported increased use of unrestricted funding in contexts where there was rapid escalation of humanitarian need, whilst awaiting approvals from donors to reallocate or provide additional funding.<sup>138</sup>

**We have given that amount of confidence to partners to give a go ahead with the funding we have. (Donor representative)**

138 Interviews 57, 61, 62, 64 & 65

139 Interview 59, 60, 62 & 63

140 Interviews 37, 38 & 61

**Enabling direct funding relationships for local actors with donors.** In Myanmar, there were examples of intermediaries enabling local partners to develop direct funding relationships with donors, with the intermediaries acting as sub-partners to the agreements. Interviewees said some donors were increasingly open to this arrangement, and that it was critical to show evidence of local actors leading contracts.<sup>139</sup>

**Covering overheads/core costs.** In Bangladesh and Myanmar, intermediary and local actors reported developing policies and agreements on the allocation of overheads/core costs.

**After continuous requests, some UN agencies now allocate a portion of the project budget, around seven per cent, to cover our central-level staff expenses. Additionally, when we participate in short-term projects, they contribute a percentage of the salaries of our staff. (Local actor in Bangladesh)**

Australian Red Cross has supported National Societies in the region, such as PNGRCS, through core costs initiatives (see Box 7). National Societies interviewed for this research were supportive of ARC's shift towards a more locally-led approach, noting that it recognised some of the key benefits and challenges for their specific contexts. For example, funding ongoing capacity building or internal strengthening, as opposed to program costs alone, was not a feature of other support provided to National Societies. However, National Society representatives continued to highlight their minimal role in decision-making over key issues such as funding. For MRCS and PNGRCS, decisions continue to be led by Movement partners, including ICRC and IFRC acting as gatekeepers for funding from other National Societies.<sup>140</sup>

### Box 7: Core cost initiatives supported by Australian Red Cross

Australian Red Cross has worked with PNGRCS systematically over the last three years on institutional strengthening as a foundational aspect of effective functioning during natural disasters and other crises. Large proportions of financial (through a core cost initiative) and technical support over multiple years have been directed towards this objective.<sup>141</sup> These funds were used to support staff salaries and accounting software training to the Finance Department and IT staff. In addition, through remote technical support, ARC established a continuous dialogue with PNGRCS to build a clear understanding of its strategic goal. Through this dialogue, ARC and PNGRCS jointly defined their localisation agenda, including the type of engagement and support required to meet objectives.

141 Interview 14

Photo: ARC



## 4. ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING AND CAPACITY SHARING



### Challenge statement

- Protracted and complex settings demand increased focus on technical accountability and minimum standards, and reduce time and focus on partner priorities of capacity sharing and strengthening leadership.

This research confirmed that in complex contexts there is less emphasis on and investment in strengthening local/national actors' systems and processes. This undermines their ability to deliver aid and be leading humanitarian actors. Default selection of and partnering with local organisations that can already meet the organisational standards of intermediaries, as well as being a piecemeal and non-strategic approach, does not support organisational sustainability. Workloads increase for local/national actors in contexts such as Myanmar and Afghanistan that experience multiple crises, due to restricted operating access without parallel investment in building systems and processes to support organisational growth.

The research further highlighted that new technical capabilities required in complex settings need to be invested in and supported. This specifically includes adapted approaches to protection and accountability to affected populations.<sup>142</sup>

### Approaches adopted to overcome this challenge

**Institutional strengthening.** Participants involved in longer-term partnerships identified a greater focus on institutional strengthening approaches for local actors. This included investments in organisational financial systems, governance processes and human resources. Intermediaries across several contexts also reported agreeing on specific strategies and targets for organisational strengthening that included increasing local actors' ability to apply for and receive international funding.<sup>143</sup> These partnerships were also more likely to continue institutional strengthening activities despite shifts in context, such as advocating to donors for continued investment when crises escalated – particularly important in these complex settings.<sup>144</sup> Movement members working in complex settings have increased support for institutional strengthening within their localisation agendas.<sup>145</sup> This includes ongoing capacity building support and greater access to funding (indicated in Box 6 above, as well through IFRC's [Capacity Building Fund](#)), as well as country-level partnerships between Movement members.<sup>146</sup>

142 Interviews 5, 12, 17 & 36

143 Interviews 20, 28, 48 & 52

144 Interviews 10, 11, 21, 31 & 49; HAG, 'Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan', 2023 (forthcoming)

145 Interviews 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 13, 50 & 57

146 ICRC, [PNG Red Cross and ICRC sign Partnership Agreement](#)

**Implementing adaptable support processes.** A clear understanding of capacity gaps of partners enables intermediaries to identify the best approaches to providing the support required. While in-person training was considered the best way to provide capacity support, intermediaries are now showing that they are open to using different approaches as needed. This includes providing real-time remote support, rather than one-off training. The remote support

model was used more widely out of necessity during COVID-19 due to contextual limitations,<sup>147</sup> but is proving to be an effective approach in contexts where access is restricted (due to travel restrictions, conflict or visa limitations, such as in Myanmar). The ARC has also used this approach to good effect, with travel still occurring as required.<sup>148</sup>

147 HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, *Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar*, 2020

148 Interview 58; ARC, *Local response in a global pandemic: A case study of the Red Cross response to Tropical Cyclone Harold during COVID-19 in Vanuatu and Fiji*, 2020

Photo: ARC



## SECTION 3. UNDERSTANDING IMPACT

---

This section explores evidence in relation to the impacts that local/national NSAs (including Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies) are experiencing in complex crisis settings due to intermediary and donor approaches to strengthen localisation. The impacts discussed in this section are broader shifts in relation to humanitarian response effectiveness resulting from the practices that intermediaries and donors have implemented in the four domains of the framework explored in the previous section.

### What are the emerging impacts of existing intermediary approaches?

The research produced evidence that suggests several impacts, both positive and negative, of the intermediary approaches in complex settings explored in the previous section. Evidence of improved outcomes for communities or local organisations provides a basis for scaling up localisation practices. However, several caveats exist. Impacts cannot be directly or solely tied to specific localisation approaches or initiatives. Each approach is delivered in the context of a broader program, operational constraints and geographic context. These broader factors may undermine the positive impact of even the most promising approaches.

In this research, several negative examples in Myanmar and Afghanistan reflect the extent of operational challenges, whilst positive examples in Pakistan, PNG and Bangladesh may reflect a more flexible environment in which to adapt localisation approaches. Moreover, the impact of localised approaches remains hard to measure in the absence of clearly defined intended outcomes. The research collected few examples of projects that had articulated what they intended to achieve with the localised approaches they adopted. However, participants noted that organisations that identified specific localisation outcomes

(e.g. better ways of operating in partnership or reducing direct INGO implementation/presence) generated greater benefits, such as local partners receiving additional funding or improving perceptions of partnerships quality.<sup>149</sup>

Findings from this research suggest four areas of impact emerging from intermediaries' localisation approaches:

1. Local partner organisational and technical capacity and leadership
2. Facilitation of international actors' continued implementation of programs
3. Community impact (right time, right assistance)
4. Response coordination and efficacy (e.g., better coordination in the HCT).

The corresponding sections below outline examples for these impact areas, including observed positive and negative impacts of localisation approaches.

### 1. LOCAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY AND LEADERSHIP

Investment in organisational and technical capacity has strengthened the leadership role, financial sustainability, risk management and technical skills of local partners. Positive impacts were outlined in Bangladesh, Pakistan, PNG and Myanmar, where there was more opportunity and drive to support localisation initiatives, whilst there were fewer examples in Afghanistan. This suggests that intermediaries and donors should invest more strongly and widely in organisational strengthening in high-risk and high-volatility contexts, where local organisations are increasingly implementing programming and bearing the greatest risk.

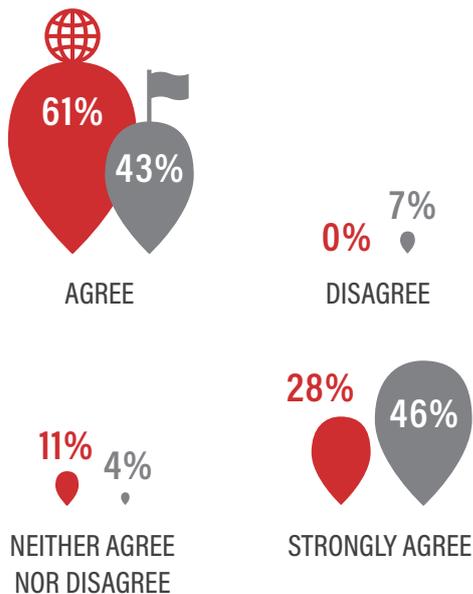
---

149 Interview 47



**Increased ability to lead and influence decision-making.** Some local partners highlighted instances in which they had taken greater leadership and contributed to key decisions.<sup>150</sup> Some National Societies also reported that this was an outcome of intentional shifts in the way Movement partners had provided organisational and technical support.<sup>151</sup> Increased ability to negotiate and engage with donors on decision-making was also mentioned as a positive impact.<sup>152</sup> Survey data shows that most participants identified local/national actors as being involved in decision-making, and that localisation initiatives have strengthened locally-led response.

**Figure 8: Overview of responses to the survey statement ‘Localisation initiatives have strengthened local leadership’.**

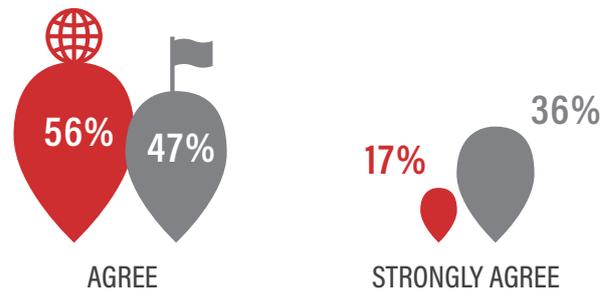


**Increased access to funding.** CBPFs, other country-based funding mechanisms and more partnerships have allowed local partners to continue operating and working with communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan in particular.<sup>153</sup> Intermediary support has increased awareness of,

knowledge about and ability to access these funding mechanisms, as well as the ability to develop funding proposals and engage in constructive discussions with intermediary and donor partners about requirements and priorities.

**Networks including PHF, NHN, START Network, and NEAR [in Pakistan] have played a crucial role in providing support to local organisations. They have helped them understand the process of submitting proposals and applying for funding [to pooled funding mechanisms], offering them valuable assistance and guidance. As a result, local organisations have received significant support and have been empowered to navigate the funding application process effectively. (National Society representative)**

**Figure 9: Percentage of local and international actors identifying that localisation initiatives have resulted in more flexible funding mechanisms.**



The research also revealed examples of increased direct funding to local actors in contexts where legal or operational requirements have created structural incentives.

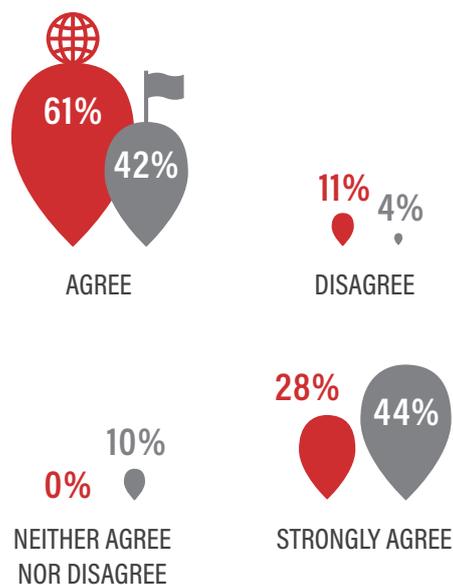
**In Myanmar, due to the demands obliging donors to work more with local actors, it is a more structured approach. We are now focused on good practices such as providing core support for local humanitarian actors and advocating for country-based pooled funding mechanisms to be more inclusive. (Donor representative)**

150 Interviews 16, 50 & 57  
 151 Interviews 19, 42  
 152 Interview 48  
 153 Interviews 10, 25, 53, 55

**Impact examples:** In Afghanistan, long-term capacity development initiatives supported by donors such as the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office strengthened local NGO institutional capacities, enabling them to receive funding from the OCHA-managed pooled fund.<sup>154</sup>

**! More effective risk management.** There were some positive examples of more effective risk planning as part of program design and clearer articulation of risk management roles between intermediaries and local partners. Survey results suggest local actors are being supported to manage risk (Figure 10). Just over half of respondents identified that donors or intermediaries always had mechanisms to support local actors to manage risk, whilst just over a third indicated this was the case sometimes.<sup>155</sup> Note that although more effective risk management practices are identified as having some positive impacts, the survey results reveal that local partners still believe they lack the resources to effectively implement risk management plans. Under half of respondents to the survey indicated that local actors consistently receive a fair share of resources to reflect and mitigate risks.<sup>156</sup>

**Figure 10: Percentage of local and international actors identifying that localisation initiatives have supported local actors to manage risks.**



**Impact example:** PRCS and MRCS received support from IFRC (as part of eight National Societies receiving this support) to set up a volunteer solidarity fund to enable Red Cross volunteers in the country to obtain self-insurance.<sup>157</sup> This was initiated during the COVID-19 epidemic as part of IFRC’s drive to create coverage for Movement volunteers who did not have insurance, but were often in the frontline of the response.<sup>158</sup> This global program received initial funding from Lacoste.

**↻ Diversions from program implementation.** In some cases, localisation approaches increased pressure on national and local organisations to meet compliance and due diligence

154 Interview 11

155 Survey results – 14 per cent of respondents stated that they don’t receive a fair share of resources to reflect the risks and responsibilities they undertake in protected and complex settings, while 38 per cent believe they only receive a fair share of resources occasionally.

156 Survey results – 48 per cent of respondents stated that they don’t receive a fair share of resources to reflect the risks and responsibilities they undertake in protected and complex settings.

157 IFRC, [COVID-19 Outbreak Operational Update #20](#), October 2020; PRCS, 2021 Annual Report; HAG, Myanmar Development Network, Trócaire and Irish Aid, [Two steps forward, one step back: Assessing the implications of COVID-19 on locally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar](#), December 2020

158 IFRC, [Guidelines for National Societies—Options for ensuring coverage for uninsured Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers impacted by COVID-19](#), May 2020

requirements. This often reflected intermediaries' well-intentioned strategies to diversify partnerships with local actors, but failure to provide adequate support to meet compliance needs.<sup>159</sup> Meeting these increased requirements is time-consuming and complex and takes resources away from programming. Some actors also outlined examples of misaligned expectations and standards due to poor partnership practices or lack of support to local partners, and in some cases, this reduced local partners' ability to establish partnerships with international actors.<sup>160</sup>

## 2. FACILITATING INTERNATIONAL ACTORS TO CONTINUE PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

An increase in partnership-based approaches – both in contexts where this has been required, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, but also in Bangladesh, Pakistan and PNG, where localisation practices have been adopted – has enabled international actors to continue to assist affected communities. Doing so would be impossible without the presence, expertise and knowledge of local partners, particularly when access is restricted. In some contexts, such as Myanmar, intermediaries have also made strategic decisions with their partners to reduce their direct implementation roles in alignment with agreed localisation outcomes (as outlined in Box 8 below).

### Box 8: Intermediaries operating with reduced access

Restrictions on international organisations sometimes mean their humanitarian/development efforts cannot reach the most affected populations. Some restrictions only allow international organisations and INGOs access to safe cities, towns and regions and not the crisis-affected areas. Hence, there have been concerns and questions about whether international actors are still attempting to reach/help affected populations or operating just for continued organisational existence. In such situations, a shift from direct implementer to intermediary roles would enable international actors to partner with local/national actors, in accordance with Grand Bargain 3.0.<sup>161</sup>

Other reported impacts of localisation were related to better partnering practices. International actors prefer to create or expand their existing partnerships with larger NGOs, who are perceived to be able to implement more effective programming and meet compliance requirements.<sup>162</sup> This can create competitive dynamics between local NGOs or small grassroots NGOs that are not receiving international funds and larger national NGOs that are, which can derail trust and undermine localisation initiatives.<sup>163</sup> For example, the creation of new networks and mechanisms associated with localisation has sidelined some smaller NGOs.<sup>164</sup> The push to work through local partners in some cases has led to shorter-term relationships in which local partners are treated as service providers, reducing investment in institutional strengthening over the longer term.<sup>165</sup>

159 Interview 65

160 Interview 52

161 Interview 59

162 Interviews 11, 22 & 52; ACAPS, *Thematic report - Afghanistan: Analysis of localisation challenges*, February 2023

163 Interviews 49 & 52

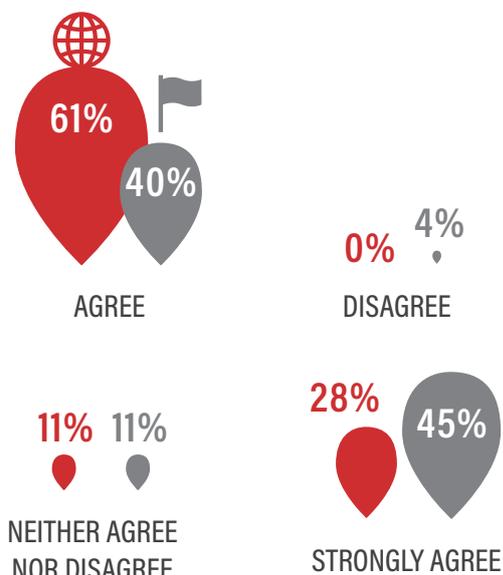
164 Interview 20; ACAPS, *Thematic report - Afghanistan: Analysis of localisation challenges*, February 2023

165 Interview 65

### 3. COMMUNITY IMPACT

All actors across the five contexts articulated the critical role of local actors in ensuring communities received the right assistance at the right time in the right way. Localisation approaches can facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex crises. For example, participants reported several examples of approaches to risk management, principled aid and flexible funding that contributed to the design and implementation of more effective and contextually relevant programming.

**Figure 11: Percentage of local and international actors identifying that localisation initiatives have effectively supported the needs of affected populations.**



**Nuanced planning through stronger partnerships.** Particularly where intermediary actors lacked access, strong partnerships allowed for more contextually appropriate approaches to principled aid, reflecting on common challenges that could be addressed during the co-design process. Strong partnerships also promote inclusion of community priorities and voices in program and proposal design.

166 Interview 12

167 Interview 7

168 Interview 23

Participants identified that working in partnership had enabled more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance in many cases.

**As a local NGO, we hold the belief that localisation strategies can have a positive impact on humanitarian aid delivery while maintaining the core principles. Through these efforts, the international actors can establish closer relationships with local NGOs and with the communities and gain a better understanding of their needs and priorities, which leads to more effective and sustainable aid delivery. (Local actor in Afghanistan)**



**Trust in local and national partners.** Local actors also identified examples of short-term and project-based partnerships omitting co-design of activities, eliminating their ability to advise on the most effective approaches to deliver principled aid.<sup>166</sup> Breakdown of trust within partnerships or irrevocable clashes in perspectives on principled aid undermined local actors' ability to deliver assistance. In contexts where trust in partnerships was based on local actors' ability to meet compliance requirements and reporting, there was less focus on understanding meaningful impact of localisation for communities.<sup>167</sup>

### 4. RESPONSE COORDINATION AND EFFICACY

The research uncovered examples of positive impacts of localisation on response coordination and efficiency, including facilitating engagement and decision-making of local actors in coordination forums. It also revealed opportunities for National Societies to strengthen coordination with local actors, notably in Pakistan.<sup>168</sup>

### Box 9: Humanitarian Country Team – Myanmar

Under the Grand Bargain workstream 2, an agreement was reached for local actors to have a seat on the Facilitation Group, and aid organisations have worked to empower locally-led response at the country level, including in HCTs and national and sub-national clusters. The UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee requested a peer-to-peer review of Myanmar's HCT. The reviewing of HCT's recommendations included strengthening HCT efforts to promote localisation in Myanmar. Increased local/national representation and leadership on the HCT will amplify the voice of local/national actors. A working group, which includes IFRC, has been created and is developing a localisation strategy for the HCT.

However, local/national actors noted that simply opening up opportunities to join HCT and other international coordination meetings does not lead to meaningful engagement.<sup>169</sup> This is often due to local/national NSAs' lack of resources to constructively and continuously engage in such forums, whereas international actors have much greater financial and staff capacity available at their disposal.



**Greater collaboration with local and national actors.** In case study countries, the Movement's level of engagement with local/national NSAs is inconsistent. This is particularly true in Myanmar and Afghanistan; the complex situations in these countries affect trust and how local organisations view Movement members – particularly the host National Society.<sup>170</sup> In PNG, it was noted that the PNGRCS engages strongly with local/national NSAs. Similarly in Pakistan, it was noted that the

PRCS engages well at the local level, but coordinates less well at some key levels.



**Maintain clear differentiation between engagement and endorsement.** Many humanitarian actors are forced to take a moral stance on state or de facto authority decisions that they believe will harm the people they serve, or risk their continued action being interpreted as an endorsement. Such instances include the infringements of women's right to work and girls' right to education in Afghanistan, and the decision to relocate Rohingya refugees to Bashan Char.<sup>171</sup> In both these contexts, humanitarian actors (particularly international actors) have worked hard to maintain engagement with these actors in the hope that long-term advocacy can lead to progress, in the face of ongoing criticism. In such instances, clear boundaries must be maintained to avoid engagement being interpreted as endorsement of certain decisions or practices (see Box 1 for similar experiences in Ukraine).<sup>172</sup>



**Maintain support and trust of local actors.** Trust is an important factor in how other humanitarian actors view others and build relationships. Within the more complex countries such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, trust was crucial – particularly when the government or de facto authorities are party to or driving the humanitarian crises. Given local and national NSAs often face the brunt of issues at a country level, their interpretation of how other NSAs (both international and local/national) engage with state or de facto actors can lead to loss of trust and support. For National Societies, this can

169 Interview 60

170 Interview 65

171 Roya, Irwin, Q&A: The aid policy 'limbo' on Bangladesh's refugee island, April 2022, The New Humanitarian; Habib, M, Jubb, C, Pallard, H, Morshed, Z, Between a refugee camp and a silt island: Rohingyas and the ethics of resettlement, April 2021, ABC

172 HAG, Challenges and Ways Forward in Supporting Local Leadership of Crisis Response in Afghanistan, 2023

sometimes be challenging given their auxiliary role to the government (see Box 10). UN agencies have faced similar backlash. In such instances, humanitarian actors need to use their existing networks

and country-level coordination forums to provide visibility on such issues (including their mandates and intended purposes of engagement) to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation.

### **Box 10: Government auxiliary role and how it can be interpreted**

In Myanmar and Afghanistan, the mandated role of host National Societies as auxiliaries to national governments was seen as a key driver of other NSAs' (particularly local/national NSAs) reduced trust in them. However, in most instances, Movement partners regard the access and support host National Societies have within their country as advantageous. For example, in Afghanistan, where the de facto authorities have placed strict restrictions on the wider humanitarian system, the ARCS has been able to operate with fewer restrictions. But engagement with government or de facto authorities (even to negotiate access or deliver humanitarian aid) can be perceived as compromising independence and neutrality, which has been an issue for ARCS and MRCS specifically within the case study countries. In Myanmar, this is heightened due to ongoing efforts to restore democracy. In other contexts, similarly, actors who are seen as dealing with parties to the crisis – even if required as part of the independent role of humanitarian actors – have faced similar criticism (see Box 1).

**I know people within the Red Cross, and they are struggling because they are seen as being too close to the military, mostly because of the way they are set up as a local movement... They have their own set of norms and so they are much closer to the governments than we would be. In the current situation, there is a balance to be seen as independent.... (International actor in Myanmar)**

*Photo: Sebastian Goldberg on Unsplash*



# SECTION 4. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Across the five country contexts, examples of intermediaries' localisation approaches were small in scope, mostly at the organisational or project level, and not strategic or coordinated enough to result in impact at scale.<sup>173</sup> In the four areas identified above, the greatest impacts identified were on local partners' organisational and technical capacity. This implies that localisation agendas should include more focus on improving other aspects of humanitarian practice. It also suggests that, as outlined above, greater focus should be placed on generating shared understandings and identifying collective outcomes of localisation for humanitarian actors in complex settings.

Equitable partnership practices are key to positive impacts of localisation for local/national NSAs and for communities in complex contexts. They include effective intermediary models that

are contextually relevant, enable the testing and implementation of localised approaches, and involve joint agreement on the intended outcomes of partnerships. Trust in partnerships continues to be critical across all case study contexts. There is a need to build in monitoring and learning when testing localised approaches so that positive and negative impacts can be documented and used to inform future approaches. Greater investment in risk-sharing approaches has been recognised globally as vital, and is an area in which the Movement and ARC can demonstrate leadership. Ultimately, the Movement, local and national actors, international agencies and donors must work together to support localisation approaches that reflect the needs and dynamics of complex settings, capitalising on the benefits that can come when intermediary roles enable locally-led response.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Partnerships and principled assistance



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Co-create partnership frameworks that support local and national non-state actors over multiple years, and can accommodate adjustments to the often-sharp changes in context associated with protracted and fragile settings
- ✓ In each setting, join with other intermediaries and local/national actors to prioritise localisation objectives and integrate them into governance, operating procedures, and monitoring and evaluation processes

### Donors

- ✓ Create a long-term strategy that fosters civil society engagement as a pillar of humanitarian assistance
- ✓ Support the strengthening of evidence and learning about the impacts and outcomes of supporting locally-led response in specific contexts

<sup>173</sup> This is replicated in challenges that continue to be identified in other literature and for the localisation agenda more broadly. See Barbelet, V., Davies, G., Flint, J. and Davey, E. [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study, 2022](#) for more analysis.

---

## Risk and compliance



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Broker agreements for tailoring compliance requirements with donors and local partners and refine and promote related policies and processes
- ✓ Explore due diligence 'passporting' as a means to simplify compliance processes and reduce repetitive requirements for partners

### Donors

- ✓ Work with partners to design and pilot approaches that support sharing (rather than transferring) operational risk between international and local organisations and donors
- ✓ Make more dedicated resourcing available for better managing risks and taking on specific compliance aspects within partnerships. Provide local/national actors with equal or higher overhead percentage (compared to intermediaries to ensure adequate resourcing for risk management and security)

---

## Funding



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Develop a range of options to enable quality funding for local and national partners in protracted and fragile settings. Consult local/national organisations in developing these options and ensure they are visible to donors
- ✓ Provide institutional support to facilitate the inclusion of local organisations in pooled funding mechanisms

### Donors

- ✓ Review internal processes for direct funding and pathways for direct as possible funding (such as pooled funds) to increase diversity of organisations that can access funding
- ✓ Establish key features of quality funding as standard practice in protracted and fragile settings, including ensuring local and national partners receive support for overheads and core costs, unarmarked funding, and flexible terms

---

## Operational strengthening and capacity sharing



### Intermediaries

- ✓ Develop partnership approaches that map out complementary roles for intermediaries and local/national actors in supporting localisation in complex and protracted settings
- ✓ Diversify partnerships with local actors and adapt partnership processes so that small grassroots organisations can strengthen locally-led response
- ✓ Provide long-term, flexible investment in organisational capabilities of local/national actors to enable them to manage risks and compliance needs (focusing on systems and process strengthening rather than individual donor needs)

### Donors

- ✓ Require evidence of how intermediaries have sought to diversify partnerships with local actors and adapt partnership processes so that small grassroots organisations can strengthen locally-led response

*Photo: Julia Volk on Unsplash*



# GUIDING QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE INTERMEDIARY APPROACHES IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

This study shows that whilst approaches to supporting local leadership are emerging, evidence about their impact is scarce due to the challenges posed by complex contexts, as well as a lack of articulation of intended outcomes. Sound localised approaches are the exception, meaning the design and planning of partnerships and programs must be strengthened. To support better design of localised approaches in complex settings, we have developed guiding questions for intermediary actors and donors, which can be used at both the organisation and response/sector level.

## Common understanding of objectives and desired outcomes of localisation approaches

- What are national and local non-state actor or partner priorities for local leadership given the complexity and challenges of the operating environment?
- Can shared and collective understanding of particular localisation priorities and outcomes in partnerships, groups, consortia or networks in specific contexts be enhanced?
- How will outcomes or priorities adapt to shifts in context such as rapid escalation of conflict or additional shocks?
- Is there an agreed exit strategy or transition guidance for intermediaries linked to particular targets or outcomes (for e.g. partner becomes compliant with donor financial requirements)?

## Risk and compliance

- What strategies or approaches are in place for testing or adopting risk-sharing approaches at scale?
- What processes are in place for designing and implementing joint approaches to risk management and sharing?
- Is dedicated resourcing for risk management and security for local partners a feature of partnership agreements, including with donors?
- What compliance approaches can be adapted or shifted at the intermediary and donor levels?
- What collective approaches can intermediaries employ to advocate to donors on compliance issues?

## Organisational strengthening and capacity sharing

- How can investment in organisational strengthening be prioritised in volatile contexts?
- How can support for organisational strengthening and technical capacity sharing be maintained during rapid shifts in context?

## Partnerships and principled aid

- What processes are in place to support discussions and actions relating to the complexities of principled aid when supporting local leadership?
- Does the partnership include localisation targets that guide complementary roles for intermediaries and local actors?
- Are there strategies in place to guide shifts in intermediary support and transition in cases of reduced direct implementation or loss of access?
- Have the potential benefits and risks of particular localisation approaches been considered and agreed on with local partners?

## Funding

- What processes are in place to support discussions and actions relating to the complexities of principled aid when supporting local leadership?
- Does the partnership include localisation targets that guide complementary roles for intermediaries and local actors?
- Are there strategies in place to guide shifts in intermediary support and transition in cases of reduced direct implementation or loss of access?
- Have the potential benefits and risks of particular localisation approaches been considered and agreed on with local partners?



... PROVINCE,  
... FOR AFFECTED PEOPLES BY EARTHQUAKE

DISTRICT	VILLAGE	# OF REGISTERED FAMILIES	ENCASHMENT SITE	DATE OF ENCASHMENT
QADIS	,Tajik Gul Chin, Mir Ghayas , Khak Polak, Khalifa Ha , Arbab Sarwar & Mad Ali Khan	500 HHs	Qadis District	25-28 / 4 / 2022

R EACH REGISTERED FAMILY: 9,000 AFN ( )

ENCASHMENT PROCESS:

1. TOKEN-...
2. FREE CAS...
3. BENEFI...

TO ANYONE

HOW FAMILIES WERE REGI...  
CRITERIA FOR REGIST...

Y COMPLAINT, QL...  
Facilitation/BenCom De...  
Mr. Nasim Razeqi, DM

The Afghan Red Cresc...  
Mr. Gholam Yahya Ra...  
Mr. Esmatullah "Modas...

The Afghan Red Crescent So...  
Mr. Gholam Nabi "Rahimi":...  
Mr. Mohibullah "Iqbal", Cas...

Register your complaint c...  
...et Afshar,

Afghan Red c...  
District 5, Kal...

Visit:

