



Grand Bargain Annual Meeting Side Event on 16th October 2024
Summary Note: Local Actor and Donor Roundtable Discussion

The roundtable was attended by eight donor representatives and fifteen national NGO representatives and representatives from the Grand Bargain National Reference Groups, Charter4Change, NEAR, A4EP and Feminist Humanitarian Network. Key priorities raised in the session were:

Scale up support for local leadership through investment in ‘local intermediaries’

Several speakers highlighted the connection between leadership, cost efficiency and innovation that can come together with locally-led pooled funds or local intermediary models. Local actors acknowledged the steps taken by OCHA over the past year to review how the UN Humanitarian Country Based Pooled Funds could more effectively be accessible to and support local actors and donors spoke about their continued investments in CBPFs. Donors played an essential role in pressing for dialogue with local actors on the priorities for this. Sustained donor support to encourage follow-up action at global level and in each country with a CBPF will be key. Examples of other pooled funds were shared including the NEAR Change Fund and the Start Country Hubs that have received support from both philanthropic institutions and donor governments.

“We will not have more humanitarian funding. The cake is not getting bigger and so someone needs to eat less. In the Grand Bargain, are we sufficiently ambitious? International intermediary agencies should be scrutinized to see what added-value do they really bring? How are they most efficiently and effectively contributing to reinforce the local response.”

Donor official

Beyond this, local actors want to see increased support for country-level funding mechanisms led by national actors. In several contexts, such as Myanmar, national NGOs are already receiving direct funding from donors [to play an intermediary role to other CSOs](#). This demonstrates their quality and accountability, as well as their access to communities in need that international agencies cannot reach. It challenges the narrative from some that local actors might always be trapped into a junior ‘sub’ role to international intermediary agencies. The shift to respect for and trust in local intermediary agencies has also emerged from long-term partnerships and investment in capacity-strengthening and support to those organisations. As such longer-term investment in locally-led capacity-sharing is essential alongside a shift in mindset, policy and practice to work in an intentional way towards local leadership of humanitarian action. The [Asal Humanitarian Network](#) in Kenya has developed a similar model. While Ukrainian CSOs are also establishing a locally-led pooled fund.

On direct funding relationships, while several donors emphasised that intermediaries will continue to play an important role for reasons of risk management and because

they cannot develop the capacity to administer hundreds or thousands of grants to local actors, there were also good practices. A local actor spoke about the importance of direct funding via embassies, which have been very impactful. One donor shared how they are revising their funding processes to increase local actor access (e.g. revising methods for communicating about funding opportunities, selection processes, use of local languages etc) and the development of prizes and awards.

Hold intermediary agencies accountable for quality of partnerships to shift away from ‘projectised’ local leadership and top-down capacity-strengthening

Local actors called for action on the Grand Bargain outcomes on holding intermediary agencies accountable for equitable partnership and support to local leadership. Several donors highlighted how they are starting to introduce different approaches to this; including on issues like providing overheads costs or involving local actors in leadership or co-leadership roles. Local actors advocated for a more systematic and aligned approach to this. One local women-led NGO flagged how local actors can face back-lash for raising critical feedback about intermediaries. In Ukraine, there is frustration with the prevalence of ‘partnership officers’ rather than an institutional shift to quality partnerships.

“We are working to foster a dialogue with donors and international agencies about how they can best reinforce us. Our country has been invaded. We have a clear enemy! We do not want to be enemies with the international agencies that have come to support us. Yet it sometimes feels like some international agencies see as a competition for their control of resources. This is not how it should be.”

Mila Leonova, Ukraine CSO Alliance

Local actors shared that there needs to be a rebalancing from the current emphasis on training to meet donor compliance. Examples were shared from Pakistan and elsewhere of how local actors are often trapped into repetitive forms of capacity-strengthening framed mainly to meet donor compliance and reporting requirements, rather than deeper support to shift towards local leadership. One donor suggested keystone surveys or other tools to help donors assess the performance of the intermediaries they fund.

Realise the potential of contextualising local leadership to deliver on the Nexus and transforming the system across humanitarian, development, peace and climate efforts (ie ‘Nexus’)

Local actors emphasised how they work in a holistic way rooted in community understanding, and it is often the international community which comes with its siloed approach to funding and policy. The current phase of the Grand Bargain has seen renewed attention to the Nexus, but opportunities for this to increase support for the contributions of local actors already delivering on the Nexus are not yet evident.

“Should we be systematically implementing Keystone type surveys for local actors to give honest feedback on the intermediaries? Local actors aren’t necessarily more accountable to local populations. So accountability is important at all levels, and you local actors have to also do a better job at demonstrating your accountability.”

Donor official

Support and centre country-level platforms for local actors to organise and articulate shared priorities to donors, UN and INGOs

Examples were shared such as the Charter4Change country-level working-groups in contexts like Kenya and South Sudan, NEAR country-specific ‘localisation labs’, the Local Intermediary Agency (LIA) platform in Myanmar and the national CSO

Alliance in Ukraine of how local actors have come together to identify shared priorities and strategies to influence humanitarian coordination, funding and partnerships. The National Reference Groups (NRGs) concept has inspired efforts to convene policy dialogue on localisation led by the priorities of local actors. In several contexts, these networks have managed to gain respect and engagement by key donor, UN and INGO decision-makers who recognise that their national NGO members have unique expertise, programme experience and access to crisis-affected communities. In other contexts such as Yemen, local actor networks have struggled to get engagement from donors or international agencies. In Colombia, a local actor shared how different localisation initiatives supported by international agencies (including the OCHA flagship initiative on people-centred humanitarian action, the NEAR localisation ‘lab’ and the German-funded TOGETHER consortium) must work harder to align efforts, avoid duplication and to reinforce leadership by local actors working at the sub-national level.

“In our experience of 10 years, we started small and now we have 100 staff, we started investing in capacity and quality partners. Now one of our strongest partners has left but the capacity we gained cannot be taken away.”

Nur Incetahtaci, SENED, Turkey

Bring the ‘Risk Sharing’ framework to the country-level and deepen support for Duty of Care for national NGOs

Local actors expressed interest in the global discussions on Risk Sharing, and called for this partnership approach to be extended to programmes and work with local actors on the ground. One local actor from Myanmar shared how in their context the staff of national NGOs are sometimes blacklisted or otherwise targeted and they need to be relocated or evacuated. Some donors or intermediary agencies will fund those costs, and others will not. Donor representatives at the roundtable shared examples of how they were taking action in line with the risk sharing agenda. For example, one donor had provided funding to support local actors to become members of INSO, the NGO security advisory network, in order to benefit from their trainings and advice.

Networks and Donors present: USAID, ECHO, Ireland, Denmark, Australia, Portugal, Charter for Change, NEAR, A4EP, Feminist Humanitarian Network

Acknowledgements: Charter4Change expresses gratitude to the Irish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trocaire, CAFOD and Kindernothilfe e.V. for support in organising this roundtable, and to the C4C, NEAR, A4EP and Feminist Humanitarian Network members who contributed to the discussion.