

# Summary of roundtable between local/national actors and INGOs on equitable partnerships and local leadership in humanitarian action

16th October 2024, Geneva

*“From some INGOs and the UN, we sense this fear that you want to survive and you see us as national actors as competition. It has become a fight for resources. As the Ukraine CSO Alliance, we want to change these dynamics. As Ukrainians, we have a clear enemy in the conflict, and we do not want to be fighting with those that have come to support us. We invite you to support us. Share your expertise, but do this in a way that reinforces us.”*

National NGO network representative

*“We cannot escape the fact that each of the organisations involved in humanitarian crises have certain kinds of power and influence, whether INGO, national NGO or another kind of local civil society group. So what are the right power dynamics? Do we want to see a more diverse ecosystem in which different kinds of local actor want to play different roles, and INGOs can support these in different ways? For example some women-led organisations tell us they want to influence decisions on the humanitarian response, but not all want to get drawn into delivering humanitarian response programmes.”*

INGO participant

On 16th October 2024, a roundtable was convened to foster dialogue between representatives of INGOs, local and national actors (LNAs) and NGO networks present in Geneva for the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting. Around 16 national NGOs and 14 INGOs participated in the roundtable including members of [Charter4Change](#), Pledge For Change, ICVA and SCHR networks and secretariats, as well as other NGOs not affiliated to these networks. The purpose was to create a space for dialogue about challenges and opportunities from both the LNA and INGO perspectives on promoting locally-led humanitarian action and equitable partnerships. The meeting was organised by CAFOD with support from Kindernothilfe e.V. and Trocaire following interest expressed by LNAs for such opportunities in the Charter4Change network. It coincided with the publication of a [joint statement by 35 INGO CEOs calling for enhanced action and accountability on local leadership and equitable partnership](#); highlighting priorities for action by international agencies, and inviting feedback from LNAs, donors and other international agencies on ways to establish better complementary roles and partnerships to reinforce locally-led humanitarian action.

This report is organised by four themes which emerged in the discussion:

1. How can INGOs evolve their identity and ways of working to reinforce local leadership?
2. How to create accountability for equitable partnership in INGO partnerships with LNAs?
3. How to shift INGO funding, reporting, due diligence and other processes towards more enabling, equitable partnerships?
4. How to strengthen solidarity and complementarity between INGOs and LNAs?

## 1. How can INGOs evolve their identity and ways of working to reinforce local leadership?

1. Several LNAs raised how some INGO create local affiliates, which crowd out local organisations. This has also impacted women-led NGOs, as some nationalised INGOs also present as local WLOs. One INGO acknowledged this can create challenges, but there is also a need to recognise that this is partly a consequence of how some national host government policies require INGOs to create such affiliates for them to operate at all; including to support

LNAs in the context. In response, an WLO representative acknowledged this, but called on INGOs that go this route to configure such local affiliates in ways that reinforce rather than compete with LNAs.

2. One LNA from Indonesia shared how government policy there has forced INGOs to partner with LNAs as a condition of being present or engaged in the context. This presents opportunities, but also challenges especially in terms of enabling INGOs to find effective ways to partner with local organisations at sub-national level. INGOs, national NGOs and local organisations must find ways to come together and forge new kinds of partnerships that are complementary. There is a strong network of LNA networks keen to engage with INGOs on shaping such complementary partnerships, and some C4C INGO signatories are already engaging with this. There is a need to build trust between back-donors, the INGOs acting in their new intermediary roles, national NGOs and local NGOs.
3. One LNA raised the challenge arising from the ‘coloniality of jargon’ used by INGOs, which can be alienating and disempowering to local actors. A representative from the LOCAL network in India advocates for local actors to define their own framework, rather than fit into the international framework and terminology.
4. Several INGOs shared examples of how they are going through processes to reflect on local leadership, partnership, decolonising aid perspectives and what this means for how they are structured and present in different contexts. This includes steps such as downsizing the number of contexts they operate in, shifting to a partnership-based approach instead of direct project implementation, and moving to provide consistent, fair overheads cost with LNAs. All of this has meant they have a significant reduction in their budget and reduced staff capacity. There are also trade-offs and dilemmas then in terms of how many contexts and how many LNA partners they can provide support to.
5. One WLO representative from Nigeria shared how one INGO C4C signatory has invited them to speak to their global INGO federation leadership committee. As this WLO is not receiving funding from that INGO, they are able to speak more freely to challenge their thinking and approach.

*“Some INGOs have started to adopt the “Why not local?” principle to promote a shift to reinforcing local actors, instead of INGO direct implementation. This is a transformative shift, but it is not without its challenges. It requires asking the board of trustees of INGOs to accept that the overall budget of the organisation may go down, instead of grow.”*  
INGO representative

## **2. How to create accountability for equitable partnership in INGO partnerships with LNAs?**

6. A decisive factor for change in INGOs is leadership at all levels. There is a need to shift how INGO leadership measures success from the size of an INGO’s budget growth to the INGO’s effectiveness in support to locally-led humanitarian action.
7. Too often, INGO Country Directors are not engaging with localisation efforts led by local actors at country level. This is contrary to INGO HQ statements about localisation, and reflects an inadequate accountability of INGO Country Directors for delivering on those organisational commitments.

8. In Myanmar, one local actor network is going to pilot a Local Perceptions of Partnership Index with one INGO and one larger national NGO to support two-way learning about partnership. They want to see a wider range of international agencies and donors support this.

9. One INGO shared how it is establishing a new consistent approach to partnership agreements, which will be contextualised and piloted in seven countries. This will include aspects like consistent overheads support and feedback on partnership quality. After the piloting process, it will be refined and rolled-out globally. In addition, they are establishing a workstream in which youth (a focus in their mandate) can have voice on global strategy for the INGO.

*“We want to see equitable partnership, but we see no aligned approach to this by INGOs. Too many INGOs come with top down approaches and impose projects on their local partners. Only few INGOs support LNAs in their own strategic planning, vision of how they want to grow as an organisation and their leadership as local actors.”*  
National NGO representative

### **3. How to shift INGO funding, reporting, due diligence and other processes towards more enabling, equitable partnerships?**

10. INGOs need to adopt more proportionate due diligence, compliance and reporting processes in their partnerships. There are examples of some INGOs and platforms involving INGOs taking steps towards this, such as the networked drought response in Kenya.
11. A national NGO from Venezuela shared how the approach of most humanitarian funding and international agencies forces them to effectively beg for short-term, top-down, siloed projects. Their organisation wants to work on a longer-term approach that brings dignity for people and reinforces their resilience, and they advocated for INGOs and other humanitarian agencies to shift towards reinforcing national and local institutions.
12. INGOs should provide greater transparency on finance and budget-share in funding opportunities and programmes so LNAs are engaged on equitable basis from the outset, not as the junior partner.
13. ICVA described how it is establishing a working group on Due Diligence issues towards looking at ways to enable localisation; building on the Charter4Change Due Diligence Passporting Initiative and other efforts. In addition, a Community of Practice for pooled fund managers will be established; including input from refugee-led and women-led organisations. Work is also underway to look at the role of national NGO networks in enabling LNA access to funding.

### **4. How to strengthen solidarity and complementarity between INGOs and LNAs?**

14. In many contexts, the shrinking civil society space is a challenge for both INGOs and national NGOs, and solidarity in responding to this is important. INGOs, national NGOs and other kinds of national and local civil society have different kinds of power and ability to take action in support of communities affected by crisis. There is a need to work on this in solidarity and in a complementary fashion that reinforces the dignity, agency and voice of communities affected by crisis.

15. Most INGOs and local actors are multi-mandate and are willing to innovate on working with LNAs across the Humanitarian, Development, Peace and Climate Nexus.
16. For local actors and INGOs, there could be a shared interest to influence host government legislation to shift resources to local actors, and to enable local actors to tap resources from government. Host government policies on localisation can be well-intentioned, but can have negative consequences for both INGOs and LNAs if poorly designed or implemented. In a number of contexts, government obstruction or political interference in civil society and humanitarian action are also the reality. So collaborative and consultative approaches between INGOs and LNAs to inform policy and practice can help.
17. Some INGOs have given support to local actors to get access to and influence on funding and coordination mechanisms, eg CBPF advisory boards and in some clusters (eg GBV). This is a practical example of how INGOs can accompany and support LNAs to gain access to decision-making space, which could be scaled-up across all clusters.
18. One INGO spoke to how its aspirations to scale-up survivor and community led crisis response are at the heart of its efforts to reinforce both local civil society and communities affected by crisis, and the links between these.