

Ten years of localization of humanitarian aid (2016–2026): time for celebration or accountability? A reflection on the future of humanitarian action in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

By Meschac Nakanywenge,

Focal Point of the Working Group of the Charter for Change (WG C4C/DR Congo)

The year 2026 marks an important milestone for the international humanitarian community. Ten years have passed since the adoption of the **Grand Bargain** and **Charter for Change commitments**, two major initiatives aimed at transforming the humanitarian system by promoting greater localisation of aid, better sharing of decision-making power, increased direct funding for local actors and recognition of their leadership.

These commitments were born out of a widely shared observation: national and local organizations are the first to respond to crises, the last to leave affected communities, and the best placed to understand the realities on the ground. However, they remained insufficiently involved in decision-making and continued to receive a limited share of humanitarian resources.

Ten years later, a fundamental question deserves to be asked: **should we celebrate these ten years of commitment or use this anniversary to honestly assess the progress made and the challenges that remain?**

The celebration of an anniversary should not only remind us of the commitments made. Above all, it should be an opportunity to measure the results achieved, to collectively assume responsibilities and to renew ambitions for the decade to come.

Over the past ten years, significant progress can be recognized. Localization is now more integrated into humanitarian policies, strategic discussions and funding mechanisms. The capacities of national organizations have been strengthened in several contexts, and the notion of a more equitable partnership has become a widely recognized principle.

However, progress remains uneven and often insufficient.

In many contexts, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, national organizations continue to face significant obstacles: limited access to direct funding, marginal participation in strategic decision-making bodies, sometimes unbalanced partnerships, and a transfer of responsibilities that often remains more theoretical than real.

Localization cannot be reduced to a simple increase in funding for local actors. It also involves a true sharing of leadership, governance, risks, responsibilities and trust.

This responsibility is collective.

Donors have a responsibility to adapt their funding mechanisms so that they become more accessible, flexible and oriented towards national organizations.

UN agencies and international organizations that are signatories to the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change must continue to transform their institutional practices so that partnerships are truly based on equity, transparency and shared decision-making.

National organizations also have a responsibility to continuously strengthen their governance, accountability, management systems, financial transparency, and ability to demonstrate impact.

Finally, national authorities have a key role to play in creating an enabling environment for localization, fully recognizing national actors and promoting their participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

The context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo makes this reflection even more urgent.

For several decades, the country has been facing complex humanitarian crises marked by armed conflicts, population displacement, natural disasters, epidemics and the growing effects of climate change. In this context, Congolese organizations demonstrate every day their ability to intervene quickly with the affected communities, often in the most difficult to access areas.

However, their potential remains insufficiently exploited.

The next decade (2026–2036) should be the decade of the effective transformation of commitments into measurable results. This includes:

- a) a gradual increase in direct funding to national organizations;
- b) equitable representation of local actors in humanitarian governance bodies;
- c) partnerships based on trust, mutual respect and shared responsibility;
- d) transparent mechanisms for monitoring the commitments made by each category of actors;
- e) performance indicators to measure localization progress at the national level;
- f) a national localization strategy developed and carried out jointly by the Congolese authorities, donors, the United Nations, international organizations and national organizations.

On this tenth anniversary, several questions deserve collective reflection:

- 1) Is it relevant to celebrate ten years of the localisation of humanitarian aid? Why ?
- 2) Have the signatories of the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change achieved the objectives set in 2016?
- 3) What concrete progress has been made and what challenges remain?
- 4) Should responsibilities be shared in a more balanced way between donors, UN agencies, international NGOs, national organizations and public authorities?
- 5) What concrete reforms are we ready to implement between 2026 and 2036 to make localization an irreversible change in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

These questions are not intended to assign responsibility, but to encourage constructive thinking, based on collective accountability and continuous improvement.

Localization should no longer be seen as a political aspiration or commitment. It must become a tangible, measurable and sustainable reality, for the benefit of the millions of people affected by humanitarian crises.

As the humanitarian community celebrates ten years of commitment to localization, real success will not lie in speeches or ceremonies, but in our collective ability to turn promises into concrete and lasting results.

I invite donors, UN agencies, international organizations, national organizations, public authorities, researchers and all humanitarian actors to share their analyses, experiences and recommendations to foster an open and constructive dialogue on the future of localization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and beyond.

Together, let us make the next decade the decade in which the localisation of humanitarian aid will no longer be just an ambition, but a fully assumed, scoped and measurable reality.

Meschac Nakanywenge

Focal Point of the Working Group of the Charter for Change (WG C4C/DR Congo)