

### Localising Humanitarian Response

In the first ever World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul in 2016, localisation of humanitarian assistance became a prominent topic of discussion among participants. Specifically, on localisation, the summit led to the formulation of the Grand Bargain Commitment promising to bring transformative changes in the global humanitarian sector. Many other relevant developments took place at the summit - Charter for Change<sup>1</sup> an initiative, signed by 29 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) which commits them to change the way they work with and relate to national actors; and, launch of NEAR<sup>2</sup> - an alliance of national local NGOs. NEAR champions the role of local and national actors with the vision to ensure genuine local participation at all levels of development and disaster management, and that effective aid is delivered to people in need.

*The term 'localisation' maybe defined in various ways. For the purpose of this document, the following definition has been considered: Localising humanitarian response (or localization) is a process of recognizing, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses.*

### Localisation in Afghanistan

Localisation has seen varying level of progress in various regions of the world. In countries like Afghanistan suffering from several decades of of unrest, localisation is a sensitive topic. The country continues to suffer from organised armed conflict, prolonged drought conditions, population displacement and returns, and disease outbreaks. The situation gets further exacerbated due to lack of access to basic and essential services, and security and access constraints for provision of external support. UNOCHA's Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2018 notes security related concerns posing significant challenges to delivery of both humanitarian and development assistance across Afghanistan.

Given the unique scenario in the country, localization considerations may be calibrated under the following categories<sup>3</sup>: Political and identity related, operational and effectiveness related, financial and efficiency related, and quality and accountability related considerations.

Political and identity related considerations are important for Afghanistan. The basic question remains, that given the dependence on external assistance, does political environment allow enough space national NGOs to influence humanitarian assistance. Moreover, national NGOs in the country are under strict control regime of the government. New set of tighter government

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<sup>1</sup> <https://charter4change.org>

<sup>2</sup> <http://near.ngo>

<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian Leadership Academy (2019) Unpacking Localisation

regulations are being introduced that may potentially put further restrictions on genuine participation and leadership of national NGOs. The success of some past programs such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) – a unique collaboration between Government and NGOs, the future of localisation in the country would depend a lot on creating an enabling political space and NGO leadership in the country.

Operations and effectiveness related considerations. In Afghanistan context, the humanitarian challenges are of scale and complexity in operations. Support from armed forces sometimes becomes necessary for ensuring security while carrying out humanitarian operations. It carries with it a perception that humanitarian principles in such contexts are compromised. This provides enough reasons for one sided partnership with national NGOs. Role of national and local actors becomes that of implementing ‘contractors’

Financial and efficiency related considerations. Localisation is to a greatly extent defined by the proportion of funding being available to local and national actors. Country based pooled funding is one such mechanism for enabling access for national and local actors. The Afghan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) is one of the few examples in the world of a country based pooled fund mechanism. The proportion of funding made available directly to national NGOs in the AHF is still very limited<sup>4</sup>. In future, national NGOs would need to improve their ability to directly access funding available both within the country and externally as much as it would be important to strengthen the AHF or similar such models in the country.

Quality and accountability related considerations. These are fundamentally reasons why localisation is necessary in humanitarian contexts especially where communities are suffering from decades of protracted crisis. The participation of affected community, systems of feedback and inclusion of marginalized groups are sensitive to role and positioning of humanitarian agencies working with them. The role of national and local organizations becomes important. It also leads to the issue of capacity and competence of staff deployed for operations in the field, the role of local leadership and the adherence to humanitarian principles. In Afghanistan, with the presence of several large national NGOs and a strong NGO consortium, ACBAR, a strong capacity has been created. To what extent is this capacity trusted with greater independence in deployment and operations remains a question.

#### Current localisation status in Afghanistan: results of survey

Localization still is not deeply understood in Afghanistan. In 2019, a national survey was conducted aimed at gauging level of awareness on the issue in the country. The survey was conducted among 65 respondents representing a range of organizations including National NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, civil society organizations, government agencies, and others, from different regions of the country. Survey respondents represented all parts of the country. 17 % came from East region 15 % from South region, 32 % from north region, 20 % west region and 15% South-eastern part of the country. 27% of the respondents were women.

The survey was conducted in by CoAR, the largest Afghan national NGO is the leading agency on both humanitarian and development. In the last 30 years, CoAR as community-based organization has been closely observing the trends and needs in the affected communities. In addition, CoAR as partner of ADRRN<sup>5</sup> – a network of southern national NGOs in the Asia

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<sup>4</sup> UNOCHA (2018), Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.adrrn.net>

Pacific Region actively promoting southern leadership since 2002, SEEDS India, WHS (member of committee for south Asia), has actively participated in several global conferences. CoAR conducted interviews with NNGOs, INGOS, UN agencies, SCOs, government institutions and affected communities. The interview variety of forms including, individual face-to-face and face-to-face group interviewing.

Analysing the outcomes of a survey, the subsequent sections provide a summary of view of of localization of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. To analyse the survey results, the authors have referred to the Localisation Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF) developed by NEAR<sup>6</sup>. (CoAR is part of the leadership council of NEAR)

The LPMF offers itself as a tool to strengthen evidence base for localisation and advance a common understanding on its progress in different contexts. The LPMF analyses 6 components of localisation : 1. Partnerships; 2. Funding; 3.Capacity; 4.Coordination and Complementarity; 5. Policy, influence and visibility; 6. Participation. It layout a methodology of assessing localisation performance, benchmarking and action planning. In this report, we provide a brief summary of survey analysis with respect to the 6 components.

The first component of localisation is partnerships and the survey makes it evident that a majority of the respondents don't consider there is an equitable partnership between international and national organizations. Thus, reflecting a poor progress in terms of quality in partnerships. This is further elucidated by the fact that 15% of respondents believe that humanitarian and development actors do not work together in Afghanistan. But the partnerships have matured in terms of moving from project-based ones to strategic partnerships as majority of respondents feel these are based on integrity and responsibility towards members in accomplishing their tasks, recognize strength and comparative advantage of and invest in the enhancing the capacity of local organizations.

There has also been only modest progress on the funding aspect of localisation as half of the respondents still feel there is not adequate support available vis-à-vis the needs of the country. A vast majority of the respondents are unaware of the Country Based Pooled Fund- AHF, which in turn means most local organizations have not benefitted from this fund. Not just in terms of quantity of funds available, a significant part of respondents (~20%) feel there is no flexibility to use the available funds for evolving programme needs.

There has been excellent progress made in terms of capacity as part of localisation efforts in Afghanistan as nearly 80% of respondents feel there is enough capacity building that is required internally. Similarly, a stark majority of the respondents feel that donor organizations have provided funds for building organizational capacity of national and local actors.

Afghanistan has made fairly modest progress in coordination and complementarity aspects of localisation as only about 15% respondents seem to think there is not enough coordination between humanitarian leadership in the country and the development actors. This is despite the majority of them not knowing about localisation as a concept or having understood what Grand Bargain is.

In terms of ability to influence in policy, advocacy, and standard setting, nearly 80% of the respondents feel that local organizations have been successful. But at the same time, they are

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.near.ngo/home/workdetail?id=2>

quick to acknowledge that most of these policies could be on paper and rarely get implemented, thereby reducing the efficacy of this influence for effective change.

While a vast majority of the respondents (nearly 90%) feel that local NGOs have gotten the opportunity to participate in needs assessments and evaluations, cluster level participation at both national and regional level is still only moderate (about 65%). Also, the survey is limited by design to capture participation of local communities, which is an important indicator to ascertain progress in terms of participation aspect of localisation.

Thus, while the overall progress of Afghanistan in terms of localisation has been considerable given its background of long-running conflict, there are some clear areas of improvement such partnerships and funding.

### Way Forward

The overall outlook of localisation in the country is positive, although still in stages of nascency. While there are good capacity building efforts, more action may be required in improving and establishing an enabling environment for improved partnerships. This extends into participation of local NGOs in national level decision making, ownership of the national agenda and humanitarian needs identification.

Overall, the following action points may be considered as way to accelerate progress towards localisation in the country:

- 1) Better institutional support to enable NGOs in following humanitarian principles including principles of transparency and accountability.
- 2) Enable greater participation of local NGOs in the country in assessment of needs of affected population, and in decision making on key humanitarian response priorities.
- 3) Improvement in forms of partnerships between INGOs and NNGOs based on comparative advantages and mutual trust. The principles of partnership are important if true progress has to be reported. The Charter for Change principles provide further guidance on shaping such partnerships.
- 4) Common understanding on standards, principles and diligence requirements. NNGOs are not fully conversant with international humanitarian standards like CHS, SPHERE and others. These organizations pursue their own standards. While there is now a push (as part of localisation) towards new approaches<sup>7</sup> to compliance, due diligence and risk management so that local organizations are able to flourish – the need for developing a common understanding nationally remains as an important area of action in future.
- 5) International to national. Clearly, the survey results indicate the need for greater efforts required in carrying out multi-stakeholder localisation dialogues at country level. NNGOs need to be actively involved in such dialogues.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://charter4change.org/2019/12/20/communique-from-the-charter-for-change-annual-meeting-10-11-december-2019/>



