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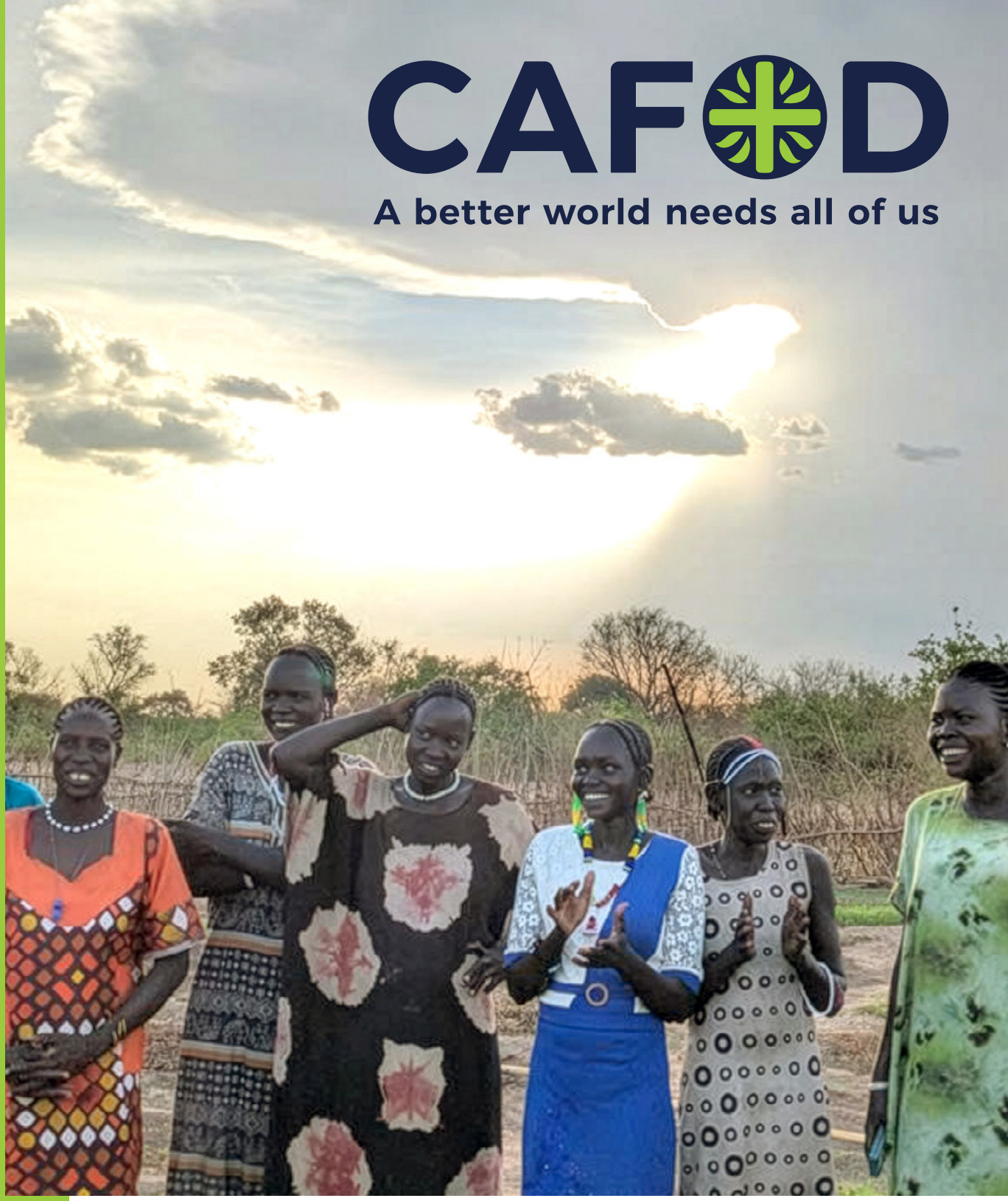

May 2026

# From Local Presence to Local Power:

## Implications for humanitarian financing, partnership, coordination, and risk-sharing

Comparative insights from Bangladesh, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe.

think ahead

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(Cover) Unity Woman's Group in Kuajok Warrap State, South Sudan. CAFOD


Recreational activities for displaced migrant children hosted in shelters, provided by Nehna Hon in Lebanon. CAFOD



In this brief, **local presence** refers to the embedded relationships, proximity, and continuity that allow local actors to remain close to communities. **Local leadership** refers to the practical ability to shape analysis, priorities, access, implementation, adaptation, and accountability. **Local power** goes further; it concerns authority over resources, risk, evidence, visibility, coordination, and decision-making.

**The case studies** suggest that humanitarian systems often rely on local presence and local leadership while still withholding the conditions required for local power. The shift required is from using local actors' presence to enabling their authority by reorganising financing, partnership, coordination, and risk-sharing around the conditions local actors need to lead.

# Key Messages

1. **Local actors do more than deliver.** They often perform the access, trust, continuity, contextual intelligence, accountability, protection, and system-navigation functions through which humanitarian response becomes possible, credible, and usable.
2. **Local leadership shapes outcomes, not only access.** Local actors help determine whether assistance reaches those most at risk, can be used safely, is adapted to lived realities, and produces tangible changes in people's lives. Many of these relational, contextual, and process-based contribution pathways are poorly captured by conventional indicators.
3. **Local actors are not a single category.** Funding, compliance, and coordination systems often favour larger, more formalised, and more donor-facing organisations, while offering weaker pathways for community-rooted or less visible actors.
4. **Access, trust, and continuity should be funded as humanitarian functions.** Negotiation, accompaniment, protection referral, community accountability, cultural translation, system navigation, visibility management, staff care, and continuity between crises are often essential to response but remain under-recognised and underfunded.

**"If local actors are trusted for access, they should also be trusted with information, budgets, and decisions."**
*— Local partner reflection, DRC case study*

5. **Localisation requires more than participation.** Local actors should not only be consulted, invited into coordination spaces, or treated as sources of contextual evidence. They need meaningful authority over convening, agenda-setting, allocation, adaptation, evaluation, and the decisions that follow from their analysis.
6. **Intermediary agencies and partnership mechanisms can enable or constrain localisation.** They enable local leadership when they reduce burden, share risk, open donor access, strengthen systems, preserve local decision space, and change their own role over time. They constrain localisation when they preserve control while shifting implementation and exposure downward.
7. **Localisation requires system reform, not isolated good practice.** Differentiated funding pathways, fair cost recovery, practical risk-sharing, meaningful influence, coherent coordination, downward accountability, and accountable system alignment are needed to move from local presence to local power.

# Call to Action: Seven System-Wide Shifts.

1. **Differentiate funding and partnership pathways.**
   Humanitarian systems should not route all local actors through the same funding and compliance model. Direct funding, accompanied funding, pooled or locally governed funds, intermediary partnerships, and small-grant or community-level mechanisms should be used according to actor, function, risk, formality, and context.
2. **Fund the invisible work of local leadership.**
   Access-building, trust maintenance, accompaniment, negotiation, protection referral, accountability, locally grounded verification, coordination, staff care, cultural translation, system navigation, and institutional continuity should be recognised as core humanitarian functions — not absorbed as unpaid local advantage.
3. **Share indirect cost recovery and core support more fairly.**
   Local leadership requires investment in organisational systems, staff, governance, safeguarding, financial management, logistics, security, and institutional resilience. These costs should be transparently recognised and shared across partnership chains.
4. **Shift from participation to influence.**
   Local actors should not only be consulted or invited into coordination spaces. They should have meaningful authority in convening, agenda-setting, decision-making, allocation, adaptation, evaluation, and donor-facing evidence generation.
5. **Share risk rather than transfer it.**
   Risk-sharing should include proportionate assurance, security and duty-of-care budgets, flexible procurement, visibility-risk analysis, contingency resources, timely disbursement, and mutual accountability for partnership quality.
6. **Close the evidence–influence loop.**
   Local actors who generate contextual intelligence, community evidence, and operational learning should have the authority to shape the decisions that follow from them.
7. **Move from fragmented initiatives to accountable system alignment.**
   Localisation policies, platform, donor strategies, pooled funds, government-led processes, private-sector engagement, and civil society initiatives should be harmonised around clear action plans, shared indicators, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability for whether they shift authority, resources, risk, visibility, and influence toward local actors and affected communities.



# Introduction

**"We want organisations that are clearly recognised in the territory. We do not want organisations that arrive to implement a humanitarian programme — we want organisations that are in the territory."** — *Bilateral donor, Colombia case study*

The central challenge facing localisation is no longer simply recognising that local actors matter. It is that current humanitarian financing, partnership models, coordination systems, and risk frameworks remain poorly aligned with the realities they claim to support. They continue to sort diverse local actors through narrow compliance and funding pathways, favouring those already better positioned to meet donor-facing requirements, while offering weaker pathways for smaller, community-rooted, informal, or less formalised actors whose contribution may nevertheless be essential to humanitarian response.

Moving from local presence to local power, therefore, requires not one model of localisation, but a more differentiated partnership and financing architecture, one that supports direct funding where appropriate, accompanied funding where useful, and locally led or co-governed mechanisms in which international actors play enabling rather than controlling roles. The task is not simply to multiply isolated localisation initiatives, but to move beyond fragmented, siloed practice toward a more coherent system that aligns financing, partnership, coordination, risk-sharing, and accountability with how local leadership already works in practice.

This requires UN agencies, pooled funds, donors, and international NGOs to rethink their roles in ways that enable a structural transition, shifting from gatekeeping resources and decisions toward creating the conditions for local actors to lead more effectively, influence more meaningfully, and sustain their work over-time. In this transition, organisations such as CAFOD, Caritas member agencies, and others working through accompaniment-based modalities can play an important role — not as permanent intermediaries, but as strategic actors helping to de-risk, resource, accompany, and strengthen more locally led systems. This is the practical implication of the Grand Bargain commitment to make humanitarian response "as local as possible and as international as necessary."

Flood Beacons as part of anticipatory action activities in the DRC. CAFOD

## New mechanisms: promise, limits, and the test of power shift

In **Zimbabwe**, CoACT has been co-designed by ZAHA and local actors, with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), as a pooled, multi-year mechanism with a phased transition toward local fund leadership. Its value lies in embedding local ownership from the outset as an ongoing and adaptive process, moving from shared governance and accompanied fund management in Year 1 to greater local control in Year 2, and a fuller local ownership of fund management, donor engagement, and resource mobilisation by Year 3. CoACT is not only a funding mechanism. It also creates spaces for ongoing advocacy and critical dialogue that can adapt as context changes, including in response to further aid cuts or shifts in humanitarian need. The remaining test is whether local actors will gain real authority over triggers, allocation, evidence, risk, and donor relationships, and whether donors show the flexibility and risk appetite needed to support a locally led mechanism that may not fit conventional assurance model.

In the **DRC**, CONAFOHD points to the importance of collective local voice. Its promise lies in moving localisation beyond individual partner relationships by bringing local and national actors together around shared advocacy, representation, and reform demands. Its limitation is that collective voice only becomes local power when platforms are resourced, inclusive, and formally able to influence funding, coordination, and risk-sharing decisions.

The **Lebanon** Locally Led Pooled Fund shows how locally governed financing can create pathways for grassroots, mutual aid, and community-led groups that are often excluded from conventional humanitarian funding. Established by Lebanese organisations with international support, including Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal funds and CAFOD supporter-raised resources, its promise lies in channelling resources closer to community-rooted actors while allowing international actors to play a more intentional role in facilitation, accompaniment, and risk sharing. Its early learning is that locally led pooled funds cannot be built only through the transfer of money. They also require time to establish shared decision-making, clarify roles, build trust among participating organisations, and agree on how risks will be managed. The remaining test is whether the fund can scale up, safely support unregistered or less formal actors, mobilise longer-term resources, and gradually reduce dependence on international facilitation while strengthening local ownership.



# 1. What Local Actors Make Possible

**“Access is not something you have once and for all. It has to be negotiated every day.”** — *Local actor, DRC case study*

## 1.1 More than delivery

Local actors are often described as important because they are closer to affected communities. The case studies point to something more consequential. Local, national, faith-based, women-led, migrant-led, refugee-led, survivor-led, and community-anchored actors do not simply deliver assistance nearer to people. They often perform the functions that makes the response possible, credible, and sustainable in the first place.

Their contribution is not only operational. Across the case studies, local actors helped interpret rapidly changing contexts, sustain relationships with communities and authorities, adapt responses under disruption, and connect people to systems that were otherwise difficult to reach or trust. This does not mean that local actors are always better placed, safer, or more legitimate. It means that their value often lies in forms of relational, cultural, political, and practical work that formal humanitarian systems cannot easily reproduce.

## 1.2 Access is social, political, cultural, and negotiated

Access is not only about reaching a place. It is also about being accepted, understood, and able to operate under conditions of fear, mistrust, fragmented authority, violence, stigma, or social exclusion. Across the case studies, this kind of access depended on relationships, local legitimacy, social infrastructure, and the ability to negotiate changing conditions.

Local actors’ value lay not only in territorial proximity but also in their ability to navigate contested environments where outsiders faced sharper barriers to entry, acceptance, or continuity. In the DRC during Ebola, trusted local and religious actors helped reopen operational space for public-health engagement. In South Sudan and Sudan, church structures such as bishops and parish councils and committees, chiefs and other local authority representatives, local staff and volunteers, women’s groups, and local leaders helped sustain access where formal authorisations alone were insufficient. In South Sudan, the identity of CAFOD’s faith-based local partners and the role they were perceived to play as mediators was more effective in enabling access than formal bureaucratic approval processes. In Colombia, local organisations sustain access in areas under armed control through long-term community recognition, careful management of neutrality, and the ability to navigate distinct territorial authorities. Ethnic-territorial organisations, including Afro-descendant community councils with collective land titles and indigenous resguardos, brought forms of territorial authority that were legal, relational, and community-rooted, yet remain poorly accommodated by humanitarian financing and compliance systems designed for more conventional organisational forms. Access was therefore not a fixed permission or one-off achievement. It was a form of work: negotiated, maintained, adapted, and repeatedly re-legitimised.

## 1.3 Trust, credibility, and accountability

If access determines whether humanitarian response can reach people, trust determines whether people can use it. Trust is not a soft add-on; it functions as part of the operational infrastructure of response. Like roads, communication systems, warehouses, or vehicles, trust shapes whether assistance can move, whether messages are believed, whether referrals happen, and whether communities feel able to engage with formal systems.

In Bangladesh, the local partner's survivor-led identity gave it credibility that formal institutions often lacked. For returnee migrant workers, especially women facing shame, trauma, coercion, debt, or social isolation, support became accessible because it was offered through people and structures they could trust. In Sudan, local partners' use of parish committees, community leaders, lawyers, and discreet verification systems helped make hard-to-reach cash assistance socially and practically workable. In Northeast Syria, locally rooted intermediation helped make fund transfers and community-led WASH actions safer and more acceptable.

Across the DRC, Sudan, South Sudan, Bangladesh, and Northeast Syria, community-rooted structures helped translate formal systems into forms people could navigate. Accountability was therefore not confined to complaints boxes or formal feedback mechanisms. It was built through relationships that made systems socially intelligible, practically reachable, and more answerable to affected people.

## 1.4 Continuity, local infrastructure, and links between people and systems

Local actors often remain when wider systems slow down, relocate, withdraw, or shift into remote management. This continuity should not be romanticised. It often means carrying disproportionate operational, social, and security burdens and risks. But it is one of the clearest forms of contribution across the case studies.

In Colombia, the organisations that arrived first in crises were often those that had remained present between crises, during funding gaps, and across political cycles. In Ukraine, the local partner's rapid response under bombardment was possible because of its prior social work, outreach, and relationships with people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable groups. In South Sudan, Sudan, the DRC, and Bangladesh, local organisations and community structures adjusted routes, delivery points, communication channels, staffing, verification systems, and follow-up under bombardment, war, flooding, disease outbreaks, displacement, and institutional disruption, drawing on local knowledge, community systems, local staff and volunteers, and relationships with authorities and coordination spaces.

Parish committees, peace committees, migrant forums, community volunteers, women's groups, CBOs, community protection networks, and local social workers were not merely consultative add-ons. They were part of the infrastructure through which response continued when formal systems were delayed, disrupted, or difficult for affected local communities to navigate.



## 1.5 Integrated local practice across humanitarian, development, and peace work

Several case studies suggest that local actors often work across divides that international systems tend to separate. Immediate response, recovery, protection, rights work, justice-seeking, peacebuilding, livelihoods, and community development are often part of the same organisational practice.

This does not remove the tensions of working across these agendas. It shows, however, that the so-called humanitarian-development-peace nexus is often already embedded in how local organisations operate. In Colombia, many of the organisations best able to provide humanitarian access did not primarily identify as humanitarian actors. They were peace organisations, faith-based structures, community development corporations, child protection foundations, women's rights organisations, or ethnic-territorial platforms. Their peace and development work created the relationships that made humanitarian access possible when violence escalated.

The implication is that localisation should not be treated as a separate reform agenda from nexus thinking. If local actors already connect immediate response with longer-term resilience, recovery, protection, rights work, and peacebuilding, then localisation cannot be reduced to preparing them to comply with external humanitarian funding systems. It should also mean resourcing and enabling local actors to pursue their own mandates and agendas in context, including their roles in community accountability, civic mobilisation, and engagement with local and national authorities. Supporting local leadership also means supporting the organisations and community relationships that connect immediate response with longer-term accompaniment, resilience, recovery, protection, and peace.

## 1.6. From access to people-centred outcomes

The case studies show that access and outcomes are closely intertwined. Local actors not only help the response reach places that might otherwise remain inaccessible. They also shape whether assistance reaches the right people, is trusted, can be used safely, and leads to tangible changes in people's lives.

This is visible across the case studies. In Bangladesh, the survivor-led model helped returnee migrants, especially women facing stigma, debt, coercion, and social isolation, access justice, compensation, psychosocial support, and reintegration pathways. In Northeast Syria and Ukraine, locally embedded networks helped communities define WASH priorities and longer-term planning, maintain service continuity, and reach conflict-affected groups, including groups often excluded from registration-based support. Across South Sudan, Sudan, the DRC, and Colombia, locally rooted and trusted structures helped turn access into food security, livelihoods, cash, hygiene, dignity, nutrition, protection, psychosocial support, resilience, public-health acceptance, and the preservation or reopening of humanitarian space. These outcomes often depended on community structures, local knowledge, and local labour and resources which made programmes timely, contextually appropriate and inclusive.

These examples also show that some locally led outcomes are not always captured well by conventional sector indicators. Referral, accompaniment, safe disclosure, community acceptance, continuity of contact, trusted mediation, and locally grounded verification may appear as intermediate steps, but they are often the pathway through which protection, health, justice, food security, or resilience outcomes become possible.

Local actors sometimes sustain this work through solidarity-based support, volunteer networks, community contributions, faith structures, mutual aid, or their own income-generating activities. These resources can keep response going when funding is delayed or absent, but they are not a substitute for predictable, flexible, and adequate financing. The policy issue is therefore not whether local actors can produce outcomes. It is whether humanitarian systems recognise, resource, and measure the outcomes and contribution pathways that locally led work actually generates.

## 1.7 Local leadership is strongest when partnerships reinforce it

The case studies do not suggest that localisation requires replacing international actors, nor that local actors are better placed in every respect. They suggest something more practical: local leadership is strongest when partnerships are organised around local agency rather than around downstream implementation.

Local actors often bring access, trust, legitimacy, contextual intelligence, continuity, cultural translation, and accountability. International actors, where they add value, often do so differently: through logistics, technical support, donor-facing access, diplomatic leverage, policy influence, institutional accompaniment, safeguarding systems, or financial and compliance support that local actors cannot always provide at the same scale.

The question, therefore, is not whether international actors have a role. It is whether their role expands local authority, visibility, decision space, and institutional resilience — or whether it keeps local actors close to communities but far from power.

Emergency Response in Myanmar. CAFOD

## Local access as humanitarian infrastructure

In **South Kivu, DRC**, the local partner's work in Mwenga shows how access can depend on cultural translation. Communities were not simply "unaware" of Ebola risks; some felt that external messages judged their food practices and ways of life. Local partners changed the entry point, beginning with familiar concerns such as safe water, handwashing, hygiene, and the prevention of diarrhoeal disease. Churches, local leaders, and community groups then carried Ebola prevention messages in language and spaces people already trusted. What began as resistance became dialogue.

In **North Kivu, DRC**, faith-based networks became access infrastructure during health emergencies and conflict. Parish networks, basic ecclesial communities, local health structures, and church relationships helped identify emerging cholera risks, assess whether roads were passable, and determine whether intervention would be accepted. During recurrent cholera alerts, local partners could mobilise chlorine, water tanks, sanitation materials, tents, doctors, and nurses quickly, sometimes before larger actors arrived. In areas affected by fighting, church structures also provided information, shelter, and continuity when access was highly constrained.

In **Sudan**, local access depended on discretion as much as proximity. Parish committees, community leaders, lawyers, and trusted verification systems helped identify vulnerable households without exposing them publicly. In a setting where visibility, documentation, and beneficiary selection could create risk, local access made support reachable without making people more visible than necessary. The infrastructure was not only transport or cash delivery. It was trusted verification, quiet referral, and protection of sensitive information.

In **Bangladesh**, Migrant Forums show how trust can turn private harm into public accountability. Returnee migrants, especially women facing stigma, debt, trauma, or family pressure, could disclose abuse because they were speaking to people who understood migration from lived experience. Forum members helped survivors prepare complaints, navigate arbitration, recover compensation, and later become community defenders themselves. Access to justice began with the possibility of being believed.

In **Ukraine**, the local partner's response in Kharkiv shows how prior relationships can become emergency infrastructure overnight. When bombardment disrupted services, the organisation did not have to build a response network from scratch. Shelter clients, church groups, students, businesses, drivers, social workers, and volunteers were already connected to its work with people experiencing homelessness. Those relationships became routes for finding people, moving supplies, and keeping assistance going under bombardment.

In **Colombia**, local organisations sustained access in areas under armed control through careful negotiation, community recognition, and consistent management of neutrality. One regional NGO director described being questioned for two hours by an armed group commander about why her team had entered the area. Her response drew on a position built over many years: the organisation entered because communities had invited it, and because its role was humanitarian rather than political or military. Access was therefore not secured through dependence on armed actors, but through a careful balance of community legitimacy, principled negotiation, and consistent institutional positioning.

# 2. Why Localisation Still Stalls in Practice

**"Local organisations depend on intermediary donors and do not deal directly with donors… there is a ceiling that local organisations cannot easily reach."** — *Local actor, South Sudan case study*

Promising examples do exist, and some partnership models clearly reinforce rather than displace local leadership. But across the case studies, these remain uneven, partial, and often exceptional. The issue is not whether locally led response works. It is why systems that depend on local actors still struggle to recognise, resource, and support them on appropriate terms. The barriers are not only technical. They are built into the way funding, compliance, coordination, partnership, and risk systems continue to organise eligibility, authority, resources, and visibility.

## 2.1 Local actors are diverse, but current systems still sort and exclude

Localisation is still too often operationalised as if "local actors" were a single category. In practice, the local ecosystem includes large national NGOs, diocesan and faith-based structures, women-led organisations, migrant-led organisations, refugee-led organisations, survivor-led organisations, community-based groups, informal mutual aid networks, volunteer formations, representative platforms, and locally registered intermediaries.

These actors differ in scale, reach, legitimacy, governance, risk exposure, institutional capacity, formality, and closeness to affected communities. Yet funding and compliance systems often reward a narrow set of institutional characteristics: formal registration, prior donor relationships, audit history, proposal-writing capacity, reporting systems, language skills, and the ability to absorb complex due diligence requirements. This favours larger, more professionalised, and more donor-facing organisations, while smaller, more community-rooted, informal, or less formalised actors may be praised rhetorically, but they often face weaker pathways to meaningful support. One response is often to push local actors toward greater formalisation. But formalisation is not always the answer.

In some contexts, registration can enable safer fund management and official recognition. In others, it can expose community actors to surveillance, political control, bureaucratic burden, or loss of independence. Support should therefore be calibrated to function, risk, and context rather than built around a blanket expectation of organisational formalisation.

## 2.2 Funding still falls short of what local leadership requires

Funding remains poorly aligned with the kinds of work through which local leadership operates. Short-term, output-heavy project cycles are especially ill-suited to trust-building, access maintenance, accompaniment, justice-seeking, psychosocial recovery, negotiation, local accountability, risk management, and institutional continuity. Yet these are precisely the functions that many of the case studies suggest are central to locally led, people-centred response. When these functions are not explicitly recognised and budgeted, they are treated as informal local contributions rather than as core humanitarian work.

The same problem appears at the institutional level. Local actors are often expected to deliver under highly demanding conditions without sufficient support for core systems, staffing continuity, governance, safeguarding, data management, logistics, security, insurance, staff care, or institutional resilience. Core support should therefore not be treated as an administrative luxury or expected to be covered by indirect cost recovery alone. While indirect cost recovery can help cover some organisational costs, it cannot substitute for explicitly recognising, budgeting, and fairly sharing the core costs that make local leadership possible. Such investment protects the relationships, systems, and continuity that make local access possible.

This problem is reinforced when pooled or rapid funding mechanisms prioritise speed, scale, and absorption capacity without also funding the core systems and access-producing work that local actors need to lead. Where overheads and indirect costs remain concentrated at the international level, local partners are left carrying delivery responsibilities without the institutional resources needed to strengthen their systems. Local leadership cannot be sustained if local organisations absorb the institutional costs of delivery while international actors retain most overhead, systems funding, or unrestricted support.

## 2.3 Participation has expanded faster than influence

**"Local and national actors are not at the table where the milk is being served; they are sitting on the floor while someone serves milk and brings it to them"** — *International actor, South Sudan case study.*

Local actors are increasingly present in coordination, consultation, and platform spaces, but far less consistently influential within them. Participation is not irrelevant, but it is not the same as power.

Across the case studies, local actors often generated critical intelligence on insecurity, exclusion, hidden needs, access blockages, changing local conditions, service gaps, protection risks, and community priorities. Yet those capacities were not always integrated into upstream decision-making. Part of the problem lies in how these spaces are structured. Technical procedures, exclusive language, standardised templates, and one-size-fits-all approaches often make it easier for externally legible forms of expertise to be recognised, while local capacities, locally relevant methods, and community-rooted ways of knowing and responding remain undervalued. Local actors could be valued as sources of information while remaining marginal to the spaces where final decisions were made.

This is one reason localisation can appear to advance while remaining structurally limited: representation may improve without materially changing who decides, whose analysis counts, or who controls resources. Being present in the room does not mean shaping the outcome. Moving from local presence to local power, therefore, requires a shift from participation to decision-making influence.

## 2.4 Risk-sharing remains more rhetorical than real

Risk-sharing remains one of the clearest areas where localisation continues to fall short. Local actors frequently carry the operational, security, fiduciary, reputational, health, protection, and duty-of-care burdens of response, especially in insecure, politically sensitive, or highly regulated settings. At the same time, international actors and donors often retain greater control over design, timelines, resource allocation, visibility, and acceptable levels of risk.

This imbalance matters because risk is not removed by withholding power from local actors. It is redistributed, often in ways that make them more exposed while giving them less control. Across the case studies, local actors negotiated access, managed community relationships, adapted to insecurity, protected staff and volunteers, handled cash and verification risks, absorbed delays, and navigated armed actor encounters, while having limited influence over the decisions that shaped those risks.

This creates a structural contradiction. local actors may be treated as too risky to fund directly or at scale, while the same risks are accepted when passed down through subcontracting arrangements. Large-scale pooled or rapid funding mechanisms can reinforce this contradiction when high-value, short-timeframe allocations favour UN agencies and international NGOs, even though local actors may later be subcontracted to implement the work. The result is not risk reduction, but risk displacement: resources, overheads, and decision-making remain concentrated upstream, while delivery responsibility and exposure move downward.

Across the case studies, this risk displacement is not only fiduciary. It was also physical, reputational, relational, and operational. Local organisations negotiated access in insecure environments, adapted visibility and procurement arrangements, protected staff and volunteers, managed community expectations when funding was delayed, and absorbed the consequences of decisions made upstream. In some cases, they did so without access to the security information, flexible procedure, contingency resources, or duty-of-care support available to international actors.

A more serious localisation agenda would therefore make risk-sharing mutual and practical. Some international actors have begun to address this through phased disbursement, pre-financing, direct cost recovery, financial accompaniment, logistics support, governance strengthening, contingency funds, flexible emergency funds, and, in some cases, absorbing or negotiating losses when local actors face shocks or ineligible expenditures. But these remain uneven rather than standard.

This requires a more mutual form of due diligence. Local actors are often assessed for fiduciary, safeguarding, reputational, or operational risk, but international actors are rarely assessed by local partners for the risks created by delayed disbursement, rigid procurement, branding requirements, unclear compliance expectations, limited security information-sharing, or insufficient duty-of-care support. Partnership quality should therefore become part of risk assessment, not an optional matter of good practice.



## 2.5 Intermediation and localisation hubs can enable or constrain local leadership

The case studies do not support a simple opposition between direct funding and intermediation. The issue is what function intermediaries, hubs, consortia, networks, and pooled mechanisms perform. They can widen local authority when they reduce burden, share risk, strengthen systems, adapt procedures, convene actors, and preserve local decision space. They constrain localisation when they retain control over resources, strategy, visibility, eligibility, and risk while local actors remain mainly responsible for implementation.

This is why their value should be judged by whether they shift authority over time, not only by whether they include local actors. A localisation mandate manifested in partnering with local actors or adopting a localisation strategy is not the same as a pathway to local power. Mechanisms limited to consultation, coordination, representation, or ad hoc access to funding may improve local presence without changing who decides, who controls resources, or whose evidence shapes priorities.

A recurring problem is asymmetrical due diligence. Local actors are assessed, ranked, and tiered according to fiduciary, safeguarding, governance, reporting, or prior grant history requirements, while international actors are often treated as eligible by default. Their own partnership practices — including overhead-sharing, timely disbursement, procurement flexibility, security information-sharing, and pathways to local leadership — are less frequently examined, or not at all. Tiering can be useful if it calibrates support and assurance, but it becomes exclusionary when it fixes local actors in lower categories without clear pathways, timelines or support packages for progression.

The case studies point to the same lesson across different institutional forms. In Colombia, the distinction between an intermediary that merely passes funds and one that adds value through accompaniment, flexible financing, procurement adaptation, convening, and advocacy shows that intermediation can either occupy space or open it. In South Sudan, consortium and accompaniment arrangements show important momentum but also the limits of local influence, where donor accountability and consortium governance remain concentrated with international actors. In Northeast Syria and Zimbabwe, locally anchored intermediation and phased pooled funding show how these mechanisms can be designed as pathways toward safer local fund management, community decision-making, and eventual local ownership rather than permanent external control.

Local and national networks can also be part of this architecture when they are genuinely led by local actors and resourced to shape priorities, evidence, advocacy, and allocation debates. Their value lies not simply in representing “local voices,” but in strengthening collective influence and creating pathways toward greater authority over resources, evidence, risk, coordination, and decision-making.

## 2.6 Localisation remains fragmented rather than systemic

Localisation is still advancing through a patchwork of pilots, targets, platforms, pooled funds, accompaniment models, national networks, technical working groups, conferences, community-led approaches, and hubs rather than through a coherent reform architecture.

Many of these initiatives matter. Some are innovative and promising. But they often operate in silos, with limited coordination, unclear division of roles, weak synergies, and insufficient mechanisms for translating commitments into implementation. In several contexts, localisation strategies and platforms lack action plans, indicators, timelines, or monitoring frameworks. Different hubs or working groups may pursue overlapping agendas without a shared roadmap, while government, communities, private sector actors, and smaller grassroots groups remain unevenly included.

This fragmentation weakens the transformative potential of localisation. Pooled funds may create local windows while retaining procedures that exclude less formal actors. Coordination spaces may increase local attendance without shifting allocation power. Conferences may generate commitments without follow-up mechanisms. Accompaniment models may strengthen individual partnerships without changing the wider system. The central problem, then, is not a lack of examples. It is the absence of a coherent architecture capable of connecting these initiatives, reducing duplication, aligning incentives, and translating promising practice into structural reform.

Staff of local church organisation conduct monitoring and accountability meeting in Zimbabwe on project funded by CAFOD and Oak Foundation. CAFOD.

## Where localisation stalls: when leadership is asked to operate without the conditions to sustain it

In **Bangladesh**, the local partner's survivor-led model depends on patient accompaniment: repeated follow-up, psychosocial support, legal documentation, arbitration, peer counselling, and community trust. Yet this work does not fit easily into short project cycles or narrow output frameworks. The risk is that survivor-led justice becomes funded as a series of activities, while the long-term relational infrastructure behind it remains fragile.

In the **DRC**, several local partners were expected to operate in areas affected by armed groups, disease outbreaks, poor roads, and weak services, but without sufficient investment in vehicles, security costs, software, indirect cost recovery, staff care, or direct donor visibility. The stall is not only about who decides; it is also about asking organisations to carry complex response functions without the institutional backbone to sustain them.

In **South Sudan**, localisation has advanced through national NGO leadership, consortium partnerships, and coordination roles, yet smaller community-based and women-led actors can still be filtered out by compliance, language, audit, and grant-management requirements, limited staffing, and restricted access to resources and information. The stall occurs when localisation strengthens larger national actors but does not create proportionate pathways for more community-rooted organisations.

In **Colombia**, local organisations adapted procurement, transport, visibility, and access arrangements to keep response possible in remote or contested areas, including by using informal transport providers, removing donor branding where it created protection risks, and managing pressure from transport guilds. Yet, pooled-fund rules, delayed tranches, rigid documentation requirements, and weak security information-sharing limited the flexibility that made their access effective, at times leaving organisations to manage the reputational and relational consequences of commitments already made to communities. The stall lies in systems that value local adaptability but fund it through inflexible procedures, transferring the costs of system failure downward to the organisations closest to communities.

# 3. What New Partnership Modalities Reveal

**"Our intermediary partner is constantly genuinely assessing whether what we are doing and how we can continue supporting. In the pooled fund, the second tranche may not arrive, even when we have already made public commitments to communities."** — *Local actor, Colombia case study*

The case studies suggest that better localisation depends not only on who receives funds, but on how partnership itself is designed. Some newer modalities combine finance, accompaniment, risk-sharing, institutional support, and local decision-making in ways that strengthen local leadership. At the same time, they show how easily progress remains partial when improved partnerships are not connected to a wider strategy for shifting power.

## 3.1 Different modalities are emerging

The evidence does not point to a single "best" model. It points instead to a range of modalities, each with different implications for leadership, risk, decision-making, and institutional development. In some cases, international actors remain the main grant-holders while local actors lead implementation with varying degrees of accompaniment. In others, local actors themselves lead or hold funds, while international actors move into lighter-touch technical, compliance, or donor-facing roles. Other modalities support smaller, more community-rooted organisations through smaller grants, systems support, and progressive institutional strengthening, or create locally governed mechanisms where local actors help define priorities, review proposals, make allocation decisions, and strengthen one another's capacities.

## 3.2 Enabling partnerships share common features

Across these differences, several features recur, including flexible and phased funding; fair cost recovery and core support; accompaniment that reduces burden; local decision-making space; shared risk; progression pathways; and local visibility and influence. These measures matter because they allow local actors to adapt under pressure, strengthen their institutional footing, and exercise judgement rather than simply absorb delays, liquidity gaps, rigid procedures, and exposure.

## 3.3 The tensions these models reveal

These models also reveal tensions that should not be ignored. Even where local actors lead implementation, the broader agenda often still sits within frameworks shaped by international organisational strategies and donor priorities. Support to individual organisations does not automatically strengthen the wider local system. Formally transferring more funds to national actors does not guarantee that community-rooted groups, women-led organisations, informal structures, survivor networks, or refugee-led actors will gain influence. Local access also does not automatically translate into better outcomes; the conversion of access into outcomes depends

## What enabling partnerships have in common

In **Northeast Syria**, the Cascading Change partnership did this by keeping decisions close to communities while managing risk around them. The local partner worked with six CBOs and community groups to develop longer term WASH-planning, including priorities such as broken pipelines, chlorination gaps, and school sanitation. Because formal banking was absent and cash movements were sensitive, funds were phased around procurement and reconciled step by step. This allowed CBOs to lead without being left to hold visible cash or absorb the risk alone.

In **Ukraine**, CAFOD's partnership shows the importance of speed and reduced burden. When Kharkiv came under bombardment, Depaul Ukraine was already mobilising shelter clients, church groups, students, drivers, businesses, and social workers into a city-wide response. CAFOD adapted due diligence, reduced administrative pressure, and moved funding quickly, then added logistics, safeguarding, feedback, finance, and organisational-development support. The partnership strengthened an existing local response rather than replacing or slowing it.

In the **DRC**, accompaniment mattered most when it helped local partners move from implementation toward visibility and institutional strength. One local partner valued support that helped it develop proposals, identify technical expertise, mobilise donors, and present its own work in international advocacy spaces. Another local partner pointed to earlier accompaniment that strengthened its systems so that its staff later trained other local organisations in project development, finance, institutional development, and emergency response. The remaining challenge is that some partners still lacked full donor visibility, adequate cost recovery, logistics, and direct access to funding decisions.

In **Colombia**, flexible intermediary partnerships show that enabling localisation can be highly practical. Pre-positioned emergency funds allowed local organisations to respond to sudden crises without new applications. Procurement flexibility allowed them to use local suppliers, boats, trusted vehicles, and non-standard documentation in remote or conflict-affected areas. These adaptations mattered because they protected the local judgement that made access possible.

In **South Sudan**, the accompaniment-based partnership model helped resource and sustain local actors' engagement in the humanitarian architecture. Support to key staff positions, coordination engagement, and advocacy accompaniment helped local partners sustain roles in cluster, localisation, and wider convening spaces. This strengthened their visibility, created more opportunities to bring community priorities into coordination discussions, and helped sustain local leadership beyond project implementation. At the same time, the South Sudan case shows the limits of enabling partnership where donor accountability, consortium governance, and some strategic decisions remain concentrated with international actors.

on supplies, services, security, donor flexibility, procurement rules, liquidity, decision space, and follow-up systems.

### 3.4 The lesson is structural, not anecdotal

The lesson is therefore structural, not anecdotal. Better partnerships matter, but they are not enough if they remain isolated within a system that still privileges standardised compliance, short-term delivery, fragmented coordination, donor visibility, and upstream decision-making concentrated elsewhere. Their value lies in pointing toward a different architecture: one in which resources, accompaniment, compliance, visibility, risk, evidence, and accountability are organised to make local leadership more viable, not more burdensome. The most promising examples are not those where international actors simply fund local implementation. They are those where the intermediary role changes over time: from controller to accompanier, from gatekeeper to broker, from risk manager to risk share, from representative to platform-builder, and from permanent fund-holder to strategic supporter of local authority.

## South Sudan — THRIVE and the scope for stronger NGO consortium power-sharing

THRIVE demonstrates both the potential of consortium-based localisation and the wider challenges facing the sector in establishing local leadership as the norm. On the potential side, the programme uses geographic leadership and locally rooted implementation to strengthen food security, livelihoods, market systems, climate adaptation, social cohesion, and disaster risk reduction in conflict- and flood-affected areas. Through local partners, the programme has supported fisheries infrastructure, fish drying kilns, solar freezers, livestock value-chain strengthening, agroforestry nurseries, cash-for-work, flood protection, peacebuilding, early warning, and community action structures. Local access has been essential, parish networks, county authorities, chiefs, community groups, and the local partner's faith-based legitimacy helped reach places where formal authorisations alone were insufficient. Local expertise has informed programme design at various stages.

The limitation is that local leadership in implementation has not yet translated into full local power in governance. Local partners carry access, contextual interpretation, community engagement, and delivery responsibilities, but key consortium decision-making, steering committee participation, donor engagement, and strategic governance remain largely INGO-led. THRIVE therefore illustrates a wider localisation dilemma — a consortium may be locally delivered yet still not be locally governed. The recently developed (April 2025) THRIVE localisation strategy, which CAFOD facilitated, provides a useful framework for strengthening local leadership and ongoing engagement with back-donor, FCDO, and consortium members to generate learning and opportunities to strengthen the approach. The test will be whether local partners gain authority over strategy, allocation, adaptation, risk, and donor-facing evidence — not only responsibility for delivery.



# 4. Toward a Coherent Localisation Architecture

**"The distinction is between an intermediary that simply passes funds and one that adds value through accompaniment, convening and presence."** — *Local actor, Colombia case study*

The case studies point to a central lesson. Stronger localisation cannot be achieved through isolated good partnerships, local funding targets, or scattered pilots alone. These efforts matter, but they do not add up to a shift in power unless they are connected through a more coherent architecture of financing, partnership, risk-sharing, coordination, evidence, and accountability.

**This architecture should be guided by five design principles.**

### 4.1 Differentiation

Local actors occupy different positions in humanitarian ecosystems. Some are ready for direct funding and stronger leadership over programme design and delivery. Others are better supported through accompanied modalities. Some may be strongest where local actors themselves hold funds while international actors provide light-touch technical, compliance, safeguarding, MEL, or financial systems support. Community-rooted, informal, survivor-led, refugee-led, migrant-led, women-led, or faith-based structures may need flexible support that reflects their role without forcing them into organisational forms that weaken the qualities that make them effective.

A coherent localisation architecture should therefore differentiate by actor, function, risk, and context. This also means recognising that smaller, community-rooted, women-led, refugee-led, survivor-led, or informal actors may require smaller grants, lighter compliance, and closer accompaniment rather than full donor contracting requirements. Small grants should not be treated as marginal. When designed well, they can protect community proximity, test locally generated solutions, and create a pathway toward stronger systems without forcing organisations into premature formalisation.

### 4.2 Recognition of access-producing work

The case studies show that local leadership depends on functions that are often invisible in project budgets: trust-building, access negotiation, accompaniment, contextual intelligence, community accountability, protection referral, safe visibility management, local coordination, staff care, and continuity between crises.

These functions should be recognised as part of humanitarian response itself, not treated as soft, secondary, or incidental work. Access, trust, and continuity are not simply enabling conditions. In many of the case studies, they are the work through which response becomes possible. This requires budgeting differently. It means funding community facilitators, parish committees, women's groups, Migrant Forums, peace committees, CBO accompaniment, local transport, communication systems, translation, feedback loops, security

briefings, staff care, and relationship maintenance. It also means recognising that branding, procurement, reporting, and evidence requirements can either support or undermine access. Where donor visibility creates protection risks, safe visibility management should take precedence over standard communications requirements. Where formal procurement rules prevent local sourcing in riverine or conflict-affected areas, procurement systems should adapt rather than push local actors into impossible compliance.

## 4.3 Progression without permanent dependency

Partnerships should have a clearer pathway for progression. For some actors, progression may mean direct donor access. For others, it may mean stronger community governance, safer informal operation, better referral systems, more sustainable peer networks, or greater influence within local platforms and coordination spaces.

Progression should not mean pushing every actor toward the same model of formalisation, direct funding, or institutional growth. It should mean asking what form of authority, sustainability, and agency is appropriate for each actor's role, risk exposure, and relationship to affected communities.

## 4.4 Continuity across humanitarian-development-peace divides

Localisation and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus should not be treated as separate agendas. Local actors are often the ones who remain present across these divides, linking immediate response with longer-term accompaniment, resilience, recovery, protection, rights work, justice-seeking, peacebuilding, and local service systems.

A coherent localisation architecture should support that continuity rather than repeatedly forcing actors to move between disconnected humanitarian, resilience, development, and peacebuilding frames. In Colombia, peace organisations became humanitarian access actors because their long-term peace and development presence made them trusted. In Bangladesh, justice, psychosocial recovery, reintegration, community watchdog functions, and policy advocacy form one integrated survivor-led model. In South Sudan, THRIVE and ICSP link livelihoods, DRR, peacebuilding, GBV services, WASH, market systems, and social cohesion. In the DRC, Ebola, cholera, GBV referral, hunger, urban agriculture, and conflict access are interconnected in practice. The architecture should therefore fund integrated local practice rather than forcing it into fragmented sectoral silos.

## 4.5 System alignment around power, risk, evidence, and accountability

The case studies show a growing number of localisation initiatives including hubs, platforms, pooled funds, accompaniment models, community-led approaches, local networks, technical working groups, and donor targets. Many are useful. But without alignment, they risk remaining fragmented, competitive, or duplicative.

A more coherent architecture would connect these initiatives around shared questions: who decides, who gets funded, who carries risk, who has visibility with donors, whose evidence counts, which functions are recognised as essential, and whether affected communities experience greater agency. This requires alignment between funding rules, partnership standards, coordination systems, localisation strategies, risk-sharing frameworks, evidence systems, and accountability mechanisms. It also requires international actors to be assessed not only by how much they fund local partners, but by whether their practices expand local authority, reduce burdens, share risk, and strengthen local systems.

Zimbabwe's ZAHA experience shows that system alignment can begin before formal pooled-fund architecture is in place. During the 2023 cholera response, ZAHA operated as a soft collective platform without dedicated donor funding or established governance. Its value lay in enabling NGOs to share information, coordinate priorities, and make practical decisions together, and use available resources more effectively. In doing so, it helped move response away from fragmented organisation-by-organisation action toward more coordinated and locally informed decision-making. CoACT builds on this experience by seeking to formalise and resource a more locally led pooled funding architecture.

### The test of power shift

New localisation mechanisms should be judged not by whether they include local actors, but by whether authority actually moves.

The test is whether local actors help define priorities before funding decisions are made; hold formal authority in governance and allocation structures; receive fair indirect cost recovery and core support; adapt activities, procurement, visibility, and timelines without repeated upstream approval; share rather than simply absorb security, fiduciary, reputational, and duty-of-care risks; have direct visibility with donors; and participate in a clear pathway for changing the role of international actors over time.

A mechanism becomes locally led when it changes who decides, who carries risk, who controls resources, whose evidence counts, and who is visible to donors.

# 5. What Different Actors Should Do Next

## For bilateral and institutional donors

- Adopt differentiated funding pathways rather than treating all local actors as a single category. Some organisations are ready for direct funding; others are better supported through accompanied modalities; community-rooted actors may need lighter and more flexible support. Differentiation should also apply to proposal timelines, application windows, language requirements, and submission processes.
- Fund the functions that make locally led response possible, including access-building, trust maintenance, accompaniment, accountability, protection, evidence generation, staff care, coordination, and continuity. This requires support for core staffing, governance, safeguarding, logistics, data systems, security, and financial management.
- Recognise access-producing work as an eligible direct cost. Community relationship maintenance, local facilitation, visibility management, flexible transport, contingency stocks, local procurement adaptation, and coordination leadership should be budgeted explicitly, not hidden in overhead or absorbed by local actors.
- Support fairer indirect cost recovery arrangements. Where international actors receive overhead or indirect cost recovery linked to local delivery, a fair and transparent share should support the local partner's core systems, staffing, governance, compliance, and institutional resilience.
- Make due diligence, reporting, procurement, and assurance more proportionate. Donors should distinguish between types of risk, budget explicitly for risk-sharing, and recognise that rigid procedures can themselves create operational failure.
- Measure localisation through power, not funding shares alone. The relevant questions are who decides, who carries risk, who has donor visibility, whose evidence shapes priorities, which local systems are strengthened, and whether community-rooted capacities are sustained over time. Equitable partnership clauses in donor agreements can be an important way to make these commitments operational.
- Support funding models that allow local actors to work across humanitarian, development, peace, protection, rights, and resilience agendas, rather than forcing integrated local practice into short-term sectoral silos. Donors should use multi-year and flexible funding mechanisms, including strategic partnership agreements, resilience- or nexus – oriented consortia, crisis modifiers, contingency funds, and pre-positioned flexible resources, to allow local partners to respond to shocks while sustaining longer-term accompaniment, recovery, protection, and peacebuilding work.
- Use donor convening power to widen direct engagement and harmonise localisation approaches. Donors should bring local and national actors, governments, private-sector actors, UN agencies, INGOs, and localisation platforms into structured dialogue, while creating regular opportunities for national and local actors to engage donors directly. The Grand Bargain National Reference Groups (NRGs) offer a promising model for structuring this dialogue at country level, subject to clear mechanisms for linking local actors' priorities to changes in donor, UN, and INGO policy, funding, and partnership practices at capital and headquarters levels.
- Recognise and promote credible external quality certifications and harmonised due diligence processes. Certifications such as the Core Humanitarian Standard and mutually recognised due diligence tools should be accepted where relevant as evidence of organisational capacity and used to reduce duplicated assessments that absorb local organisational capacity without adding protection or accountability.

## For international NGOs and intermediary organisations

- Move from subcontracting to enabling partnership. Local actors should be involved early in identifying priorities, shaping response, designing and adapting activities, and reviewing results.
- Be transparent about budgets, overheads, donor chains, compliance expectations, visibility requirements, and how responsibilities are shared. Equitable cost recovery and institutional strengthening should become standard rather than exceptional.
- Use accompaniment strategically. Governance, safeguarding, finance, procurement, logistics, audit readiness, security support, donor translation, contextualised due diligence, and policy access can all strengthen local leadership when they reduce burden and widen decision space.
- Assess whether partnerships expand local power. International actors should ask whether their role expands local authority, visibility, decision space, and institutional resilience, or whether it keeps local actors close to communities but far from power.
- Ensure accompaniment does not become a permanent substitute for power shift. Where relevant, it should be linked to clearer progression pathways, stronger local visibility, greater local control, and an explicit strategy for changing the intermediary role.
- Treat visibility as a risk issue, not only a communications requirement. Branding, donor logos, and public association can affect access and protection and should be assessed jointly with local partners.
- Co-create partnership progression plans with local partners, clarifying whether the pathway is toward direct donor access, local fund management, stronger community governance, safer informal operation, or another locally appropriate form of authority.
- Build partnership relationships based on mutual respect, trust and shared decision-making. These values should be integrated throughout the partnership cycle, including communication, learning, project documentation, external visibility, donor engagement and consortia meetings.
- Institutionalise pre-positioned flexible emergency funds as a standard feature of partnerships with conflict-context local organisations. These should be accessible through rapid consultation rather than new applications.

## For pooled funds, UN agencies, and humanitarian coordination actors

- Move beyond participation as attendance. Local actors need meaningful roles in needs analysis, agenda-setting, allocation, monitoring, decision-making, and strategic adaptation. This should include stronger local actor representation in the global and capital-based forums where funding rules, governance structures, and reform agendas are shaped, rather than assuming that consultation through country-level forums is sufficient to address structural barriers.
- Reduce structural exclusion in eligibility and allocation systems. Reporting burdens, language requirements, technical terminology, humanitarian jargon, turnover thresholds, prior grant history, registration requirements, and compliance expectations often exclude smaller, community-rooted, women-led, faith-based, migrant-led, refugee-led, survivor-led, and disability-inclusive actors.
- Expand locally governed or co-governed approaches, local early warning and evidence systems, and accompanied pathways for actors central to access and accountability but not yet fully donor ready.
- Ensure local evidence leads to local influence. If local actors generate the knowledge on which response depends, they should have an influence over the spaces where priorities and allocations are decided.
- Treat localisation strategies as implementation commitments, not policy statements. Strategies need action plans, indicators, timelines, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability for progress.
- Share security and access information with implementing partners. Local actors should not carry operational risk without access to the information systems that shape international actors' own security decisions.
- Attach partnership-quality clauses to large allocations. Where UN agencies or international NGOs receive funding that depends on local implementation, funding agreements should require transparent sub-granting arrangements, fair overhead or indirect cost sharing, timely and value-protected disbursement, flexibility to adjust targets and budgets when exchange-rate losses or funding shortfalls occur, meaningful local involvement in design and adaptation, and reporting on how local partners' institutional costs and risks are covered.
- Avoid making local and international actors compete on formally equal terms when the rules are structurally unequal. Funding windows intended to strengthen local leadership should either be locally governed, reserved for local actors, or designed with differentiated requirements that reflect the scale, role, and risk profile of different actors.
- Create mechanisms through which local evidence, access intelligence, and community analysis directly inform allocation, targeting, adaptation, and response prioritisation.
- Extend security information-sharing to implementing partner staff operating in the same territories as agency personnel. Current UN security management architecture treats implementing partner staff as a structurally separate category, leaving them to carry operational risk without access to the information that international actors use to manage it.



## For localisation platforms, national networks, and collective local structures

- Strengthen downward accountability. Platforms should be accountable not only to donors and international actors, but to their members and, where relevant, to affected communities.
- Avoid reproducing exclusion within the local sphere. Stronger inclusion of women-led, migrant-led, refugee-led, survivor-led, disability-inclusive, faith-based, youth-led, and community-rooted actors is essential. This requires reducing barriers to meaningful participation, including humanitarian jargon, accessibility constraints, participation costs, and unpaid time, while ensuring localisation platforms do not reproduce sectoral silos or concentrate influence among better-resourced local actors.
- Invest in governance, transparency, and collective evidence so that local platforms can shape priorities, influence allocation decisions, and help define accountable localisation in practice.
- Support downward localisation by asking not only whether resources reach national actors, but whether communities, grassroots structures, women's groups, survivor networks, and refugee-led groups gain greater voice and agency.
- Increase local leadership in UN-led coordination bodies. Local actors should hold decision-making roles in cluster strategic advisory groups, country-based pooled fund advisory boards and other spaces where priorities, allocations, and response strategies are shaped.

## For humanitarian reform actors more broadly

- Treat localisation as structural reform, not only as a funding target. The central questions are who decides, who carries risk, whose evidence shapes priorities, which institutions are strengthened, and whether community-rooted infrastructures are recognised as essential parts of response.
- Move beyond compliance-centred localisation. Localisation should not be reduced to making local actors "donor-ready" according to external compliance standards. Funding, partnership, and coordination models should enable local actors to fulfil their own mandates, priorities, and accountability roles in context.
- Use broader indicators of progress and monitor implementation. Funding shares remain important, but they should be complemented by measures of decision-making authority, local influence, institutional resilience, community accountability, transparency in overhead and risk arrangements, and support to access-producing functions. Localisation commitments should be tracked through clear targets, timelines, public reporting, and accountability measures where agreed commitments are not met.
- Use broader indicators of locally led outcomes. Funding shares and delivery outputs should be complemented by measures that capture referral, accompaniment, safe disclosure, community acceptance, continuity of contact, trusted mediation, locally grounded verification, and other contribution pathways through which protection, health, justice, food security, and resilience outcomes become possible.

- Foster models that can be normalised, not only admired. The goal is not simply to accumulate good examples, but to create a system in which differentiated pathways, enabling partnerships, shared risk, and stronger local leadership become ordinary features of humanitarian action rather than exceptional ones.
- Strengthen alignment across localisation initiatives, platforms and key stakeholders. Humanitarian reform actors should promote harmonisation and complementarity across donor strategies, pooled funds, coordination platforms, localisation networks, government-led processes, and civil society initiatives.

## For local and national actors

- Engage strategically with governments and other national stakeholders. Local and national actors should work with relevant government institutions, where appropriate, to shape country-level localisation policies, align localisation initiatives, and strengthen accountability for implementation.
- Strengthen collective advocacy and coordination among local and national actors. LNAs should harmonise their localisation approaches where possible, build shared advocacy positions, and collaborate across networks to increase collective influence in funding, coordination, and policy spaces.
- Strengthen downward accountability and reflect on internal power dynamics. LNAs should consider how localisation is operationalised within their own organisations, networks, and communities, including whether power, resources, and voice reach communities and smaller community organisations.


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