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About this report

The authors conducted the research on a consultancy commissioned by CAF as part of their MSc in Development Management at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

About CAF

CAF is a leading international charity headquartered in the United Kingdom, operating in nine countries and covering six continents. For over 90 years, CAF has served as an intermediary between donors, companies, charities and individuals by offering their research, advocacy, policy work, and solutions to make a better impact. CAF specifically works within the fields of charitable giving and corporate social responsibility to support and develop a vibrant, resilient and independent civil society by pioneering effective and sustainable ways to give.
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# GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships</td>
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<td>ALPC</td>
<td>Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships Consortium</td>
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<td>C4C</td>
<td>Charter for Change</td>
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<td>CAF</td>
<td>Charities Aid Foundation</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-Based Organisations</td>
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<td>CBPF</td>
<td>Country-Based Pooled Funds</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<td>DEPP</td>
<td>Disaster and Emergencies Preparedness Programme</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCDO</td>
<td>Foreign, Commonwealth &amp; Development Office</td>
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<td>GB</td>
<td>Grand Bargain</td>
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<td>GMI</td>
<td>Global Mentoring Initiative</td>
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<td>GPC</td>
<td>Global Protection Cluster</td>
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<td>GTLRG</td>
<td>Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments</td>
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<td>HAG</td>
<td>Humanitarian Advisory Group</td>
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<td>HCT</td>
<td>Humanitarian Country Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>IO</td>
<td>International Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JST</td>
<td>Joint Strategy Team</td>
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<td>LNO</td>
<td>Local and National Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>L/NNGO</td>
<td>Local and National Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAWGB</td>
<td>Needs Assessment Working Group Bangladesh</td>
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<td>NEAR</td>
<td>Network for Empowered Aid Response</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PIANGO</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>PoP</td>
<td>Principles of Partnership</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>VANGO</td>
<td>Vanuatu Association of Non-Government Organisations</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
The international development and humanitarian sectors have often grappled with trying to ensure aid achieves good results and helps the target population. In recent years, there's been a shift in conversations over how to cultivate long-term sustainable development that enables aid assistance to go further and successful change. One of the more recent ideas which has steadily gained momentum is that of a localised response. There is no universal definition for how to conceptualise ‘local’ and what an authentic ‘localised’ response is, this report refers to localisation as:

“Localising humanitarian response is a process of recognising, 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” (OECD, 2017).

While no definition can fully reflect the heterogeneity of localisation, approaching the concept in this way enables us to explore how localisation is a holistic process which considers both the process and the outcomes. This report will explore the complementary roles of different stakeholders involved in the process of localisation, such as international organisations (IOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local and national non-governmental organisations (L/NNGOs), governments, academics, etc.

The motivations for engaging in localisation as opposed to traditional humanitarian efforts, are numerous and significant, such as local actors having better access and therefore faster response times when responding to emergency crises, a better understanding of local needs, and ultimately a stronger local civil society, which has a higher likelihood of leading to long-term development (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).
This report focuses primarily on the humanitarian approach to localised aid responses as COVID-19 has presented a unique opportunity to measure how effective localisation is across different contexts as countries from around the world experience the same crisis in different ways.

**Approach**

The goal of this project is to research, evaluate, and recommend how to improve localisation practices against the backdrop of COVID-19. This report takes a qualitative approach to evaluating localisation. First, we conduct desk-based research in order to identify why localisation matters, and the existing theoretical components that are indispensable to the localisation process. Through evaluating multiple theoretical frameworks, we identify six primary components that feed into successful localisation practices:

- Partnership
- Funding
- Capacity
- Coordination
- Policy and decision-making
- Participation

These components serve as a benchmark with which to assess the extent in which localisation is happening.

**Analysis**

In order to test how localisation in practice measures up against the theoretical localisation components, we compare four cross-country case studies: Bangladesh, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Vanuatu. By doing so, we are able to identify the similarities and differences of localisation in practice across a variety of humanitarian, geographical, and political contexts, both before and during the context of COVID-19. We interview key international development and humanitarian stakeholders, such as INGO and IO practitioners, academics, and aid experts in order to gain in-depth insight.
of the lived experiences in order to understand from their point of view why widespread localisation of international aid efforts is yet to be achieved. We use their insights to derive key themes regarding the standing impediments to localisation, which ultimately need to be addressed by the international community in order to propel the localisation agenda forward.

Ultimately, while COVID-19 has presented many opportunities for increased localisation, the results remain inconclusive about whether it has enabled enduring change in the international and humanitarian aid sector (Respondent A;B;F, 2021).

Key Takeaways

To seize the window of opportunity created by the pandemic and translate these emergency localising responses into long-term decentralisation of the humanitarian and development sector, several fundamental systemic impediments need to be addressed:

1. The perpetuation of power imbalances between the Global North and South
2. The institutional lack of local understanding and context
3. The insufficient institutional incentives to localise

Although these problems are interconnected, it is important to unpack them in order to create changes in attitudes and incentives. The persistence of entrenched power asymmetries between the Global North and South have hindered local actors' opportunities of owning, coordinating, participating, and making decisions about programmes which pertain to them (Respondent A;C, 2021). There is often an institutional lack of understanding of local contexts, which can impede meaningful engagement in local development programmes. Finally, the reason why these systemic impediments persist is because there are insufficient institutional incentives to localise (Respondent A, 2021), as it can be antithetical to the business model of INGOs and IOs (Respondent F, 2021), which survive on that same funding themselves (Respondent D;E, 2021).
Ultimately, we find that the main standing impediments to localisation are not technical problems which address how to localise, but systemic, institutional problems that uncover why actors may not want to localise.

**Necessary Systemic Changes**

In order to overcome these impediments, a series of necessary systemic changes are required:

1. **Shift in mindsets**
2. **Complementarity between local and international actors**
3. **Contextualisation of the localisation process**
4. **Alignment of incentives**

Donors have significant power and influence in shifting the incentive structure of INGOs, and can play a critical role in encouraging localised practices by only funding programmes that truly dedicate funds and technical expertise to local actors in order to foster long-term sustainability. Moving forward, the international aid system should foster complementarity between local and international actors in order to build upon their comparative strengths (local actors have contextual knowledge and implementation capabilities, while international actors could be advocates on a global scale). Lastly, in order to accomplish these, both external and internal organizational incentives must be aligned. The international community must ensure more accountability of following through on localisation commitments.

We have finally generated a set of self-assessment questions for international aid practitioners to ask themselves in order to foster reflective thinking about the role they play in the localisation process.
1. INTRODUCTION

The elaboration of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the recent Grand Bargain agreement (2016) have put localisation at the forefront of the international agenda. While there is still no global agreement on the definition of ‘localisation’ and how it can best be measured, the consensus that localisation leads to long-term positive change remains consistent (IASC, 2021).

While some reports indicate the sector is headed in the right direction, progress has been slow-going (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). For example, while the goal of the Grand Bargain was to “provide 25% of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020” (IOM, 2016), in 2019 only ten signatories had met the target (Konyndyk et al., 2020). Results on leadership indicators are also stark: currently no national cluster in the world is led by L/NNGOs (ibid.).

However, progress in localisation is often more complex and difficult to quantify than simply meeting global commitments; it thus requires holistic analyses that move away from only financial indicators in order to capture the nuance and heterogeneity of how localisation is conceived globally and across different stakeholders. This report aims to fill this gap by assessing how localisation works in practice in four different contexts in order to identify the common underlying barriers to improvement and suggest changes required that are refined and not suggestive of a one-size-fits-all approach. By explaining how strengthening localised responses to humanitarian crises creates mechanisms conducive for sustainable development, this research hopes to inform policymakers on how they could activate institutional changes in order to generate long-term sustainable development.
2. METHODOLOGY

This report aims to analyse the ways in which localisation is practiced in a variety of humanitarian contexts, how COVID-19 has disrupted the humanitarian system, and provide key insights from localisation experts and practitioners. The scope of this project will focus on humanitarianism primarily in order to consider whether localisation is improved in situations of emergency; we expect strong localised responses will naturally transform into long-term development.

We seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the purpose of localisation? What are the motivations for engaging in it? What are the components of theoretical localisation models?

2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of localisation in practice before COVID-19? What are the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19 for localisation?

3. What are the standing impediments to localisation on a systemic level?

4. How can the international humanitarian and development sectors tackle these impediments moving forward?

For this report, we conducted extensive desk research by gathering secondary data from academic journals, reports, think tanks, United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) websites, etc., in order to understand what localisation is and identify the key components that make localisation models successful. We then compare four cross-country case studies (Bangladesh, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Vanuatu) to understand how the theoretical components of localisation identified in the literature review work in practice and how these components have been affected by COVID-19. The case studies will be used to draw out commonalities in the challenges and nuances facing localisation which cross-cut geographical, political, and humanitarian contexts.
We conducted key informant interviews with international development and humanitarian stakeholders in order to add depth to the desk research and offer key insights and recommendations for building upon the current localisation ecosystem. We reached out to 24 L/NNGOs, academics, IOs and INGO practitioners, and conducted nine interviews (see Appendix 4 for full list). The interviews were semi-structured, and questions were designed in a phenomenological way in order to garner honest insights about the lived experiences of localisation experts and practitioners.

Our report comes with several limitations: the subjectivity of localisation and variability of stakeholders makes generalising findings difficult, therefore the high-level takeaways may not be applicable across all developing contexts. Additionally, the ongoing nature of COVID-19 at the time of this report has limited the amount of information available, therefore insights gleaned may evolve as circumstances continue to change. Furthermore, most interview respondents were international actors due to difficulties of connecting with local practitioners. Nevertheless, the global perspective of these interviewees helps us gain a holistic understanding about the systemic and transnational challenges to achieving localisation; thus, enabling this report to provide suggestions for change that are more globally applicable and relevant to policymakers.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. DEFINING LOCALISATION

3.1.1. Background

Localisation is a complex, nuanced process that is becoming more popular in the realm of humanitarianism and international development. The term was officially introduced into the humanitarian system agenda during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit because of an increasing awareness that “the international humanitarian system [has struggled] to respond effectively and adequately to humanitarian situations” (Barbelet, 2018). Previously, the architecture of humanitarian aid and development was primarily built around the roles that stakeholders from IOs, INGOs, and foreign governments, amongst others, played in leading, designing, and implementing projects. In contrast, localisation puts local actors at the centre of the humanitarian agenda, shifting the onus of project ownership from international actors to local actors. Through this movement, international aid is intended to support local initiatives, strengthen local capacities and ownership, and make communities more resilient to humanitarian crises (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016).

The Charter for Change (2015), the Agenda for Humanity (2016), and the Grand Bargain (2016) are just a few of the seminal commitments which demonstrate a growing consensus amongst the global community that humanitarian action must become more localised in nature to foster local and national leadership and strengthen civil society.

3.1.2. Definition

Despite universal interest, however, there is not one universal definition for localisation; its multi-layered nature and ambiguity in determining what classifies as ‘local’ has made the concept subject to interpretation (Roepstorff, 2019). As a result, many definitions from various stakeholders have been established. Table 1 includes
two general definitions from leading multilateral organisations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN which demonstrate how localisation can be interpreted in very different ways.

Table 1
Localisation Definition Comparison

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<tr>
<th>ORGANISATION</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
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<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>“The process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress” (UN, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
<td>“Localising humanitarian response is a process of recognising, 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” (OECD, 2017)</td>
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The UN's definition focuses primarily on taking subnational contexts into account in their aim of meeting the 2030 SDGs. This definition does not explicitly focus on the importance of strengthening local civil society to better address local needs, rather it views localisation as a means to accomplish their organisational goals. In comparison, the OECD’s definition is more comprehensive and direct about the localisation process and its desired outcomes. Therefore, we will be looking at localisation through the lens of the OECD’s definition as it focuses more on the overarching localisation process itself.

3.1.3. Localisation stakeholders

Localisation involves a fluid set of stakeholders, infrastructure, and logistical and funding mechanisms. Even amongst similar types of humanitarian crises, the levels of potential and actual localisation will vary given an area’s local capacities and the types of stakeholders involved (ICVA & ODI, 2016). There is not a one-size-fits-all approach,
therefore, localisation must be integrated and contextualised to ensure multi-level commitment by key stakeholders and local actors is successful and long-lasting (Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments [GTLRG], 2016). The OECD (2017) has categorized the following as localisation stakeholders:

**Figure 1**

*Localisation Stakeholders*

- **National and sub-national state actors**: National and sub-national authorities in aid recipient countries include government agencies, line ministries, state-owned enterprises, federal, regional and/or municipal authorities, amongst others.

- **National and sub-national CSOs**: These national and sub-national CSOs in aid recipient countries include societies of the Red Cross and the like, NGOs (including community-based and faith-based organisations) and private sector organisations.

- **International actors**: Humanitarian responders that are not based in an aid recipient country. This includes INGOs, multilateral organisations, National Societies operating abroad and international private sector organisations.

Note. While the OECD does not explicitly list local beneficiaries as stakeholders in localisation, they are broadly considered constant stakeholders (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018) and this report will include them as such. Furthermore, donors will be considered given their critical role in funding humanitarian and development initiatives.
3.1.4. Advancing the Global Agenda: localisation and the SDGs

Despite continuing debates over what constitutes as ‘local’ and the more sceptical visions on the lack of local capacity and expertise in emergency crises, the humanitarian community has collectively recognised the advantages of localisation and are now pursuing an approach to humanitarian action that is “as local as possible, as international as necessary” (United Nations, 2016, p. 30). The relationship between the SDGs and localisation is mutually reinforcing: the SDGs established a universal agenda that provides a framework which influences national and local development policies, while localisation helps inform how the policies shall be adapted in order to be effective (GTLRG, 2016).

3.2. MOTIVATIONS FOR LOCALISATION

To understand why localisation has gained momentum and risen to the forefront of humanitarian debates in recent years, it is essential to recognise its areas of strength relative to traditional international humanitarian action. The following advantages of a local-led response have repeatedly demonstrated to improve humanitarian responses, make aid more effective, and lead to long-term sustainable development (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).

3.2.1. Local understanding of local circumstances

Local actors understand local politics, cultures, and needs. Therefore, their responses are more likely to respect the sensitivities and priorities of affected communities, and thus be accepted rather than seen as an imposition from abroad. For example, during the 2013-2016 Ebola crisis, the WHO prohibited traditional funeral rites, disregarding the cultural implications of such a policy. In response, people mislabelled causes of death in order to continue with traditional rites, ultimately exacerbating the spread of Ebola (Manguvo & Mafuvadze, 2015). In contrast, over 10,000 national volunteers in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia engaged with their communities in a respectful way, ensuring dignified burials and effectively satisfying the community needs (IFRC, 2018).
3.2.2. Better access and early response

Access to conflict areas is already challenging and even impossible in certain circumstances for IOs, therefore local responders are considerably better placed to deliver aid (Fabre, 2017). Proximity to the affected area also reduces reaction time; local actors respond quicker to humanitarian crises because they are closer. For example, during the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador, while it took local volunteers only minutes to deliver first aid, it took the European Union (EU) 36 hours (Silva, 2016). Not only can local actors access communities that INGOs cannot, they also successfully reduce the costs associated with transportation and the installation of communication infrastructures, thus combatting the current $15 billion financing gap in the humanitarian sector (Building Markets, 2018). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced many INGOs to suspend operations or scale back their projects due to restricted access to crisis-affected countries, further highlighting the necessity of a strong localised response to avoid humanitarian implementation gaps (Bseisy & Gianni, 2020).

3.2.3. Increased accountability

Owing to the increasing supply of humanitarian agencies since the 1990s, INGOs have traditionally faced strong competition which has led them to prioritise the interest of and accountability to their donors, over that of their beneficiaries in order to guarantee a sustained source of funding (Krause, 2014). As a result of this upward accountability, aid often led to the provision of unnecessary goods and services, externalities, and unsustainable impacts that did not ultimately favour recipients (Building Markets, 2018). In contrast, when aid is provided by local actors who belong to the affected communities, they are generally more demanding of their governments, more vigilant of the services provided, and more critical of the quality of goods distributed (Fabre, 2017).
3.2.4. Long-term development prospects

As opposed to international actors, local responders remain long after the shock or crisis has been alleviated and play an essential role in helping their communities recover and create pathways for sustainable long-term development (IFRC, 2018). For example, as a response to COVID-19, the OECD has advocated that donor investments be allocated based on strategic local priorities that strengthen local and national resilience; for example, helping governments build social safety nets that can absorb shocks in case of future crises (OECD, 2020). By prioritising local needs, these programmes lend themselves to long-term development by improving local preparedness, mitigating the impacts of shocks and thus enhancing CSO capabilities in the future (Fabre, 2017).

Figure 2

Advantages to Localisation

![Diagram showing the advantages of localisation]

- **Local understanding of local circumstances**
- **Long-term development prospects**
- **Better access and early response**
- **Increased accountability**
3.3. ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF LOCALISATION

To actualise the vision of a more localised international humanitarian and development sector, it is imperative to lay out the general direction for localisation. However, scholars acknowledge that defining a common ‘localisation agenda’ can be challenging since ‘localisation’ is a buzzword imbued with disparate meanings and used by different parties to achieve different ends (Robillard et al., 2020). Therefore, developing clear practical frameworks and indicators of good localisation practice are essential to offering guidance and monitoring implementation for both international and local actors in the humanitarian and international development sectors (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).

A wide range of localisation frameworks have been considered, in the hope of finding a comprehensive framework that covers both international development and humanitarian initiatives. However, given the overlapping nature of the two, most notably in the recovery and reconstruction stage when short-term relief bridges with long-term development, we have decided to focus on frameworks in the humanitarian sector. Upon synthesising well-established and widely applied localisation frameworks, six key components have been identified as essential for localisation. These components are not mutually exclusive, but complementary and interdependent. Referenced frameworks are coded as follows:
3.3.1. Partnership (GMI, LPMF, GPC, GB, ALP, C4C, PoP, HAG)

Partnership is one of the most highlighted components in all localisation frameworks. Derived from the PoP, principled partnership built between international and national/local actors are expected to be genuine, equitable, transparent, and complementary (Nolan & Dozin, 2019). Instead of treating local responders as
'implementing partners' in subcontracting projects (De Geoffroy & Grunewald, 2017), they should strive towards establishing more inclusive long-term strategic collaboration (Accelerating Localisation through Partnership [ALP], 2019).

Local voices and value should be acknowledged and promoted in the entire project cycle (NEAR, 2019) with the aim of reinforcing rather than replacing the local (IOM, 2016). To cultivate an open and egalitarian culture of partnership, the GMI recommends the use of 'joint reciprocal evaluation' in place of formal unnecessary due diligence processes that augment the power asymmetry between the international and the local. This allows for a mutual appraisal in lieu of a unilateral top-down evaluation of the local capacity by international agencies (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018). Quality partnership in localisation efforts possess transformative potential of rectifying historical power imbalances between the Global North and South (ibid.).

3.3.2. Funding (GMI, LPMF, GPC, GB, ALP, HAG)

As reflected in the Grand Bargain’s target of committing 25% of global humanitarian funding to national and local organisations by 2020, direct channelling of resources is seen as foundational to sound localisation practices (IOM, 2016). The proportion of funding provided to local partners can be increased via two channels: direct funding or the ‘as direct as possible’ funding approach (NEAR, 2019). Direct funding refers to unrestricted core funding or project funding that are directed from institutional donors to local organisations without passing through any intermediaries (Fabre, 2017). ‘As direct as possible’ funding includes partner funding, network funding and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) (IFRC, 2018) that make monetary resources and tangible assets directly accessible to national and local responders (Fabre, 2017).

Apart from quantitative indicators, funding quality can be examined in terms of timeliness of funding, openness of budget, levels of conditionality, etc. (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018). A desired outcome of localising funding is for local actors to attain fiscal independence and sustainability that enables more efficient responses in both emergency and long-term development scenarios (OECD, 2017).
3.3.3. Capacity (GMI, LPMF, GPC, GB, ALP, C4C, HAG)

Capacity-strengthening is another quintessential element in the localisation agenda. Through investing in and supporting local institutional capacity, including preparedness, response and coordination (IFRC, 2018), local actors would become more resilient towards disaster and more sustainable in development contexts (NEAR, 2019). Technical and operational capacity should be strengthened through training such that local actors can respond effectively and efficiently to humanitarian crises (ibid.). Capacity-building is often incorporated into partnership agreements via outlining performance management and quality standards that monitor the efficacy of local partners; for instance, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) created a Partner Capacity Assessment to examine local actors' performance and identify relevant support needed when managing CBPFs (OCHA, 2017).

However, it is vital to emphasise that capacity-strengthening should not be a top-down unilateral process; instead, local actors can strengthen the capacity of their international counterparts through contributing local knowledge and expertise (Robillard et al., 2020). Effective capacity-building not only enhances local CSOs' technical capacity and resilience in the face of crisis, but also strengthens the coordination between the local and international network support system.

3.3.4. Coordination (GMI, LPMF, GPC, GB, ALP, HAG)

An effective coordination mechanism between local actors and international stakeholders not only fosters collaborative and complementary responses that ensure efficient aid delivery, but also advances the localisation agenda through deeper engagement with local actors (HAG & PIANGO, 2019). To avoid reinventing the wheel, it is imperative to build upon existing national platforms and networks for sectoral coordination at the transnational level (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018). The aim of strengthening coordination is to promote greater leadership and visibility of local actors (NEAR, 2019). Despite the need of a clearly defined framework for coordination,
flexibility should be reserved in the humanitarian ecosystem to cater for adaptive situations (OECD, 2017).

3.3.5. Policy and decision-making (GMI, LPMF, ALP, HAG)

To achieve successful localisation, local actors need to participate in the entire programme cycle, including early needs assessment, programme development, implementation, and evaluation (ibid.). There are calls to decentralise decision-making processes at the international level and ensure that local organisations have influence in national, regional, and international policy planning and performance benchmark setting. This ensures that the vantage point of the ‘local’ is not overshadowed by international players who dominate the humanitarian sector (NEAR, 2019). Greater presence of local actors in international discussion panels and public acknowledgement of their risks, roles, contribution and innovation in relief work are also vital to the localisation process (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).

3.3.6. Participation (GMI, LPMF, ALP, HAG)

A recent addition to the localisation agenda is the inclusion of the voices of the local community. The objective of participation is to promote downward accountability to beneficiaries. Relief and development initiatives should empower the affected community, responding to their needs and feedback via formal communication channels (HAG & PIANGO, 2019); for instance, a complaint response mechanism that documents feedback from the community on a periodic basis. Local stakeholders should also be formally incorporated into policy development and regularly consulted for readjustments (Van Brabant & Patel, 2018).
3.4. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Strengthening localisation practices and focusing on critical areas like partnership, direct funding, capacity-building, effective coordination, inclusive policy and decision-making, and increased participation by local actors will ensure that solutions to development problems are adaptive, positive, and long-lasting. However, because localisation is a nuanced process, it can be difficult to implement successfully. Furthermore, the outbreak of COVID-19 has significantly disrupted how actors like INGOs, governments, funders, and CSOs work, creating new challenges and potentially paving the way for more opportunities of propelling the localisation agenda forward.
4. ANALYSIS

COVID-19 has disrupted all facets of international development, from humanitarian relief operations, to decision-making procedures on all levels. This calamitous event has pushed over 88 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 alone, marking a major reversal in the fight against poverty (Blake and Wadhwa, 2020). Every country in the world has felt the ripple effects left by the waves of COVID-19, however local actors in the humanitarian community have felt its effects most intensely, as it has further heightened the environmental complexity humanitarian actors work in. Border closures impeding the procurement of international emergency supplies and the mass exodus of foreign staff are some examples of how local actors have been left to fend for themselves without the previous levels of support typically given from international actors. At the same time, the digital disconnect between international and local actors has evidenced that changes need to be made to ensure local organisations are equipped to respond well to the needs of their communities.

COVID-19 could be a critical juncture for the international development community. Despite, or perhaps because of, increased difficulties in aid delivery and implementation, international development actors can take stock and leverage the lessons learned from local actors in order to understand how they can improve their own efforts moving forward. The aim of this analysis is to identify how existing strengths and weaknesses in localisation practice have been exacerbated, revealed, or created by COVID-19 through the lens of the different components discussed in Section 3. This section will also analyse how COVID-19 has presented new opportunities and pathways for better localisation practices.

4.1. CASE STUDIES

Moving away from theoretical frameworks, we will use case studies to explore how the essential components of localisation performed in practice both before and during
the pandemic. These case studies will interrogate, add to, and examine how localisation has occurred differently and similarly within complex humanitarian environments.

### 4.1.1. Case study overview

For the purposes of this report, we have chosen to analyse the different humanitarian environments in Bangladesh, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Vanuatu to study how localisation has worked across different environments which also experienced the effects of COVID-19 differently.

**Table 2**  
*Ccase study overviews (see Appendix 3 for full case study profiles)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>South Sudan</th>
<th>Vanuatu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humanitarian Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya Refugee Crisis since 1978 (hosts 1 million)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recurring Armed Conflict &amp; Internal Displacement</td>
<td>Protracted Conflict &amp; State Fragility (Civil War ended in 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Disaster-prone Region (TC Harold in 2020)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HDI Ranking out of 189 countries (UNDP, 2020)</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5
COVID-19 Burden: daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people (Global Change Data Lab, 2021)

Note: numbers are shown as a rolling 7-day average.

Figure 6
Humanitarian Aid Funding: Net Funding by Donor Type 2016-2020
Note. Percentages identified are the percentage of local funding out of total funding from 2016 to 2020. Source: Compiled by the authors by collating data from the OCHA Financial Tracking Service (see Appendix 2 for full list of cross-border and local funding streams considered).

4.1.2. Case study selection

4.1.2.1. Selection criteria

We have chosen case studies based on four criteria:

- **Similarities**: they are (1) developing countries (as depicted by low Human Development Index rankings) and (2) have been impacted by COVID-19.

- **Differences**: to add nuance and external validity to our findings, we have chosen countries that are in (3) different geographies and (4) also undergoing other crises at the same time (which are different in nature).

- **Comparison relevance**: it shows how the theoretical localisation components play out in different humanitarian contexts, thereby grounding localisation theory in practice. This comparison generates high-level insights of the similarities and challenges to localisation which cross-cut humanitarian, political, and geographical cleavages despite being an inherently diverse process. Owing to the cases chosen, the analysis will enable us to draw out findings that capture the reality and complexity of localisation at a national level and are thus more useful for policymakers.

4.1.2.2. Limitations

The recent and constantly evolving nature of COVID-19 has constrained us to select only those case studies which have updated information available. The findings obtained from these cases, therefore, may not be representative of how localisation is performing elsewhere.
4.2. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

4.2.1. Partnership

Before COVID-19

In all mentioned cases, partnerships continue to reflect unequal power dynamics, where local actors have considerably limited decision-making capacity and international actors are unwilling to change (Tanner & Moro, 2016). In Bangladesh, while international-national partnerships already existed in relation to the Rohingya refugee crisis, their effectiveness is highly undermined by their short-term and contractual nature, and heavy, unsustainable reporting requirements; instead of becoming equal partners, local actors are implementors of pre-designed projects (Humanitarian Advisory Group [HAG] & NIRAPAD, 2017).

As seen in South Sudan, the failure to grant L/NNGOs full and equal influence, control, and recognition over humanitarian responses makes partnerships less effective in tackling local problems, creates tensions between local and international staff, and shifts risk to local actors without adequate training or resources (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships Consortium [ALPC], 2019). Being amongst the most present in dangerous areas—but without the necessary insurance, physical protection or security preparation should any risks occur—these partnerships leave L/NNGOs more vulnerable and exposed to the insecurity of their contexts (Stoddard et al., 2016). By example, the total casualties of national humanitarian aid workers is approximately seven times higher than international aid workers (Aid Work Security, 2020).
Figure 7
Total number of humanitarian worker killed, 1997-2019

Given L/NGOs’ dependence on short-term partnerships and funding, this disregard for local risk further reduces local trust in partnerships as the best pathway towards localisation, reaching the support of only 49% of respondents in South Sudan (ALPC, 2019). While in the Kachin state in Myanmar, limited humanitarian access to conflict-affected communities is starting to foster a trend of greater balance in partnerships. As international humanitarian operations are restricted, reliance on local partners for a greater share of the operation design and implementation is starting to occur (South, 2018).

During COVID-19

Despite an increased promotion of engagement between local and international actors, new partnerships primarily involve emergency procurement procedures with loosened requirements and mostly temporary arrangements, which are not conducive for long-term localisation (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). For example, local actors in South Sudan shoulder more security and safety risks without international coverage of insurance costs despite the protracted violence in the country. They receive one-off INGO training sessions that do not help build their long-term local capacities, either (ALPC, 2019).
Nevertheless, increased flexibility in partnerships is also allowing for swift responses to emergencies during COVID-19 where, in Myanmar, fewer documentation requirements have meant local CSOs are able to expedite faster procurement (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). In addition to increasing effective responses, COVID-19 is also highlighting the important role of local actors and acting as a catalyst for change by initiating pathways for improved, more strategic, and longer-term ways of partnering going forward (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). The Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold response in Vanuatu is also emblematic of this shift (HAG & VANGO, 2020), where remote support reinforced rather than replaced local humanitarian action and leadership (Bamforth et al, 2020; HAG & VANGO, 2020).

**4.2.2. Funding**

**Before COVID-19**

Despite the hopeful declaration of the Grand Bargain, funding from donors, IOs and INGO partners to local and national actors has continued to fall short. In Bangladesh, despite L/NNGOs proposing roadmaps for necessary support from donors to tackle the Rohingya crisis, only 3.7% of Oxfam's funding went to national organisations, thus constraining local capacity to react (HAG & NIRAPAD, 2017). International funds via international aid agencies are also often inflexible and don’t adapt to local financial needs; local actors often lack the cash reserves and reimbursement practices to keep up with the predetermined conditionalities and log frames associated with indirect funds (Mobarak, 2020). In Myanmar, low budgets emphasise the employment gap of competent local individuals by making appropriate local recruitment impossible, resulting in fragile job stability, and thus incentivising competent staff to find work elsewhere (South, 2018).

However, in contexts of large humanitarian crisis propensity, some structures of international funds are starting to change towards more direct assistance to local organisations. In Vanuatu, the Red Cross surpassed the Grand Bargain goal of committing 25% of humanitarian funding to local actors, by committing
approximately 60% to National Societies in the Pacific Islands as a response to TC Harold (Bamforth et al., 2020). Vanuatu’s geography may explain this comparatively different funding trend as its small, relatively remote location and susceptibility to seasonal natural disasters can act as an impediment to physical international intervention and induce more support of local ownership.

**During COVID-19**

Donor processes and expectations, including the possibility of adopting more risk, do not seemed to have changed sufficiently after COVID-19 hit in order to enhance localised funding (HAG & VANGO, 2020). Despite access restrictions which forced international actors to rely on and increasingly fund local actors, donors still often prefer channeling funds towards organisations who are more likely to fit with their expectations for project reporting and language preferences, essentially putting local organisations at a disadvantage (ibid.). In Myanmar, one-third of INGOs surveyed reported no intention to continue targeting local funds after the pandemic, suggesting that the shift towards funding local partners is motivated by the temporary access restrictions posed by COVID-19, and not by long-term localisation aspirations (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). As local actors lack diversity in funding sources, they are left vulnerable to these short-term strategies of international actors.

Although localised funding may be temporary, local actors are making use of their current increased flexibility to design more effective and locally informed responses. As in Vanuatu and Bangladesh, multi-donor funds in Myanmar—such as the Access to Health Fund—have realigned their funding and shifted towards relevant priority areas, changed reporting and reviewing timelines, and adapted cost structures to local capabilities (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). Likewise, the government of Vanuatu created a unique regulation which requires “any aid donations to be matched with a similar size contribution to government,” which sets an interesting precedent of governmental intervention in localisation practices (HAG, VANGO, 2020).
4.2.3. Capacity

Before COVID-19

Given recurrent concerns surrounding L/NNGOs' lack of technical and logistical capacity to coordinate for humanitarian assistance, donors and INGOs continue to deprioritise support to local institutions (HAG & VANGO, 2020). This is often based on a failed recognition of CSO capacities and an inflated valuation of overseas expert knowledge over local knowledge which has led to underutilised local capacities and worsened the institutional capacity in developing countries (Fast & Bennett, 2020). An example of this vicious cycle occurs in South Sudan, where INGOs offering higher salaries incentivise more experienced local workers to leave their country to work abroad and focus on expert training, ultimately creating a brain drain of local knowledge (Tanner & Moro, 2016). In fact, as a report on localisation in Vanuatu suggests, even when capacity support is provided, there is little evidence that it is appropriate or relevant to the needs of local actors (HAG et al., 2019).

However, some communities have already established strong CSOs that effectively combat precarity through local mobilisation. In Bangladesh, L/NNGOs focus on targeting vulnerable populations in their geographical proximity. In a country with a high informal sector, the decentralised structure and local knowledge of these actors is key, as it enables them to identify people, evaluate their needs, and target support that is tailored, thereby enhancing local capacity to deliver aid (Sakib & Rahman, 2020). Similarly, when TC Harold hit, the Vanuatu Red Cross's decentralised embedded networks enabled them to deliver faster and more efficient emergency responses and strengthened INGO responses as well (Bamforth et al., 2020).

During COVID-19

As borders closed and in-person labour became more dangerous, many developing countries faced a threatening reduction in human resource capacities. In Myanmar, 50% of international respondents indicated that they experienced a decrease in staff
capacity due to repatriation of INGO staff (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). Local actors are facing unsustainable increases in their responsibilities and workloads as they attempt to fill positions held by foreigners, with risk of being overwhelmed and unprepared (ibid.). Additionally, as international capacity support shifts to remote training, local actors are now at the mercy of internet service and are facing the cancellation of more practical technical training, such as that on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), which is vital in Myanmar and Bangladesh (Needs Assessment Working Group Bangladesh [NAWGB], 2020).

Nevertheless, new opportunities have also arrived for local actors to increase mutual support and share knowledge and resources while pushing INGOs into a more supportive role. In Bangladesh, L/NNGO efforts to assess the impact of COVID-19 have been accompanied by over 30 IOs and INGOs simultaneously conducting complementary research on awareness, capacity-building, and prevention in order to help inform local authorities (NAWGB, 2020). In Vanuatu, there has also been a rise in local recruitment of staff and in-country specialists, and remote capacity-building, such as online trainings. These efforts are likely to lead to the long-term empowerment of national and local humanitarian communities and a shift in power dynamics towards greater local leadership (Bamforth et al., 2020).

“As much of a struggle as it is, this is a step forward for our country”

4.2.4. Coordination

Before COVID-19

Despite calls for increasing local inclusivity and visibility in coordination platforms, the humanitarian and development architecture has remained internationally heavy. Dominated by international actors, national coordination structures like the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) have failed to represent local actors' voices and reflect their interests in policymaking (De Geoffroy & Grunewald, 2017). In South
Sudan, L/NNGOs reflected they had ‘very limited’ voice since they were rarely invited to coordination meetings (ALPC, 2019). Similar sentiments were shared by Myanmar local CSO respondents, as only four large NNGOs were incorporated into formal coordination structures like the national HCT (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). L/NNGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) reacted by coordinating and sharing information effectively through ‘informal’ channels like social media, outside of the ‘formal’ cluster system. Hence, while international and local actors were capable of coordinating among themselves, the coordination gap between them is stark.

An exception to the international-centered coordination approach is the Oxfam and Joint Strategy Team (JST) partnership in Kachin, Myanmar which evolved organically and developed as an alternative to the UN coordination system. With flexible funding and minimal intervention from Oxfam Novib, the JST network has the liberty to set their own strategic direction, from conducting assessment, coordinating relief operations, to engaging in advocacy work (Stephen & Martini, 2020). This was not the only bottom-up CSO-led coordination initiative in Myanmar; in regions where urgent humanitarian needs are inaccessible to international actors, L/NNGOs have taken the lead on large-scale relief and development projects, and coordination mechanisms.

During COVID-19

Opportunities for strengthening local representation emerged amid the global pandemic, as the expatriation of INGOs staff created vacancies for local staff to step into regional coordination meetings. In Myanmar, OCHA founded an additional task and regional cluster to support local CBOs technically and connect them with international partners; 62% of local NGO staff respondents indicated that local actors are better represented in regional coordination forums since the outbreak of COVID-19.

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1 As part of the humanitarian coordination system, the Cluster Approach was adopted in 2005. Each focused on a specific humanitarian action, e.g. water, education and protection, clusters are constituted by both UN and non-UN actors with the aim of coordinating response (IASC, 2015).
Moreover, pre-existing coordination networks between local and international partners have enabled effective coordination and swift collective response. Harnessing established communication and distribution channels, INGOs and L/NNGOs in Bangladesh like the Start Fund overcame the problems of accessibility and coordination posed by COVID-19 (Mobarak, 2020). A clear specialisation of tasks helped avoid the duplication of work between international and local actors; for example, many INGOs focused on providing virtual training and preparing resources such as food and protective gear, while L/NNGOs shared knowledge with the community (ibid.).

Nevertheless, enhanced local representation in coordination platforms is subject to regional conditions, such as language. In the case of Myanmar, L/NNGO participation in coordination meeting has only increased when held in the local language (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). Even when conditions are favourable and L/NNGOs are involved in meetings, one INGO practitioner who worked in South Sudan during the pandemic, revealed that local actors’ opinions are often not considered and sidelined by the UN and government, proving no difference before and after the pandemic (Respondent E, 2021). Additionally, as meetings have shifted online, access to stable internet has become a determinant for local participation in coordination programmes; if the tool is captured by governments to pursue political interests, local actors may be left even more vulnerable. Since June 2019, the Myanmar government shut down the internet service in the Rakhine area due to prolonged armed conflict, making it difficult for local aid workers to engage in regional meetings and hindering the dissemination of timely information to local communities, adversely affecting the coordination and delivery of aid (OCHA, 2021e).

“The humanitarian architecture hasn’t been ready to shift to a locally led response. It is a very much internationally led response. And local organisations are not sufficiently part of the coordination and decision-making process. There are very limited avenues for local organisations to engage in the international coordination [process]”

– IO respondent (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020).
It is also questionable whether the positive changes in coordination practices during COVID-19 will promote long-term transformation towards locally led responses in the humanitarian system. While the localisation agenda has been amplified due to decreased international presence, structural inadequacy impedes both international and local partners from tapping into the opportunities for change. In practice, current international coordination mechanisms are ‘de facto gatekeepers’ that systematically bar and marginalise local actors through imposing barriers of language, networks, and complicated formal procedures (Fast & Bennett, 2020).

### 4.2.5. Policy and decision-making

#### Before COVID-19

Notable improvements have been observed since the mainstreaming of the localisation agenda: as noted in a 2019 evaluation of Grand Bargain, NNGOs have constituted 42% of cluster member worldwide and half of the clusters interviewed included locals in leadership positions at national level (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, as the humanitarian and development arena are monopolised by international actors, local actors are rarely included in policy and decision-making, and the parameters used to measure localisation are still shaped and dominated by donors and international agencies (A4EP, 2019). As small-scale L/NNGOs with limited financial resources and staffing constraints can hardly join important global-level decision-making forums, their views are often either neglected or ‘represented’ by larger L/NNGOs (Fast & Bennett, 2020). At the national level, a similar pattern is revealed by a study in South Sudan, in which the majority of L/NNGO respondents expressed they had ‘limited’ or ‘very limited’ influence in decision-making despite being incorporated into national coordination mechanisms (ALPC, 2019).

#### During COVID-19

During COVID-19, local communities, local leaders and CSOs stepped up to fill the gap left by the absence of external aid. For instance, local chiefs in Vanuatu took ownership
of their relief work when TC Harold hit, reinvigorating traditional mechanisms to distribute food and resources such as transported yams and bananas to a fellow island via boat since international aid procurement was restricted (HAG & VANGO, 2020). In similar veins, Bangladeshi CSOs were engaged in the entire programme cycle of their COVID-19 emergency response, from initial assessment to decision-making, planning, and implementation. Despite shortages of doctors and protective equipment, existing disaster management structures – due to the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis – supported by local civil society and government have sparked community action ranging from spontaneous individual help, to volunteer organisations, and NGO and corporate initiatives that are more targeted and locally informed, and thus more successful at tackling the issue (NAWGB, 2020).

However, strengthened L/NNGO leadership and decision-making at the local level does not necessarily translate into global-level decision-making. A localisation study in Myanmar after the outbreak of COVID-19 found that although 79% of national organisations responded positively towards a rise in decision-making power as they had more influence in discussions and planning during regional coordination meetings, less than half of the local staff felt that international actors respect local leadership (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). While more L/NNGOs are included in regional meetings, there is no evidence suggesting that they are more influential in international meetings.

**4.2.6. Participation**

*Before COVID-19*

International development efforts have consistently fallen short of including local stakeholders in policymaking, aid delivery, and implementation. In Vanuatu, multiple case studies found that local actors have not often been incorporated into humanitarian action (Cornish, 2017; HAG et al., 2019). This system of international actors taking the lead undermines the confidence of local actors in their abilities to solve problems pertaining to them. A local NGO worker in South Sudan observed,
“When [you] lack confidence it will keep you in the same position always because you will not be innovative enough, you will only rely on that which comes from the one who is more superior” (ALPC, 2019). INGOs are not the only actors who influence participation, cultural and traditional norms can also play a role. In Myanmar, one of the biggest obstacles to community participation was because of traditional and hierarchical systems wherein “people were hesitant to express their opinions and speak out openly in front of seniors or village leaders” (Kramer, 2011).

Despite hurdles to participation, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Vanuatu in particular show strong examples of local mobilisation. For instance, community-based ceasefire monitoring teams in Myanmar which acted as an early warning system and documented human rights violations, have essentially provided an entry-point for grassroots participation in the peace process. However, the lack of acknowledgement or acceptance by the Myanmar government sometimes crippled their efforts, which further accentuates the role the government has in facilitating localisation (South, 2018). L/NNGOs in South Sudan and Vanuatu have also benefited from working closely with communities to plan responses and build relationships with traditional leadership. An L/NNGO representative in South Sudan noted, “[The community] is open with us because they trust us... people feel that the organisation that is coming is theirs” (Tanner & Moro, 2016).

During COVID-19

One of the recurrent obstacles to participation which hinders effective localisation, is the lack of access to information because of technological difficulties and misinformation. In Bangladesh, information gaps inhibited participation in international and national policy debates, which undermined the local responses to COVID-19 (Mobarak, 2020). The sudden expatriation of INGO staff has created new opportunities for community members to be more involved in their local response and decision-making processes. Because Vanuatu’s borders were closed when TC Harold hit, local volunteers and the national government stepped up and 74% of 53
L/NNGOs and INGOs surveyed felt the response in Vanuatu was nationally led (HAG & VANGO, 2020). The same respondents noted:

“The reduced number of international advisors and specialists bolstered the confidence of local participants and gave them more space to share their input.”

Similarly, 41% of INGO and L/NNGO survey respondents in Myanmar felt COVID-19 created opportunities for communities to participate more in relief projects. The new normal of physical limitations and increased remote work enabled more connections and opened the doors for increased local participation (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020).

4.3. CATALYST FOR LOCALISATION?

The long-term impacts of COVID-19 on localisation are generally inconclusive. Drawing from the comparative analysis of four case studies, various opportunities and challenges for localisation have arisen amidst the pandemic. On one hand, COVID-19 has consolidated the aid sector's focus on the localisation agenda, as more recognition is given to the value of locally led responses/development in a time of restricted mobility and reduced humanitarian access. In addition to the continued support from international actors, new opportunities for local actors have also emerged as they took an unprecedented leading role in planning, coordinating, and deploying effective local responses. On the other hand, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing weaknesses in some of the localisation components, thus impeding progress towards more localised aid practices. Overall, the sustained impact of COVID-19 on the larger aid system remains uncertain given the many systemic obstacles in place.
5. KEY TAKEAWAYS

After highlighting the trends of different localisation components in practice, this section is dedicated to synthesising the findings above and uncovering the common impediments that underlie various components. Mega-crises have a history of inducing major sector-wide reform processes in the aid system, as seen in the establishment of new humanitarian accountability standards in response to the humanitarian community’s failure to respond adequately to the Rwandan genocide (Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2020). Likewise, COVID-19 can be the shock required to expedite localisation reform, on the condition that standing impediments are addressed properly, and opportunities are harnessed strategically.

To seize the window of opportunity created by the pandemic and translate these emergency localising responses into long-term decentralisation of the humanitarian and development sector, fundamental systemic changes need to be made. In recognition of the lack of a one-size-fits-all solution, we will focus on the systemic changes required in the aid industry instead of suggesting generic check-list-based recommendations.

**Figure 8**
*Summary of the Key Takeaways*

**STANDING IMPEDIMENTS**

- Power imbalance between the Global North/South
- Institutional lack of local understanding
- Insufficient institutional incentives to localise
5.1. STANDING IMPEDIMENTS TO LOCALISATION

5.1.1. Power imbalance between the Global North and South

While COVID-19 has been a great impetus for shifting partnership, coordination and funding practices, L/NNGO actors from the case examples expressed concerns over whether such temporary ‘localised’ measures would be institutionalised in the long-run (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020). Since the formal humanitarian and development sector is notorious for its high resistance to change (Ramalingam & Barnett, 2010), it is likely that INGOs may default to normal operation of sub-contracting and remote programming once travel restrictions are lifted and the reliance on local actors has receded (Barbelet et al., 2020; Respondent B, 2021).

One of the standing hindrances to systemic change and enforcement of the localisation agenda is the enduring power imbalances between international institutions and local agents. The aid sector has deeply entrenched power dynamics that stem from colonial roots, prioritising international standards and technocratic solutions over local ones (Fast & Bennett, 2020; Respondent A;H, 2021) and subordinating the local population to the ‘colonisers' culture’ (Barbelet, 2019). Despite benevolent intentions, most of the models and programmes are designed by consortia led by international actors, with the aim of, in the words of one INGO
practitioner, “making them look like us [IOs]” (Respondent A, 2021). Similar sentiments were shared by the majority of our interviewees (Respondent B; C; H, 2021). By defining the goals of localisation using Western-centric rhetoric and indicators, international actors are perpetuating paternalism and power inequalities between the Global North and South. Anecdotal evidence raised by interviewees suggests that local actors, who remain ‘outsiders’ to the traditional power structure of formal aid system, have little influence over funding decisions and localisation ‘models’ design (Respondent A, 2021). Even with the onset of COVID-19, L/NNGOs are still underrepresented in coordination meetings and side-lined in decision-making processes.

“...The word ‘localisation’ already tells something about the power dynamics... The problem is that the predominant forces of the humanitarian sector, that are overly localised in the Global North think of themselves as universal, as global. This is why they believe they have a mandate to be able to impose their ways of doing things, moralities, priorities on people. That needs to be unpacked if we start to talk about localisation” – Respondent C (2021).

A Senior Strategic Advisor at Oxfam thus concluded that the sector has wrongly focused on creating frameworks or checklists for ‘successful’ localisation, ignoring the power dynamics and expert knowledge economy of the aid sector (Respondent A, 2021). It is only by decolonising aid and the knowledge production associated with it, that power can truly be devolved into the hands of local actors and the aspiration of localisation can be actualised.

5.1.2. Institutional lack of local understanding

The persistent belief that L/NNGOs lack the ‘capacity’ to fully own and implement humanitarian and development programmes is one of the main justifications for continued international intervention. However, these beliefs are a result of imprecise, unrealistic, and often prejudiced evaluations of local ‘technical capacities,’ which are unfairly assessed by donors and INGOs against Western standards (Respondent A; B; C; H, 2021). The current lens with which local capacities are evaluated inadequately
frames local capabilities as insufficient, unprepared, and at times ill-intentioned, ultimately perpetuating the justification that international technical expertise is needed because local actors are ‘not ready’ (Respondent B;C,D, 2021). For example, by including procedural expectations on due diligence requirements and risk-assessment evaluations, which local actors do not use or are trained to engage with, they are systemically portrayed as incapable of owning their own humanitarian responses (Respondent B;C, 2021).

As demonstrated by the case studies, and made especially apparent during COVID-19, local CSOs are considerably more ‘capable’ than international actors give them credit for: embedded coordination networks, cultural knowledge of community needs and best strategies, family contacts and linkages to relevant government agents reflect L/NNGO capabilities (Respondent C, 2021). While local actors see value in their capacity to understand the local context and gain access to the field, because technocratic efficiency is understood narrowly in Western standards, these variables are not factored in. As explained by an experienced Independent Humanitarian Analyst and Consultant, L/NNGOs do not operate in silos or clusters as international standards expect, but instead work in a much more holistic manner (Respondent C, 2021). As a result of unrealistic evaluation criteria, the potential of local actors is underestimated and opportunities for greater and more efficient localisation are dismissed.

“While the international community is guided by deadlines and guidelines, local actors are caught between front lines and ethnic lines”
– Myanmar National NGO staff (De Geoffroy & Grunewald, 2017).

In some cases, the work of L/NNGOs is also hindered by more systemic problems that are not directly attributable to them. One INGO interviewee highlighted how, given the history of corruption within the aid sector, donors tend to generalise their distrust to all L/NNGOs (Respondent E, 2021); instead, they prefer to safeguard their funding by continuing to fund indirectly through INGOs, ultimately impeding localisation.
5.1.3. Insufficient institutional incentives to localise

According to a Senior Strategic Advisor at Oxfam, the difficulties to achieving localisation have often been treated as a technical issue, operating under the assumption that organisations want to localise, they just don't know how (Respondent A, 2021). They go on to point out that “the [localisation] components are not wrong, [but] they don't tackle the issue of institutions and institutional incentives.”

Engaging in localisation entails a shift in power and can threaten the funding resources of international actors — a powerful disincentive and threat to the raison d’être of international actors. In example, despite widespread support of the Grand Bargain declaration wherein signatories committed to dedicating at least 25% of aid funding towards local actors, there's been a disappointing lack of follow-through (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2020). As one interviewee mentions, "no one wants to divert their funds to other organisations. There are no incentives to do that" (Respondent F, 2021). Another interviewee candidly shared that localisation could jeopardise their INGO programmes and future funding, saying, “partial localisation would be appropriate... This justifies our existence, [as] the more we do localisation, the more we disappear...” (Respondent D, 2021). This insight is supported by literature which claims INGOs fear that localisation will “diminish their role and increase competition over scarce funding for concurrent needs” (Barbelet et al., 2020).

One interviewee who has experience sitting on a number of funding panels says, “There's no criteria around ‘Are organisations giving 25% of funding to local contracts?’ Instead, [funding] goes on whether the proposal is written brilliantly, which essentially has to be written by a head office person who speaks English” (Respondent F, 2021). Furthermore, donors have a low-risk appetite and may have worries around issues of fraud or safeguarding and would therefore prefer to direct their funds to trusted INGOs (Respondent E;F;I, 2021). According to a policy advisor at the FCDO, governmental donors are accountable to the nation's taxpayers, which creates a natural inclination to support INGOs that can satisfy their financial and project
reporting standards and expectations in order to safeguard their interests (Respondent G, 2021).

“You have to look at the political economy of the system... there’s no accountability mechanism, very few incentives for people to do it other than it’s a good idea, there’s no alignment of incentives within or between agencies to deliver this... The question isn’t why the Grand Bargain isn’t being implemented, but why would it be implemented?” – Respondent A (2021).

While the aforementioned components are critical indicators for what localisation should entail, the institutional barriers create a standing impediment which disincentivises the broader international development community from pursuing localisation.

5.2. NECESSARY SYSTEMIC CHANGES

5.2.1. Shift in mindsets

A recurring theme raised during interviews with NGO practitioners is the critical role that donors play in reorienting the aid system. Donors have the power to redefine success, shifting away from narrow terms of effectiveness, and according centrality for localisation. One interviewee who is the director at a large humanitarian research organisation, has advised that donors should explicitly fund projects with equitable partnership and two-way capacity-strengthening programmes (Respondent F, 2021). Rewarding partnerships, complementarity, local leadership, and financial sustainability would incentivise INGOs to engage in more radical localisation programmes (ibid.). However, these shifts in donor mentality can be difficult to achieve. A way to change donor preferences for funding INGOs is to prove the cost-effectiveness of localisation programmes, both on the contributions of local actors in relief response and the long-lasting effectiveness of localised aid in reducing dependency (Respondent A, 2021). This would encourage donors to invest in strategic
Interventions that strengthen local CSOs in terms of resilience and capacity in sustaining themselves once aid flows cease.

In order to transform the system, a shift in mindset is also required from local actors. As pointed out by an international aid consultant, the current ‘subjugation of the third world’ mindset is not only upheld by Global North donors but also reinforced by Southern L/NNGOs or governments themselves; by relying on aid from richer countries, their independence and control of long-term financial strategy are undermined (Respondent C, 2021). It is imperative for national governments to shift their perception on foreign aid to regain autonomy of their own development trajectory. Reduction of foreign aid can be fostered by promoting local giving culture, for instance through the use of innovative online crowdfunding platforms. Additionally, national governments could influence IOs operating in-country by imposing legal requirements on partnering with local CSOs, writing reports in local languages, etc., in order to foster partnership mechanisms that strengthen local CSOs in the long-run. In a rather hopeful tone, an INGO aid specialist stated that “localisation would happen by default rather than by design” with the support of national governments imposing stricter regulations on INGOs (Respondent H, 2021).

There generally needs to be a system-wide shift in how stakeholders in international development and humanitarian sectors conceive of doing aid. Opening the debate to new conversations, such as ‘decolonising aid,’ could be a necessary disruptor that forces well-intentioned humanitarian agents to confront how good intentions could be inhibiting localisation and playing a role in deterring long-term development (Respondent C, 2021).

5.2.2. Contextualise and adapt the localisation process

In order to address the concern of the development sector overshadowing and constraining local capacities, it is necessary for the sector to move away from standardised, Western-centric localisation frameworks towards contextualised and adapted processes that better reflect local potential. INGOs and donors must start by
placing local actors at the centre of operations, where “programmes must explicitly have the objective of shifting money and power to local actors as an intended outcome”, as suggested by a policy advisor at FCDO; a system cannot attempt to understand and adapt to local needs if local voices are merely consultative and secondary (Respondent G, 2021). It is vital for INGOs and donors alike to adapt their assessments of local capacities and place more value on local context-specific knowledge of culture, politics, and governance, which is arguably more important than technical proficiency (Respondent C, 2021).

Donors and international actors must also ensure that capacity-strengthening projects build upon existing capabilities and tackle real needs, aiming to foster long-term institutional capacity, resilience, and aid independence in communities. As suggested by multiple interviewees, setting up pooled funds to organisations that are able to raise revenue by themselves are two strategies that have so far helped incentivize local actors to invest in revenue generating activities and diversify funding sources (Respondent A;G, 2021).

“COVID-19 has exposed how weak our approaches to capacity-strengthening have been until now. In instances where local actors have really struggled to respond, one asks: what has their capacity strengthening been doing over the last years?” – Respondent F (2021).

5.2.3. Complementarity between local and international actors

Complementarity recognises the strengths of both international and local actors. Where tasks cannot be contextualised, it is necessary for INGOs to step in and assist. In fact, as suggested by a policy advisor at FCDO, the role of INGOs should be reconsidered entirely: “instead of focusing on operational tasks, INGOs should facilitate the transfer of power to locals, provide knowledge-sharing platforms, share advocating and campaigning networks, and scale up the concerns of LNGOs to the international conversation” (Respondent G, 2021).
One INGO respondent expressed that in the specific context of Vanuatu, their research found a clear division of roles between L/NNGOs and INGOs. “INGOs get the context and cultural understanding part wrong all the time; they understand international law, but what’s missing is the understanding of the cultural implications” (Respondent F, 2021). Another interviewee concurred that L/NNGOs are good at providing context in the field, while INGOs may be better equipped with communicating with donors and understanding the international standards/donors' needs (Respondent D, 2021). International actors have power and influence in ways that small local NGOs do not: “local and national actors still see a strong role for international actors in the advocacy sector... Complementarity can work at its best here” (Respondent F, 2021). Another aid practitioner agrees that national and local actors should become more proactive in the international system, however international actors should not be completely dismissed either as global responses require global level mechanisms (Respondent H, 2021).

“I don’t think that the international aid system should be dismantled; but it definitely needs recalibrating” – Respondent H (2021).

5.2.4. Alignment of incentives

In order to maximise the advantages of localisation, the incentives both in the international aid ecosystem and within organisations themselves must change. Interest alignment is critical to solving for the incentivisation problem which is ever-present in the international development realm. While declarations like the Grand Bargain have been effective in bringing the international community around a collective issue, the declaration itself has no teeth; it does not have any incentives or accountability mechanisms built in to ensure signatories follow through on their commitments (Respondent A, 2021). Therefore, “You have to align incentives with carrots and sticks. You overcome the stick of losing money with the [carrot] of recognition” (ibid.).
This Senior Aid Advisor goes on to suggest publishing a ranking system in order to see which Grand Bargain signatories have given more or less. This effectively creates a very visible accountability mechanism (ibid.). International actors must also be made accountable to local beneficiaries. Another independent localisation expert suggested having a feedback system wherein beneficiaries could rate the quality of the aid offered, and have the option to sue aid agencies which did not meet certain standards or who perpetuated false narratives (Respondent C, 2021). The ‘supply side’ (i.e. donor mentality) of international aid must also be addressed. One way donors can wield their powerful influence is by giving money to INGOs if 25% goes to ‘real’ local NGOs (Respondent A;F, 2021), and by prioritising funding to organisations and networks with greater local and national actor partnership (Barbelet et al., 2020).

5.3. MOVING FORWARD

Since resistance to localisation lies in the inherent imbalanced power dynamics, lack of understanding of L/NNGOs and underlying incentive structure of the aid system, neither internationally led mandate reforms nor disruption to aid operations by the pandemic is enough to transform the sector. To harness the opportunities created by COVID-19, a fundamental shift in mindset and the perception of aid is required in donors, and international and local actors. This point is emphasised by multiple interviewees who stressed the importance of donors and international actors being more honest and reflective in their aid practices (Respondent B;C;F, 2021).

We developed a list of self-assessment questions for international localisation stakeholders with the aim of challenging existing localisation practices and opening a dialogue. Instead of framing the questions to address broad systemic impediments, the self-assessment toolkit focuses on specific localisation component-related questions as these address the tangible ways in which international actors can reflect upon their own experiences. These questions are set up to encourage reflexivity and are a tool that can stimulate future conversations and critical thinking about how to localise aid processes moving forward (see Appendix 6 for self-assessment questions).
6. CONCLUSION

Since the 2016 WHS, the localisation agenda has gained traction in the aid community. In addition to improving the efficacy of aid delivery, the localisation approach is in line with current global discussions on ‘decolonising aid’. Leveraging the voices of local actors could mitigate widespread neo-colonial practices, leading to more contextualised solutions to local problems and ultimately engendering local empowerment. Despite the common interest in localising aid, what ‘good’ localisation entails remain opaque due to a lack of consensus on the definition of the ‘local’ and the degree of ‘localisation’ needed. While aware of the absence of a perfect one-size-fits-all model, we have identified six components that are crucial to localisation as benchmark for assessment.

Global disruption caused by the pandemic has allowed us to test the strengths and weaknesses of localisation initiatives in practice. Through evaluating the four case studies against the key localisation components, it is revealed that ample opportunities for localisation have emerged amidst COVID-19, primarily due to the reduced presence of international actors. However, while more acknowledgement is given to local actors, the persisting challenges imply that the operational changes in such ‘state of exception’ might not lead to enduring institutional changes. Therefore, to harness the opportunities offered by COVID-19, it is critical to understand the deep structural impediments that hinder localisation from achieving its full potential.

Our research has demonstrated that the realisation of localisation requires considerably more than technical solutions—systemic changes should be introduced to transform the mindsets and incentive structures that act as obstacles to localisation. In an attempt to challenge the persisting imbalanced power dynamics in the aid system, we generated a set of self-assessment questions in order to encourage reflective thinking of aid practitioners. We hope this report will serve as a tool to invigorate the discussion of a more localised aid system in the future.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

TERMS OF REFERENCE
Charities Aid Foundation – LSE Consultancy Project

This Terms of Reference defines the agreed upon roles, objectives and deliverables between Charities Aid Foundation (hereafter “CAF”) and a team of research consultants from the MSc Development Management programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science (hereafter “LSE team”).

Project Working Title

From Global to Local: Local Solutions for Local Problems During a Global Pandemic

Background

CAF believes in a thriving, independent and self-sustaining civil society, upheld by a generosity movement and responsive to the population it serves. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of local civil society and community action in responding to the evolving and challenging needs of people most impacted by the crisis. The crisis has also highlighted that localisation is not local enough. Localisation is a locally resourced, accountable and sustainable civil society – supported and funded by local populations, reflecting their needs and able to hold national governments to account.

CAF endeavours to understand what the challenges and gaps are in localisation today, and how different stakeholders may be able to play a role in building local and cross-border networks of infrastructure and increasing the effectiveness, sustainability, and resiliency of local civil society organisations (CSOs). The study shall analyse how localisation has been impacted by COVID-19 and will provide insights and recommendations for funders and INGOs in order for them to improve localisation practices so that they may foster inclusive, long-term, sustainable development that speaks to local needs.

Consultancy Goal

The overarching goal of this project is to research and recommend how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of localisation projects against the backdrop of
COVID-19. This report will act as a tool to encourage international development actors and other stakeholders (CSOs, INGOs, funders, and governments) to engage and collaborate in improved localisation efforts that promote local ownership, civil society sustainability and resilience.

**Research Questions**

- What is the **purpose** of localisation? What **impact** have current localisation projects had on local communities (local ownership, civil society sustainability and resilience)?
- What are the **components** of theoretical localisation models? What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of localisation in practice?
- What are the **challenges** and **opportunities** presented by COVID-19 for localisation?
- Why isn’t localisation overcoming **standing impediments**? How do we tackle impediments and leverage opportunities in ways that are fit for the future, without being constrained in current thinking and systems? How can the international development sector support local solutions to global challenges?

**Methodology**

The proposed research will be conducted with a combination of the following methodologies:

- **Desk research**: conduct literature review of localisation; research the impacts of COVID-19 on localisation in practice.
- **Case examples**: will use the literature review to shed light on case examples that illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of localisation practices before and during COVID-19.
- **Qualitative research**: high-level interviews with academics and stakeholders in CSOs, including local organisations and networks, INGOs.

**Key Deliverables: Preliminary outline of project research**

1. **Literature review**:
   a. Defining localisation
   b. Motivations for localisation
   c. Identifying important components for localisation: derived from localisation models and observed through the lens of the UN Sustainable Development Goals
2. **Analysis**:
a. Strengths and weaknesses presented in localisation before COVID-19
b. Challenges presented by COVID-19: analysing through case examples how COVID-19 exacerbated weaknesses and revealed or created challenges for the different localisation components identified above
c. Opportunities presented by COVID-19: analysing through case examples how COVID-19 can support and encourage better localisation practices

3. Key takeaways:
   a. Standing impediments to localisation
   b. Leveraging the opportunities moving forward
   c. Limitations of our analysis

4. Conclusion

**Project Milestones**

The proposed research will consist of the following milestones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finalised and approved Terms of Reference</td>
<td>December 11th, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Desk Research for Literature Review</td>
<td>November – January, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate and Conduct Interviews</td>
<td>December – early March, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status update: preliminary outline and findings</td>
<td>Early January, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit Draft Report</td>
<td>Mid-March, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit Final Report</td>
<td>26th March, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Presentation to CAF</td>
<td>31st of March, 2021</td>
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**Contacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSE Team</th>
<th>Charities Aid Foundation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marta Barba Prieto</td>
<td>Sameera Mehra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanna Hines</td>
<td>Head of Global Alliance and International Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astor Wong</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX 2: TYPES OF FUNDING STREAMS

These categories are pulled from the [OCHA Financial Tracking Service](https://ocha.org) website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROSS-BORDER DONOR TYPES</th>
<th>LOCAL DONOR TYPES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International NGOs</td>
<td>National NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-governmental</td>
<td>Local NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cross/Red Crescent International Society</td>
<td>Red Cross/Red Crescent National Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global pooled funds</td>
<td>Country-based pooled funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private international organizations, foundations, individuals</td>
<td>Private local/national organizations, foundations, individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National governments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3: CASE STUDY PROFILES

A. BANGLADESH

Key Features

Bangladesh is a South Asian country that is currently facing three humanitarian crises at the same time: successive waves of Rohingya refugees fleeing from persecution in Myanmar, cyclic floods and cyclones and the COVID-19 pandemic (ACAPS, 2021a). According to a report by UNICEF (2021), the country now faces 173.7 million people and 62.7 million children in need.

COVID-19: Changes in the Localisation Landscape

Given the country’s dense population, containing the spread of the virus has been especially difficult. However, in the first months of the WHO declaration, Bangladesh had already engaged in anticipatory impact and needs analyses of the health crisis. Despite travel restrictions, numerous humanitarian programmes have continued by delegating increased implementation responsibilities to the local actors. L/NNGOs have been especially helpful in determining community assessments of immediate needs by regions in order to target responses and to coordinate local efforts.

Channelled Funding Trends

As shown in the graph, the vast majority of aid primarily goes to UN agencies and INGOs, leaving local actors highly under-resourced (OCHA, 2020a; Ocha, 2021a).
**B. MYANMAR**

**Key Features**

Myanmar, a Southeast Asian multi-ethnic nation, continues to struggle with severe humanitarian challenges due to longstanding armed conflict, inter-communal violence and natural hazards including flooding and earthquakes. Over one million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, with more than 336,000 internally displaced people (IDP) living in precarious conditions in conflict zones like Rakhine and Kachin states (OCHA, 2021b). Limited access to non-government-controlled regions made international actors highly dependent on local NGOs and CBOs to deliver humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020).

**COVID-19: Changes in Localisation Landscape**

The travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic have further reduced the coverage of humanitarian response (OCHA, 2021b). The key epicenter of COVID-19 includes the Rakhine state, where many overcrowded IDP camps are located, raising serious concerns of the pandemic getting out of control (ibid.). COVID-19 response in regions with restricted access were mostly managed by L/NGOs and grassroots organisations. While local actors have demonstrated their capacity in delivering aid by utilising existing networks and local knowledge, they were shouldering more risk working at the frontline with limited protection and insurance (Wijewickrama & Rose, 2020).

**Channelled Funding Trends**

The vast majority of aid is directly predominantly into the hands of international bodies like UN agencies and INGOs; local actors remain under-resourced (OCHA, 2020b; OCHA, 2021c).
C. SOUTH SUDAN

Key Features

South Sudan is a country in Africa marked with a high presence of international humanitarian actors due to its severe and complex crisis environment. These crises have displaced over 4 million people, and led to 8,300,000 people in need (ACAPS, 2021c). Protracted conflict, a long-term civil war, food insecurity, and large numbers of internal displacement have had severe ramifications on the country’s long-term development and have contributed to South Sudan’s high ranking on the Fragile State Index (The Fund for Peace, 2021).

COVID-19: Changes in Localisation Landscape

COVID-19 has exacerbated an already fragile and precarious humanitarian situation, by constraining access to impacted areas. Regional border restrictions have elevated difficulties in a context already known for being “one of the most challenging service delivery environments in the world” (OCHA, 2021e). This has put pressure on the international aid landscape, but it remains to be seen whether these changes have led to a stronger localised response to humanitarian emergencies.

Channelled Funding Trends

Despite trends in high levels of humanitarian aid in funding, donor funding from local sources still remains just a fraction of the overall aid funding. Furthermore, the vast majority of aid recipients are international actors such as UN agencies, INGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent International Society (OCHA, 2020c; OCHA, 2021d).
D. VANUATU

Key Features

Vanuatu is a small country in the heart of the Pacific Islands with a population of nearly 300,000 (World Bank, 2019). As a response to the widespread outbreak of COVID-19, the Vanuatuan government closed its borders in March 2020, in order to shield its population from the rapidly spreading virus (Gunia, 2020). One month later, Category 5 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold battered the Pacific Islands, devastating infrastructure, impacting over half of Vanuatu’s population, and compounding the vulnerabilities facing the isolated island nation.

COVID-19: Changes in Localisation Landscape

Because of the restricted access to international humanitarian responders, Vanuatu was forced to respond to this two-fold crisis with limited external aid and an increased reliance on local government networks, actors, and leaders. The case of Vanuatu highlights the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 has brought in addressing the onslaught of a devastating natural disaster amid a global pandemic.

Channelled Funding Trends

There are currently zero reports of local funding in Vanuatu, and the vast majority of aid recipients are the national government (which received an influx of aid in 2020), UN agencies, and INGOs (OCHA, 2020d; OCHA, 2021f).
APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEWEES

All interviewees’ names anonymised by mutual agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Interview Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Senior Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Oxfam</td>
<td>17 February 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Senior Civil Society Lead</td>
<td>Aga Khan Foundation UK</td>
<td>3 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Independent Humanitarian Analyst and Consultant</td>
<td>Independent Consultant</td>
<td>4 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Former Project Coordinator</td>
<td>Medair</td>
<td>11 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Humanitarian Research &amp; Advisory Think Tank (anonymised)</td>
<td>15 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Policy Advisor</td>
<td>Foreign, Commonwealth &amp; Development Office</td>
<td>17 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Head of Humanitarian and Resilience</td>
<td>Tearfund</td>
<td>19 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>WASH Specialist</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>22 March 2021</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewee Background:

1. Can you please share a little bit about your background and role with [org name]?

Localisation in Practice:

2. How do you and [organisation name] conceive the concept of ‘localisation’ and who ‘local’ actors are?

3. There are 6 main components to localisation that have come up in literature again and again: partnership, funding, capacity, coordination, policy & decision making, and participation. How do you see these components play out in localisation through your organisation or with the projects you have engaged in?
   a. Which component do you consider the most difficult to achieve? Which comes more easily? Can you give us any examples of how they work in practice?
   b. Are there any components that you believe are missing?

4. How does your [org name] measure success in a localisation project?
   a. Can you share with us some examples of successful projects that you or your organisation has been involved in?

5. Despite its rising trend in development, what are some obstacles that you believe prevent CSOs, governments, etc. from localising?
   a. How could these obstacles be mitigated? Are there ways that would improve motivation for more actors to engage in localisation?

6. In your experience, what have you seen as some key weaknesses in implementing localisation practices? (I.e., obtaining funds, risk transfer…)
   a. What about key strengths that have worked particularly well for you?

During COVID-19:

7. What weaknesses in localisation have you seen exacerbated by COVID-19? And what strengths in localisation have been augmented by the pandemic?

8. What would you say the new challenges are as a result of COVID-19 moving forward?
   a. Any examples?

9. What new opportunities have come about as a result of COVID-19?
   a. Any examples?

Recommendations:

10. In your opinion, how can localisation efforts best be supported amidst COVID-19 by the international development sector and by stakeholders (INGOs, CSOs, funders, governments)? What infrastructure and further action is needed?
APPENDIX 6: TOOLKIT FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

This list of self-assessment questions is geared primarily towards international actors. This list is meant to encourage reflective thinking over past projects they have engaged in order to analyse the extent in which localisation was achieved.

**Partnership**

1. How have feedback and complaint mechanisms been made available for local actors? Do partnerships include clauses on joint reciprocal evaluations and monitoring of the quality of relationships? How are reporting and evaluation mechanisms adapted to fit local contexts?
2. How are local partners engaged throughout the project cycle (from designing and implementing, to monitoring and evaluating, to hand-off)?
3. Is the role of international and local partners complementary? Who is taking the lead in partnerships and for what purpose? Does your IO/INGO empower local actors in the long-term?
4. How are you ensuring that your partnerships are strategic and equitable? Do donors and IOs/INGOs have an exit strategy, agreed and discussed with the L/N NGO?
5. To what extent is partnership happening openly and honestly? Are there systems in place that ensure power imbalances between international actors and local actors are mitigated? How is your organisation avoiding the perpetuation of power asymmetries?

**Funding**

1. Can L/N NGOs access funding directly or ‘as directly as possible’ from donors without any intermediary? Is 25% of funding going to L/N NGOs? What percentage of your funding portfolio is going to projects versus multi-year operational costs?
2. Are funding mechanisms conducive to long-term, reliable funding, or more focused on short-term, inflexible projects? Is funding unattached and unconditional? How are you ensuring that aid funding is not creating dependencies and impeding long-term development?
3. How is your local partners’ financial sustainability strengthened through your partnership? To what extent is your international organisation encouraging local actors to diversify funding sources?
4. Are funding requirements associated with applications and reporting contextualised? (i.e., can local actors conduct risk assessments, monitor and evaluate effectively, within an appropriate amount of time?)
**Capacity**

1. Is capacity-building based on Western-centric standards? Do capacity-building conversations and mechanisms go both ways? What technical standards, if any, are you imposing on L/NNGOs?

2. What is the end goal of being “capacitated”? Is the business model of your organisation about growing or about solving an issue? (i.e., are you focused on growing your organization or solving local needs?)

3. Are capacity-strengthening efforts need-driven or supply-driven? Are local actors a part of defining capacity needs?

**Coordination**

1. How is your organisation collaborating with existent community-based organisations and networks? If not, why?

2. How do you adapt your coordination processes to fit local networks? Do you impose hierarchical coordination processes onto local actors?

3. Do coordination mechanisms foster collaborative and complementary responses? How often are coordination meetings conducted in the local language? How do you formally ensure that the voices of local actors are equally represented and heard in coordination meetings?

**Policy and decision-making**

1. How are decision-makers incorporating the context-specific needs and sensitivities into their equations? Are you reflecting local needs and concerns to the international development and humanitarian policy space?

2. Are local voices heard in both national and international development policy-making spaces? Do local actors influence decisions in international development and humanitarian forums?

3. Are local actors in positions of leadership, for instance, as the chair of meetings, in coordination meetings?

**Participation**

1. Are there channels of communication which include bottom-up feedback mechanisms from beneficiaries? How often are these channels used?

2. How are the opinions and feedback of local beneficiaries included in programme and project evaluations?

3. How are local needs considered when taking on a project? How do different local recipients have a voice and visibility in the decision-making of localisation projects? Who normally has a voice? Is it rotational? Is it democratic?