ACCELERATING LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action in Myanmar.

christian aid care tearfund act:onaid CAFOD OXFAM

Acknowledgments

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Front cover photo:
Children playing at a camp for internally displaced people in Wai Maw Township, Kachin State.

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Contents

List of Acronyms

CHS   Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability

CSO   Civil society organisation

ECHO   European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department

HR   Human resources

INGO   International NGO

L/NNGO   Local and National NGO

MEAL   Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

UN   United Nations

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Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme – a multi-agency consortium programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019) – to establish what operational elements of partnerships between local, national and international NGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches. In-depth consultations were conducted in three locations across Myanmar to reach a varied sample of local and national actors: Sittwe, Magway, and Myitkinya. In total, 98 NGOs were consulted for this research in Myanmar; 87% of which were local or national NGOs.

The findings reflect experiences from a rich diversity of local and national NGOs in Myanmar and provide valuable insights that can assist humanitarian organisations in ensuring partnership practices accelerate localisation of humanitarian action. Findings are also relevant for those funding humanitarian response, in particular signatories of the Grand Bargain.

Local and national NGOs in Myanmar believe their own organisations have only limited influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and United Nations (UN) agencies. Partnerships, while not perceived as equitable, are still seen by the majority as instrumental in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people in disaster response operation.

The seven core organisational capabilities important for effective partnerships in Myanmar ranked highest by research participants were: Capacity building and organisational development; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); Project design, planning and management; Financial management and reporting; Consultation and coordination; Fundraising; and Human resources (HR) management. Examples of partnership practices which are most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the report with relation to each of these seven core organisational capabilities. Core values and principles highlighted as the most important for partnerships by research participants were: shared commitments to humanitarian programme quality, humanitarian principles, and accountability to affected populations. Trust and respect were voiced as critical to partnerships and many of the examples of partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation reflect a lack of these values, particularly in conflict settings.

National and local NGOs should continue to play an important leadership role in project design and planning, advocacy, coordination, logistics, and human resources management, while INGOs can make the most important contribution to partnerships by supporting L/NNGOs with fundraising, financial management and technical expertise. Research findings suggest that longer-term partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs will result in partnership practices most conducive to localisation. NGOs and civil society organisations in Myanmar will need to better understand the reasons why natural hazard and conflict contexts have differing levels of satisfaction in partnerships. Additionally, partnership practices should recognise the unique place that volunteers and their networks hold in humanitarian efforts.

Eleven key recommendations emerged from the research including: Jointly review research findings and recommendations; identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships; review partnership agreements; assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors; assess capacity building skills of international actors; support organisational / policy development; hold discussions around understanding of humanitarian principles; invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction; hold frank discussions on direct access to funding; Support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies; support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable.

The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members will be testing these recommendations in a pilot phase; learning from which will inform a Localisation Framework for Myanmar and a global Pathways to Localisation report. The consortium are keen to hear from organisations and agencies with feedback or learning from their own experiences of implementing these recommendations.

Introduction

1.1 Background

The essential role of local and national actors in humanitarian response has long been upheld in the humanitarian sector's key standards and codes, such as the Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, Sphere standards, and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). In recent years, the *Missed Opportunities* series of reports[1] has documented partnership experience with local actors in several humanitarian response programmes, providing insightful positions in support of the localisation of aid and humanitarian partnership. More recently, commitments to increase direct funding to, and improve partnerships with, local and national actors were predominant themes in discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, and in the Agenda for Humanity[2] (2016), the Grand Bargain[3] (2016), and the Charter for Change[4] (2015).

Since the WHS, hundreds of reports have been written on the subject of localisation – but very few on partnership practices in relation to localisation. Fewer still on the operational or practical partnership practices which can make up a partnership model. This research primarily focused on the capacities, resources and added value of each partner in humanitarian partnerships, rather than the relationship between partners. Partnership relationships have been studied in the *Missed Opportunities* series of research reports. Therefore, the key research question explored in this research is:

> **What operational elements of partnerships between NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster (effective, relevant, efficient, etc.) localisation of humanitarian action?**

The research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme, a multi-agency consortium – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund – programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019).

The research was conducted by an independent consultancy, Integrated Risk Management Associates (IRMA) through national researchers and guided by national steering committees and existing NGO Forums in the four programme focus countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium agencies have committed to piloting the recommendations that have been identified in the country-specific research reports.

This report summarises the key findings and recommendations from the *Myanmar Country Report: Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* (November 2018). The recommendations, while not necessarily relevant for all actors, nevertheless provide a guide that can help agencies identify and prioritise recommendations to pilot in operational practice, based on a comprehensive evidence base. At the very least, the findings and recommendations can be the starting point for conversations between partners.

1.2 Definitions

It has to be acknowledged that there is no consensus in the humanitarian sector around the definitions of the key concepts under discussion here. The researchers adopted the following working definitions for the purpose of the research:

- **Local NGO or community-based organisation:** operating in one community or location within a country.
- **National NGO or community-based organisation:** operating across the whole country, but not outside.
- **International NGO (INGO):** operating in more than one country with country offices / country programmes.
- **Localisation**: local and national humanitarian actors increasingly empowered to take a greater role in the leadership, coordination and delivery of humanitarian preparedness and response in their countries.
- **Partnership:** the relationship between international humanitarian actors (especially international NGOs) and local and national actors (especially local and national NGOs), whereby the international actors work

with, support and resource their local and/or national partners to design and implement humanitarian preparedness and response programming.

The term 'L/NNGO' is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for local or national NGOs or community-based organisations. Where there were clear differences between what local or national actors were saying, these are highlighted. The term 'INGO' is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for these organisations and/or reflecting what L/NNGO reflect participants were saying about them. In many cases, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, United Nations agencies, and even in some cases donor or funding agencies, were called INGOs. Therefore, the terms 'INGO', 'international organisation', and 'international agency' are used inter-changeably in the report, and partnership practice examples and recommendations are relevant for INGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and United Nations agencies alike

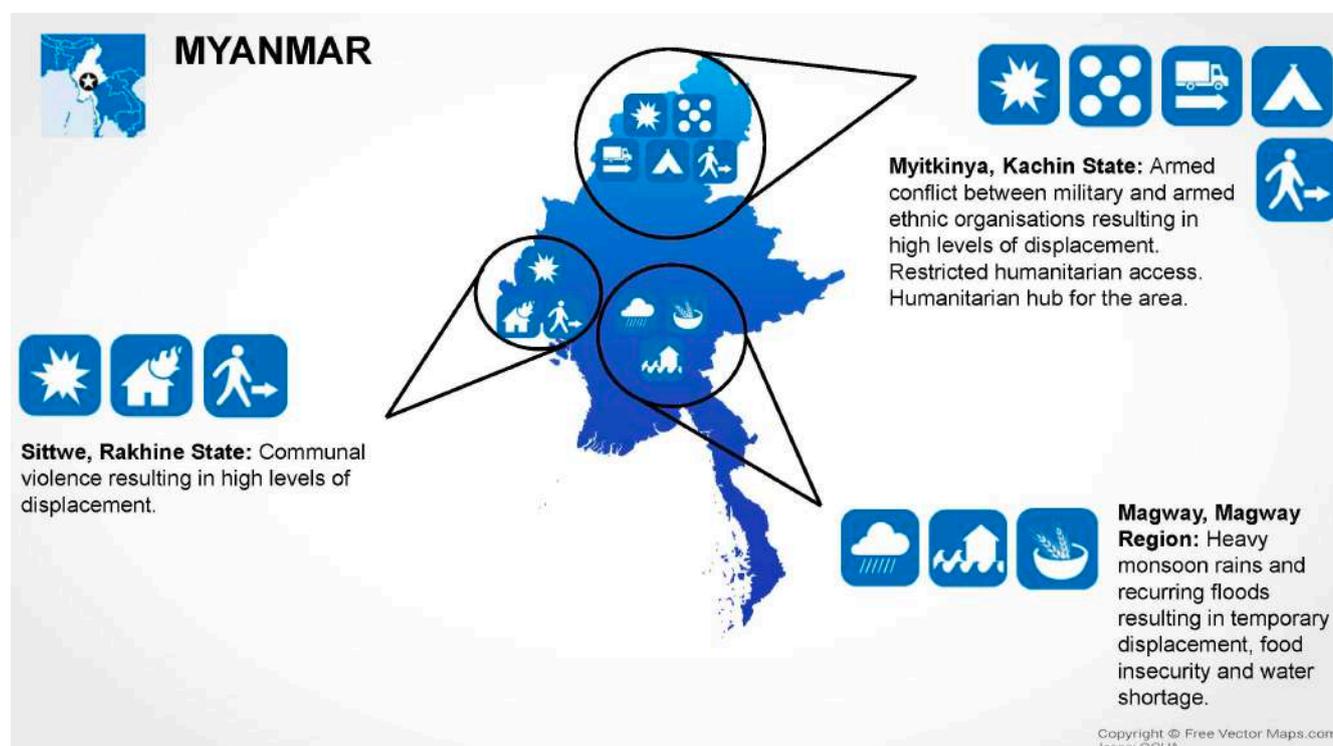*Pilot design workshop participants - Myanmar*

Methodology

The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach, including classic qualitative (systematic literature review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) and quantitative (survey) collection techniques. During the analysis phase, all sources of evidence were triangulated to identify and document convergent and divergent trends.

To guide the research, an analytical framework was developed that represented an idealised operating model of INGOs in humanitarian action. This framework was the foundation that directed the scope of the research, and included all the factors that contribute to an INGO operating model, i.e. an agency's capabilities and resources, values and principles, its unique identity ('added value'), as well as external factors. All the different research methods referenced this framework and thereby allowed cross-referencing and triangulation of findings for the research overall.

2.1 Research locations

The in-depth consultations as part of the research in Myanmar were conducted in three different contexts, identified in consultation with local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) conducted during the design phase of the research, and selected in close coordination with the National Research Associates and Programme Coordinators, and approved by the consortium Research Advisory Group. The goal of the overall sampling process was to capture diversity of humanitarian crises types (e.g. natural and human-induced), phases of humanitarian action (e.g. response, preparedness, recovery), and urban versus more remote locations.

The three contexts selected in Myanmar, and the humanitarian situation in each, is outlined in the map below.

MYANMAR

Myitkinya, Kachin State: Armed conflict between military and armed ethnic organisations resulting in high levels of displacement. Restricted humanitarian access. Humanitarian hub for the area.

Sittwe, Rakhine State: Communal violence resulting in high levels of displacement.

Magway, Magway Region: Heavy monsoon rains and recurring floods resulting in temporary displacement, food insecurity and water shortage.

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2.2 Quantitative: Survey

All actors (L/NNGO, INGO, UN or government partners and donors) were also invited to complete a survey. The survey was designed on Kobo Toolbox and also forms a baseline for the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* Programme. The survey was made available online and offline in English and Myanmar languages; for low-bandwidth environments, print and enter-in-document versions were also disseminated and shared in both languages. Altogether 47 respondents completed the survey from Myanmar; 77% (36) of them representatives of local or national NGOs.

2.3 Qualitative: In-depth consultations

In each context, between 10 and 20 L/NNGOs were invited to participate in a focus group discussion; a total of 3 were conducted in the locations outlined in the map. A sample of L/NNGOs was selected to ensure diversity: to include at least one organisation with no experience of working in partnership with another NGO in humanitarian action, at least one women-led organisation, and organisations from different networks/consortia and/or focusing on specific marginalised groups (e.g. persons with disability, disadvantaged castes/ethnicities). A few L/NNGOs invited to participate in focus group discussions were existing or previous partners of one or more of the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members, but the majority were not. Therefore, the research findings are not a direct reflection of partnership quality of the consortium members and their partners.

Following on from the focus group discussion in each context, L/NNGOs that reported unique or interesting actions or partnerships and other relevant humanitarian actors – including INGOs, UN and donors – were invited to participate in key informant interviews; many who were requested for interview chose to complete the online survey instead of taking part in an interview. A total of 12 key informant interviews were conducted in Myanmar. These included representatives from different organisational departments/divisions within two L/NNGOs, one local government and one United Nations (UN) officials.

A total of 44 L/NNGOs were consulted through the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews in Myanmar, including seven women-led organisations.

2.4 Research Validation

The results of the research were affirmed through a validation process. A research validation workshop was conducted in Yangon which allowed a large group of humanitarian stakeholders to discuss the findings, check for accuracy, provide feedback, and confirm that the preliminary findings and recommendations resonated with their realities. Further validation was conducted through meetings and email exchanges sharing the preliminary findings in Myanmar, and were an opportunity to reach out beyond those who participated in the research. In total, 45 representatives of 44 NGOs (of which eight were INGOs) and donor entities were involved in the validation process.

In total, 98 NGOs were consulted for this research in Myanmar; 86% of which were local or national NGOs.

2.5 Research Limitations

Although a wide range of voices were captured through the research, given the focus on local and national NGOs, some key humanitarian stakeholders are underrepresented in the research: funding, government and UN agencies. However, this research will be shared with these stakeholders and dialogue on how the findings and recommendations relate to them will be discussed.

Other challenges the research encountered include, amongst others: poor bandwidth environments, translation challenges, and difficulties in navigating Kobo Toolbox. While Kobo Toolbox is recognised as a powerful remote data collection tool, there was limited remote support for problem solving. It is also important to highlight that, this research was not intending to reach enough organisations to make the findings statistically significant; there are thousands of organisations operating in Myanmar, and so the sampling strategy aimed to reach a representative and diverse sample to allow for some extrapolation and generalisation.

Despite those challenges, the research has succeeded in presenting the views and experiences from a rich diversity of NGO voices in Myanmar, especially from local and national NGOs, whose voices are often not heard clearly enough in research conducted by INGOs. The research provides valuable insights into partnerships and beyond that can assist all humanitarian stakeholders in designing and co-creating strategies to accelerate localisation of humanitarian action.

Findings

3.1 The status of local and national NGOs in Myanmar
What is the status of local and national NGOs in Myanmar?

When asked how well the international humanitarian system respects and promotes the role of local or national NGOs in managing and coordinating humanitarian response, the majority of survey respondents answered 'fair' (rather than 'good' or 'poor'). Respondents also believed that their own organisations have only 'limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and United Nations (UN) agencies.

For the majority of survey respondents, the term 'localisation' was not easy to explain; interestingly, in the in-depth consultations, most participants indicated that they equated localisation with 'involvement of local people and organisations in the humanitarian programmes'.

3.2 Partnerships between INGOs and NGOs
What is the quality of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs in Myanmar?

In Myanmar, the majority of survey respondents had experience working on a humanitarian response operation in partnership with another NGO – 56% of the L/NNGOs and 91% of INGOs. When asked to judge the quality of the partnership they had experienced, local and national NGOs were decidedly more critical than INGOs. At the same time, there was overall agreement amongst respondents that the partnership had been instrumental in meeting humanitarian needs, even if only 'moderately'.

While a majority of survey respondents from Myanmar think that partnerships were the best pathway to localisation, 32% believed there were better ways. For them, capacity development as well as direct funding and 'learning by doing' are the best pathways to localisation.

3.3 Core Capabilities and Resources
What core capabilities and resources are most important to partnerships?

Survey respondents were asked to identify the core capabilities and resources that were the most important to partnerships. Qualitative consultations were then used to elaborate on the results as participants in the in-depth consultations were requested to provide examples from their experiences of partnership practices that were most and least conducive to enabling localised humanitarian action against the top core capabilities and resources.

Altogether seven core organisational capabilities ranked highest (in terms of frequency of mention) as being important for effective partnerships in Myanmar:

1. Capacity building and organisational development
2. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
3. Project design, planning and management
4. Financial management and reporting
5. Consultation and coordination
6. Fundraising
7. Human resources (HR) management

The following sections give more details of partnership practices which were deemed most and least conducive to localisation by the L/NNGO research participants under these top seven organisational capabilities. Many practices, fit into more than one of the capabilities. Some also appear to be contradictory, e.g. that INGOs design projects and allow their L/NNGO partners contextualise it versus the L/NNGOs design projects. However, this reflects the fact that local and national NGOs in Myanmar are not a homogenous group and have a variety of experience and capacity (as do their INGO partners).

Capacity building and organisational development

L/NNGOs in Myanmar consider capacity building and organisational development to be the most important contribution that INGOs can make to partnerships that foster localisation. Through in-depth consultations, L/NNGOs in Myanmar appeared to genuinely value the capacity building initiatives in which they have participated. They want to improve quickly, and in all areas of humanitarian action, as indicated by the long list of desired topics for training outlined. Training figures highly in these responses from Myanmar and raises two questions: 1) What other capacity strengthening methods might be as or more effective than training? e.g. mentoring, accompaniment, on-the-job training / learning by doing etc.; and 2) What do INGOs need to do to ensure they have the right skillset for humanitarian response and capacity strengthening of their partners (and these are not the same skillsets)?

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ A 'complete package' of training in human resources, financial management, logistics, procurement, and policy/procedures development is provided ✓ Discussion between the L/NNGO and INGO partner about what training they want or need ✓ L/NNGOs supported to develop policies, official registration and other organisational development priorities ✓ Combine training with policy development, so the draft policy is the output of the training ✓ Inclusion of training in proposal development ✓ Inclusion of disaster risk reduction (DRR) in training topics ✓ Partnerships dedicated to training ✓ INGO and L/NNGO partners conduct an organisational capacity assessment and a develop plan for improvement based on it ✓ INGOs share and apply learning from other countries where they have done similar work ✓ L/NNGOs invited and supported to send staff to relevant forums and collective learning/training events ✓ INGOs' are patient while L/NNGOs build their capacity gradually ✓ INGO partners provide constructive feedback on reports	× Capacity building support that stops when funding ends × Lack of L/NNGO control over how funds allocated to capacity building are used × Training topics for L/NNGO staff selected only by the INGO partner × A focus on capacity building for project delivery aspects, but not on foundations of humanitarian work or organisational development × L/NNGOs having to pay for training that is required by the INGO partner × International agencies do not support their L/NNGO partners to establish income-generating activities to increase financial sustainability.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Initial selection of project milestones by the L/NNGO, followed by discussion and agreement with their partner INGO. ✓ Complementary and close monitoring, in which international partners (INGOs or donors) visit the communities where programmes are being implemented, to see the situation for themselves. ✓ Responsiveness by the INGO to the monitoring results shared by the L/NNGO. ✓ L/NNGOs passing damage and loss data and the related needs to the government.	× INGOs or donors visit communities alone, without L/NNGO staff, to collect data. × INGOs using predefined sampling criteria for monitoring visits which are not discussed with the L/NNGO partner. × INGOs produce monitoring reports without consultation with L/NNGOs.

Project design, planning and management

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs consult local committees and groups about intended activities and budgets before communicating with the partner/donor. ✓ INGOs provide funds to the L/NNGO partner to do the needs assessment that will lead to the plan/design. ✓ L/NNGOs design/develop projects based on their experience in other regions and discuss these with local government in the affected area before approaching a partner/donor. ✓ L/NNGOs and INGOs design/develop the project plan and budget together with the contribution of all staff. ✓ A complementary approach whereby the design comes from the INGO but is contextualised and managed by the L/NNGO. ✓ L/NNGOs and INGOs make decisions about planning and management together, in a management committee.	✗ L/NNGOs are not permitted to make changes in the project design/plan after the project is approved, even for people with special needs. ✗ L/NNGOs being referred to as 'change agents' but being required to follow the partner's/donor's wishes rather than conduct adaptive management in line with the needs of the local people.

Financial management and reporting

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Training and mentoring on the use of accounting and reporting tools and processes. *See also: capacity building and organisational development.* ✓ Development of administrative procedures, including for procurement. *See also: Capacity building and organisational development.* ✓ Design/development of project budgets by L/NNGOs using an internal participatory approach, before submitting to INGO/donor. *See also: Project design, planning and management.* ✓ International agencies allowing L/NNGO indirect and direct costs in project budgets. ✓ L/NNGOs producing financial reports in a simple spreadsheet and the INGOs convert these into the template/format expected of donors.	✗ Delays in fund transfers from partners. Sometimes this results in L/NNGO volunteers using their own money to carry out planned activities. ✗ INGO partners that do not provide opportunity to discuss any rules or procedures required by them which are difficult or impossible to follow in Myanmar. ✗ The current emphasis on humanitarian response, when the funding could be most cost-effective and more driven by local priorities if used for development and DRR. ✗ International organisations ruling out L/NNGOs as potential partners if weaknesses in their financial management systems are identified. ✗ Tight turnaround times between implementation phases and report deadlines.

Consultation and coordination

Consultation and coordination was perceived and interpreted much more broadly by L/NNGOs in Myanmar than in other locations. L/NNGO research participants in Myanmar value the contributions of many different actors in humanitarian action, including volunteers, civil society organisations (CSOs), government, military, networks, national NGOs, international NGOs, donors and private philanthropists. Consultation is an important for L/NNGOs in Myanmar: national NGOs consult their local NGO and CSO partners before approaching donors or international NGOs and tend to make decisions collectively or at least after robust consultation. L/NNGOs in Myanmar are also keen to keep government informed, recognising the importance of local government for both humanitarian response and risk management.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Partnerships in which international, national and local NGOs and community-based organisations all coordinate with each other, to ensure the greatest reach. ✓ Using a multi-lateral partnerships / networks approach. ✓ L/NNGOs coordinate closely with national and local government as well as with INGOs. This is also reported to favourably *'change governments mindset'* in the words of one research participant. ✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for coordination with the military present in the programme locations or routes.	No partnership practices highlighted here.

Fundraising

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Creation of a contingency fund by an INGO in partnership with L/NNGO, for use in new disasters/ imminent crises. ✓ Creation of a seed fund by international partners, for DRR programming with an L/NNGO.	✕ L/NNGO staff being obliged to spend their personal money on transport or aid items while formal transactions are completed. *See also: Financial management and reporting.* ✕ Projects that rely only on L/NNGO membership fees to fund activities. ✕ L/NNGOs not being able to fundraise from the donors without using the INGO as an intermediary.

Human Resources (HR)

The way Human Resources was discussed by L/NNGO research participants reflected the particular circumstances in Myanmar. For local organisations specifically, it is the combination of skilled people and local knowledge that contributes so strongly to partnerships, and in Myanmar this is provided not just by staff but by a labour force of volunteers. Volunteerism, either through time, skills or private donations, is widespread in Myanmar and often connected to religious beliefs and practices.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ INGO support to L/NNGO partners to develop appropriate internal procedures. *See also: Capacity building and organisational development.*	✕ Over-reliance on the goodwill and funds of local staff. *See also: Financial management and reporting, and Fundraising.* ✕ Constant movement of L/NNGO staff to positions at INGOs due to the higher salaries and living conditions.

Other capabilities

In contrast to the key skills identified in the section above, other particular capabilities, specifically **technical expertise** and **logistics management**, were mentioned by respondents but less clearly associated with partnerships and localisation. The issue of safety and security management did not feature highly in survey responses or in-depth consultations at all, and neither did the connection between short, medium and long-term programming. This is interesting given the increasing discussions at international level about localisation resulting in a transfer of risk to local partners, and the commitments to increase multi-year funding in the Grand Bargain.

At the same time, some other resources were mentioned which do not fit readily into current humanitarian operating models – these are:

- Personal connections and influences;
- Networks, particularly in Kachin context;
- Support from the communities.

3.4 Values, Principles and Standards
What values, principles and standards are most important to partnerships?

In Myanmar, knowledge and application of **humanitarian principles** and **accountability to affected people** were recognised by survey respondents as the two most important values or principles within partnerships for humanitarian action. In-depth consultations revealed that local understanding of humanitarian principles is not restricted to what is commonly referred to in the sector (i.e. the Humanitarian Charter, Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), or Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Organisations working in Disaster Relief) but encompasses concepts such as commitment, dedication, gratitude, respect, passion, volunteerism, protest, and leadership. The principle of accountability was prominent in in-depth discussions, and the partnership practices that local and national organisations considered most and least conducive to localisation in relation to accountability were as follows. It's important to note that a lack of impartiality and willingness of local and national NGOs to work with some ethnic groups was mentioned during the research but not discussed in length.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ International organisations provide training for L/NNGOs on 'Do No Harm' and 'Accountability'. ✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for interaction with affected communities because, as one research participant said, they *"have skills on dialogue, community empowerment and delivering services to meet with local needs".*	✕ International agencies do not invite local people to participate in assessments or decisions. ✕ INGO staff try to consult with communities directly, but lack facilitation and participatory rural appraisal type skills, leading to inadequate consultation processes and 'mismatches' between project activities and real needs.

Programme quality standards were also acknowledged as being an important element of partnerships, particularly for local NGOs. Research participants specifically referred to partnership practices that they considered have negative effects on the relevance and cost-effectiveness of programming:

- ✓ INGO programmes which do not appear to respond to the needs identified in assessments because they did not include L/NNGOs in their design/development. One research participant said: *"Sometime aids were not matched with the findings of assessment. Local organisations know these situations and did not get chances to input".*

- ✓ Programmes are not cost-effective because international agencies pay high prices for transport and accommodation.

Trust and respect were values prioritised by all local survey respondents as vital for partnerships with INGOs; while some good partnership practice examples were discussed, some research participants had strong negative feelings towards international agencies in Myanmar.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ Gradual increase of trust from INGOs towards L/NNGOs as project progresses systematically and successfully. ✓ Openness and transparency in everything. ✓ Supportive communication.	✕ Organisational assessments that use criteria and processes that are not contextualised for Myanmar nor seek localisation as their goal. ✕ Lack of useful feedback on unsuccessful proposals. ✕ INGOs not sharing financial 'benefits' with their partners [such as unrestricted budget lines]. ✕ INGOs or UN agencies implement projects

| | which L/NNGOs contributed ideas/input, without informing or crediting them. |
| | × INGOs do not work with local organisations despite commitments to do so. |

3.5 External Elements
What are the key external factors that can affect partnerships?

Ongoing **armed conflict** was raised repeatedly in the in-depth discussions in Sittwe and Kachin. L/NNGO participants explained how insecurity affects their operations, partly because they need special government and army permissions to travel to some areas, and partly because if they seek official registration with the government they will not be welcomed in those areas. It is interesting then that safety and security management were not considered an important element of partnerships.

The tense political backdrop to humanitarian action in some areas of Myanmar, and religious divisions, were alluded to in in-depth consultations but not explicitly described. **Ethnic tensions and violence** have wide implications for partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs and localisation in Myanmar, ranging from restricting access to affected areas to questioning the impartiality (and independence) of L/NNGOs. In connection with the discussion about humanitarian principles, and the importance given to this by survey participants, it is important that partnerships in Myanmar be based on a shared understanding of each other's networks, loyalties, values and principles.

Government capacity was highlighted as an important external factor by survey respondents. There was also a strong shared sense that government transparency was often a 'deal breaker' for partnerships. This issue was not discussed in depth in the consultations. One UN informant pointed out that the lack of government contingency or recovery plans for conflicts and/or return processes for displaced people contributes to the uncertainty of the humanitarian operating environment. Another research participant noted that Government of Myanmar legislation relating to aid, originally designed for development aid, has not yet been adapted for humanitarian operations. Nevertheless, several NGOs mentioned maintaining communications with local and regional government as a practice that reinforces the legitimacy of their own role in humanitarian action.

3.5.1 Natural hazard versus conflict contexts
Are partnership practices different in natural hazard and conflict contexts?

The research found that different L/NNGOs perceived their partnership with INGOs depending on the context: in the natural hazard context, L/NNGOs appeared to be relatively satisfied with the partnerships with INGOs, particularly with the financial support and capacity building provided. By contrast, in conflict-affected contexts there was a greater tension between L/NNGOs and their international partners. Here, they did not feel adequately respected by international agencies for their knowledge and skills, and they voiced concerns about INGOs' practices related to operating costs and financial management.

More research is needed to fully understand the reasons for the differences, and the potential implications for partnerships and localisation. For example, are INGO partnership practices less conducive to localisation when they are operating in insecure environments or complex political contexts? Is this linked more to pressures on upholding humanitarian principles or counter-terrorism regulations by funding agencies? The research seems to suggest a little of both. To what extent are concerns about the impartiality and independence of local actors impacting partnerships with international actors, and to what extent are these legitimate concerns? Further discussions on these questions, and identifying what can be changed to enable humanitarian actors to build more constructive and strategic relationships in conflict zones, are needed. Better communication and transparency around stricter due diligence processes in conflict-affected contexts are also necessary.

3.5.2 Length of partnership

The full cycle of disaster management includes phases of preparedness, disaster risk reduction, response, recovery, and transition to longer-term development (linking back to preparedness and resilience building) or exit. In in-depth consultations in Myanmar, little differentiation was made between these phases. Respondents emphasised the need for sustained engagement with communities after a humanitarian event which raises a clear challenge for international agencies on how best to support 'sustained local presence' as a means to promote local leadership in humanitarian action.

The length of partnership between INGOs and L/NNGOs was also highlighted in the research with many local organisations querying project-based partnerships, with longer-term support highlighted as important for localisation. However, one research participant believed the "total and absolute handover of field operations" from international agencies was the best path towards localisation. This raises a clear challenge for INGOs and international humanitarian organisations to think beyond the (often) short timeframe of humanitarian programmes and partnerships. The finding points to a key role for long-term development programmes and funders to integrate disaster preparedness, including capacity strengthening of local/national agencies and partnership development, into all aspects of developing in hazard-prone contexts, while planning for exit and hand over.

National Steering Committee meeting - Myanmar

Conclusions and recommendations

In what way can INGOs use the findings from the research to foster, accelerate or enable a greater role for L/NNGOs in humanitarian programming?

In conclusion, L/NNGO and international agency representatives who participated in this research identified the added value which agencies bring to partnerships for humanitarian response as follows:

L/NNGOs	Both L/NNGOs & international agencies	International agencies
• Project design and planning • Advocacy • Coordination • Logistics • HR management	• MEAL	• Fundraising • Financial management • Technical expertise

The capabilities and value-added outlined in the diagram above should be discussed openly and built on so that as much as is practicably possible is under the leadership of L/NNGOs. International, national and local organisations and agencies responding to, and funding, humanitarian crises in Myanmar now and in the future should use the findings and recommendations of this research to have frank and open discussions with their existing and/or potential partners/grantees about partnership practices which enable effective responses to the needs of crisis-affected people, while empowering local and national organisations to take a greater lead in the response by recognising their existing capabilities.

Internationally, international agencies should also use their relationships with major donors and funding agencies to encourage them to evaluate current and new funding arrangements against localisation ambitions and commitments – most notably under the Grand Bargain – while considering for themselves a new role in which they do not necessarily operate as the direct funding recipient. Donor agency counter-terrorism regulations and increasingly complex due diligence processes also need to be assessed with the lens of localisation and commitments made in the Grand Bargain.

Nationally, given the complex operating environment for NGOs in Myanmar, power analyses should be conducted to understand the systems and dynamics in each humanitarian response location. Any investment in localisation should also recognise the unique importance of volunteers and their networks in Myanmar. Ultimately, capacity strengthening, planned phase out, and hand over strategies are also vital in partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs.

The following are key recommendations for accelerating localisation framed in the context of partnerships informed by the findings of the research, relevant for all humanitarian actors and stakeholders, including NGOs and civil society organisations, UN and funding agencies, and government.

1. **Jointly review research findings and recommendations:** Humanitarian partners should have open and frank discussions together about the findings and recommendations of this research and draw up an action plan on how to address partnership practices which are not conducive to localisation, identifying milestones, targets, resources needed, and a monitoring mechanism. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnership* consortium agencies will be following this process and developing action plans for a pilot phase. See Annex 2 for a template which could be used. When entering into a new partnership for humanitarian response, consider the findings and recommendations from this research from the beginning.

2. **Identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships:** Humanitarian partners can identify where partnership practices which support localisation are restricted by external factors such as

donor policies and identify actions which might reduce or remove the restrictions. An advocacy strategy or engagement plan might be useful, along with discussions with humanitarian stakeholders presenting barriers to localisation in Myanmar. Further research is needed on the reasons for the differences in satisfaction with partnerships in natural hazard contexts compared to conflict contexts as uncovered in this research.

3. **Review partnership agreements:** Partners should review their partnership agreements together, with a view to redressing the power imbalances inherent in many agreements and revising them to reflect longer-term collaborations and support through the full disaster management cycle rather than project-focused agreements.

    - Roles, responsibilities and added value of both partners should be outlined, not just those of the implementing partner.

    - Commitments and funding for organisational development and capacity development should be outlined, along with a strategy for meeting the needs identified by the L/NNGO partner themselves (or as a minimum identified through a joint assessment process).

    - Plans to shift power and decision-making should be included, through a phased approach if necessary.

    - Revised agreements could be the basis for a standardised template for partnership agreements developed through relevant NGO fora and/or working groups. These could ultimately replace agency-specific templates and be used by L/NNGOs as a negotiating tool when engaging with new partners.

4. **Assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors:** L/NNGOs should assess their own capacity and organisational strengthening needs – with support from international partners and/or NGO fora – and develop action plans for addressing these needs. These capacity strengthening plans can be used in conversations with existing and new partners to request the tailored technical expertise and support needed. They should be used to ensure similar training is not duplicated by multiple international partners and is tailored to the needs and increasing levels of capacity. Preferences on the modality of capacity strengthening should be outlined, e.g. learning events, in-person or online training, mentoring, accompaniment or work shadowing, simulations and learning by doing. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme is aiming to support L/NNGOs to conduct capacity self-assessments using formats such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) self-assessment.

5. **Assess capacity building skills of international actors:** It should not be assumed that people or organisations with expertise or experience have the necessary skills to be good trainers or mentors. As such, international agencies should assess their own internal capacity to provide capacity strengthening support to their partners. Based on the results of this assessment, actions should be taken to address weaknesses, review staff training/mentoring skills (and attitudes), review and edit job profiles etc. Efforts should be made by INGOs to coordinate on capacity strengthening, avoiding duplication and working together to build capacity, particularly where they share partners. Additionally, mapping of local training capacity in Myanmar should be conducted and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning identified. The most effective approaches for capacity strengthening should be identified in consultation with partners as outlined above, and an honest assessment of whether such methods would be more effective if outsourced to specialised training providers should be conducted. A mentoring or coaching scheme could be established, identifying mentors in-house or through networks of peers.

6. **Support organisational / policy development:** International agencies should support their local partners to develop a basic set of organisational policies that meet their organisation's needs and requirements of potential donors, and are not only relevant for specific projects. These might include policies related to finance (including management, reporting, procurement) and HR (including safeguarding, inclusion, recruitment) as well as thematic strategies such as disaster management as requested / required.

7. **Hold discussions around understanding of humanitarian principles:** The research

suggests humanitarian principles and accountability are extremely important in humanitarian partnerships, but language – and potentially understanding – differs. Values mentioned by L/NNGOs such as commitment, dedication and compassion, should be discussed in relation to international humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; to reach a common understanding of the principles and values which underpin humanitarian work and are founded in International Humanitarian Law.

8. **Invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction:** International organisations and donor agencies should (continue to) plan, develop and fund disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction programmes in hazard-prone areas of Myanmar. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction, including peace-building, should also be mainstreamed into development programmes, building on L/NNGOs' longstanding presence, strengthening their capacity for humanitarian response, and supporting them to establish close coordination with relevant local government and other local disaster management stakeholders.

9. **Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding:** All stakeholders to have open dialogue about the fact that localisation is a process and, in the short-term at least, realistically INGOs and UN agencies may continue to be the gatekeepers for large funds from institutional donor agencies while they build strategies and trust in new systems which enable them to fund L/NNGOs directly while still being accountable to the people the funds come from: taxpayers. Commitments made in the Grand Bargain enable all stakeholders to hold these donor agencies to account, and frank discussions about progress in Myanmar will be vital.

10. **Support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies:** International organisations and donor agencies should identify ways to support local and national NGOs to build up relationships between, and understanding of, donor agencies and L/NNGOs, with a view to accessing funds directly.

    - International organisations should ensure L/NNGO staff join key meetings with relevant donors, and that reports and conversations with these donors highlight the role of the L/NNGO partner, ensuring their visibility.

    - Relevant agencies can run training for L/NNGOs on donor policies, expectations, proposal and reporting templates etc. and support them to understand, plan for, and meet due diligence and compliance requirements. Donor agencies themselves could run these training events as a route to meeting prospective future grant holders.

    - Donor agencies should translate their calls for proposals, funding announcements, key guidelines, and proposal templates into Myanmar languages.

    - NGOs could conduct mapping to identify funding agencies that are open to funding L/NNGOs directly (or might in the near future).

    - INGOs can identify good practice examples of donor agencies which provide the flexible and direct funding needed to L/NNGOs while funding a key support role of INGOs for technical expertise, capacity building and communications. These can be shared with other Grand Bargain signatories who fund humanitarian response. These can be shared widely.

    - Further efforts should be made to establish/increase pooled humanitarian funds which are accessible for L/NNGOs and can be used for small and large scale disasters.

    - International agencies should share reports submitted to donors with their Partners for transparency and learning purposes.

11. **Support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable:** Project-based funds, staff contracts and capacity strengthening support create a real barrier for L/NNGOs to retain competent staff with good experience, invest in organisational development, and maintain presence in communities where

they focus.

- International agencies can support their L/NNGO partners to develop resource mobilisation plans. International agencies should support the development and implementation of such plans as much as is practicable either through capacity strengthening support and technical expertise and/or directly with funds.

- Support for the establishment of income-generating activities have been mentioned by L/NNGOs throughout this research and international partners should consider supporting this. As with capacity building skills however, it must not be assumed that international agencies already have staff with the skillset required to establish such schemes and outsourcing to specialist organisations might be more effective.

- International agencies could support L/NNGOs to calculate a set of justifiable overhead rates to be used in future budget development with partners. This might include funds to retain key staff for low-intensity project activities between project-based funding, key assets required (e.g. laptops and vehicles), and/or contributions to office rent and running costs. Where donor policy does not allow overhead costs of local partners to be included in project budgets, international agencies should consider sharing the administration budget line commonly allowed.

- NGOs should have honest conversations about what costs are eligible and which are not, and whether this is due to donor policy or organisational policy. Discussions on costs and budget lines which are reasonable and allowable should be open and honest to ensure a clear understanding between partners.

The suggestions above are anything but complete and are mainly offered to stimulate decision-making processes amongst all stakeholders for prioritising practical application. Whatever choices are made for piloting desirable changes in processes or behaviour between partners, it will be crucial that any decisions made will be made in consultation with L/NNGOs. Enabling a stronger leadership role for L/NNGOs requires not only appropriate prioritisation on activities – the contents – but has t start with a process which in itself ensures the strong involvement and participation of that L/NNGOs continue to be asking for and are entitled to.

The recommendations here are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are offered to stimulate open discussion, provide an evidence base for dialogue, and support decision-making processes of humanitarian stakeholders. This research has confirmed dissatisfaction amongst L/NNGOs in Myanmar related to their partnership experiences with INGOs and other international agencies in on-going humanitarian crises, in particular in conflict contexts. It is vital this is taken seriously and used as a catalyst to review operating models and partnership approaches with a view to improving partnerships. L/NNGOs must be part of, or lead, this review process, along with the communities they represent. Ultimately, stronger partnerships and increasing leadership of local and national humanitarian actors is expected to reach crisis-affected people in the most effective manner possible.

The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members will be reviewing the research findings and recommendations with their local and national humanitarian response partners in Myanmar and beyond; learning from which will inform the development of a Localisation Framework for Myanmar and a global Pathways to Localisation document. The consortium is keen to hear from other organisations who have already implemented any of these recommendations and/or are willing to pilot them. The more agencies that share practical learning or feedback on these recommendations the better. This will strengthen the evidence for what operational elements of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

Annexes

Annex 1: Key references and more reading

Key references

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More reading

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Annex 2: Template for action plan to assess progress on, and pilot, research recommendations

Recommendation from research	To be piloted? *(yes/no)*	If yes…					If no…	
		Milestones *(how will you know progress has been made?)*	**Indicator** *(how will you know the recommendation has been met?)*	**Action** *(what needs to happen?)*	**Responsibility** *(who will be the main focal people for this?)*	**Resources** *(are any additional resources needed? Who will cover these?)*	**Why not?**	**Any potential advocacy messages to external stakeholders?**

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