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Beyond Localization: Building Equitable Partnerships that Shift Power to Communities

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The Grand Bargain: Signatories, Commitments, Workstreams, Versions & Focus

The need to localize was agreed upon by governments and humanitarian organizations in 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit meeting in Turkey.

Localisation was promoted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2017, as part of a wider series of reforms called the "New Way of Working".

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BUT THE REALITY....

A target to increase the percentage of global spending on humanitarian aid flowing directly to local organizations to 25% by 2020 was NOT reached.

In the past 3 months: nearly \$1.9 billion of US spending on Foreign Humanitarian Assistance has been disbursed worldwide, reaching 227 projects and 81 partner organizations. Nearly 57% of that funding has gone directly to U.N. agencies such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the UN Refugee Agency, while just over 4% of cash has been delivered directly to national and local nongovernmental organizations.

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Localization is not about moving projects to local actors. It is about moving decision-making, leadership, and ownership closer to communities.



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When we speak about localization, we often focus on funding percentages, compliance systems, and partnership models. Yet the real question is much simpler: Who is making the decisions that affect people's lives?

In Syria and many other crisis settings, communities have often been the first responders, the last responders, and sometimes the only responders. Yet they are often the last to be consulted in decisions about their own future.

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What is Localization?

Localization is:

- Strengthening local leadership
- Enabling local ownership
- Supporting community-driven solutions
- Ensuring decisions are made closer to affected populations

Why It Matters

Local actors:

- Understand context better
- Have community trust
- Remain after international actors leave
- Provide long-term continuity

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Reality Check: THE SAD TRUTH!

Despite years of commitments:

- Most humanitarian funding still flows through international intermediaries.
- Local organizations often carry implementation risks.
- Strategic decisions are frequently made elsewhere.

THE TRUTH!!!

We have localized implementation faster than we have localized power!

Localization Is Not Just Funding

Many discussions focus on direct funding.
Funding matters.

But localization also means:

Decision-Making Power

Who designs programs?

Leadership

Who speaks for communities?

Accountability

Who determines success?

Representation

Who sits at coordination tables?

Knowledge Ownership

Whose evidence counts?

Key Message:

Localization is not simply transferring resources.
It is transferring influence

From Subcontracting to Partnership

Many partnerships remain transactional.

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Traditional Model

INGO/Donor → Local Partner →
Community

Characteristics:

- Top-down design
- Risk transferred downward
- Local actors implement
- Others decide

Equitable Partnership Model

Donor ↔ International Actor ↔ National Actor ↔
Community

Characteristics:

- Shared design
- Shared leadership
- Shared accountability
- Shared learning

Question:

Are local organizations implementing someone else's vision, or helping shape the vision itself?

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The Syria response offers powerful lessons.

Syrian Organizations Have:

- Responded during conflict
- Led community engagement
- Managed large-scale programming
- Built sophisticated compliance systems
- Developed technical expertise

Over time, many Syrian NGOs evolved from:

Service Providers

to

Strategic Humanitarian Actors

Key Lesson

Local organizations are not simply capable of delivering aid.

They are capable of shaping policy, influencing strategy, and leading recovery efforts.

The Role of Refugee-Led and Diaspora Organizations

This conference is uniquely positioned to discuss newcomer and refugee leadership.

Refugee-Led

Organizations Bring:

- Lived experience
- Trust
- Cultural understanding
- Direct accountability

Diaspora

Organizations Bring:

- Global networks
- Technical expertise
- Resources
- Advocacy influence

Opportunity

- Build partnerships where:
- Refugee-led groups
- Diaspora organizations
- National NGOs
- International actors
- work together as equals.

5 Recommendations

1. Fund Relationships, Not Just Projects

Partnerships require investment.

2. Share Decision-Making

Include local actors early.

Not after decisions are made.

3. Invest in Local Leadership

Not only organizational systems.

4. Share Risk Fairly

Do not transfer all risk downward.

5. Measure Power Shifts

Not only project outputs.

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Closing Reflection

- Localization is not a destination. It is a continuous process of shifting trust, ownership, and leadership closer to communities.
- The question is no longer whether local actors can lead.
- The question is whether the humanitarian system is ready to let them.

Final Thought

Communities are not beneficiaries of change.

They are the authors of it!

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***Five years from now, how
will we know localization
has succeeded?***

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When affected communities are not merely consulted, but are genuinely leading the decisions that shape their future, only then can we say Localization is being acknowledged.

"Localization is not about replacing international actors with local actors. It is about building equitable partnerships that empower communities to lead their own journey and shape their own future. For communities affected by conflict, displacement, and crisis, localization is more than a development approach—it is about dignity, agency, and hope.

Success will not be measured by how much funding reaches local organizations, but by whether communities have the power to define their future, the institutions to sustain it, and the partnerships to support it. When that happens, local actors move beyond implementing someone else's vision and become owners of their own future—leading recovery, rebuilding trust, and creating lasting change.

Because sustainable change is not built for communities; it is built by communities. Our role as partners is not to lead on their behalf, but to create the space, trust, and opportunities that allow them to lead for themselves."

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Thank You for Your Attention & Eagerness!

Any comments, feedback, questions?

LET'S TALK!

Feel Free To Reach Out to Me at:
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