ACCELERATING LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

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

Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

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Displaced families collect clean drinking water, provided by Christian Aid in Nigeria.

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List of Acronyms

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
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
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations

Suggested reference:

Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam (2019) *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships: Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action in Nigeria.*

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 Nigeria to reach a varied sample of local and national actors: Abuja, Jos and Maiduguri. In total, 70 NGOs were consulted for this research in Nigeria; 80% of which were local or national NGOs.

The findings reflect experiences from a rich diversity of local and national NGOs in Nigeria 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 (L/NNGOs) in Nigeria 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 operations. The majority of research participants believe that partnerships are the best pathway to localisation.

The three core organisational capabilities important for effective partnerships in Nigeria ranked highest by research participants were: Project design, planning and management; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); and Financial Management and Reporting. Examples of partnership practices which are most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the report with relation to each of these three core organisational capabilities. Other core capabilities rated highly included human resources (HR) management, capacity development, and fundraising. Core values and principles highlighted as the most important for partnerships by research participants were: commitment to programme quality, gender equity and inclusion, humanitarian principles, and accountability to affected persons, yet research results on these themes are not conclusive. Trust and respect also emerged as a priority for partnerships.

National and local NGOs (L/NNGOs) should continue to play an important leadership role in advocacy and logistics management, while INGOs can make the most important contribution to partnerships by supporting L/NNGOs with fundraising, capacity building. The research highlighted that L/NNGOs feel unable to influence humanitarian decision-making in Nigeria, and efforts are needed to address this. L/NNGOs also raised concerns on the trend towards international NGOs (INGOs) establishing national entities and competing for funds open to L/NNGOs. Research findings suggest that longer-term partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs will result in partnership practices most conducive to localisation. Additionally, partnership practices should respond to the high-risk operating environment in Nigeria and make further efforts to support L/NNGOs in this.

Twelve key recommendations emerged from the research including: Jointly review research findings and recommendations; Identify external factors restricting localisation; Review partnership agreements; assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors; assess capacity building skills of international actors; Support organisational / policy development; Increase understanding and commitment to humanitarian standards; Invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction; Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding; Support linkages and understanding between local actors and funding agencies/mechanisms; Establish an inter-agency working group to discuss the issue of 'INGO nationalisation'; and 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 Nigeria and a global Pathways to Localisation report. The consortium is keen to hear from organisations and agencies with feedback or learning from their own experiences of implementing these recommendations.

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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 *Nigeria 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.

Methodology

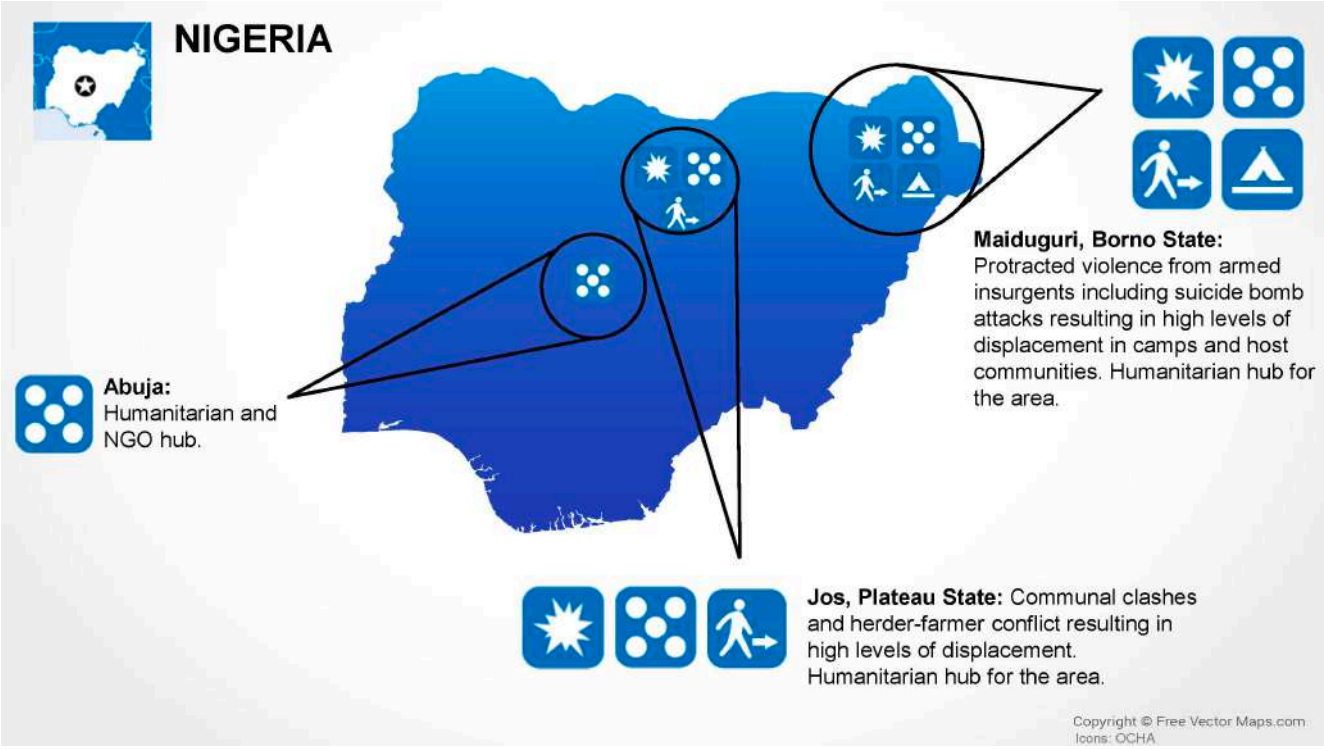
The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach, including classic qualitative (systematic literature review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) and quantitative (survey) collection techniques. During the analysis phase, all sources of evidence were triangulated to identify 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 Nigeria 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 Nigeria, and the humanitarian situation in each, is outlined in the map below.



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; for low-bandwidth environments, print and enter-in-document versions were also disseminated and shared. Altogether 36 respondents completed the survey from Nigeria; 83% (30) 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 9 key informant interviews were conducted in Nigeria. These included representatives from different organisational departments/divisions within two L/NNGOs, five INGO and one United Nations (UN) agency.

A total of 28 L/NNGOs were consulted through the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews in Nigeria, including nine 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 Abuja 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 Nigeria, and were an opportunity to reach out beyond those who participated in the research. In total, 46 representatives of 44 NGOs (of which six were INGOs), INGO fora, and United Nations (UN) and donor agencies were involved in the validation process.

In total, 70 NGOs were consulted for this research in Nigeria; 80% 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 Nigeria, 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 Nigeria, 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.

National Steering Committee members - Nigeria

Findings

3.1 The status of local and national NGOs in Nigeria

What is the status of local and national NGOs in Nigeria?

When asked how well the international system respects and promotes the role of local or national NGOs in managing and coordinating humanitarian response in Nigeria, the majority of survey respondents (72%) said 'fair' or 'poor'. More than half (53%) of survey respondents also believed their own organisations had only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and UN agencies.

In Nigeria, the concept of localisation appears to be gaining traction. At the time of the survey, a vast majority of survey respondents – 78%, the highest of four studied countries – reported they were 'absolutely' able to explain what 'localisation' means to a colleague; the remaining 22% said they could explain 'some' of what it means.

3.2 Partnerships between INGOs and NGOs

What is the quality of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs in Nigeria?

The research did not set out to explore satisfaction with partnerships, nor attempt to analyse the effectiveness or sustainability of any partnerships mentioned. Nevertheless, the following findings are important inputs to consider in discussions in Nigeria about INGO-L/NNGO partnerships and localisation.

In Nigeria, the vast majority (90%) of L/NNGO survey respondents said their organisation had experience working on a humanitarian response operation in partnership with an INGO. When asked to judge the quality of the partnership they had experienced, local and national NGO respondents were more critical than INGO respondents; no local NGO respondents qualified their relationship as a 'genuine partnership' compared to 40% of national NGO respondents and 60% of INGO respondents. However, on average, 77% of survey respondents said the partnership had been 'very' instrumental in meeting humanitarian needs; including all national NGO respondents. There was some divergence in responses to this question however, with 20% of INGO respondents saying the partnership had not been instrumental in meeting humanitarian needs 'at all'.

The majority of survey respondents believe that partnerships are indeed the best pathway towards localisation. However, the 14% identified better alternative pathways to localisation including capacity development, practical experiences ('learning by doing') or accessing funding directly.

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 three core organisational capabilities ranked highest (in terms of frequency of mention) as being important for effective partnerships in Nigeria:

1. Project design, planning and management
2. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
3. Financial management and reporting

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 three organisational capabilities. Many practices, fit into more than one of the capabilities. Some also appear to be contradictory, e.g. that L/NNGOs take responsibility for monitoring project implementation versus INGOs and L/NNGOs jointly conduct field monitoring. However, this reflects the fact that local and national NGOs in Nigeria are not a homogenous group and have a variety of experience and capacity (as do their INGO partners).

Project design, planning and management

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ INGOs carry out an institutional assessment and, once they are satisfied, they give the L/NNGO freedom to plan and deliver the project. ✓ L/NNGOs are entirely responsible for implementation, and INGOs track progress through periodic monitoring.	× Key decisions taken by INGOs or donors [without consultation of L/NNGOs]. × INGOs design projects alone, with no input from L/NNGO. × Lack of communication about what the project and/or partnership is aiming to achieve.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

All actors in Nigeria agreed that expertise in MEAL is the single most important contribution INGOs can offer to partnerships. At the same time, the vast majority of in-depth discussion research participants believed that L/NNGOs' local knowledge and presence gives them advantages in MEAL, as illustrated in the quotation from a L/NNGO research participant below:

> *"Lack of credible data is the aspect we deal with most in humanitarian work. Sometimes you see that when you go to the field, you see different things, different from information you have prior. I think localisation can help to correct these discrepancies between what is actually the situation and what is been rumoured."*

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for monitoring project implementation and supported by their INGO partners for discussions on problems and solutions. ✓ INGO staff are present alongside L/NNGO partner staff in the field, to jointly observe and monitor, and to base decisions on a shared understanding of the situation. ✓ Roles and responsibilities for monitoring are *"clearly spelt out in the contract".* ✓ L/NNGOs are able to communicate with their INGO partners immediately after (or during) field visits in which data is collected that indicates an imminent threat or worsening situation which then follows a procedure for early warning and early action. This encourages L/NNGOs to take the lead in broadcasting emergencies. ✓ Support provided to L/NNGOs to develop appropriate MEAL systems, to ensure that goals are realistic, and activities are aligned to achieve the intended results. ✓ INGOs provide MEAL training for L/NNGO staff.	× INGOs provide templates for monitoring, telling L/NNGOs what to report on, and focusing solely on outputs. × INGOs give low visibility to their L/NNGO counterparts who do the monitoring. × INGOs dominate MEAL and do not involve the L/NNGO.

Financial management and reporting

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
✓ INGOs give L/NNGOs freedom to adjust the budget as they see fit (while respecting the total amount of funding available). ✓ Budget include relevant assets for L/NNGOs. ✓ Budgets include a contribution to L/NNGO's overheads (e.g. office rent, utilities, internet etc.). ✓ International agencies provide training on financial management to L/NNGO partners (procurement, accounting, tax regulations, compliance etc.). ✓ A budget line for capacity building is included in partnership agreements / contracts.	× INGOs develop budgets that do not include funds for the institutional development of their L/NNGO partners. × Budgets do not cover the indirect costs of implementing the project. × INGOs delay funds transfers due to disagreements over expenditure. × Lack of opportunity for L/NNGOs to participate in the budget development.

Other capabilities

In addition to the most highly ranked organisational capabilities for partnerships outlined in the sections above, other core capabilities ranked by a high number of survey respondents were: human resources (HR) management and skilled people, capacity building and organisational development, fundraising, technical capacity and advocacy. Technical expertise and advocacy were not raised or discussed in detail in the in-depth consultations so there are limited details about how these were important in partnerships. Discussions around HR management and skilled people, capacity building and organisational development, and fundraising are outlined below.

Human Resources (HR) management

In in-depth consultations, research participants did not mention any partnership practices in human resources that are conducive to localisation, but they did highlight the following practices that they believe are not conducive to local and national NGOs taking a greater lead in humanitarian action:

- × INGOs pay stipends to the L/NNGO field staff; sometimes even directly to them rather than through the organisation.
- × NGOs give instructions directly to the partner staff rather than through the partner's own management structure.
- × INGOs 'poach' staff from L/NNGOs.

Capacity building and organisational development

Capacity building and organisational development were not consistently ranked highly as one of the most valuable contributions to partnerships, but were discussed at length in focus group discussions. The partnership practices that L/NNGOs identified as most conducive to localisation are as follows:

- ✓ INGOs carry out an institutional assessment of their L/NNGO partners that respond to their call for proposals, then provide capacity building and organisational development support based on the outcome of that institutional assessment.
- ✓ L/NNGOs are encouraged to make choices for themselves about the capacities that they most need to develop, and what training they want.
- ✓ A budget line for capacity building is included in partnership agreements / contracts. (*see also Financial management and reporting*).
- ✓ International agencies support capacity building with a timeline, so that the L/NNGOs can see when they should have developed those capacities.

- ✓ International organisations outsource capacity building for L/NNGO partners when they do not have capacity the in that area, or lack capacity-building skills.
- ✓ INGO partners provide training and funding for national NGOs to replicate training they have received for local NGOs.
- ✓ INGOs support capacity building in fundraising.
- ✓ International agencies provide training on financial management to L/NNGO partners (procurement, accounting, tax regulations, compliance etc.). (*see also Financial management and reporting*).

L/NNGO research participants also identified a number of partnership practices in capacity building and organisational development that are not conducive to localisation such as when international agencies: limit training to project-specific topics rather than broader training that would support organisational development, and provide training to L/NNGO partners based on what they consider priorities rather than what L/NNGO identify as a weakness.

Fundraising

Fundraising emerged as a core capability that both INGOs and L/NNGOs think their partners add value to their partnership with. INGOs were recognised for the capacity building support they can provide for fundraising, which was identified as one of the main contributions INGOs can make to partnerships. However, a main theme in in-depth discussions was around L/NNGOs wanting to access donor funding directly, without the INGO as an 'intermediary'.

A number of INGOs were highlighted as demonstrating commitment to localisation by successfully implementing humanitarian response actions in Nigeria where their L/NNGO partners managed large parts of the overall programme budget – up to 70% in one case. This partnership practice is seen by many L/NNGOs as a valid model to replicate. Other partnership practices that research participants highlighted as strengthening local leadership of humanitarian action concerned their ability to raise funds directly from sources other than international agencies and institutional donors, such as from national donors or through national fundraising campaigns, from their members, through income-generating activities, from influential individuals, and through churches. Local NGO survey respondents in Nigeria were the only group to highlight the importance of in-kind resources, but this was not a topic raised or discussed during in-depth consultations.

Technical expertise

Technical expertise as a value partners bring to partnerships was ranked quite highly by survey respondents, but no partnership practices related explicitly to technical capacity were highlighted in the in-depth discussions. In one interview, however, L/NNGO staff expressed that the most important contribution an INGO can make through partnerships to strengthen L/NNGO's ability to lead humanitarian action is through enhancing technical capacity (and providing funding). One L/NNGO research participant said *"The INGO's technical capacity is important replicating international standards, international principles for the local level...for the proper outcome"*.

Advocacy

Advocacy capabilities were also ranked quite highly by survey respondents for partnerships – the majority of L/NNGOs believed their own organisation's capabilities in advocacy were an added value to their partnerships – but the topic was not raised of discussed in in-depth consultations.

Other capabilities which were not ranked highly or discussed much in in-depth consultations included: safety and security management; connections between short, medium and long-term programming and funding; logistics management; coordination; and media and communication.

The fact that safety and security management did not feature highly is interesting given that Nigeria was the 5th most dangerous country for aid workers in 2017[5] and the increasing discussions at international level about localisation resulting in a transfer of risk to local partners. However, survey respondents in Nigeria did not rank conflict and insecurity highly as an external influencing factor for humanitarian partnerships, therefore perhaps its omission in discussions in Nigeria is not surprising. Just over one-quarter of L/NNGO survey respondents value safety and security management capabilities as a contribution that their INGO partners bring to

partnerships. Some partnership practices related to safety and security management which were highlighted during focus group discussions as conducive to localisation are outlined below.

- ✓ INGOs provide advice to L/NNGOs on security in the field.
- ✓ International partners provide training on security management to L/NNGO partners.

Conversely, participants of key informant interviews raised concerns about the lack of INGO support on security management, especially when they were operating in conflict settings. Research participants also highlighted the valuable role L/NNGOs have in supporting their INGO partners to access high risk areas, illustrated by quotation from a L/NNGO research participant: *"we went with them [the INGO] because there are places they cannot reach as international NGOs"*.

It is also interesting that the connection between short, medium and long-term programming and funding was not mentioned in in-depth consultations given the commitments to increase multi-year funding in the Grand Bargain in response to such a demand.

For logistics management, INGO survey respondents ranked their partners' capabilities as an added value in their partnerships. However, a number of L/NNGO research participants highlighted the importance of their INGOs partner's pre-positioned goods and equipment.

3.4 Values, Principles and Standards

What values, principles and standards are most important to partnerships?

Commitment to programme quality, gender and inclusion, and accountability to affected persons were the top three values and principles which partners bring to partnerships in Nigeria according to survey respondents, followed fairly closely by knowledge and application of humanitarian principles.

The majority of survey respondents (78%) believe that the main value in partnerships lies in their own organisation's **commitment to humanitarian programme quality**, only survey respondents whose own organisation had no experience of working in partnership did not select this as one of the top values. INGO survey respondents also recognised their partner organisation's commitment to humanitarian programme quality as one of the most important values in partnerships.

Commitment to **gender equity and inclusion** was also rated highly – by 75% of survey respondents – but a closer analysis revealed an interesting differentiation: INGOs ranked their L/NNGOs partner's gender approach as adding greater value to the partnership than their own gender approach. However, gender equity and inclusion was barely mentioned during in-depth consultations. Research participants did not identify any partnership practices related to gender and inclusion which supported or limited localisation.

Survey respondents also gave considerable weight to **accountability to affected people** and **knowledge/application of humanitarian principles** as important values and principles for partnerships. However, partnership practices relating to these barely featured in in-depth discussions, and none were framed in the context of localisation. In one interview, the L/NNGO staff member seemed unsure about principles that their organisation and their partner INGO had in common. Survey results do suggest that familiarity with internationally-adopted humanitarian principles and standards such as Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) and Sphere are high in Nigeria; 44% and 42% respectively reported that they were 'very familiar'.

Given the commitment by the aid sector to gender equity and inclusion, accountability, and humanitarian principles, the absence of these issues from debate in Nigeria is somewhat surprising. If arguments for localisation raised by L/NNGOs in Nigeria continue to focus primarily on access to funding without reference to commitments to, and capacities in, ensuring people-centred humanitarian assistance, then they may ultimately fail. Commitments to localisation evolved from the belief that L/NNGOs taking a great leadership and coordination role in humanitarian response in their own country will result in better responses for crisis-affected people.

Discussions on **trust and respect** in partnership relationships during in-depth consultations uncovered inconsistent experiences for L/NNGO research participants; some provided partnership practice examples from INGOs that demonstrated transparency, trust and respect, whereas others gave examples of partnership practices which lacked these qualities. Two quotations from L/NNGO research participants below reflect this dichotomy:

> *"[Our international agency partner] are very transparent with us and accountable, we discuss at the review meeting funding, we discuss activities that have happened, and they also send in some monitors once in a while, they visit us to see if we are having any difficulties, what we are doing, and also they are very professional…"*

> *"[Our international agency partner] consider us very high-risk partners because of the distrust, they will check until you have a lot of systems, policy in place so when they give you the money, you won't just disappear."*

3.5 External Elements

What are the key external factors that can affect partnerships?

Half of the research participants from INGOs operating in Nigeria ranked the **legal status** of L/NNGOs in the country as one of the most influential external factors to partnerships for humanitarian response. Half of the INGO survey respondents. In this context, legal status is connected to anti-terrorism policies applied by institutional donors and by which INGOs have to abide by.

Conflict and insecurity was not ranked highly or raised as an external factor strongly affecting partnerships. This provides an explanation for the lack of mention or importance placed on safety and security management capabilities in partnerships mentioned earlier in the report. However, L/NNGO research participants did mention the impacts that conflict and insecurity have on their ability to access funding; examples of strict due diligence and anti-aid diversion procedures of INGOs were mentioned, as also highlighted above. Linked to conflict and insecurity, **access** or 'organisational reach' was mentioned relatively frequently by L/NNGOs related to external factors influencing partnerships. Many L/NNGOs are able to access some areas more easily than INGOs are.

The **role of government** was barely mentioned as an external factor affecting partnerships for humanitarian response in Nigeria. During in-depth consultations, government transparency was considered much more important than government capacity, but overall, the Government of Nigeria was conspicuous by its almost total absence in-depth discussions.

Although not mentioned in survey responses, in-depth consultations uncovered a common sense of dissatisfaction and frustration of Nigerian L/NNGOs regarding the trend of INGOs setting up and registering national entities; a trend referred to as '**INGO nationalisation**'. The assumption of L/NNGOs was that the prime reason for such a trend was so that INGOs could access funds available for local and national NGOs in the country, thereby competing with them.

3.5.1 Natural hazard versus conflict contexts

Are partnership practices different in natural hazard and conflict contexts?

As all the contexts in which the research was conducted in Nigeria are associated with high levels of insecurity and conflict contexts, it was not possible to reach any conclusion on differences between partnership practices in natural hazard and conflict-related contexts, or rapid/slow-onset events at a national level. See the global report for a deeper analysis of the influence the humanitarian context in relation to natural hazards and conflicts has on partnerships.

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 Nigeria, little differentiation was made between the response and recovery phases, and partnership practice examples which do and do not support localisation spanned both phases. This may be due to the protracted nature of the conflict in the research locations in which such interventions often occur in parallel or are cyclical when

violence escalates. Still, several research participants highlighted the need for capacity building in preparedness and disaster mitigation, largely to reduce the need for an international response and manage the humanitarian action nationally.

The partnerships that appeared to be the most likely to support localisation are longer-term; although some good partnership practices were mentioned for short-term partnerships too. Given the protracted nature of the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria, partnerships tended to be longer than in other countries with sudden onset disasters such as floods and earthquakes, and so offered opportunities for partners to develop trust and come to common understandings.

Discussing research findings and recommendations - Nigeria

Conclusions and recommendations

In what way can INGOs and L/NNGOs 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
• Advocacy • Logistics management	• Project design, planning and management • MEAL • Financial management • HR management • Capacity building	• Fundraising • Pre-positioning goods and equipment

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 Nigeria 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 – and local government where relevant – 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.

Nationally, given the continued threat to aid worker security, NGOs should discuss safety and security management; and the protocols and support needed to reduce risks to staff of L/NNGOs in Nigeria. In response to the lack of respect and influence L/NNGOs perceive their organisations to have in the international system and in humanitarian decision making in Nigeria, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and cluster coordinators must review the way the cluster system engages with L/NNGO staff to ensure their active participation. Ultimately, capacity strengthening, planned phase out, and hand over strategies are also vital in partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs, and for leadership in the cluster system.

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:** Humanitarian partners can identify where partnership practices which support localisation are restricted by external factors such as donor or government policies and identify actions which might reduce or remove the restrictions. Discussions are also

needed with OCHA and cluster coordinators to support them to develop a strategy where humanitarian coordination mechanisms in Nigeria ensure the genuine and active participation of L/NNGO staff, and that their views are given the importance they deserve. An advocacy strategy or engagement plan might be useful, along with discussions with humanitarian stakeholders presenting barriers to localisation in Nigeria.

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. For Nigeria, these should also include phases of peace-building and conflict resolution where relevant.
    - 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. Capacity strengthening plans should include the identification of learning opportunities on safety and security management in particular in response to the high-risk operating environment for NGO staff. 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 Nigeria 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, compliance) and HR (including safeguarding, gender,

inclusion, recruitment) as well as thematic strategies as requested / required such as safety and security management or disaster management.

7. **Increase understanding and commitment to humanitarian standards:** The research suggests humanitarian principles and accountability are extremely important in humanitarian partnerships, but discussions on these were very limited. The importance of people-centre humanitarian approaches should be discussed in relation to international humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; to reach a common understanding and commitment to 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 longer-term disaster preparedness and risk reduction, including peace-building and conflict resolution, programmes in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. Disaster preparedness and peace-building should also be mainstreamed into development programmes, building on L/NNGOs' access to high-risk areas, strengthening their capacity for humanitarian response, and supporting them to establish close coordination with relevant local government and other local peace-building and disaster management stakeholders.

9. **Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding:** All stakeholders should 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 Nigeria will be vital, particularly around anti-terrorism, aid diversion and complex due diligence processes.

10. **Support linkages and understanding between local actors and funding agencies/mechanisms:** 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, and those that manage pooled funds.

    - 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.
    - Relevant agencies can run training for L/NNGOs on donor and pooled fund policies, expectations, proposal and reporting templates etc. and support them to understand, plan for, and meet due diligence and compliance requirements. Donor agencies or pooled fund managers themselves could run these training events as a route to meeting prospective future grant holders.
    - 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 and pooled funds 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 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. **Establish an inter-agency working group to discuss the issue of 'INGO nationalisation':** Given the concerns raised about INGOs establishing national entities and registering as national NGOs in Nigeria, this is clearly a topic which needs more open dialogue. The trend appears to be counter to localisation commitments, so open discussions bringing together all relevant stakeholder are needed.

Feasible solutions are needed which protect the space of local and national NGOs, and enable them to compete for the limited funds which are only open to national organisations, without unfair advantages. Advocacy around this issue may be necessary, and links to other groups and networks in other countries could help to inform the discussions.

12. **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 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 a strong sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst L/NNGOs in Nigeria related to their partnership experiences with INGOs and other international agencies in recent humanitarian crises. 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 Nigeria and beyond; learning from which will inform the development of a Localisation Framework for Nigeria 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

[1] Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, Tearfund, ActionAid (2012) ***Missed Opportunities: the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses***. Written by B. Ramalingam, B. Gray and G. Cerruti. Available online: https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/missed-opportunities-case-strengthening-national-and-local-partnership-based.

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More reading

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

		If yes…					If no…	
Recommendation from research	**To be piloted?** *(yes/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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