

# ACCELERATING LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

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



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## Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships consortium

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## Integrated Risk Management Associates (IRMA)

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### Front cover photo:

Women collect sacks of grain to give to communities who have fled from conflict in South Sudan.

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## List of Acronyms

<b>CHS</b>	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HR</b>	Human resources
<b>INGO</b>	International NGO
<b>L/NNGO</b>	Local and National NGO
<b>MEAL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

Suggested reference:

CARE, Christian Aid, 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 South Sudan.*

## 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 South Sudan to reach a varied sample of local and national actors: Wau, Bor, and Juba City. In total, 96 NGOs were consulted for this research in South Sudan; 85% of which were local or national NGOs.

The findings reflect experiences from a rich diversity of local and national NGOs in South Sudan 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 South Sudan 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. Over half of the research participants believe there are better pathways to localisation than through partnerships.

The six core organisational capabilities important for effective partnerships in South Sudan ranked highest by research participants were: Financial management and reporting; Project design, planning and management; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); Human Resource (HR) management and skilled people; Fundraising; and Capacity building / organisational development. Examples of partnership practices which are most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the report with relation to each of these six core organisational capabilities. Core values and principles highlighted as the most important for partnerships by research participants were: commitment to programme quality, humanitarian principles, and accountability to affected persons. Transparency also emerged as a priority for partnerships, and trust and respect were discussed widely.

National and local NGOs (L/NNGOs) should continue to play an important leadership role in project design and planning, financial management, and human resources management, while INGOs can make the most important contribution to partnerships by supporting L/NNGOs with fundraising, technical expertise, and coordination. The research highlighted that L/NNGOs feel excluded from humanitarian coordination mechanisms – commonly mentioned was the cluster system – in South Sudan, and efforts are needed to address this. 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 South Sudan and make further efforts to support L/NNGOs in this.

Eleven 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; 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 funding agencies/mechanisms; 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 South Sudan 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<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> (2016), the Grand Bargain<sup>3</sup> (2016), and the Charter for Change<sup>4</sup> (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 *South Sudan 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.

Localisation has been widely debated in South Sudan, and it is now widely accepted that increasing the leadership of ‘national and local humanitarian actors’ in humanitarian response refers to all civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), and national NGOs *founded and operating* in South Sudan.

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 referred to as 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.



*Inception workshop participant – South Sudan*

## Methodology

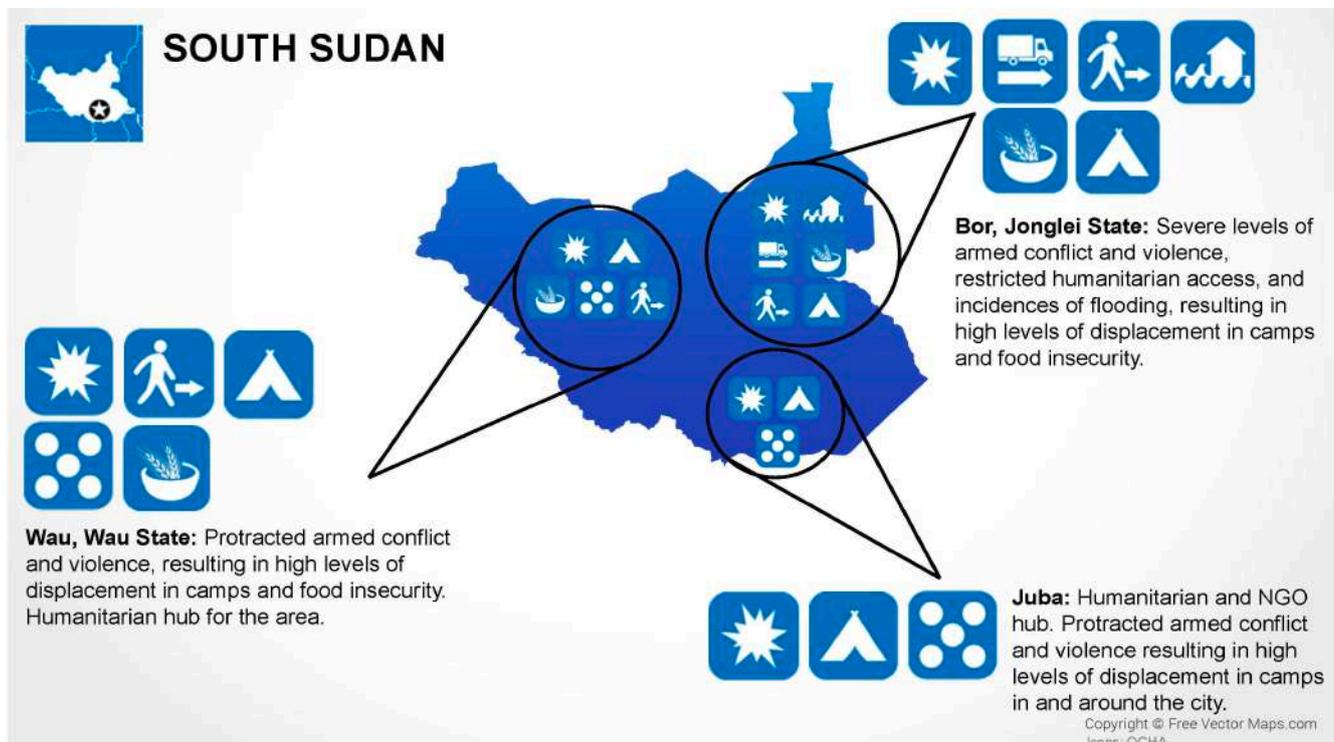
The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach, including classic qualitative (systematic literature review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) and quantitative (survey) collection techniques. During the analysis phase, all sources of evidence were triangulated to identify 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 South Sudan 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 South Sudan, 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 42 respondents completed the survey from South Sudan; 76% (32) 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), plus representation from those working in Government-controlled and opposition-controlled areas. 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 15 key informant interviews were conducted in South Sudan. These included representatives from different organisational departments/divisions within two L/NNGOs, two local government and one United Nations (UN) agencies. A total of 32 L/NNGOs were consulted through the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews in South Sudan, including five women-led organisations.

### 2.4 Research Validation

The results of the research were affirmed through a validation process. Research validation workshops were conducted in Juba and Wau 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 South Sudan, and were an opportunity to reach out beyond those who participated in the research. In total, 44 representatives of 42 NGOs (of which eight were INGOs), United Nations (UN), and donor entities were involved in the validation process. In total, 96 NGOs were consulted for this research in South Sudan; 85% 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 South Sudan, and so the sampling strategy aimed to reach a representative and diverse sample to allow for some extrapolation and generalisation.

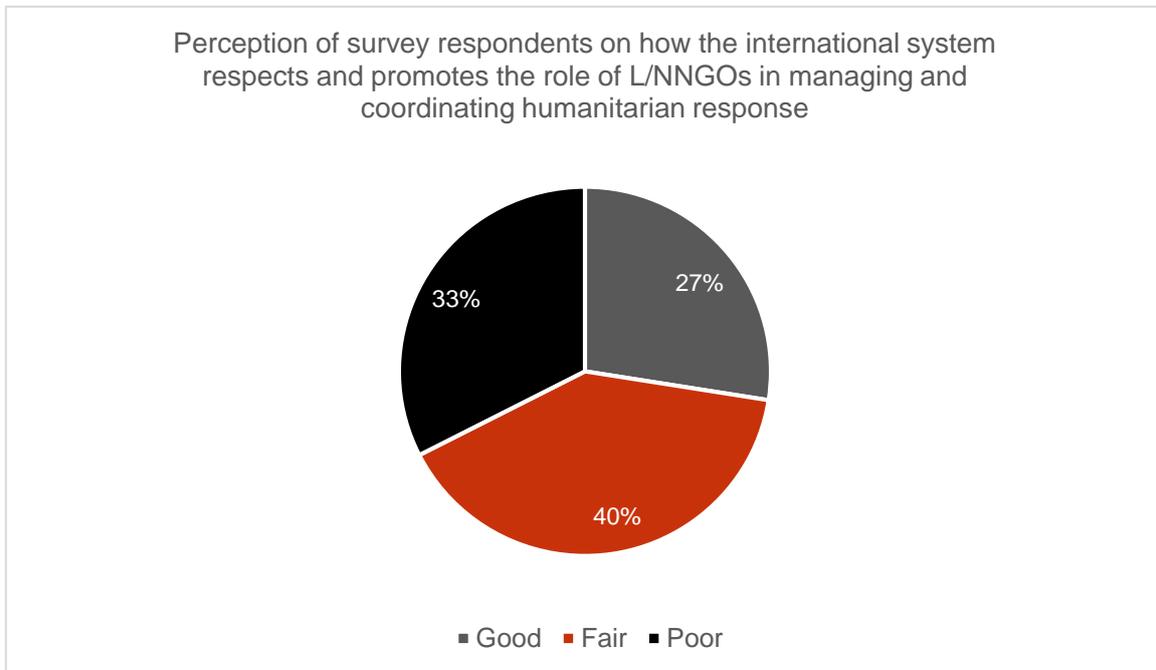
Despite those challenges, the research has succeeded in presenting the views and experiences from a rich diversity of NGO voices in South Sudan, especially from local and national NGOs, whose voices are often not heard clearly enough in research conducted by INGOs. The research provides valuable insights 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 South Sudan

#### *What is the status of local and national NGOs in South Sudan?*

When asked how well the international system respects and promotes the role of local or national NGOs in managing and coordinating humanitarian response, respondents are divided as outlined in the graph below:



An overwhelming majority of respondents believed that their own organisations have only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and UN agencies. This is despite the fact that the majority of national NGOs that participated in the research (along with INGOs), reported being part of the humanitarian coordination mechanisms in South Sudan such as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the Cluster system, including the Inter-Cluster Working Group. However, at the time of the research, only 2 national NGOs out of a total membership of 24 agencies (8%) were members of the HCT in South Sudan. National NGOs reported being involved in the humanitarian coordination mechanisms as a way to inform the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and subsequently access humanitarian funding committed through this route, such as the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund and the Emergency Response Fund. One National NGO survey respondent said:

*“Local/national NGOs are involved in emergency responses as respected and equal partners. International organisations actively reach out to local/national NGOs but local/national NGOs do not have full influence and control over humanitarian response.”*

In South Sudan, knowledge of localisation is growing very fast, and at the time of the survey, only 4% of survey respondents said they could not explain what localisation means to a colleague. The remaining 96% of survey respondents said they were 'absolutely' able to explain to a colleague what 'localisation' means (76%), or they could explain 'some' of what it means (20%).

There was a palpable sense of frustration among L/NNGO research participants about the lack of localisation by INGOs; in particular about their direct implementation at the community or 'grassroots' level as illustrated by the following quotations from research participants:

*“I think the definition of localisation is known but in practical terms it is not happening because most of the time the INGOs are implementing projects at the grassroots.”*

*“There is only one organisation here confirming to localisation policy. They don’t implement projects directly in the communities. They work through local NGOs. They give the funding and NNGOs take the lead and they do it very successfully.”*

Recognition of the capabilities which NGOs bring to partnerships also appears to be less than positive in the survey results, and possibly reflects this approach to direct implementation. Survey respondents were asked to select the most important capabilities an organisation brings to a partnership for humanitarian action – or put another way their ‘added value’ – and whether these capabilities were those their own organisation brought or that their partner brought. International, national and local NGOs survey respondents regarded their own organisation’s capabilities as more valuable in their partnerships than their partner’s capabilities.

### 3.2 Partnerships between INGOs and NGOs

*What is the quality of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs in South Sudan?*

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 South Sudan about INGO-L/NNGO partnerships and localisation.

In South Sudan, the majority (81%) 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, the majority of respondents, both INGOs and L/NGOs, did not qualify their relationship as a ‘genuine partnership’, but that their collaboration had ‘many’ or ‘a few’ qualities that reflected an equitable partnership. However, there was overall agreement amongst survey respondents that the partnerships had been ‘very’ or ‘moderately’ instrumental in meeting humanitarian needs.

Just under half (49%) of survey respondents in South Sudan believe that partnerships are indeed the best pathway towards localisation; yet just over half (51%) identified alternative pathways to localisation. These included direct funding following appraisals and L/NNGOs ‘learning by doing’. Survey respondents in South Sudan highlighted that the most important roles for INGOs in supporting localisation are developing L/NNGO capacity (68%), providing funding to L/NNGOs (50%), and mentoring them.

### 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 six core organisational capabilities ranked highest (in terms of frequency of mention) as being important for effective partnerships in South Sudan:

1. Financial management and reporting
2. Project design, planning and management
3. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
4. Human Resource (HR) management and skilled people
5. Fundraising
6. Capacity building / organisational development.

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 six organisational capabilities. Many practices, fit into more than one of the capabilities. Some also appear to be contradictory, e.g. that L/NNGOs design projects versus L/NNGOs co-design projects with their INGO partner. However, this reflects the fact

that local and national NGOs in South Sudan are not a homogenous group and have a variety of experience and capacity (as do their INGO partners).

### Financial management and reporting

Discussions on finances in South Sudan were commonly related to support for L/NNGOs to be financially sustainable and the need for assets such as vehicles, office space and computers. Having such assets would not only enable them to more effectively deliver and monitor humanitarian aid but also increase their sustainability and ultimately be more attractive to donors and international agencies for funding. Support for establishing income-generating activities were also mentioned. Given the protracted nature of the conflict and corresponding humanitarian action in South Sudan, it is not surprising that L/NNGOs feel frustrated in their dependence on short-term funding, rented vehicles and temporary offices. For them, good partnership practices that supports localisation includes the provision of, or a contribution to, this. See also partnership practices mentioned in Fundraising below which are closely linked to these discussions.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ International organisations encourage L/NNGOs to design the project and budget themselves (see also: <i>Project design, planning and management</i>).</li> <li>✓ International organisations allow partners flexibility to revise or adapt the budget needed as a result of changes in the operating or fiscal environment, such as currency fluctuations.</li> <li>✓ Regular but not unnecessarily complex financial reporting to international agencies, through which L/NNGOs gain practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× International agencies create budgets without involving the L/NNGO.</li> <li>× INGOs exclude costs paid by L/NNGO such as taxes, duties, insurance etc. from budget.</li> <li>× International agencies do not include L/NNGO costs for assets such as vehicles in budgets.</li> <li>× Delays in INGOs transferring funds, which can result in delays in paying L/NNGO staff salaries and might result in staff leaving to work for INGOs or the UN.</li> <li>× International agencies require that procurement is done by them, not their L/NNGO partner.</li> </ul>

### Project design, planning and management

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ International organisations encourage L/NNGOs to design the project and budget themselves. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> <li>✓ INGOs and L/NNGOs jointly carry out the budgeting process at the same time as they co-design the project.</li> <li>✓ Establishment of steering a committee with members from both partners, to guide project planning and implementation.</li> <li>✓ Partners agree that the most local voice (usually the beneficiaries') should carry the most weight, when issues are raised and problems need solving.</li> </ul>	No partnership practices mentioned here.

### Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ INGO acceptance that their L/NNGO partners can identify appropriate project indicators.</li> <li>✓ Joint project monitoring and reflection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× International agencies develop budgets with no costs for MEAL. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> </ul>

### Human Resource (HR) management and skilled people

For Human Resources (HR), research participants agreed during in-depth consultations that allowing L/NNGOs space to recruit according to their needs (duration of contracts, staff profiles, salaries, etc.) was a 'basic' of localisation, although not always respected by their international partners. L/NNGO research participants mentioned a number of partnership practices related to HR they considered were not conducive to localisation, but did not highlight any that were. However, it can be assumed that the converse of the practices mentioned below would go some way to improve in this area.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
No partnership practices mentioned here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× International partners do not cover health and insurance costs for staff. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> <li>× INGOs set budget for staff without consultation with L/NNGOs, and so low that appropriate recruitment is impossible, or staff leave to work for INGOs or UN agencies. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> <li>× INGO interference in the staff disciplinary practices of its partner, including to influence whether a L/NNGO staff member remains or is dismissed.</li> <li>× L/NNGOs pressured by a person of influence to recruit a specific person.</li> <li>× Gaps in funding [in between projects] that result in competent staff finding work elsewhere.</li> </ul>

### Fundraising

See also discussions outlined under Financial management and reporting above, which are closely linked to raising funds through access to donor funds and income-generating activities.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Organisational capacity building by INGOs resulting in L/NNGO being more likely to access funding.</li> <li>✓ Funds provided by international agency to use for income-generating activities to build a sustainable income. One example given was the construction of a guest house where funds are raised by the L/NNGO.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× L/NNGOs restricted and/or discouraged by INGOs from approaching donors directly.</li> </ul>

### Capacity building / organisational development

Capacity building or organisational development featured in many discussions as a major contribution INGOs can make through partnerships to strengthen local and national NGO's ability to lead humanitarian action and meet humanitarian needs.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ L/NNGOs identify their own capacity building needs to ensure that training and other forms of capacity development provided by international agencies are relevant and valued.</li> <li>✓ INGOs provide training for L/NNGOs with the clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× International agencies regard organisational development as a one-off activity, without provision for cascading training and rollout.</li> </ul>

<p>intention being for INGOs to take on a support or secondary role once adequate capacity is built.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Allocation of funding for development of policies for HR, finance and other areas. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> <li>✓ Provision of funding for assets such as vehicles. (See also: <i>Financial management and reporting</i>).</li> <li>✓ Transfer of assets to L/NNGOs at the end of a project.</li> </ul>	
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### Other capabilities

In addition to the most highly ranked organisational capabilities for partnerships outlined in the sections above, other core capabilities ranked highly by a number of survey respondents or discussed in in-depth consultations were coordination and organisational development. Technical expertise and logistics management were ranked in the top 10 capabilities which add value to partnerships by less than 30% survey respondents, but were ranked highly by some of these and mentioned quite frequently in in-depth consultations. Technical expertise was not discussed in detail in the in-depth consultations so there are limited details about how these were important within partnerships other than where they were discussed in relation to other capabilities such as project design, planning and management. Discussions around coordination, organisational development, logistics management, and safety and security – the latter receiving surprisingly little attention – are outlined below.

### Coordination

Coordination was considered an important capability for partnerships, and INGOs were ranked as adding the most value here in comparison to L/NNGOs. However, in discussions on coordination through in-depth consultations, participants focused on INGOs' failure (deliberate or unintentional) to mention L/NNGO partners and their roles when participating in cluster meetings as demonstrated on this quotation from a L/NNGO research participant: *"Whatever outcome that come from the cluster you will find the NNGOs are not mentioned most of the times."* Despite the majority of L/NNGO survey respondents reporting that they are part of the humanitarian coordination mechanisms such as the cluster system (see Section 3.1), L/NNGOs research participants highlighted their need to be invited to these cluster and other coordination meetings and their views listened to. The feeling that they are not listened to is backed up by the result that an overwhelming majority of survey respondents believed that their own organisations have only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and UN agencies. L/NNGOs are also keen to establish their own spaces – separate from the formal cluster system – for information-sharing and learning on humanitarian action.

### Organisational development

In-depth consultations revealed that L/NNGOs value INGO support for developing humanitarian policies, strategies and guidelines in partnerships, and that this supports localisation as it enables L/NNGOs to guide their own operations but also to attract new donors (and partners).

### Logistics management

The following partnership practices considered most and least conducive to localisation by in-depth consultation participants are as follows.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ L/NNGOs fully responsible for key logistics functions, with funding provided by their INGO partner.</li> <li>✓ INGO expertise provided only for complex cases, and in a manner that builds experience and capacity of L/NNGOs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× Important procurement managed by the international agency.</li> <li>× Insufficient provision of vehicles for L/NNGOs, while INGOs appear to have sufficient.</li> <li>× Procurement procedures imposed by donors that are unrealistic in the operating context and discredit the L/NNGO.</li> </ul>

### Safety and security management

Safety and security management was not ranked as a core capability important for partnerships by survey respondents in South Sudan. This topic was also rarely discussed in in-depth consultations, except in relation to INGO's reliance on L/NNGOs to assess needs, and deliver and monitor aid, in certain high-risk areas where INGO security protocols prevent their staff from going. This is surprising given South Sudan was ranked the most dangerous place for humanitarian aid workers with record numbers of aid workers killed, attacked and kidnapped in 2017, the year preceding the research, including a steep rise in the number of victims belonging to national and local NGOs.<sup>5</sup> There are also increasing discussions at international level about localisation resulting in a transfer of risk to local partners and the need to ensure localisation in conflict settings is done with safety and security in mind.

However, throughout in-depth consultations, the L/NNGO research participants referred to their local knowledge and long-term presence as being crucial to their valuable contribution to all aspects of programme implementation and partnerships.

### 3.4 Values, Principles and Standards

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

The survey respondents ranked commitment to programme quality, knowledge / application of humanitarian principles, and accountability to affected persons as the most important values, principles or standards within partnerships in South Sudan. Transparency also emerged as a priority value or principle for partnerships through the in-depth discussions, but by far the most discussed values were trust and respect; mainly in relation to INGOs towards L/NNGOs.

**Commitment to programme quality** was ranked highly by all survey respondents but does not necessarily refer to quality standards in terms of Sphere Minimum Standards. Overwhelmingly, in-depth discussion participants instead considered qualities of cost-effectiveness/efficiency in partnerships as conducive to localisation. Timeliness and appropriateness were also mentioned, and L/NNGO values in this area attributed to their presence and local knowledge. One L/NNGO research participant commented that: *"With locals you can do more jobs with less money"* that seems to encapsulate the sentiment of many others.

In relation to knowledge / application of **humanitarian principles** research participants rarely referred to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence widely adopted by UN and international agencies or to international standards such as Sphere or Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). Forty-six percent and 45% of survey respondents in South Sudan said they were 'very familiar' with Sphere and CHS respectively; although only 24% of them reported that their own organisation 'always' put these into practice in humanitarian response. In in-depth discussions, research participants referred to other principles (and values) were considered key to localisation of humanitarian action, such as professionalism and stewardship of funds.

**Accountability to affected people** was also ranked among the top three values for partnerships. In discussions on this topic, L/NNGOs requested more commitment from INGOs in really listening to, and understanding, the needs of the affected communities and ensuring that aid is tailored to meet them. As one research participant said: *"What is happening is the community...talks about the needs (that they think) the internationals are looking out for, not their own needs."*

With regards to **trust and respect** in partnership relationships, more than half of the INGO survey respondents rated their own organisation's respectful attitude and behaviours among the top 5 most important values or principles they added to their partnerships with L/NNGOs. Partnership practices highlighted by L/NNGO staff during in-depth consultations as the most conducive to localisation in relation to trust and respect were: transparency in all aspects of partnership and a problem-solving rather than a blaming approach to issues raised.

The values-related partnership practices that in-depth consultation participants felt were least conducive to localisation are **attitudes of authority or dominance**, demonstrated by the following quotation from a L/NNGO research participant:

*"When you work under strict directives of another you may develop fear and lack of confidence in you. When [you] lack confidence it will keep you in the same position always because you will not be innovative enough you will only rely on that which come from the one who is more superior."*

Very little mention was made overall of commitments to **gender equity and inclusion**. Surprisingly, gender was only mentioned once in a focus group discussion in relation to an HR policy; inclusion was not spontaneously mentioned any of the in-depth consultations.

### 3.5 External Elements

#### *What are the key external factors that can affect partnerships?*

Overall, external factors which affect partnerships did not feature prominently in the in-depth discussions in South Sudan, and even when they were raised, they were not raised consistently by all participants. **Insecurity**, for example, surfaced as the most important external factor affecting partnerships for female research participants. However, NGO capabilities related to project planning, implementation and resourcing were more important than safety and security management in partnerships, as outlined in Section 3.4 above.

L/NNGOs perceive their **legal standing** to be the third most important external factor influencing partnerships. This may be related to the recent NGO Act (2016) and new requirements for INGOs and L/NNGOs which includes the requirement for any NGO operating in South Sudan to employ at least 80% of South Sudanese nationals in all managerial, intermediate and junior positions.<sup>6</sup> The same Act has caused concerns among INGOs in particular with regard to requirements for asset registration.<sup>7</sup>

A large group of respondents regard the availability and speed of **access to humanitarian funding** in the top 5 most important external factors affecting partnerships in South Sudan. At least one-third of INGO survey respondents consider the 'availability of funds' a key resource which they contribute to partnerships with L/NNGOs. From the L/NNGO perspective, the way funding passes through multiple levels/organisations before reaching the field level is a source of frustration. As one L/NNGO research participant commented, and agreed by many: *"When you see the movement of funds, at international level they have 25%, regional level 20%, coming to the country 40%, and to the field a very small percentage"*. Direct access to donors was proposed multiple times as an alternative.

**Government transparency** and **government capacity** were not mentioned by research participants in South Sudan as important external factors, which contrasts with findings in the other three countries this research was conducted in (Myanmar, Nepal and Nigeria), and perhaps reflects the fact that the Government of South Sudan is relatively new. In fact, the role of government was absent in in-depth consultations in general.

#### 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 South Sudan 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 South Sudan, little differentiation was made between the response and recovery phases, likely 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. Partnership practices mentioned throughout the research appeared to refer to both response and recovery phases; and are in reality relevant for all phases of disaster management, and for peace-building and development programmes. There was, however, interest from research participants in disaster preparedness as an approach that could support localisation of humanitarian action.

The partnership practices that were most frequently highlighted as the most conducive to localisation tended to be from multi-year partnerships and long-term relationships. The long-term partnerships highlighted by research participants explicitly and strategically aim to strengthen local leadership of humanitarian action through training, policy development, contribution to overheads, mentoring, flexible funding and reporting arrangements, and increasing trust to manage parts of project planning and MEAL. That said, some shorter partnerships with a clear

capacity building objective were also highlighted as demonstrating many partnership practices conducive to localisation.



*National Steering Committee meeting – South Sudan*

## 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial management</li> <li>HR management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project planning and design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fundraising</li> <li>Technical expertise</li> <li>Coordination</li> </ul>

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 South Sudan 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 South Sudan. In response to the lack of influence L/NNGOs perceive in the humanitarian coordination mechanisms in South Sudan, 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. Given the concerns over new Government of South Sudan legislation, discussions will need to be held to identify the potential impact. Discussions are also needed with OCHA and cluster coordinators to support them to develop a strategy where humanitarian coordination mechanism in South Sudan 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 South Sudan.

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 South Sudan, 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 South Sudan 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 as requested / required such as safety and security management or disaster management.

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 cost-effectiveness, timeliness and relevance, 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 longer-term disaster preparedness and risk reduction, including peace-building and conflict resolution, programmes in conflict-affected areas of South Sudan. 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 South Sudan will be vital.
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. **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 sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst L/NNGOs in South Sudan related to their partnership experiences with INGOs and other international agencies in recent humanitarian crises and a sense of exclusion from humanitarian coordination mechanisms where key decisions are made. The research also highlighted a number of longer-term partnerships which were viewed as demonstrating good partnership practices which are conducive to localisation. It is vital this sense of dissatisfaction and exclusion is taken seriously and used as a catalyst to review operating models, partnership approaches, and coordination mechanisms with a view to improving partnerships and coordination. 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 South Sudan and beyond; learning from which will inform the development of a Localisation Framework for South Sudan 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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