

Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships

A Learning Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships (ALTP) programme is an ECHO- funded programme, which was implemented over two years (Nov 2017 – Oct 2019) in four countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. Christian Aid leads the consortium of 6 INGOs (Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD and Oxfam); in each country, programme implementation has been guided by a National Steering Committee, made up of local and national NGOs and the consortium members.

This Learning Review constitutes the final output of the programme, meant to assess its value for money and beyond, to capture learning for the programme’s stakeholders.

The findings presented here incorporate views expressed through 60 survey responses; several workshop reports; and 10 phone interviews. There was overall agreement among respondents that the programme had been:

- run **economically**, with judicious being made of the funds available;
- implemented **efficiently**, supported by a transparent and functioning structure, enabling systems, and a supportive, flexible management approach;
- **effective** at accelerating localisation through building an evidence base and an enabling environment.

In the four countries, the programme has succeeded in advancing the localisation agenda, positively affecting the self-perception of local actors and the relationships between local actors and INGOs. There are clear indicators that in those country contexts, the foundations are in place for a sustained engagement in support of localisation. For the INGOs, participation in the programme has meant a stronger profile in the global localisation debate. The *Partnership Practices Guidance Note* has been recognised as the most important output of the programme, and is already being adopted beyond the stakeholders involved in the programme.

Consultations about a possible future second-phase programme generated a rich amount of diverse recommendations. Regarding **project design**, respondents expressed a strong desire for local involvement in any future project development process. Another recommendation advocated for a more diverse consortium **structure** and stronger role of local actors; there was a notable general desire to see a much stronger role for **local actors**, including budgetary decision-making responsibilities and access to external funding. Opinions diverged on the **scope** of a future next programme, as well as on the **thematic focus**, with propositions extending to a continuation of ALTP, capacity building, advocacy, preparedness planning, and humanitarian response, with some emphasising a new focus on gender and results-based programming.

INGOs interested in taking these suggestions forward need to decide transparently which of these recommendations to enact, and why. As a way of clarifying a future direction of a new programme, it is suggested they:

- **determine the objective** of any future “ALTP type” engagement for themselves in the first instance;
- **(self-) Identify committed stakeholders for any future ALTP 2 engagement;**
- **determine the scope** – regarding **geography and participation** – of any future programme; and
- develop the process of a **bottom-up programme design**.

The next localisation programme, aiming to empower local leadership, will need to reflect, in its design process, operating modality, structures, staffing and ways of working, the central ambition itself. Such a programme would model localisation successfully – while underscoring the credibility of INGOs who are strong advocates for localisation.

Introduction

The Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships programme is an ECHO- funded programme, which has been implemented for two years (Nov 2017 – Oct 2019) in four countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. Christian Aid leads the consortium of 6 INGOs (Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD and Oxfam); in each country, programme implementation has been guided by a National Steering Committee (NSC), made up of local and national NGOs and the consortium members.

This Learning Review constitutes the final output of the programme and is meant to assess its effectiveness and impact, and more broadly to capture learning for the consortium members and humanitarian stakeholders in the four programme countries and beyond. While a follow-on programme, Phase 2, is yet to be confirmed or funded, this review will support the design of any such programme.

Methodology

The findings presented in this document are based on a variety of different sources and incorporate views expressed through survey responses; workshop reports; and phone interviews. The endline survey was returned by altogether 60 project participants, with the large majority of them members of local or national NGOs (80%). Only 65% of respondents had been part of the pilot phase but the overwhelming majority stated they were very familiar with the ALTP programme.

Interviews were conducted with altogether 10 individuals who had been key participants in the ALTP project, as project staff, local partner staff, or agency advisors. The conclusions presented are collective views shared by many respondents, with isolated views identified as such. Not surprisingly, the views expressed are disparate, at times contradictory; they can also reflect a lack of understanding or information gaps. This should not detract from their validity – but rather highlights additional communications needs within the programme. In a few instances, opinions are expressly related to what role the individual had in the programme, e.g. as national coordinator. In this programme, which brings together different stakeholders in the humanitarian system under an agenda that challenges that system, the views of local actors in particular can at times provide key insights.

Findings

The document below is structured along four main themes, which altogether aim to assess the programme against value for money and impact:

- Economy: did the programme make most of the money available? Were the funds spent wisely and appropriately?
- Efficiency: was it implemented efficiently? With an appropriate structure, roles and responsibilities, management, collaboration?
- Effectiveness: Did the programme meet its objective and accelerate localisation? What impact has it had?
- Partnership Practices: how do the participants assess their partnerships against the Partnership Guidance principles?

Economy: Value for Money

In interviews, this question got a nearly unanimous response from all of the participants: for a programme with such a relatively small budget and a wide geographical spread, good, judicious use was made of the money available. It was acknowledged that a substantial amount was spent on personnel costs – staff salaries but also flights, accommodation, per diems. These were still

recognised as necessary expenses to incur: bringing people together to develop shared understanding of localisation, to discuss and explore partnership modalities, to collaborate in joint actions could not have been done without face-to-face encounters. Neither can it be underestimated what an important signal was set by including national staff as attendees at the Brussels Grand Bargain conference.

It was also clearly affirmed that the role of the national coordinators in-country was absolutely essential to the project. In terms of cost, in-country implementation and coordination delivered by national, rather than international staff, no doubt made for lower staffing cost.

Despite the overall agreement that the project funds had been spent economically, quite a few project participants remain dissatisfied with the limited amount of money that had been available and what choices had to be made as a result. They diagnosed a mismatch between proposed activities and funds available, and an operating budget that was seen, in the words of one participant, to be “grossly inadequate”. There are regrets and dissatisfaction over the fact that only a limited geographical reach could be attempted within the project, often centred around capital cities; that insufficient funds were available to commit to advocacy and sensitisation efforts as well as capacity building; that no funds were available in the end to put into practice what had emerged as good practice recommendations. Generally, participants in-country would have liked to have more flexibility on how money was used, i.e. decision-making responsibility at country level over some small part of the budget. Still, the majority have by and large not questioned the decisions that were made on the use of funds.

There were some divergent views, though. One local NGO representative thought that the budget was well-utilised “to some extent” but would have preferred to see less money made available for workshops and meetings and more towards capacity development and piloting good partnership practices. In their view, too much time was spent on understanding and agreeing what localisation meant, negotiating between government and Grand Bargain interpretations. However important those discussions were, it has meant that very little tangible results are evident at the end of the project.

Another interviewee offered counter-suggestions on how project funds should have been spent more economically, specifically by shifting leadership and coordination to local capacity. In their view, money could have been saved by focussing on local, rather than global, coordination mechanisms. Likewise, leadership of consortium management could have been delivered by a representative body of local organisations rather than Christian Aid as consortium lead¹, with commensurate – cheaper - resources made available for salaries, travel, and coordination. Project resources should rather have been dedicated to tangible actions plans by local organisations – which would have demonstrated real improvements and brought about greater ownership of localisation.²

There was only one interviewee who questioned the amount of publications that were produced under the project within the two years of implementation (country research reports, national frameworks, Pathway Towards Localisation). Instead, they suggested, it might have been better to focus on only the first one, and thereafter use its findings to implement pilot actions. – Another interviewee remains uneasy about the value of the capacity self-assessment exercise and what was actually gained from it; after so many similar processes conducted before – could it not have been

¹ Under ECHO rules, only agencies that have a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with ECHO can act as consortium lead of an ECHO contract. Similarly, project staff can only have employment contracts with FPA agencies.

²In each country, the sum of €5k, available at the disposal of country teams, remained unspent at the end of the programme. The reasons cannot be explored in this document.

more judicious to find out about the respective results of previous exercises and build on those? On the subject of capacity assessment, it was also noted negatively that capacity gaps were identified through the assessment process but then no plan designed to address them (even though, admittedly, the programme had not been designed to translate the assessment exercise findings into a capacity development action plan).

Should it be considered a matter of concern that most representatives of partner organisations who were interviewed (three out of four) did not know anything about the project budget? As one NGO member stated: “I received the money to participate in the conference but do not know what budget it came from.” One interviewee could not understand why the project had been struggling with limited funding over the entire period, for then a substantial sum to be returned to the donor at the end of the project. In reality this was not the case. Clearly, local organisations, even when they participated in the project, had only limited understanding and or responsibility for what was being decided or implemented.

Efficiency of Programme Implementation

The programme took a very long time to get started – some national coordinators were only in place six months after the formal start date. It did mean that activities, too, all started late, and not without time pressure – but were then efficiently run, helped by the logical sequence of the activities to be undertaken: one activity had to be completed before the next one could be initiated. Overall, despite the late start, the timeline was adhered to - except for the research phase, which thereby also affected the timing of the pilot phase.

The Structure

Project participants commented positively on the “infrastructure” of the project. The positions and functions at global level were clearly defined by Terms of Reference, such as the role of the **Global Project Manager** or the role of **focal points** (where they were filled), and there was no overlap amongst these two. (Where no focal points came into being, i.e. in Myanmar and Nigeria, the project manager had to shoulder this responsibility as well.)

At country level, the final set-up of the overall structure did take a little more time to fall into place but eventually, the two initial roles of National NGO Advisor and National NGO Liaison Officer were merged into the post of National Coordinator, for both financial and efficiency reasons. As one of the post holders put it, “it meant quite a lot of work and some stress but it streamlined communications and in terms of the project, made sense and meant higher productivity”.³

There can be no doubt that the role of the **National Coordinators** was key to the success of the programme. They oversaw and managed in-country relationships, including different NGO perspectives that had to be brought into one programme plan. As one of them commented, their role was crucial in ensuring participation and inclusiveness - they were familiar with the country context, able to speak the local language and to mediate inclusiveness, “making sure that no one is left behind”. In this project, the active participation of local actors was in no way linked to bespoke financial incentives – as one of the coordinators put it, it was important to “find a way of motivating them without being able to give them grant money”. National coordinators also had to weather the

³ Project set-up was further hampered in one of the countries when an influential network of NGOs made a claim for them to lead the project, while also propositioning a different content focus in general. The physical location of the national coordinator became another point of negotiation.

difficult localisation debate in-country, which could at times turn rather frosty between INGOs and L/NNGOs, dominated by antagonistic perceptions.

For most of the staff in the ALTP project, the project structure itself was a factor that enabled the project's smooth operation: in the best case, they would experience a "well-functioning national steering committee, an intact consortium, and an institutional lead agency providing support to this project". As one interviewee pointed out, without those, it would have been challenging to deliver the project with only one person in-country. In this regard, the substantial support provided from the global level – through the Global Research Advisory Group, the Global Steering Committee, the Global Advocacy Group, and support from the lead agency – were all appreciated as valuable contributions. In-country, both the consortium structure and the **national steering committees** could be efficiently leveraged for the pilot phase, with the national steering committee enabling effective information flow.

This positive view on the project set-up is not universally shared by those further removed from its "inner workings", both in terms of geographical proximity or closeness to decision-making processes. One interviewee from a participating local NGO did not understand the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved – "I knew it was a consortium [project] but did not know who was the leading agency. I heard that four INGOs were involved". Neither was it clear to them how decisions were made on who was to participate in the project; they were invited by an INGO they were working with to the first meeting, where they felt motivated, based on what they learnt there about the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change, to join the National Steering Committee. At the same time, they did not know by what criteria organisations had been invited into the Localisation Promoters Group – and remain unhappy about the fact that their number was eventually very limited.

Another interviewee was rather critical about the functioning of the global **multi-agency consortium** and had experienced the project as "one of the more challenging projects [they] had ever been involved in". Turnover of staff at global level and lack of focal points in some consortia agencies made it difficult to run the project efficiently overall. With new staff coming in, there would usually be handover issues – which often left two of consortia members having to take on a disproportionate amount of consortium responsibilities. Individual INGOs themselves often had to struggle with communications gaps between northern-based headquarters and country staff – often related to the federated nature of an agency.

In the end, as this interviewee put it, it was the commitment and buy-in of **individuals** that helped overcome structural (or political) difficulties and made the programme work. Passion and commitment of all staff, but also of the local partner organisations, were identified as a key factor that enabled the programme's success. Interviewees were universal in praising the "soft competencies" in evidence in the project: ALTP colleagues held each other in high regard not only as to their respective management and coordination competencies but also their ability for nurturing and managing high quality working relationships across the project. This positive management culture made itself felt beyond the team and was highlighted by more than one representative of a local organisation.

Systems

Astonishingly, very little feedback was obtained as to the existence, whether hindering or enabling, of systems and procedures behind the project's management. Only one critical remark was made on the internal bureaucracy of the global lead agency, which sometimes took a relatively long time to process expenses for reimbursement to local partners. – At the global level, a query was raised as to whether enough financial control mechanisms were put in place in support of the project manager

who oversaw and managed the project's finances. Dedicated engagement by an internal but not project-related finance function would have been desirable to ensure financial management best practice and accountability.

Overall, though, the fact that so little was said with regard to any "INGO bureaucracy" can only be interpreted as positive: whatever financial or organisational systems were being adhered to during programme implementation were not perceived by participants as getting in the way of activities.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, every three weeks the project manager held one-to-one meetings with the national coordinators which covered updates and finances and which were perceived (by most) to be supportive and engaging rather than controlling. Global Steering Group meetings every three months served as a regular forum to discuss updates and projections, on programmes and budgets.

Flexible management

All national coordinators appreciated the supportive management approach by the Global Project Manager, who also acted as matrix manager towards them. Continuous support was provided through regular interactions, and when concerns were raised, they were effectively and respectfully dealt with.

Despite a clear, sequential programme implementation plan, there remained scope for modifications and changes in-country when deemed advisable. The national coordinators played a key role in influencing such decisions, and they uniformly expressed appreciation for the degree of **flexibility and responsiveness** that they experienced: "our own decisions were possible when needed, the PM let us decide what would be best to do". As one of them said, the project had clearly been designed "in a unilinear approach" which did not take account of particular conditions in a given context. National coordinators were all able to provide instances where activities which had not formed part of the original project plan were in fact added on in the course of implementation. The Nepal team, for example, initiated a multi-stakeholder platform – involving the government, INGOs, the Red Cross, the education sector, donors, and the UN - to discuss the agenda and scope for localisation within Nepal's federal system. Because the government of Nepal had not been part of the 2016 WHS, it was considered important to ensure government commitment to the localisation agenda as well as create synergies with their respective federal policies. A real-time assessment of a natural disaster emergency intervention in Nepal was another example that was added to the project's original plan.

In Myanmar, taking into account the humanitarian situation and political considerations, the original idea of a national workshop was replaced by a regional workshop which enabled higher participation from local organisations. Furthermore, the language factor was recognised as a big impediment, with English not being working language in both Nepal and Myanmar; as a result, it was decided, even though not planned for in the budget, that in both countries documents were translated for the benefit of local partners.

In Nigeria, additional sensitisation activities were suggested – and implemented – in Maiduguri, in the form of a preparatory meeting that helped NGOs develop a joint position before the arrival of the Grand Bargain Localisation mission. Similarly, in South Sudan, another research validation exercise was made possible in Wau. Any such additions or changes to original plans were enabled through re-allocations from existing budgets, at times even across budget lines, accommodated by ECHO as the funder when requested.

In the final, additional five-month-period, which was granted to the project after the formal completion and is actually funded by consortium members themselves, the four country teams were allowed to decide what they wanted to do in the period Nov 2019 – Mar 2020; activities therefore look quite different, reflecting different priorities highlighted by the Programme Coordinators and National Steering Committees (NSC).

What specifically could have made for greater efficiency?

In response to this question, interviewees focussed specifically on **financial matters**. There was a shared view amongst many different respondents that the budget should have included a portion of “free funds” for country teams to use as they thought appropriate. It was felt particularly difficult for pilot actions to be implemented without budgets attached to them. One respondent thought that it “would not work well to ask people as volunteers to commit to localisation”. Instead, in their view, responsibilities need to be matched with resources to create ownership and better accountability.

The programme **design and initiation** came also under scrutiny. The project being perceived as “designed in London, with no input from the country offices”, was considered problematic. From the start, it made for a communications problem between focal points at agency headquarters and in-country staff and required a series of interactions to deal with country staff confusion but also help them understand and commit to the project. Furthermore, higher level of input from the country offices right from the start, during the design phase, would reportedly have generated more cooperation, developed capacity through the process, and would have strengthened the profile of the project and learning for local NGOs.

Two project participants deplored specifically that the project did not express and realise a strong gender ambition alongside the localisation focus and noted the very small number of women-led local organisations involved.

In terms of the set-up generally, and mirroring what has been said elsewhere, the question was raised more than once whether the consortium model was the most efficient one to adopt – in view of the fact that “not all consortium partners showed the commitment necessary”.

Effectiveness and Impact

For those related to the programme who have been most aware of the funding contract under which the programme was implemented, there have to be doubts as to whether the specific objective “Enable local and national actors to progress the localisation of humanitarian response at both national and global level” was in fact realistic within the two-year timeframe of ALTP, or even whether the activities carried out were in fact aligned to the objective. But what the project indeed was able to do was to accelerate localisation through building an evidence base and an enabling environment.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly affirmed that the programme had contributed to some “positive change” in the humanitarian sector in their country (“a lot” by 48%, “a little” by 35%). A large majority of respondents (72%) also thought that the programme had indeed engaged the right actors in their countries. Those who disagreed would have wished to see inclusion of both government and more local actors who were not necessarily partners of INGOs.

Impact on local actors

For those involved in the day-to-day negotiating and implementing around the ambition of localisation, this programme has met most of its aims, and when not all, has prepared the ground for

advancing the localisation agenda. In the words of one staff member: “If the central idea was to take a global discussion to the local level - the idea of “empowering local actors”, advocating, sensitising, testing evidence, bringing groups together, delivering tangible outcomes - in that sense, in its intent, great value for money was delivered.” Many of the respondents were clear about the learning processes they had experienced through the programme: “before, we had no idea about localisation – and have learnt a lot”; or, as another local NGO member clarified: “You need to know about your rights before you can claim them!”

Local partners appreciated the opportunity for collective discussions and peer learning, and membership in a forum where their voices were heard and their perspectives valued. They also acknowledged the capacity building support they had received as consortium partners during the pilot phase and noted concrete changes in their own operations, e.g. with regards to financial processes, governance, safeguarding, or development of SOPs.

Specifically, the national localisation frameworks were considered a great achievement. All of the respondents from the four countries were able to provide examples of the programme’s discernible impact on others.

Relations L/NGOs – INGOs and donors

Mobilising substantial numbers of local organisations around the theme of capacity self-assessments and the development of national localisation frameworks clearly attracted attention and interest beyond the group of direct project participants and amplified advocacy around localisation.

In more than one country, INGOs who had not been part of the ALTP programme have contacted project staff to initiate localisation discussions and collaboration. In Myanmar, bringing the findings of the localisation debate to the INGO Forum elicited two kinds of responses: some INGOs started reviewing their own engagement on localisation and invited local actors to discuss how to collaborate on the agenda and change their own practices. By contrast, other INGOs were shocked to hear, let alone accept, that their own capacity should also put be part of any capacity assessment process.

At the global level, involvement of local actors in the Grand Bargain workstream has increased substantially during the project period (up to 28% participation of local actors at the global localisation conference). One INGO (who have not been part of the ALTP programme) have explored each one of the recommendations from the ALTP research to assess how they themselves could adopt them in a new strategy developed with a main focus on partnerships.

In Nepal, engaging with the UN Resident Coordinator and obtaining their support for the localisation agenda led to increased awareness in the sector, with INGOs and UN sector maximising their influence. The UN do coordination mainly around contingency planning – and are now engaging local partners in the contingency plans. This in itself raises the profile of local actors CSOs and LNGOs, bringing them into the planning cycle for possible emergency scenarios.

ECHO in Myanmar is reportedly trying to facilitate a country-wide working group on localisation, scheduled to meet every two months, and have invited ALTP coordinator to discuss how localisation can be enacted in conflict settings, with duty of care, without jeopardising the safety of small organisations. A representative from one key institutional funder has declared that the “Partnership Practice Guidelines are the only one he would put forward as a recommendation to use”.

When asked to explain the programme’s relative success, despite its small budget, respondents mentioned the evidence coming out of the research as one important factor which has influenced

thinking around localisation. Interview partners generally did not think that it had been an innovative programme, in its structure, contents or modality. They concurred, though, that the programme did seem to tap into an existing interest: maybe it is the case, as proposed by one staff, that pressure is indeed emerging in the sector in view of the fact that more than three years after the WHS, there is a clear realisation that not much has changed since 2016. In this environment the hope is that the ALTP will have had a catalysing influence by making available not just solid evidence but practical guidance towards implementation.

Sustainability

It does feel for many that even though the big changes around legal and compliance requirements in partnerships remain to be addressed, it will not be possible to turn the clock back on discussions that have started and changes that have been galvanised. The fact that the consortium wanted to continue the programme and agreed to put in their own funds to support an additional five months' period demonstrates that there is a belief that the programme has been effective and had impact. At the end of the original programme period, clear plans at country-level, tailored to their context, mirrored a sustained commitment to localisation. ECHO, when notified, reacted with praise:

“Wow, congratulations to Christian Aid! Thank you for sharing this great news! You are actually the only organisation we have supported within the localisation context that has taken the initiative to ensure the sustainability of the project by itself!

This is also “quid pro quo” in action, so something you can be proud of and mention at the meeting. I sincerely hope that donors will follow suit with financial support for phase 2 and that local and national actors will also take ownership.

For Nigeria, the localisation agenda presented itself as a great benefit to the country – after the humanitarian experienced in northern Nigeria and the recognition that without strong local leadership, there is no way the government as a gatekeeper can hold INGOs to account for what they do. There is a strong belief that the government will take ownership of the national localisation framework, through a National Localisation Working Group to ensure implementation in line with the framework. Evidence is already emerging that the government is keen to make the national localisation framework an integrated part of cooperation agreement with international actors who want to operate in the country. Apparently, a new INGO coming into Nigeria now has a clause added to their contract that asks for their localisation agenda.

Also in Nigeria, on the back of the project, the “Women in Humanitarian Response Network” was launched in September 2019, bringing 60 local and national NGOs organisations together. The launch was attended by the government, INGOs, the private sector, and the UN, with the Swiss government promising support thereafter.

In South Sudan, the ALTP has been effective in pitching the localization agenda across the humanitarian sector and bringing it to most humanitarian coordination platforms. This year, for the first time, NFI cluster has picked all women-led NNGOs for the 2020 HRP. More NNGOs are taking greater responsibilities in the different humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

Myanmar is currently not witnessing “big” changes but instances of mobilisation - e.g. in two areas (Kachin and northern Shan) local coordination mechanism have been set up including local faith-based groups and multi-sector NGOs, which are being led by a member of the Localisation Promoters Group.

Impact on INGO consortium members

The INGO consortium feedback has been quite nuanced, and rather modest. Their representatives acknowledge that the programme has been successful in pushing the global localisation agenda forward in the four countries. One agency country office is now developing a new 3-year strategy with a new key objective of “scale-up with local partners” – which is a shift away from decades of direct implementation.

At the same time, this positive effect of furthering localisation has largely been limited to the four countries only; it is hoped that the five-month extension will be utilised to further embed its findings, and impact, into agency headquarters and their international outreach - to have a much broader impact will require a dedicated strategy of dissemination. One of the consortium agencies has also noted that the small team dedicated to ALTP has not been representative of headquarters culture overall, and that substantial effort of internal advocacy and promotion is needed for the localisation agenda to become more widely known and accepted within the agency as a whole.

There was agreement that engagement in the programme has strengthened and amplified consortium members’ profile and voice in the global localisation debate. The outputs generated from within ALTP – specifically the Partnership Practices Guidance Note and the self-assessment tool alongside – are appreciated as valuable tools that have already affirmed existing good partnerships and will, in the future, help assess and amend the agencies’ partnership models and practices.

What would need to happen to make such a programme more effective?

The survey question “What should have been done differently to achieve a bigger change within the humanitarian sector?” elicited a wealth of suggestions across a variety of themes, with only few of them related to specific aspects of the programme. There were – again – requests for more capacity building of local NGOs but a much greater number of respondents would have wished generally for a longer project period and availability of additional funding, e.g. to allow for implementing recommendations arising out of the pilot actions. The largest amount of responses, though, related to the scope of the project – with many of the survey participants indicating that the project should have engaged government structures and extended to the entire NGO sector, including all national and local actors. The desire expressed by so many to see the project reach a lot more organisations than it could reflects a generally positive perception of the programme and its aims.

Notably, a considerable amount of respondents suggested that engaging grassroots communities themselves into the programme would have affected a greater change in the humanitarian system. Overall, more than 3 years after the World Humanitarian Summit, the survey responses seem to indicate that localisation remains a rather “foreign” concepts, which requires substantial advocacy, among local actors first and foremost, but also governments and INGOs.

At the same time, for those who have experienced working around localisation, and who have come to embrace its ambition, more should have been done to raise the profile and role of local and national actors within the programme. Concrete suggestion along those lines include direct funding to local partners as well as direct connections between local actors and donors. Respondents also suggested that the development of the national localisation framework should have been led and coordinated by a national steering committee; or that the country consortia could have included national organisations. One radical view challenged the operational modality of the programme as a whole, with the participant suggesting not only that consultants employed in the programme should have been local consultants but more generally, that the programme should have been funded through a National NGO Consortium – rather than the current model of an INGO consortium, with

funding provided by an INGO agency. Another respondent made the case for a much more collective management structure: “Leadership of the project should not be one person but three or four covering different functions – to enable a variety of ideas feeding into overall management. If led by one person, it will be too focussed on the identify and policies of the lead NGO behind that post”.

The section below summarises all the recommendations made by all the participants, through the various channels. They have been grouped thematically for easier absorption – but within those sections, of course, there will be contradictory views expressed. It would be inappropriate to weigh or judge these in terms of importance, in the absence of any pre-defined parameters that would guide such judgments. The summary therefor reflects the variety of themes and ambitions that somehow have found expression through the ALTP project.

Recommendations for a possible follow-on “ALTP2” programme

Project Design

Numerous respondents agree that project design should originate at country level – in order to develop a project that is relevant to local actors, and allow for a more dynamic and NNGO owned process.

Others propose that the project should be co-designed with other stakeholders as consortium members at country level, such as the UN and donors, so as to increase ownership and buy-in for the change.

One suggestion is to build on the 23 recommendations [from the partnership guidance note] at country level and work with wide stakeholder to identify a process for change, so there are more chances for its adoption.

Structure

There is no agreement that the consortium modality is the best model for a future programme. At the same time, commentaries do not seem to question a consortium model as a given but then diverge on constitution. There is a universal call for an “ALTP 2” to be more diverse, and not just consist of International NGOs.

Local voices at country level assert that a future ALTP should be (co-)led with the national steering committee, right from the start, i.e. starting with the project design phase. A related recommendation is that all posts and consultancy commissions be awarded to local staff in the first instance. Overall programme management, even for a global programme, should not be based in northern Europe but one of the continents where it is actually implemented.

Some INGO representatives, by contrast, call for a broader global consortium structure, extending to reach organisations beyond the UK, like ACT Alliance or others.

One specific voice called for a consortium culture where all members are equal and have a voice, asking for the lead agency should be more open to listening and include discordant voices in order to build a strong group. A comparable suggestion calls for a collective, rather than individual, management structure.

Project Scope

It is mainly local actors who put forward recommendations for a much larger reach – at their own country level. Their specific demands are to make a second phase programme national, and include all geographic regions, extend localisation efforts beyond local actors which are partners to INGOs, and include government structures.

Where local voices are more specific geographically, they want localisation efforts to be focussed in those areas that are hard to reach, e.g. specifically in conflict environments where there is limited

international involvement and big gaps in aid delivery and where often only local NGOs can be active.

At INGO level, the question of structure is related to funding opportunities: in view of the fact that very little multi-country funding is available, it is suggested instead to look for single-country based funds – which would also be easier to tailor to local leadership. (Multi-country programmes usually have leadership based in the UK.)

Role of local actors

Across the board, respondents wish for a much greater role for local partners in any future programmes, e.g. by allocating to them management of project costs in line with more responsibilities. The desire for budgetary responsibility, i.e. decision-making power over at least part of the budget, features high on the list of recommendations. Local actors also wish to generally see a more participatory approach to the management of a project throughout its stages.

Unsurprisingly, there is again the desire for more support to local actors in accessing **direct funding**. This would include a demand for pool funding made available for local organisations to access for intervention in humanitarian crises. Notably, one recommendation is that a steering committee should only include those actors who actually engage in humanitarian response programmes.

Quite a few recommendations for a future localisation programme centre around the need for a stronger link into communities, and advocating for working with **community-based organisations** at grassroots level. Some radically query the previous top-down programme implementation modality and instead, suggest to listen to **communities first**, hear what they need, and only then plan the programme – thereby make it demand-driven, bottom-up: “Localisation should be promoted first among local NGOs and local NGO fora and coordination mechanisms. Only then should it reach INGOs/UN/government/donors.”

Thematic Focus

Most of the recommendations from participants extended to discussions of priority areas of any future programme – and covered very many and many different angles.

A few of the views wanted to see a programme which would serve as a **continuation of ALTP**, with the following activities as key priorities:

- dissemination of ALTP project findings
- implementation of the national localisation frameworks;
- continuing support to regional and global participation in localization discussion to draw lessons from other countries.
- Improvement of partnerships
- Advocacy towards a shift in humanitarian leadership, specifically **towards donors** in support of opening direct funding to local actors

A great amount of participants suggested a strong focus on **capacity building** of individuals, organisations and networks, including Institutional capacity enhancement of local organisations. Donors and INGOs should invest in building capacity that allows L/NNGOs top access funding - there are still arguments among donors and INGOs and legislative restrictions around passing money to local/national NGOs. For some, priority should be strengthening newly established NGOs through capacity building and providing micro-funding to them. – An opposing view instead was that focus should *not* always be on funding and capacity development but instead on **information sharing**, information flow and coordination mechanisms, which should be formalised (comparable with OCHA mechanisms).

One suggestion made was to clearly align localisation work to **preparedness planning**. More than one respondents wanted to see a stronger prioritisation of **humanitarian response**, specifically on health, shelter, food, water; and education.

An alternative suggestion wants to focus on **harvesting the stories** or effectiveness of local humanitarian work supported by partnering practice, as a way of building up evidence for localisation in the broader humanitarian sector.

Several respondents thought that the next programme should adopt a **gender focus** and involve more women-led organisations, and more women at decision-making level, including adapting and contextualising the findings and learning with women-led organisations and women's rights organisations.

More than once it was proposed that if there was another localisation programme, it would need to be practical in the first instance - linked to **tangible results and practical implications**, which need to be visible on the ground in terms of real changes.

Self-Assessment Exercise

In order to provide further insights into the effect the programme has had on participating agencies, specifically with relation to their partnering practice, country teams as well as UK-based headquarter teams from the five consortium agencies also carried out a self-assessment against the Partnership Practice Guidance Note criteria. The findings from those exercises, though, need to be treated with caution and do not allow for in-depth analysis, for a variety of reasons.

Only a rather limited number of partner organisations participated at country-level participated in the self-assessment exercise. Their feedback, albeit valid in itself, cannot be generalised to apply to the ALTP partnership experiences overall in that given context. A number of reasons could account for the low participation rate amongst local partners. They were sent the self-assessment tool with the request to conduct the analysis internally, then bring back the results to a facilitated workshop format where the results from all participating actors would be discussed. This process was initiated at the end of a highly productive two-year programme, very close to the upcoming Christmas break – it is fair to assume that it just might not have been possible to again mobilise the required energy, and commitment, for another key activity. Some of the self-assessments were also done but not to the format requested; it is possible – see the highly complex wording of the self-assessment tool itself – that local actors could have benefitted from a stronger facilitation input to get this right.

For the INGO consortia representatives a different dilemma presented itself when they tried to complete the assessment: they found that for many of the 23 categories, they were not able to provide a rating since data was not available to them, as a result of their agency's business model. Overall, their assessment findings pointed to a high degree of inconsistency and variation across countries and a lack of systemic practices. [To what degree such findings need to be related e.g. to business models, communications cultures, or internal agency divergences, cannot be explored here.]

Recommendations

What to make off the findings of survey results, interviews, and partnership self-assessment exercises?

As shown above, the list of recommendations put forward by key stakeholders in the ALTP is very long indeed, and very varied. A first step needs to be to recognise that it is not possible to adopt all

of these – not only for practical reasons, but also because some of them are contradictory. The very diverse views on what would be the best structure of a future ALTP are a case in point: this is a challenge that requires a clear decision, e.g. either for or against a consortium structure. Other, more aspirational recommendations towards changing the humanitarian system could be at odds with the desire for clear, tangible results on the ground. More generally, it is crucial to determine, transparently and rationally, which of the recommendations are (not) taken into account and why.

Many of the recommendations specifically from local actors reiterate ambitions and demands voiced so many times before – and which are not necessarily related to the ALTP programme. At the same time, there is an overall appreciation of this small programme they have been engaged in. The dilemma then is a fundamental choice: should ALTP 2 be a continuation of ALTP1, cementing its success but with improvements along recommendations made (in full acknowledgement of limitations of scope and scale), or should it be a radically different programme (which would face up to different limitations)? This then is the fundamental question to take to the INGOs, who hold the power and the purse strings. The suggestions (and questions) below are meant to assist in clarifying the way forward.

Recommendations:

1. **Determine the objective** of any future “ALTP type” engagement for the INGOs

What is meant to be achieved? Is this going to focus on partnership practices? Or localisation? It does not have to be both. Will INGOs want to continue along the path of partnering for localisation, or rather – merely - funding for localisation? The feedback from local actors indicates a clear demand for a greater role, but does not say a lot with regard to partnering.

The vague localisation ambition, even when supported by INGOs, can mask their own stake in the debate. What does the INGO want to achieve in the long run around localisation? This needs to be clear and transparent – and it might require internal negotiations and debates on what is feasible/possible/desirable.

2. **(Self-) Identify committed stakeholders for any future ALTP 2 engagement**

Rather than assuming equal contributions from various interested parties, clarify and identify roles and tasks related to programme design, initiation, leadership, management, and implementation at the outset – as a way of building ownership (and avoiding inadvertently perpetuating structures which have proven to be less than 100% efficient). This question also needs to be considered against the business model of the agencies involved – to what degree can decisions and commitments at headquarters be assumed/shared globally?

3. **Determine the scope** – regarding **geography and participation**

The question of breadth vs. depth - does the next programme aim to be global again - or to be focussing more narrowly on one country, for example?

This question also relates to participation – who to invite around the table, and why. Will government be invited – why (not)? Which local partners are to participate? There is a need for a clear stance on the choices required against what will always be a limited budget. Clearly, requests for national coverage of any programme, in any country, are not realistic.

But neither are demands for inclusion of all civil society. What will the criteria need to be? The demand for inclusiveness will also need to be balanced against the ability and willingness of local actors to engage in humanitarian programming.

4. Develop the process of a **bottom-up programme design**

The need for a bottom-up/country-centred design process has been identified by many ALTP stakeholders – but how this could be set up, managed and implemented in detail needs to be explored, clarified and developed. This is the kind of endeavour often talked about in INGOs but very rarely put into practice. How could a “bottom-up” programme design process be implemented? Who would need to be part of it? Who would need to determine the participants? What kind of help do willing INGOs need to make this happen? Will it require professional multi-stakeholder facilitation or a partnership brokering approach? What are the options?

The development of such a process will also need to entail a parallel process for the INGOs involved, a move away from “doing” towards “supporting” that still meets the charitable purpose/mandate but can be advocated, communicated and supported internally and externally while meeting the respective

Conclusion

Feedback from participants about the project has reaffirmed in many ways what the localisation agenda is about: a demand for a stronger leadership role of local actors. Whether it is about project design, location, leadership, management – on all of those topics, there is demand for a much stronger role for local actors.

There is also, among those local actors, very little evidence of a global perspective which reaches beyond their own country, let alone an understanding of the substantial hurdles imposed by funding constraints, agency rule books, mandates, funding shortages of the agencies that run this kind of project. Should this be surprising?? What has been done to help local partners understand “the bigger picture” of the system they are included in when INGOs look for partners? It does appear concerning when local actors desire a national type of localisation programme against the fact that this is utterly impossible to fund, finance, implement by any of the INGO involved. There is a need for honest communication that has not happened. The most troubling finding in this learning review, surely, is that in a project meant to accelerate the role of local partners, these local partners have not understood the full remit of this project they were included in, how it is run, who runs it, or what amount of money was involved. It mirrors that ironic statement, made repeatedly, that “localisation is not understood at local level”.

If “localisation” remains a concept that requires sensitisation, roll-out, advocacy and awareness raising towards those who are supposed to benefit from it, it will become yet another “thing” that is “done to” local partners, or local communities, from a position of superiority and power. The only way for this not to happen is to model what it means. The most successful localisation programme, a programme aimed at empowering local leadership through partnership, would need to reflect, in its design process, operating modality, structures, staffing and ways of working, the central ambition itself. It is not sufficient if the project aim is the right one but implementation modality still embedded in traditional power imbalances all along the funding chain. A move away from those, a move towards real local empowerment, will remain the key challenge for INGOs who are supportive of localisation. It will entail fundamental internal changes which to date, have not been put into practice. What is at stake is no less than the credibility of northern INGOS who have publicly claimed localisation to be their major ambition.