

A PATHWAY TO LOCALISATION IMPACT: Laying the foundations



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Humanitarian Horizons 2021-2024

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative that adds unique value to humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific by generating evidence and creating conversations for change. It is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The research program for 2021–24 builds on the achievements of the Humanitarian Horizons pilot phase (2017–18), the previous iteration of the program (2018–21) and Humanitarian Advisory Group's experience in supporting the sector for almost 10 years. The research is structured into three interlocking streams: 1) Power, People and Local Leadership, 2) Greening the System, and 3) Real-Time Analysis and Influence. It is underpinned by a fourth stream that considers governance, accountability, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

About the partners

GLOW Consultants based in Pakistan, is a leading national entity providing practice solutions and field implementation support to donors, their implementing partners and research institutions. GLOW has successfully completed more than 100 third-party monitoring and evaluation assignments.

Collaborate Consulting Pty Ltd (CoLAB) is a Fiji-based development consultancy company that has delivered projects with diverse partners in the Pacific, Asia, Africa and Europe. CoLAB's vision is to achieve localised responses to development that are inclusive and sustainable, enabled through genuine collaboration amongst all partners.

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that contributes to excellence in humanitarian practice.

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Contents

Abbreviations	v
Executive summary	vi
Section 1: Introduction	8
Why do we need to measure the impact of localisation at the community level?	9
About this paper	10
Structure	11
Methodology	11
Limitations	12
The parameters of impact	13
Section 2: Barriers to measuring the impact of localisation	15
Why isn't impact measurement happening?	15
Pakistan Case Study	17
Section 3: The first steps to understanding the impact of localisation	19
Domains of community-level impact	20
The RIGHT ASSISTANCE is provided to communities	20
Communities receive assistance in the RIGHT WAY	22
Communities receive assistance at the RIGHT TIME	24
The RIGHT MEMBERS of communities receive assistance	27
Section 4: A way forward	28

Abbreviations

CoLAB	Collaborate Consulting
CSO	Civil society organisation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee, United Nations
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IRC	International Rescue Committee
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NEAR	The Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHN	National Humanitarian Network [Pakistan]
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
TC	Tropical cyclone
VANGO	Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations

Executive summary

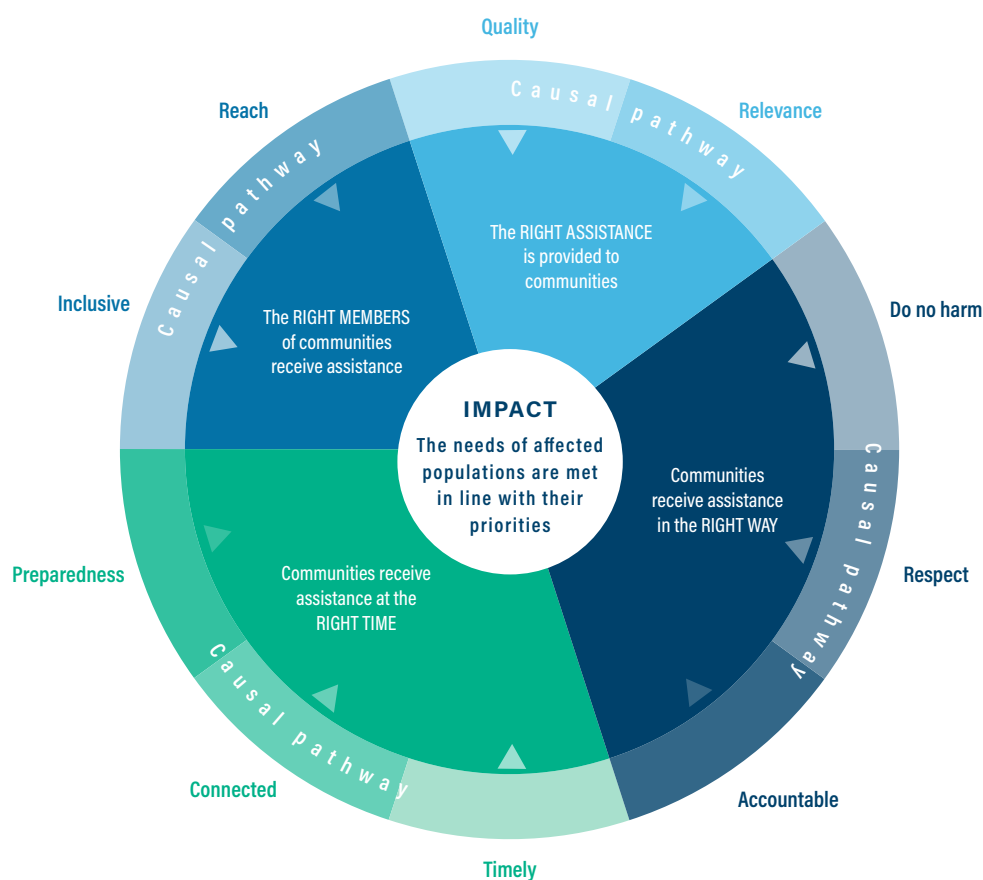
The impact of localisation practices that the humanitarian sector has adopted at the community level remains unclear. No systematic process has been undertaken to define the intended outcomes of localisation for crisis-affected populations, or to measure whether change is in fact happening. This doesn't mean that localisation isn't having an impact; on the contrary, anecdotes, case studies and research provide context-specific examples of changes and plausible theories of change. Positive and negative outcomes of localised practices have been discussed and documented. However, in the absence of consistent design, data collection and analysis across the sector, we cannot be definitive about if, when and how localisation delivers better humanitarian outcomes for communities.

Humanitarian Advisory Group, GLOW and CoLab undertook this research to determine what is known about the impact of localisation; the barriers to measuring localisation impact; and to propose an approach to overcoming those barriers and documenting change. Ultimately, the objective of the research was to support humanitarian actors to better define and understand the impact of their localisation practices on crisis-affected populations. The research team carried out an extensive document review, key informant interviews, and a case study of the Pakistan flood response in 2022. This paper summarises the research findings and proposes an approach to community-level impact measurement.

There are multiple barriers to understanding the impact of localisation. Humanitarian organisations are not articulating the intended outcomes of their localised approaches, there are few clear incentives to measure impact, and there is still the challenge of attributing how much of the change is a result of localised practice. The starting point for overcoming these barriers is a clear definition of the intended change. This paper proposes 10 domains of change that evidence suggests will support improved humanitarian assistance through delivery of the right assistance, at the right time, in the right way, to the right members of the community (see Figure 1).

As important as defining what the intended change is, organisations and communities should discuss and agree on how that change will actually happen; in other words, what are the steps or micro-changes that will lead to the intended outcome? The answer lies partly in some of the existing evidence, theories and practice. Organisations, donors and communities have been making assumptions about how localisation supports change without articulating or explicitly testing them. For each domain of change, this paper proposes possible causal pathways that require testing and interrogation. Through the process of understanding how change is occurring, the sector will be able to determine whether localisation is having an impact and what that impact is.

Figure 1: Potential domains of change as a result of localised practices



The sector has made some concrete progress on embedding localisation practices into humanitarian assistance; however, the momentum will falter unless humanitarian actors are able to demonstrate that the work and effort is creating tangible positive change. This paper outlines a clear three-step pathway to measure and understand change and demonstrate impact for crisis-affected communities (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Steps to measure change as a result of localised practices

- STEP **1** ▶ **Define** level and domain of intended impact of localised practices
- STEP **2** ▶ **Articulate** the possible causal pathways that correlate with the domain areas you seek to influence
- STEP **3** ▶ **Test** the validity of your causal pathways

This is the first paper in this series; the research team aims to work with donors and humanitarian organisations to support localisation impact measurement over the next 18 months and document it in subsequent papers. If you are interested in participating in the process, please contact Madeline Baker (mbaker@hag.org.au) or Eranda Wijewickrama (eranda@hag.org.au).

Section 1: Introduction

Localisation practices have been increasingly adopted by humanitarian actors with the intent of improving the humanitarian system and the assistance it delivers. This improvement is articulated in terms of rebalancing power in the system, living out values-based commitments, or delivering practical outcomes such as more effective and efficient assistance.¹ However, the impact of these practices at the community level often remains unclear or is mostly anecdotal. As a sector, we cannot be definitive about if, when and how localisation is delivering better humanitarian outcomes for crisis-affected populations.

“ ‘We don’t have robust findings on how people affected by crisis see the implications of localisation for their welfare, protection, and future prospects.’ Mark Lowcock (2021)²”

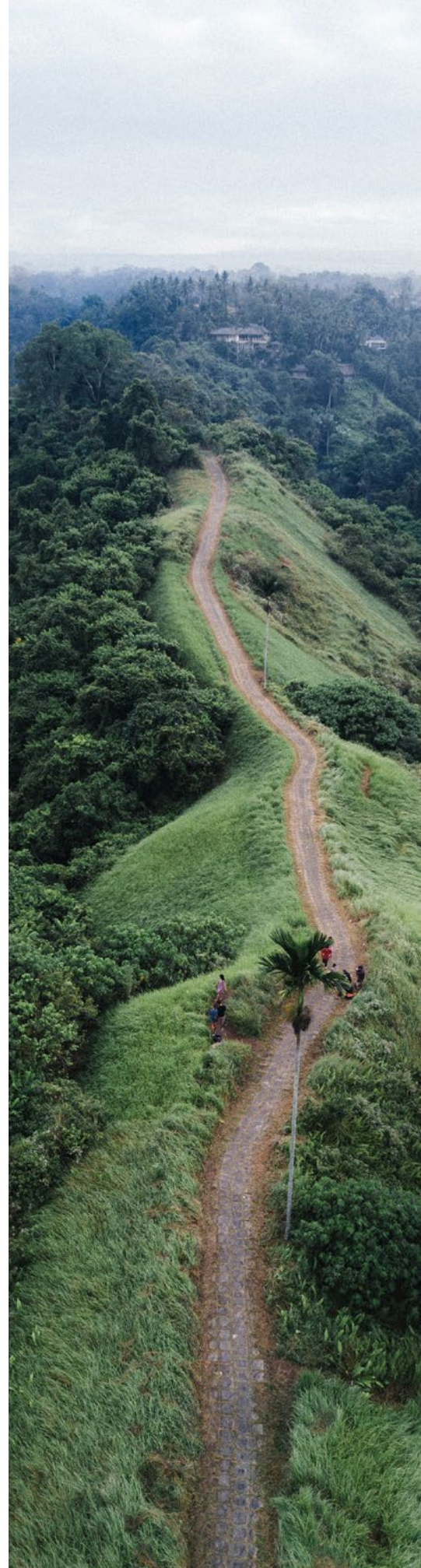
There has been substantial progress in embedding localisation practices and initiatives that track the process of localisation.³ These have provided the sector with good data in relation to changed practices, such as the number and quality of partnerships with local actors or funding allocations to local partners. However, this data provides little insight into the outcomes or impacts that result from these initiatives.⁴ Ultimately, researchers highlight that evidence of localisation impact, particularly at the community level, is scarce and largely anecdotal, and to the best of our knowledge, no specific initiatives are underway to fill this gap. The humanitarian sector currently lacks both the evidence base and the processes required to determine the impact of localisation.

1 IFRC (2018) [IFRC policy brief: localization – what it means and how to achieve it](#); CARE (nd) [Our commitments to humanitarian partnership and localisation](#); Oxfam (2021) [Local humanitarian leadership: the view from local actors](#).

2 OCHA (2021) [What’s wrong with the humanitarian aid system and how to fix it](#), remarks by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, at the Center for Global Development on Proposal for an Independent Commission for Voices in Crisis.

3 Initiatives to measure the process of localisation include Global Mentoring Initiative’s Seven Dimensions of Localisation, PIANGO and HAG’s Measuring Localisation Framework, and NEAR’s Performance Measurement Framework – Accelerating Localisation through Partnership: Global Localisation Framework.

4 Guyatt H (2022) [Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action](#), ODI-HPN; Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), HPG, ODI & HAG; ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund (2013) [Missed opportunities: the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses](#).



This research paper documents what is and is not known about the impact of localisation; outlines barriers to measuring localisation impact; and proposes an approach to overcoming those barriers and documenting change. The paper is intended to support humanitarian actors to better define and understand the impact of their localisation practices on crisis-affected populations. Importantly, the research suggests that donors, humanitarian organisations and communities adopting localised approaches would benefit from articulating intended impact and the pathways for change to happen. Without a defined pathway and a clear endpoint, the sector is unlikely to make the important shift to more evidence-based localisation practice. Above all, this means understanding impacts at community level, where humanitarian action aims to make a difference.

“‘At present there remains very little literature aiming to articulate in a holistic way what success looks like or what might be the desired end point for all stakeholders in localised humanitarian response.’⁵

WHY DO WE NEED TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF LOCALISATION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL?

Building the evidence base for impact is important for four reasons.

- The momentum behind the localisation agenda may falter unless humanitarian actors perceive that their efforts are creating positive change. Research on the role of intermediaries in supporting effective localisation found that change occurs when organisations support and believe in the desired change, rather than undertaking efforts merely to meet certain requirements as a ‘tick box’ exercise.⁶
- Humanitarian actors need to be accountable to the communities we serve. A 2019 study of people from seven countries found that less than half of the 12,000 respondents felt positively about the aid they received.⁷ There is an urgent need to understand how we can work with communities to improve accountability. If localised practices are a contributing factor, then we need to understand how and why, and promote them widely.
- As part of accountability, organisations need to understand their impact (positive or negative) in order to inform decision-making about adopting localised approaches. This understanding will support more evidence-based localisation practice, ensuring it is relevant to specific contexts and enabling identification of where and how it can be strengthened.
- Some actors, although they agree with the ethical imperative of localisation, are unlikely or unable to adopt new ways of working without an evidence-based rationale.⁸

“‘Measuring the impact of the work has been left behind at the community level, which is a shame because if that information or that evidence had been available and collected early on, there would really be no need for the long conversation on localisation ... we wouldn’t need to talk about [it] anymore if we had the evidence!’⁹

5 Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) *Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study*, HPG, ODI, HAG, p. 29.

6 HAG, GLOW Consultants, CoLAB, inSights & Antonios Z (2021) *Bridging the intention to action gap: the role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action*.

7 OECD (2019) *Lives in crisis: what do people tell us about the humanitarian aid they receive?*

8 GLOW Consultants, CoLAB, inSights, Pujiono Centre & HAG (2022) *Achieving a more equitable and impactful humanitarian sector: platform paper*.

9 Interview 2.



ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper summarises evidence and ideas about localisation impact at the community level. It identifies key domains of impact that can be integrated into the program management cycle, in order to strengthen data collection and analysis, from inception to evaluation and reflection. It also proposes an approach to data gathering that is based on an articulation and exploration of causal pathways. Its objective is to support humanitarian actors to better define and understand the impact of their localisation practices on crisis-affected populations.

This report is intended for use by humanitarian actors at many levels, including:

- Humanitarian agencies and their staff (including program and operational staff): by providing parameters for localisation impact measurement and data collection
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) technical personnel: by providing domains of impact to explore in M&E processes and an approach for localisation impact measurement
- Donors and policymakers: by providing domains of impact that can be considered in policy frameworks, and guiding implementing partners to identify the intended impact of their approaches and progress towards measuring them.

Box 1: A note on intention

The purpose of this paper is not to propose that localisation will always have a positive impact. On the contrary, we argue that measurement of impact will provide a mixed picture of when and where localised practices are improving outcomes for affected communities, and (hopefully) insights into why. Far from undermining the localisation agenda, we believe that evidence will strengthen localised practices – helping organisations to understand when and how they can be most effectively applied and why they are likely to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

STRUCTURE

This paper has four sections:

- ▶ Section 1 (this section) introduces the report
- ▶ Section 2 unpacks the barriers that are preventing actors from measuring the impact of localisation at the community level
- ▶ Section 3 explores the potential impact of localisation at the community level and proposes domains in which organisations can focus their intended change
- ▶ Section 4 proposes a way forward that actors can use to begin measuring the impact of localisation.

Box 2: Situating this report

One of the key areas of research for Humanitarian Horizons' Power, People and Local Leadership stream is to understand the impact of localised practices. To this end, two strands of work are underway: mapping approaches to localisation, and determining how actors can define and measure impact (the focus of this document).

This initiative builds on the previous Humanitarian Horizons research program, which sought to measure progress on localisation. With a co-developed Measuring Localisation Framework and Tools, HAG and PIANGO offered an approach and tools for tracking progress on localisation, with a focus on the Pacific. This framework has since been adapted and contextualised for use across the humanitarian system. Note that whilst the approach enables stakeholders to track *progress*, it does not measure whether localised approaches are having *impact*.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was jointly designed and implemented by HAG and research partners GLOW Consultants (Pakistan) and Collaborate Consulting (CoLAB, Fiji). The methodology was designed to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in assessing approaches, understandings, and experience in measuring the impact of localisation. The research approach included the following methods (see also Figure 3).

- A desk review of over 50 documents, including literature relating to localisation and measurement approaches, and country-specific reviews and evaluations (with a strong focus but not limited to) six country contexts. These reviews and evaluations provide a broad geographical overview of contexts with active localisation discourse.
- Key informant interviews with 11 global stakeholders representing humanitarian practitioners, M&E experts, donors and policy advisors.
- A Pakistan floods case study, including key informant interviews with 12 stakeholders and a rapid literature review of over 20 documents relating to localisation practices in Pakistan, with a focus on the ongoing 2022 flood response and recovery.
- Validation and testing with research partners: HAG, GLOW and CoLAB came together to discuss and validate emerging trends and findings to shape the content of the paper.

Figure 3: Methodology



LIMITATIONS

- Coverage: while the geographic scope of the research was broad, it could not include comprehensive analysis of all existing literature and knowledge on localisation and its impact.
- Community consultation: the research methodology did not include consultation with communities. However, the findings of a Ground Truth Solutions survey of the perceptions of crisis-affected communities were factored into the analysis. The case study of the 2022 Pakistan floods did not involve consultation of affected communities due to ethical restrictions on research during times of crisis, and instead focused on consulting local organisations involved in the response.
- Representativeness: the interview sample size was intended to capture perspectives from a key group of stakeholders, rather than to enable comprehensive analysis and represent the entire humanitarian sector. Stakeholders were approached based on their involvement in the localisation dialogue, ensuring the views of a range of actors relevant to this area of focus (donors, policymakers, civil society, M&E experts and academics) were captured.



THE PARAMETERS OF IMPACT

This research acknowledges existing tensions with respect to the concept of impact and how it is measured. We also acknowledge that many definitions and understandings of the term in humanitarian literature are determined by Global North actors, and may not necessarily reflect all understandings and experiences of impact, particularly in Global South contexts and knowledge production.¹⁰ For the purposes of this study, we used the following definition.



Impact refers to 'lasting or significant change – positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a series of actions.'¹¹

Who defines lasting or significant change?

Defining *what* to measure is a critical consideration in research. At the heart of the localisation agenda is the understanding that locally determined priorities need to be at the forefront and better supported.¹² Therefore, approaches that measure localisation impact are also largely contextual, meaning that approaches to measuring impact need to be flexible enough to capture local measures of success and contribute to a broader picture of the impact of the localisation agenda.¹³

Deciding on *how* to measure is equally important. Determining the impact of localisation in a non-localised way is problematic.¹⁴ To date, the primary tool for measuring impact in humanitarian action has been the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) model, based on Western approaches to measurement. This presents problems, because international agencies' and Western conceptions of impact may differ from those of affected communities.¹⁵

“ ‘What does success look like – what is important to communities? We have our own criteria – OECD – but that has not been translated to, or understood by the community – how much does it make sense to them?’¹⁶

10 The terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are used in this report 'to distinguish between countries with high-income economies (Global North) that have historically dominated the provision of development and humanitarian aid, and countries with middle or lower-income economies (Global South), which are located primarily in the Southern hemisphere and have historically been recipients of aid.' (Carden F, Hanley T & Peterson A (2021) [From knowing to doing: Evidence use in the humanitarian sector](#), Elrha Learning Paper). We acknowledge the flaws in using these terms, including the profound differences between countries in each category. Additionally, we recognise that actors may not identify with these categories or may represent both.

11 Roche C (1999) *Impact assessment for development agencies*, Oxford: Oxfam/NOVIB.

12 Interviews 2, 20; Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), London: ODI; Charter 4 Change (nd), [Commitments](#); IASC (2016) [The Grand Bargain – a shared commitment to better serve the people in need](#).

13 Interviews 2, 5, 7.

14 Praag N (2022) [Affected people are mostly missing from the localisation debate. Let's change that](#), *The New Humanitarian*, 19 April; Groupe URD (2017) [More than just money: localisation in context](#); Interviews 2, 4, 5, 6.

15 OECD (2017) [Localising the response](#).

16 Interview 2.

Impact over time

“Evidence is still needed of the long-term benefits (as well as the challenges) of such [localisation] efforts.”¹⁷

Impact can be considered and measured in different time frames. Several studies argue that the benefits of localised practices should be considered in terms of long-term influence or impact.¹⁸ Reasons for this long-term perspective include the importance of measuring *sustained* capacity transfer that strengthens local leadership, and the reality that meaningful shifts are unlikely to happen within narrow windows, such as emergency response funding timeframes. However, there are benefits to measuring the immediate impacts of interventions *alongside* those of longer-term approaches. Doing so enables actors to pivot approaches if data demonstrates that gains are not being realised, and thereby meet the realities of shorter-term project and funding cycles.

17 IFRC (2022) [Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent](#), p. 11.

18 IFRC (2022) [Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent](#); Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), London: ODI; Guyatt H (2022) [Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action](#), ODI, HPN.

Section 2: Barriers to measuring the impact of localisation

This section explores why localisation impact measurement is not happening.

Importantly, hardly any organisations are documenting the intentions underpinning their localised practices that relate specifically to improving outcomes for affected communities.¹⁹ When organisations articulate their approach to localisation, they usually start from a basis of principles or ways of working rather than the impact they are seeking.²⁰

This research uncovered limited examples of processes that guide organisations on measuring localisation impact at the community level, or documentation of the assumptions and causal relationships that underpin intended outcomes. A lack of clear approaches to defining and measuring impact means there is little evidence of the extent to which localisation is contributing to change. The research did not uncover clear examples of decisions to increase, decrease or adapt localised approaches based on evidence of effectiveness.²¹ Adaptations are undoubtedly happening based on learning and conversations, but without a clear process in place to promote broader learning within humanitarian organisations or for the sector more broadly.

WHY ISN'T IMPACT MEASUREMENT HAPPENING?

Multiple factors are hindering measurement of the impact of localisation.

- *The intended outcomes of localised approaches are not being determined at the start of interventions.* Because organisations are not identifying intended outcomes with communities as a result of localised approaches, they are not collecting data that can be used to monitor or evaluate progress.

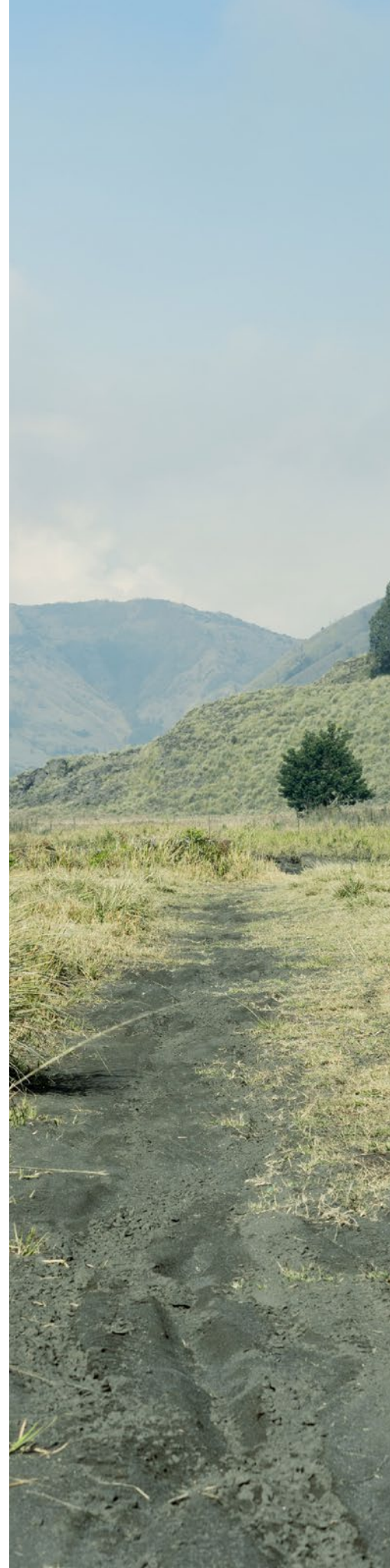
“ ‘The biggest challenge right now is closing the gap between what we desire and what we really do, and many people, in my opinion, haven't seen the intended results.’²² (National actor, Pakistan)

¹⁹ All interviewees stated they were unaware of any organisations documenting the intentions of their localised practices specific to improving outcomes for affected communities.

²⁰ Interviews 3, 9, 10, 19, 23.

²¹ All interviewees stated they were unaware of any examples of organisations adapting their localised approaches based on evidence of what is working.

²² Interview 17.



- *There is no shared understanding of the potential community-level impact of localisation. There are assumptions and propositions about the relationship between localised approaches and community outcomes, but these are not yet articulated or agreed.*²³ This gap in understanding is further complicated by the absence of defining successful impact, as indicated above. As a result, humanitarian organisations rarely know or have a shared understanding of what sort of change could be achieved and how this could advance community priorities.

“‘You would have to identify what impact really means – people aren't clear about what the impact of localisation means.’²⁴

- *Donors are not requiring organisations to measure impact.* The most widely cited barrier to effective localisation impact measurement is that donors do not require partners to demonstrate change.²⁵ Participants recognise that donor requirements are strong influencers of practice; in the absence of a requirement to show evidence of localisation impact (rather than process), the sector has not taken it up at scale.

“‘If it's not a donor requirement, of course organisations aren't going to measure localisation.’²⁶

- *The ability to measure impact is perceived as something that extends beyond the parameters of funding cycles.*²⁷ Despite intentions to shift to longer-term funding models, the humanitarian sector still faces relatively short funding windows, with most measurement and reporting against programs aligned to them. This is perceived to prevent organisations from determining the parameters of long-term, sustained impact achieved through localisation.

“‘... attention shouldn't just look at the short term, if good localisation means you hand over power to shape a power, you won't be able to assess the value of doing this over a single response.’²⁸

- *Attribution.* At times, communities cannot distinguish between international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and do not know from whom they receive assistance, as community consultation studies have determined.²⁹ This complicates attribution of results and accountability. For example, if assistance has been very timely and relevant but local communities are unable to identify its deliverer, it is hard to attribute it to localised or internationalised practices. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance is delivered on a localised continuum, whereby assistance is rarely either completely localised or completely international, and so it is difficult to attribute successes and failures.

23 Interviews 2, 5, 7; Group URD (2017) *More than the money: localisation in practice*, p. 7; Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) *Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study*, HPG, ODI, HAG.

24 Interview 7.

25 Interviews 2, 4, 5, 7, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21

26 Interview 7.

27 Interviews 3, 4, 5, 6.

28 Interview 2.

29 Guyatt H (2022) *Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action*, ODI, HPN; Ground Truth Solutions (2021) *COVID-19 takes social and financial toll on Cox's Bazar camp communities*; Ground Truth Solutions (2022) *Perceptions of aid in Ukraine – quantitative findings round 1*; interviews 10, 20.



PAKISTAN CASE STUDY

Our exploration of the evolving situation around the 2022 flooding crisis in Pakistan provided additional insights into what is preventing localisation impact measurement. Whilst the research team had minimal access to response agencies' programmatic documents, no evidence emerged from other documents or interviews that indicated responders had public intentions or approaches to support localisation impact measurement in the flood response, or more broadly. Barriers to localisation impact measurement are shaped by the composition, structures and processes of the emergency response sector in a given country; the level and length of engagement with localisation practices; and cultures that influence how information is gathered, interpreted and shared.

Flood response

In June 2022, extreme monsoon flooding hit Pakistan, devastating the country. The disaster affected 33 million people across 116 districts, killing 1,600 people, displacing 7.9 million, and damaging 1 million homes.³⁰ The response experienced strong local leadership: local and national actors³¹ were the first responders, contributing significantly to the joint needs assessment and appeal, and have delivered significant resources to affected communities in the heavily damaged Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces.³²

30 GLOW Consultants & Humanitarian Advisory Group (2022) [Closing the loop: Pakistan flood emergency \(Sept 2022\)](#);

31 The IASC's definitions of local and national NGOs/CSOs are as follows: 'Local NGOs/CSOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid recipient country, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO. This category can also include community-based organisations and local faith-based organisations.' 'National NGOs/CSOs operating in the aid recipient country in which they are headquartered, working in multiple subnational regions, and not affiliated to an international NGO. This category can also include national faith-based organisations.' A4EP (2019) [IASC definition of 'local' and 'national' actors – a barrier to achieving Grand Bargain localisation commitments](#).

32 National Humanitarian Network Pakistan (2022) [2022 multi-sector rapid needs assessment](#).

Barriers to measurement

- *The localisation discourse is still in its early stages in Pakistan.* Despite some progress, there is considerable scope to advance progress towards measuring localisation in Pakistan. Some promising initiatives are underway via the Start Network and the National Humanitarian Network (NHN), which have made joint efforts to improve the capabilities of Pakistani humanitarian actors.³³ Humanitarians are working closely with NHN to progress the localisation agenda, following the Charter of Commitments and its Commitments to Results Indicators framework.³⁴
- *A lack of requirements or incentives from donors for partners to measure impact.*³⁵ Without funders requiring or incentivising measurement of the impact of localised practices, progress will continue to be slow. Several stakeholders in Pakistan referenced a lack of such push factors as barriers, including in the ongoing response.
- *Intermediaries not pursuing or supporting their local and national partners' impact measurement.*³⁶ Some interviewees suggested that intermediaries (and donors) should equip local and national partners with the tools and resources needed to measure localisation impact. Respondents also noted that some partnerships in Pakistan operate on transactional or contract-based models in which intermediaries do not adequately build the capacity of their partners.
- *Greater value placed on quantitative than qualitative data.*³⁷ This study revealed that efforts to measure the impact of localisation largely rely on qualitative data. Respondents in Pakistan felt that this is a barrier to progress, because quantitative data is more highly valued, particularly by funding agencies, than qualitative data.

Despite the barriers to measurement outlined above, there is appetite for tracking the impact of localisation initiatives in the ongoing relief and recovery effort in Pakistan.

“ There should be a well-tested model for measuring the localisation impact. There should be a proper mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. This will help other people to be aware about such agendas.”³⁸ (National M&E adviser, Pakistan)

33 The Start Network (nd) *Our network in Pakistan: Pakistan hub*, available at: <https://startnetwork.org/pakistan-hub>

34 National Humanitarian Network (2019) *Charter of Commitments*.

35 Interviews 20, 19, 22.

36 Interviews 23, 13, 12, 17, 18.

37 Interviews 23, 17, 21, 22, 15.

38 Interview 18.



Section 3: The first steps to understanding the impact of localisation

This section proposes a model for understanding the impact of localisation. It concentrates on impact at the community level and acknowledges the complexity of localisation outcomes (see Box 3 below). It draws on evidence and examples from independent studies and from the participants in this research.

The model includes the following components:

- **Domains of change** – broad areas of potential impact identified from previous studies, evaluations and research
- **Potential benefits of localisation** – specific benefits identified within the domains. Articulating these allows the model to specify what needs to be measured and understood within each domain
- **Possible causal relationships** – hypotheses about why localisation is creating benefits from the perspective of communities. The possible causal relationships identified in the model serve as examples, which can be refined or built upon by actors seeking to explore causal relationships and how they contribute to impact measurement and can be tested through analysis.

Box 3: A note on causal pathways

Causal pathways are key to the knowledge that this model seeks to build. Causation is a critical factor to understand when attributing impact. As ALNAP³⁹ explains, 'Causation in evaluation refers to the process by which evaluators identify and document a causal relationship between a particular intervention and change in the conditions of people's lives and context.'⁴⁰ Without understanding causation, processes designed to measure change may not capture the reasons why change has or hasn't happened. We propose that the sector advance towards meaningful impact measurement in the domains suggested by examining the causal pathways to see if they hold true or if other explanations of change apply.

It is important to recognise that change can be positive or negative. The proposed causal pathways in this paper are framed as questions to avoid the implication that the outcome will always be affirmative or positive and to support an exploratory process. However, given that donors, organisations and communities apply localised practices with the intention of improving assistance, the proposed causal pathways aim to unpack potential positive impacts brought on by such practices.

39 ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics, networks and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises. <https://www.alnap.org/>

40 ALNAP (2015) *Addressing causation in humanitarian evaluation: a discussion on designs, approaches and examples*.

DOMAINS OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL IMPACT

Below we unpack each domain, the benefits that localised practices may bring, and the associated causal pathways or relationships that humanitarian stakeholders and research present as explanations for why impact happens.

The RIGHT ASSISTANCE is provided to communities

Localised approaches are claimed to result in more appropriate response outcomes than internationally led approaches.⁴¹ Some studies have correlated localised approaches with enhanced community perceptions of quality of support, and greater relevance of the support that they receive from actors.

“They [local organisations] are in a better position to deliver a more accountable and effective response; they have the capacity and resources, contacts, networks, and knowledge.”⁴²

Quality

Improved quality of support is a potential benefit of localisation, with affected populations asking for better quality support from actors that have an ongoing presence in their communities.⁴³ During the Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold response in Vanuatu in 2020, the combination of COVID-19 restrictions and a shift to greater empowerment for local actors resulted in the delivery of locally sourced, high-quality food supplies. For example, youth and women’s groups from unaffected areas mobilised to donate root crops and organise delivery logistics to affected areas. Sourcing locally available and appropriate food meant that relief was more diverse and nutritious than standard relief items historically distributed by internationally led responses in Vanuatu.⁴⁴

However, evidence from some contexts points to communities preferencing support from international actors. Ground Truth Solutions recently found that surveyed community members in Ukraine preferred international aid over local aid, stating they perceived relief from international agencies to be of higher quality. However, it was suggested that extensive supply chains and the complex environment obscured the sources of assistance, and prevented affected populations understanding who was delivering it.⁴⁵

Causal pathways to explore include:



41 Kraft K & Smith JD (2018) Between international donors and local faith communities: intermediaries in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon; Guyatt H (2022) Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action, ODI, HPN.

42 Interview 3.

43 OECD (2017) Localising the response.

44 HAG & VANGO (2020) No turning back: local leadership in Vanuatu’s response to Tropical Cyclone Harold.

45 Interviews 10, 20; Ground Truth Solutions (2022) Perceptions of aid in Ukraine – quantitative findings round 1.



Relevance

From the outset of a response, local and national actors usually take the lead in assessing community needs and prioritising types of assistance.⁴⁶ Local actors have a deep understanding of the needs of communities and important community initiatives that can be supported and leveraged during an emergency. One study noted that:

“Local actors often share cultural proximity with recipients of aid. Their location can help them to develop more relevant and effective distribution mechanisms than international humanitarian organisations with limited experience of the local environment.”⁴⁷

For example, church networks in the Pacific have been recognised for their key role in humanitarian response, due to their extensive understanding of local values, culture and knowledge. One study found that during the Manaro Voui Volcano eruption response, CAN DO delivered effective, timely and relevant assistance through engagement with its extensive local network of churches, community members and psychological first aid providers.⁴⁸

Causal pathways to explore could include:

<p>Do local actors have a better understanding of community needs?</p>	<p>▶ AND therefore, do local actors identify the responses most relevant to those needs better than other actors?</p>
<p>Do local actors have better access to communities to discuss what is needed?</p>	<p>▶ AND therefore, do local actors identify the most relevant and appropriate support?</p>
<p>Do local actors have the trust of the community, which allows them to convene conversations on what is working and what needs to change?</p>	<p>▶ AND therefore, do local actors identify the most relevant and appropriate support through those conversations?</p>
<p>Do local actors speak communities' language(s) that make it easier for communities to define and articulate their needs?</p>	<p>▶ AND therefore, do local actors identify the most relevant and appropriate support through those conversations?</p>

46 Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study, HPG, ODI & HAG

47 Kraft K & Smith JD (2018) Between international donors and local faith communities: intermediaries in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, p. 3.

48 Lauria B, Canete A & Cochrane R (2019) Church networks and localisation practice in the Pacific, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.

Communities receive assistance in the RIGHT WAY

How aid is delivered can directly influence preferences for support. Localised approaches influence the way in which assistance is delivered. Examples include local actors supporting communities in ways that mitigate negative or harmful impacts of humanitarian assistance, ensure that communities are treated respectfully, and enhance accountability.

“ ‘Another benefit of localisation is that local people know the local context. They know the dignity of community members and how to respect local values and belief. They act according to people’s values and dignity is respected.’⁴⁹

Do no harm

There has been some discussion of how strengthened local leadership can mitigate the negative impacts of humanitarian assistance. For example, the Kenya Red Cross argues that its role allows it to identify approaches that will minimise disagreements in the community.⁵⁰ Interviewees also described the importance of local actors advising on how to approach sensitive issues in communities.⁵¹

Despite the many benefits of strengthened local leadership, it is important to recognise that localised approaches may not consistently result in more favourable outcomes, and that cultural, religious and ethnic factors can complicate the humanitarian agenda. For example, in some contexts, humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality may be at odds with cultural and ethnic dynamics. In Iraq, sectarian divisions between Kurdish and Arab communities, as well as Sunni–Shi’ite divisions, have hampered efforts to coordinate Kurdish staff in Sunni-dominated areas.⁵² Local actors highlighted concerns that the people they were attempting to reach would not view them as impartial. In this case, it may be argued that international organisations are better positioned to provide what communities perceive as impartial assistance.

However, locally led approaches can mitigate environmental harm. In the recent Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcano eruption and resulting tsunami in Tonga, civil society organisations (CSOs) leveraged community-based interventions to collect and remove plastic waste associated with international relief supplies. They also noted that some of the aid distributed via international operations was culturally insensitive and unfamiliar to communities, and therefore more likely to become waste.⁵³

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Do local actors have a better understanding of community power dynamics and sensitivities?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors navigate power dynamics and sensitivities to mitigate negative impacts better than other actors?
Are local actors more likely to directly source locally available relief supplies?	▶ AND therefore, are environmental harms (such as plastic waste and carbon emissions from international freight) reduced by local actors?
Do local actors understand the local natural resources better?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to propose solutions that build on and support local ecosystems?

49 Interview 18.
50 IFRC (2022) *Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent*, p. 40.
51 Interviews 8, 20.
52 Van Mierop ED (2018) *Local humanitarian actors and the principle of impartiality*, p. 5
53 HAG, Civil Society Forum of Tonga & MORDI Tonga Trust (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*.

Are local actors more invested in the future health of their communities?

▶ AND therefore, are local actors more motivated to support more environmentally responsible programming?

Do local actors have a better understanding of local indigenous and traditional knowledge in their communities?

▶ AND therefore, do local actors leverage such knowledge and practices to supplement programming?

Respect

More localised responses may influence community members' perception of their treatment by responding actors.⁵⁴ Following the 2021 earthquake in Haiti, a survey of 1,251 affected Haitians found that most preferred to receive aid from local rather than international organisations, with respondents stating that they see the former as more honest, respectful and understanding of their needs and priorities.⁵⁵ Case studies have also unpacked the importance of acceptance by the community; research by the Kenya Red Cross attributes its successful humanitarian programming to long-term trust built on respectful relationships with communities.⁵⁶

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Do local actors have a better understanding of cultural norms and protocols?

▶ AND therefore, do local actors engage with communities in a way that is more culturally respectful?

Do local actors have a better understanding of how to engage communities in a way that is sensitive to customs and traditions?

▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to promote positive engagement and conversations?

Accountable

Localised processes have been documented as key to effective community feedback that inform program adaptations. For example, a Start Network study in Pakistan and Guatemala found that communities perceived local and national actors to be more engaged in adapting programs to meet community needs based on feedback, due to their established connections within their local contexts, and familiarity with the cultural and social norms of the community. In contrast, international agencies were perceived as 'distant' and 'inaccessible'.⁵⁷ Similarly, case studies undertaken by the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement show that locally led preparedness and response plans enhance community engagement and accountability.⁵⁸

“... because of their local knowledge, local actors can offer services that are more aligned to community needs and cultural norms, better coordinated with local government and other stakeholders, and continually adapted and improved based on community feedback.”⁵⁹

54 Ground Truth Solutions (2022) *People at the centre? A reality check on post-quake accountability to affected people in Haiti*; IFRC (2022) *Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent*, p. 40; interviews 4, 5, 7, 20, 18.

55 Ground Truth Solutions (2022) *People at the centre? A reality check on post-quake accountability to affected people in Haiti*.

56 IFRC (2022) *Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent*, p. 40.

57 Interview 23; Guyatt H (2022) *Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action*, ODI, HPN.

58 IFRC (2022) *Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent*, p. 15.

59 Guyatt H (2022) *Unpacking the value of locally led humanitarian action*, ODI, HPN.

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Are local actors more trusted and do they have stronger relationships with communities?	▶ AND therefore, are communities more likely to discuss concerns and feedback with them, AND therefore, is it more likely that community concerns and feedback will be addressed?
Do local actors have a better understanding of community communications preferences?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to implement two-way communication mechanisms that are contextually appropriate?
Are local actors better able to communicate with communities who can then define needs and add input to program cycle processes?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors more accurately feed into and design M&E processes?
Are local actors based in the community?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more accessible to engage more consistently?
If local actors speak the same language, are they better placed to understand cultural cues so can receive and interpret feedback?	▶ AND therefore, is it more likely that community concerns and feedback will be addressed?

Communities receive assistance at the RIGHT TIME

The receipt of support at a time that suits communities has been central to discussions of the benefits of localised practices.

“ ‘In recent floods, we have seen that international players have taken time to come to [the] scene, whereas locally established players, they were in the field much earlier than the international support.’⁶⁰
(National actor, Pakistan)

Timely

“ ‘Responses to emergencies can be carried out in a timely way because of the presence of the local organisation in the communities.’⁶¹

A widely referenced perceived benefit of localised approaches is the speed with which local actors can mobilise to support communities.⁶² For example, ActionAid found that local women and women-led organisations were some of the first actors mobilising and supporting communities on the ground following the tsunami in Central Sulawesi in Indonesia in 2018. Leveraging their connections and networks and trusted positions in the community enabled rapid response and provision of services, including supporting evacuations and distributing food and clothing.⁶³

60 Interview 20.

61 Interview 18.

62 IFRC (2022) [Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent](#); Action Aid (2019) [Leading the way: women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: towards gender transformative action](#); IFRC (2018) [IFRC policy brief: localisation – what it means and how to achieve it](#); Groupe URD (2017) [More than just money: localisation in context](#); Somalia NGO Consortium, Rift Valley Forum, Centre for Humanitarian Change & NEAR (2017) [Dialogue for action on aid localisation in Somalia](#); interviews 2, 4, 5, 12–15, 18.

63 Action Aid (2019) [Leading the way: women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: towards gender transformative action](#), pp. 298–797.



In contrast, some data points to delays in locally led responses. For example, only 6% of national and international stakeholder interviewees felt the response to TC Harold in Vanuatu in 2020 was completely timely, notwithstanding obstacles related to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁴

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Are local actors based in the communities?	▶ AND therefore, because they don't need to travel, can they provide more timely assistance?
Do local actors have stronger connections with communities?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to be aware of the needs on the ground, and sooner?
Do local actors have established networks with businesses and community groups that enable efficient sourcing of supplies/staff?	▶ AND therefore, can local actors respond more quickly by more timely sourcing of staff and supplies?
Do local actors have established connections with local government and authorities?	▶ AND therefore, can local actors obtain authorisations and permissions more quickly?

Connected

“Local actors who deliver humanitarian assistance are less likely to distinguish between emergency, resilience and recovery programmes, and often deliver humanitarian, development and at times peacebuilding programmes, which brings opportunities to enhance connectedness and longer-term perspectives.”⁶⁵

Some analysis suggests that localisation enables better connections between response and recovery and longer-term programming.⁶⁶ For example, research into the role of localisation in the response to Hurricane Matthew reflected that in Haiti, a more localised response encourages recovery and conversely, that a response that prioritises recovery allows for greater localisation. Further, a literature review of humanitarian localisation indicates that local actors may be less likely to distinguish between humanitarian response, development and peace programming, therefore supporting connections between phases of delivery.⁶⁷

64 HAG & VANGO (2020) [No turning back: local leadership in Vanuatu's response to Tropical Cyclone Harold](#).

65 Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), HPG, ODI, HAG, p. 44.

66 Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), HPG, ODI, HAG; IFRC (2022) [Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent](#); Interview 2.

67 ICVA (2018) [Localisation examined: an ICVA briefing paper](#); IRC (2021) [Focus on the frontlines: how the Grand Bargain can deliver on its promise to improve humanitarian aid](#); Barbelet V, Davies G, Flint J & Davey E (2021) [Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study](#), HPG, ODI, HAG, p. 69.

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Do local actors have a better understanding of the various initiatives in their own communities?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to ensure and promote linkages?
Are local actors less likely to distinguish between disaster response and recovery phases?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to prioritise initiatives that support both short and longer-term needs?
Are local actors more likely to understand what is sustainable in their context?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to promote sustainable programming?
Do local actors have better connections to local government and key stakeholders, including faith-based actors?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to engage key stakeholders in programming that will be connected and sustainable?

Preparedness

“ [Local NGOs] are well versed in their local context and they also know the needs and preparedness levels of the communities for a certain disaster.”⁶⁸

Localising humanitarian action has also been seen to contribute towards better preparedness to respond.⁶⁹ Following the Merapi volcano eruption in Indonesia, the Jalin Merapi project – founded by local journalists and activists – distributed timely information on the eruption to local communities through radio and digital platforms. In contrast, locals perceived that the government’s response and efforts to provide information to communities had been slow.⁷⁰

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Are local actors more likely to have a sustained presence in communities?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to undertake initiatives that support community preparedness for future responses/strengthen resilience to future shocks?
Are local actors more aware of the specific risks and hazards in their communities?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors likely to have greater awareness of how to prepare for and/or respond to specific risks and hazards?
Do local actors have pre-established networks and connections with local government and other stakeholders?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to engage key stakeholders in preparedness or rapid response?
Do local actors have a better understanding of their local context and therefore the needs of their community?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors more likely to pre-position appropriate stock?

68 Interview 18.

69 Groupe URD (2018) *Humanitarian aid on the move No. 19 – January 2018*, pp. 2–7; CARE (2021) *Does gender responsive disaster risk reduction make a difference when a category 5 cyclone strikes?*

70 Wall I & Hedlund K (2016) *Localisation and locally-led crisis response: a literature review*, L2GP.

The RIGHT MEMBERS of communities receive assistance

Inclusive

Through their ongoing presence and proximity to communities, local actors may have deeper understandings of the community, including hidden or vulnerable groups, and therefore may be in a better position than their international counterparts to identify and reach them. The RCRC Movement has correlated localised approaches with practising social inclusion, arguing that the mobilisation of diverse membership, youth and volunteers facilitates more inclusive programming.⁷¹ Local organisations that meet the needs of specific groups are also well placed to identify and meet such needs. For example, during the Central Sulawesi response, local women-led organisations were critical in supporting and meeting the diverse needs of women and girls.⁷² In instances where discrimination against marginalised groups is common, a fully localised response may not be conducive to strengthened inclusion.

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Do local actors have a more comprehensive understanding of who is in the community?	▶ AND therefore, are local actors better able to identify and target those that are the most vulnerable?
Do local actors have a better understanding of cultural nuances that contribute to some groups being less visible?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors put in place strategies to make sure those less visible in the community are supported?
Do local actors have established connections with CSOs such as women's groups and organisations for people with disabilities?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors more easily or frequently have conversations about the specific needs of particular groups?
Are local actors more likely to be trusted by marginalised groups?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors more easily or frequently have conversations about the specific needs of particular groups?

Reach

The ability of local and national actors to reach remote or hard-to-access areas has been a driver of localisation and a documented benefit.⁷³ In areas where security constrains access, local and national actors can drive responses to needs. The IFRC points to the ability of National Societies to access areas off limits to international actors for reasons of security, permissions, or geographic realities. For example, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has access across most areas of Syria, but international actors are prohibited.⁷⁴

Causal pathways to explore could include:

Are local actors more likely to have an ongoing presence in affected areas?	▶ AND therefore, do local actors have better ability to deliver assistance to remote or hard-to-reach areas?
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71 IFRC (2022) [Study: localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent](#).

72 Action Aid (2019) [Leading the way: women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: towards gender transformative action](#).

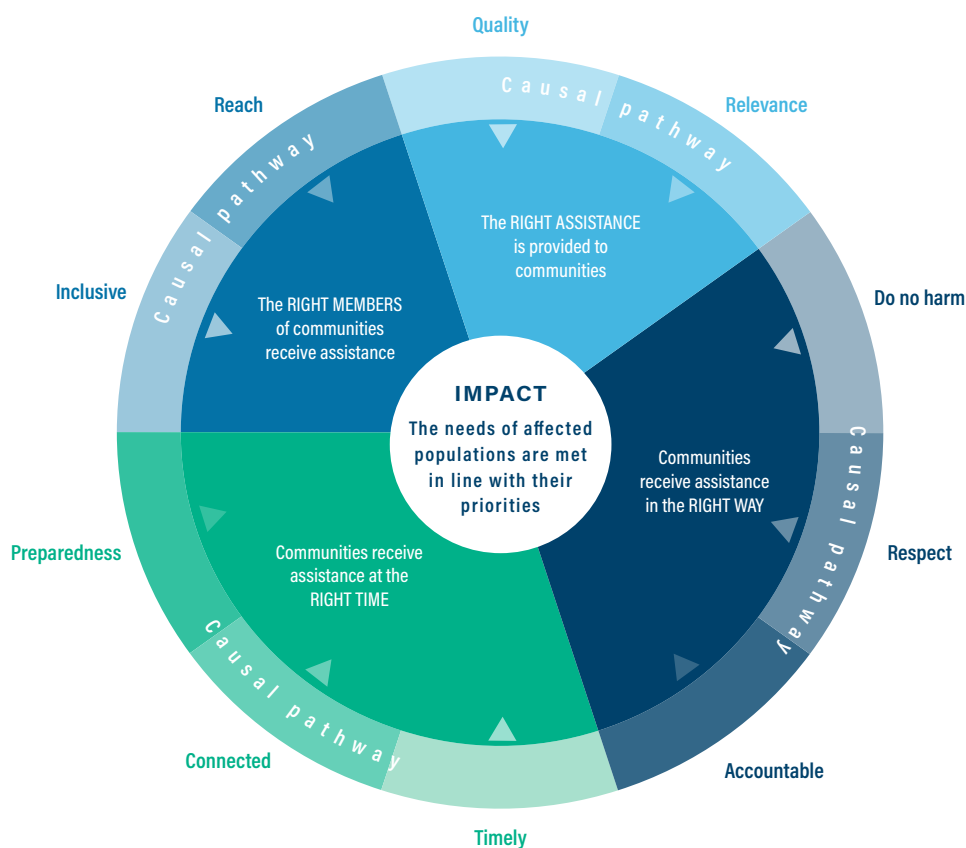
73 Action Aid (2019) [Leading the way: women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: towards gender transformative action](#), p. 68; Trocaire (2017) [More than the money – localisation in practice](#); DEC & Groupe URD (2021) [DEC CVA real-time response review: Yemen country report](#), p. 15; Fast F (2020) [From the ground up: it's about time for local](#), HPG; IFRC (2018) [IFRC policy brief: localisation – what it means and how to achieve it](#).

74 IFRC (2018) [IFRC policy brief: localisation – what it means and how to achieve it](#).

Section 4: A way forward

This paper proposes a model, building on M&E best practice, for the parameters that will enable humanitarian actors to measure the impact of localised practices for communities. An overview of the model and proposed steps to put it into practice is provided in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Overview of domains and potential benefits of localised practices



The areas articulated in the model emerged consistently in the data as having either emerging or anecdotal evidence that points to localised approaches influencing community outcomes (either positively or negatively).

The steps below show how the model can be used to set the stage for measurement of localisation impact. It will undergo validation and field testing, then be adapted, refined and complemented with additional tools and guidance (e.g. indicators and key evaluation questions).

STEP 1 ▶ **Define** level and domain of intended impact of localised practices

- ▶ Are you targeting the system, organisation or community level?
- ▶ *If you are targeting the community level, what domains do you seek to influence?*
- ▶ Have you articulated what you seek to achieve in your programming documents, with respect to these domains?

STEP 2 ▶ **Articulate** the possible causal pathways that correlate with the domain areas you seek to influence

- ▶ What are your assumptions about the conditions that will contribute towards the intended change you seek?
- ▶ What are the risks that these assumptions create? Can you mitigate any of these risks to increase the likelihood of your intended change?

STEP 3 ▶ **Test** the validity of your causal pathways

- ▶ What evidence can you gather to determine whether your identified causal relationships are valid? Try, if possible, to seek input from diverse voices within your program context to inform this.
- ▶ Determine whether your assumptions are valid and if so, why? If not, why not? Document this.
- ▶ Revisit and amend your intended outcomes based on the validity of causal pathways.

After completing these three steps, you will be in a better position to understand the impact of localised practices in your context. Subsequent papers in this series will explore untested components of this framework, such as:

- The completeness of the domains and whether they require expansion and/or adaptation
- The validity of approaches to testing causal pathways within the domains
- Steps to link articulated localisation outcomes to impact measurement indicators.

The authors of this research acknowledge that this paper, and the model proposed within it, is a first step towards **building an evidence base for the impact of localised practices**. This will be an iterative learning process, and the team welcomes feedback, questions and examples of the model being used and tested.

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A pathway to localisation impact: Laying the foundations



