
LOCALIZING HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN AFRICA

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The international humanitarian community is increasingly focusing on the need for local and national actors to lead humanitarian response and recovery efforts in conflict-affected or disaster-prone regions, especially in the Global South. Local and national actors responding to crises remain severely underfunded, particularly in Africa, where civil society organizations (CSOs) receive insufficient funding from African and international actors alike. African funders reportedly directed

<https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/images/articles/disparities-in-funding-for-african-ngos/disparities-in-funding-for-african-ngos-report.pdf> 9 percent of large gifts to African CSOs between 2010 and 2019, while non-African philanthropists provided 14 percent of their funding to these groups.

The United States is the world's largest foreign assistance donor, having contributed \$35.5 billion <https://donortracker.org/country/united-states> in overseas development assistance (ODA) in 2020. Much of this aid goes to sub-Saharan Africa, including \$8.5 billion <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-africa#:~:text=in%20fiscal%20year%202020%2c%20usaid,programs%20in%20sub%2dsaharan%20africa> to 47 countries and 8 regional

programs in 2020. Yet national and local organizations receive little of this funding directly. At the same time, Washington has repeatedly signaled <https://www.devex.com/news/rajiv-shah-s-usaid-legacy-85239> a commitment to the “localization” of humanitarian aid, or the shift of decisionmaking power, program implementation, and resources to local and national actors. Yet localized humanitarian assistance in Africa has failed to materialize.

Bureaucratic and regulatory hurdles, as well as geostrategic calculations, pose a challenge to localization efforts. African voices are excluded from the decisionmaking landscape—in donor discussions and localization efforts themselves—resulting in a gap in cultural competency. The conversation on localization in Africa cannot be limited to the African continent; it must occur in donor capitals, with African voices leading the dialogue. To achieve sustainable localization, the U.S. and African policy landscapes should resolve bureaucratic obstacles and shift an exclusionary aid paradigm to one that is inclusive and builds on existing successes.

Defining Localization

In fragile and conflict-affected states, resident CSOs are often the first to respond and have access to areas that are difficult for international actors to reach in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Their presence within communities before, during, and after crises positions them to provide basic services, mobilize resources to respond to the needs of affected populations, and build longer-term resilience.

Despite the importance of engaging local and national actors in all phases of humanitarian action, they remain excluded in systems built by and designed for international actors and multilateral organizations.

Local and national actors are not a homogeneous group. “Local actors” can comprise CSOs and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that operate in a specific, geographically defined subnational area of an aid recipient country. “National actors” refer to organizations that operate in the aid recipient country in which they are headquartered and work in multiple subnational regions. In many cases, CSOs and NGOs at the national level have started to operate like international organizations and attract most of the funding from international donors. In contrast, organizations at the local level often face higher risk, lack sufficient resources, and are overburdened with work.

The international humanitarian system has faced criticism from CSOs, academics, and practitioners for excluding African actors from response and recovery efforts and is under pressure

[to enable and support localized response and recovery efforts](https://www.devex.com/news/is-it-finally-time-for-the-localization-agenda-to-take-off-97323). This effort, known colloquially as “localization,” calls for the transfer of control, decisionmaking power, and resources to local and national actors, allowing community members to be the leaders of the programs and services that support their needs. Localization efforts exist alongside [a broader global movement toward anti-racism and decolonization](https://www.alnap.org/blogs/decolonisation-and-localisation-new-dawn-or-old-history), [seeking to identify and eliminate the power imbalances that govern international relations](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/13/opinion/africa-foreign-aid-philanthropy.html). Localization is a necessary technical step in the decolonization process but may only tackle its symptoms, not its root causes.

The term “localization” itself is also not well defined <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2021.711090/full> and is problematic in its terminology <https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/the-centre/events/covid-19-and-localisation-shifting-the-power-or-shifting-the-risk/>, and its emphasis on CSOs perpetuates a system that undermines the state’s capacity to respond. Some activists argue <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2022/2/8/localisation-lip-service-fixing-aid-colonial-legacy> that “localization” has become a ubiquitous term that avoids the heart of the issue: deep-rooted racism and ongoing legacies of colonialism. They also claim “localization” often implies a reductionist understanding of who is local, excluding the voices of the most vulnerable. Likewise, international actors often fail to grasp the relationship between CSOs and the state, prioritizing their preferred partners and reinforcing a system that undermines indigenous response capacity.

African Women and Youth Action for Development

Uganda is the top refugee-hosting country in Africa and one of the top five hosting nations in the world, providing sanctuary for approximately 1.5 million displaced persons. In Uganda, international actors continue to dominate humanitarian response and recovery efforts, and CSOs are often left entirely out of decisionmaking circles. Although the Ugandan model of hosting displaced persons is one of the most progressive worldwide <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/ugandas-progressive-approach-refugee-management>, host communities and refugees nevertheless face protection and safety challenges. Displaced women and girls are at risk for multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including child marriage, domestic violence, rape, and trafficking. Ugandan CSOs and local activists are best suited to respond to both the immediate and long-term needs of women, girls, and other vulnerable populations.

Organizations such as African Women and Youth Action for Development <https://www.afriwyad.org/> (AWYAD), for example, work on SGBV awareness and prevention through interventions such as community protection committees, watch groups, and task forces training participants to identify and refer cases. AWYAD also addresses security challenges, such as reports of an increased number of guns in refugee-hosting areas, which threatens the safety of refugees, especially women and children. Ritah Nansereko, executive director of AWYAD, calls <https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/a-feminist-approach-to-localization.pdf> for humanitarian agencies and

international actors to “support women’s rights organizations with the required technical and financial capacity to effectively and sustainably respond to the needs of vulnerable women.”

Neocolonial Structures: A Lack of African Voices in Localization

Before the rise of the humanitarian industrial complex in the late 1980s, African CSOs served as the primary emergency responders across the continent. In that capacity, they were the primary interlocutors of the governments in their countries of operation. These organizations operated in economically and politically challenging environments and made whatever impact they could with limited means. Their position vis-à-vis governments and the crises they sought to address changed with the arrival of international actors. The latter, which first intervened to address humanitarian suffering from cataclysmic developments such as the Biafra War in the late 1960s and the famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s, inched their way into spaces that previously had been the focus of local organizations, including corruption, economic justice, and human rights.

Today, humanitarian engagement in Africa is driven by events such as conflicts, epidemics, and natural disasters. Organizations at the provincial, town, and village levels are typically the first to respond to crises. While they sometimes receive support from international and national actors, NGOs, and other organizations, local actors are often excluded, overlooked, or tokenized, causing tension and renewed demand for localization.

Existing Efforts Toward Localization

To a certain extent, localization has been embedded in the humanitarian system from its origins. For example, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement which sits at the origins of the humanitarian system is predicated on national volunteer societies leading in humanitarian response. Yet, as the humanitarian system has been formalized, international organizations have crowded out local efforts.

The contemporary localization movement gained traction at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit

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[=world+humanitarian+summit+a+quarter+of+funding+flows&gs_lcp=cgndnd3mtd2l6eamybagjecdkbahbgabkbahggabqafgaykwcaabwaxgagafiaftkgebzmzgbakabacabaq&sclient=gws-wiz](https://www.google.com/search?q=world+humanitarian+summit+a+quarter+of+funding+flows&sxsrf=apq-wbsm4vjckswmb9lenb9n_tabw63rq%3a1645811988083&ei=fbkzyroxbiywytmploulwa8&ved=0ahukewizi6q3t5v2ahumhiehzt1avgq4dudca4&uact=5&oq=world+humanitarian+summit+a+quarter+of+funding+flows&gs_lcp=cgndnd3mtd2l6eamybagjecdkbahbgabkbahggabqafgaykwcaabwaxgagafiaftkgebzmzgbakabacabaq&sclient=gws-wiz), where UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon called

[http://cdn-odi-production.s3-website-eu-west-](http://cdn-odi-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/as_local_as_possible_as_international_as_necessary_understanding_capacity_and_comp.pdf)

[1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/as_local_as_possible_as_international_as_necessary_understanding_capacity_and_comp.pdf](http://cdn-odi-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/as_local_as_possible_as_international_as_necessary_understanding_capacity_and_comp.pdf) for humanitarian

action to be “as local as possible, as international as necessary.” Preceding the summit, representatives

of CSOs, international organizations, local and national governments, and the private sector agreed

<http://synthesisreport.worldhumanitariansummit.org/> that giving local communities the tools to respond immediately

and improve their resilience was a critical step in mitigating the costly and deadly effects of

humanitarian crises. At the summit, representatives from 18 donor countries and 16 humanitarian aid

organizations approved a “Grand Bargain [https://theglobal.blog/2020/09/09/localization-of-humanitarian-action-from-grand-bargain-](https://theglobal.blog/2020/09/09/localization-of-humanitarian-action-from-grand-bargain-to-grand-betrayal/)

[to-grand-betrayal/](https://theglobal.blog/2020/09/09/localization-of-humanitarian-action-from-grand-bargain-to-grand-betrayal/),” where signatories promised to directly allocate at least 25 percent <https://charter4change.org/> of

their humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020.

But by 2020, the percentage of funding to local and national actors sat at a mere 3.1 percent, the same

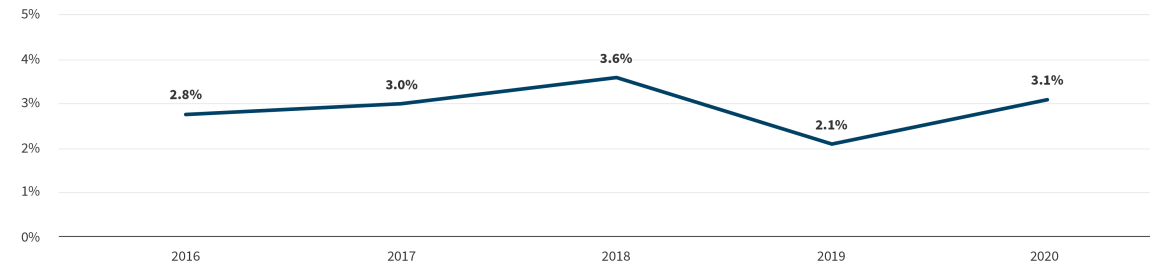
as in 2016. In response, a network of local NGOs based across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East wrote an

open letter <https://www.devex.com/news/dispute-over-grand-bargain-localization-commitments-boils-over-90603> accusing

international aid agencies, donors, and NGOs of failing to keep their commitment.

Direct Funding to Local and National Actors

as % of total funding



Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data.

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The ambitious target set at the summit failed to transpire for three reasons:

1. Aid is rooted in neocolonial structures, allowing Western donors to maintain power and influence over recipient countries, and manifests through the exclusion of recipient voices from conversations.
2. Aid programming is often impacted by political agendas, including great power competition, as opposed to the interests of recipient country governments and NGOs.
3. The structures governing the aid architecture are burdensome and inhibit localized responses, even when the ambitions and motivations behind humanitarian aid are genuine.

Current localization efforts measure progress through indicators and metrics, such as the 25 percent commitment agreed on during the 2016 summit. Although this target has become “the default measurement for supporting ‘local’ action,” some signatories to the Grand Bargain are still unable to report [the proportion of their funding that goes to local responders](https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/localisation_lit_review_web-1.pdf). Such indicators and metrics are designed to measure and quantify progress toward localization; however, experts argue that by focusing on percentages spent instead of impact, they may be counterproductive to achieving meaningful change.

African vs. International

Local African actors have a better grasp of the situation on the ground and the dynamics that shape the context. They grapple with a situation's causes and drivers long before it degenerates into a crisis. Consequently, they can design and implement more effective responses with the appropriate type of support.

Even at the national level, there is sometimes a disconnect between capital-based organizations and those operating in other parts of the country. While prominent national organizations may have a zoomed-out perspective of the country's challenges, there is no guarantee they fully understand local realities due to challenges such as cultural differences, the distance from which they operate, and local political dynamics.

Due to structural advantages, such as hefty budgets, operational capacity, and staff expertise, international actors can respond to humanitarian crises effectively and efficiently. Just as important, international actors and multilateral organizations have access to policymakers in donor countries and, as a result, can mobilize funds more quickly.

For these reasons, international actors tend to dominate when they intervene in a crisis. By virtue of their resources, they have greater access to local and national authorities. International actors have the logistical capacity to deploy quickly and effectively, allowing them to craft and advance a narrative that shapes advocacy efforts. This approach, however, relegates local and national organizations to the background and stifles African voices.

The failure to include African voices and local and national actors in humanitarian responses has affected numerous high-profile campaigns dealing with blood diamonds, child soldiers, sexual violence, and conflict minerals over the last few decades. If waged without adequate representation of African

voices and perspectives, campaigns may lead to counter-productive policies and the oversimplification of complex issues.

From Conflict Minerals to Covid-19

At the height of the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which lasted from 1998 to 2003, local activists, CSOs, and national and international NGOs mobilized around the exploitation of mineral resources. The conflict and humanitarian crisis were exacerbated by the exploitation of gold, coltan, tin, and other minerals extracted in areas under the control of armed groups, creating the world's deadliest humanitarian crisis since World War II, with 3.9 million Congolese <<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/661/2006-7congomortalitysurvey.pdf>> excess deaths occurring between 1998 and 2004.

Some analysts and activists argue that the proceeds from the mineral trade provided militias the financial means to acquire more firepower, which in turn intensified the conflict. Others insist that the government's inability to assert state authority was the real cause of the insecurity that set off the emergence of militias and sustained the plunder of natural resources.

Congolese organizations extensively investigated the role of mineral resources in the conflict, produced several reports on the subject to raise awareness about the problem, and recommended policy solutions, to limited effect, until a cluster of international actors adopted the conflict as a priority and invested considerable resources into the matter. These organizations waged a robust campaign on several fronts, including at American universities, corporate boardrooms, major international media outlets, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Reacting to the international campaign, Congolese president Joseph Kabila suspended artisanal mining operations in the Kivus. This outcome was devastating for thousands of Congolese who depended on the trade. Unemployment and underemployment were at 8.9 percent and 81.7 percent, respectively. Kabila deployed army units to protect the mining areas, who turned their assignment into a business opportunity and instead joined the black-market trade. Six months later, unable to enforce his decision, Kabila lifted the ban.

In 2010, the U.S. Congress passed the Dodd-Frank Act, requiring in Section 1502 that companies listed on the U.S. Stock Exchange that sourced minerals from the region certify these minerals were “DRC conflict-free.”

As impressive as the international campaign was, it failed to include Congolese voices and account for the diversity of Congolese perspectives in the debate and consultations. International groups dominated the debate at the expense of the primary stakeholders: the Congolese people. Finally, the U.S. legislation, partially revoked by Congress in 2018, failed to address Congolese local and national dynamics and curb violence in eastern Congo. Bridging the gap between the local and international stakeholders would have made a difference.

Like the conflict minerals campaign, which was dominated by large Western organizations with little input from Africans, the West has controlled the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, setting up protocols and policies that affect the world at large. Despite their experience dealing with epidemics, African medical experts have been mostly ignored. This lack of African voices and input in Covid-19 response and recovery efforts contributed to the mistrust of the vaccine campaign across Africa that has undermined these initiatives.

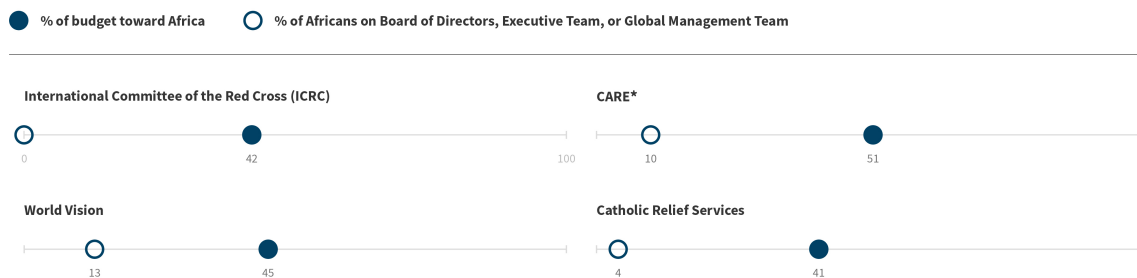
Bureaucratic Barriers

Large international donors face significant structural limitations that make it difficult for local and national actors to access direct funding. Donors cannot administer grants—even smaller, more targeted grants—because of burdensome bureaucracy, internal processes, and inadequate staff. Funders issue requests for proposals through online systems and in the donor country’s language, making it difficult for local and national actors who lack regular access to the internet or who primarily speak non-colonial languages to acquire direct funding. There is also a mismatch between the ambitions and good intentions of individuals working on the ground and people in international organizations tasked with compliance (e.g., human resources, legal, procurement).

According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-01/iasc%20guidance%20understanding%20and%20addressing%20bureaucratic%20and%20administrative%20impediments%20to%20humanitarian%20action_framework%20for%20a%20system-wide%20approach.pdf, donor requirements, including restrictions on operational modality and requests for beneficiary lists, make it challenging to fulfill policy commitments on localization, particularly concerning accountability, diversity, and inclusion.

Funds > Executives

While top humanitarian organizations commit around half of their annual budgets to operations in Africa, their leadership teams often fail to reflect this regional prioritization. This discrepancy is one of the issues underlying a lack of African perspectives, voices, and decision-making regarding humanitarian programming.



* Budget toward sub-Saharan Africa, as opposed to the African continent.
Note: Data reflects the Global organization and not the U.S. branch.
Source: Publicly available information via organization websites and annual reports.

The lack of clarity on what is meant in the Grand Bargain by terms such as “local responders” and phrases such as “as directly as possible” remains a source of tension in localization debates and further inhibits efforts by local and national actors to obtain direct funding.

Local actors also face complex legal issues regarding who is eligible to receive funds. Compliance measures by financial institutions

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iasc%20guidance%20understanding%20and%20addressing%20bureaucratic%20and%20administrative%20impediments%20to%20humanitarian%20action_framework%20for%20a%20system-wide%20approach.pdf with donor

requirements create extensive barriers for smaller CSOs, particularly in situations where international sanctions are in effect. Although lack of capacity is flagged regularly as a key challenge to localization, capacity-building projects in the past have failed to yield sustainable results, mainly because

<https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/08/icva-localization-examined-briefing-paper.pdf> “partners focus on technical and individual capacities, rather than organizational and administrative capabilities such as financial and human resources management.”

Examining the Actor-State Relationship

The failure to account for the relationship between local actors and their national governments undermines localization efforts. In many cases, citizens want the state to play a more meaningful role and be empowered to lead. In others, local CSOs face challenges regarding their relationship with the state actors. These challenges exacerbate when governments impose restrictions on CSOs and their partners, such as limitations on receiving foreign funding.

States often prohibit CSOs from addressing certain needs of the populations they are serving, such as protection concerns or reproductive health issues. According to Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/global-assault-on-ngos-reaches-crisis-point/>, host governments worldwide—authoritarian and non-authoritarian alike—are increasingly creating “laws that subject them and their staff to surveillance, nightmarish bureaucratic hurdles, and the ever-present threat of imprisonment.” Such restrictions hamper the ability of local CSOs and their partners to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in a timely manner. As a result, the relationship between CSOs and host governments can be described as discordant at best and can be aggravated by engagement from donors that fails to account for this dynamic.

Over the past 15 years, 11 African countries <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2019/spread-anti-ngo-measures-africa-freedoms-under-threat> have adopted legislation and policies that constrain the legitimate activities of local CSOs. These laws enable states to strengthen their grip on CSOs in various ways, including by creating obstacles in the operational environment, limiting the hiring of foreigners, and making it difficult to register organizations.

Countries across Africa are increasingly limiting or prohibiting foreign funding, imposing some of the most damaging anti-NGO measures. In Ethiopia, for example, CSOs that received more than 10 percent of their funds from international donors were designated “foreign agents” and effectively placed under the watch of security agencies. In Kenya, a proposed funding cap for “public benefits organizations” was taken off the table following intense political opposition and sustained pressure from CSOs. One year later, President Uhuru Kenyatta gave a fiery address, vowing “not to allow organizations advancing foreign interests to destabilize the government,” leading to renewed calls to cap foreign funding.

Funding Streams

For years, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has put localization efforts at the center of its humanitarian reform agenda under both Democratic and Republican leadership. Despite bipartisan support and efforts to expand the agency's partner base and increase funding levels for national actors, little progress has been made. Over the past decade, USAID funding designated to local organizations has increased from 4 percent to 6 percent <https://www.cepr.net/report/capacity-development-for-whom-an-agenda-for-usaid-reform-in-haiti/>. In November 2021, in line with the Grand Bargain, USAID administrator Samantha Power announced a pledge to increase funding to local organizations to 25 percent within the next four years, a challenging feat given the current trajectory.

Previous administrators have had similar ambitions, only to find their efforts stymied. In 2011, then-administrator Rajiv Shah announced a similar goal of increasing direct funding to local organizations to 30 percent <https://inkstickmedia.com/what-does-localization-look-like-in-usaid/>. The initiative largely failed due to backlash from development contractors and NGOs that felt threatened that their funding would get cut.

The funding provided by USAID to local organizations is insufficient, especially compared to the billions that contractors receive yearly. USAID funding to local organizations is around 6 percent of its budget, approximately \$2.46 billion, but a far larger portion goes to U.S.-based service contractors. The top contractor for USAID, Chemonics International, received https://pages.devex.com/rs/685-kbl-765/images/devex_reports_usaid_top_contractors_in_2016.pdf?aliid=2107099003 over \$1 billion of USAID financing in 2016, following an indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/module6_understandingusaidawards_final.pdf worth \$9.5 billion in 2015. In 2016, USAID supplied 20 U.S.-based contractors with \$4.7 billion https://pages.devex.com/rs/685-kbl-765/images/devex_reports_usaid_top_contractors_in_2016.pdf?aliid=2107099003 in total funding.

Opposition to localization in Congress also remains, with some believing increased funds to foreign governments and institutions would fail to yield sustainable results and lead to corruption and waste. Meanwhile, USAID staff expressed concerns <https://www.devex.com/news/rajiv-shah-s-usaid-legacy-85239> that budget cuts would limit the staff time available to process and approve increased funding opportunities, especially for “higher-risk” partners.

Great Power Competition and National Interests

Aid is often viewed as a diplomatic tool for strategic competition and a means to further national interests; however, this can be detrimental for less well-resourced partners. Congress requires recipients of U.S. funding to sign off on political commitments to receive aid, such as not using Chinese equipment. Some restrictions are rooted in concerns about privacy and technology transfers, but imposing these requirements on smaller partners, who play a critical role in assisting their communities, is deeply limiting and often unrealistic given local market dynamics.

Requirements for branding remain another sticking point. For donors and implementing partners, branding goods and supplies with logos is perceived as a tool for “soft power” projection, ensuring the beneficiaries of a program and the world at large know who is responsible for providing humanitarian aid. According to USAID’s branding guidelines <https://www.usaid.gov/branding>, their red, white, and blue logo “was developed to ensure that the American people are visibly acknowledged for their contributions.”

In certain contexts, branding is necessary to distinguish the civilian nature of an activity, and some visibility is required for the sake of accountability; however, most branding today is predicated on communications and marketing rather than public safety and the well-being of affected populations. For

partners, especially UN agencies, branding is a marketing and visibility strategy to demonstrate their centrality to humanitarian action. Branding efforts often crowd out the visibility of local responders, which perpetuates impressions of who is present and capable of responding.

Shortly after the Ebola epidemic, foreign donors and partners came together to help finance major infrastructure projects in Liberia. According to W. Guide Moore, the former Liberian minister of public works, signage boasting the flags and logos of project donors

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/25/620475755/logos-on-aid-supplies-helpful-demeaning-or-dangerous>—the African Development Bank, the European Union, the United Nations, USAID, and the World Bank—became commonplace. In a 2018 piece <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/case-against-branding-development-aid-fragile-states> published by the Center for Global Development, Moore argues that aid groups and development agencies should give credit to the home country for big-ticket aid interventions and rebuilding efforts, even if their role was just negotiating the deal. Doing so would help heal a fractured relationship between governments and their citizens, avoiding <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/25/620475755/logos-on-aid-supplies-helpful-demeaning-or-dangerous> “nationwide consequences, ranging from protests to separatism.”

Risk Transfer

The localization of humanitarian aid often leads to risk transfer

<https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/more-than-the-money-localisation-in-practice.pdf> from international to local and national actors. Although international actors are increasingly aware of risk transfer in their decisionmaking, some degree of transfer is unavoidable <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/risk-global-study.pdf> when two organizations form a partnership because of the interrelated nature of risks.

The opposite also holds true: in fragile and conflict-affected settings, it can be challenging for international actors to engage in impartial and neutral humanitarian response and recovery efforts and equally as difficult for local and national actors. Local NGOs may be associated, intentionally or inadvertently, with parties to the conflict through community ties or local staff. These links can have severe implications for their security and impact the perception of any international actor that may be in partnership with them, which, in turn, can also result in security challenges for the international partner.

The most important step to understanding risks faced by local and national actors is to actively listen. Recent research suggests <https://odihpn.org/publication/covid-19-and-localisation-an-opportunity-for-equitable-risk-sharing/> discussions about risks “are often driven by international interests, center on fiduciary and legal risks, and leave little space for locals to express safety or security concerns.”

“Risk-sharing,” also known as “risk distribution,” refers to a process in which international and local actors share the risk involved. A shift from the practice of risk transfer toward risk-sharing demands flexible, long-term funding and requires strategic thinking and a wider shift of power in the international humanitarian system. To rebalance power arrangements and share risk, local and national actors must be on equal footing with their international counterparts. An effective risk-sharing model would include fair compensation for local actors for the risks they undertake, particularly on behalf of international actors, which would strengthen the institutional capacity of local actors.

Progress?

Some progress has been made, largely attributable to indirect funding to local and national actors through intermediaries. Country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), for example, allow government donors to pool their contributions into a single, unearmarked fund to support local humanitarian efforts.

According to the [2022 Global Humanitarian Overview](https://gho.unocha.org/) [<https://gho.unocha.org/>](https://gho.unocha.org/), CBPFs have been meeting their target of contributing 25 percent of direct funding to local and national actors, having provided 39 percent in 2021. Other funding streams, such as the NGO START Network Fund, allow indirect support costs to be sub-granted to NGOs. Oxfam has been developing a [pre-financing rapid response facility](https://reliefweb.int/report/world/funding-frontline-how-oxfam-emergency-response-fund-facilitated-local-humanitarian), [<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/funding-frontline-how-oxfam-emergency-response-fund-facilitated-local-humanitarian>](https://reliefweb.int/report/world/funding-frontline-how-oxfam-emergency-response-fund-facilitated-local-humanitarian) allowing for funds to be disbursed more rapidly to local actors in humanitarian emergencies. Save the Children has established [locally managed pooled funds](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/cbpf%202020%20in%20review_20210706.pdf) [<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/cbpf%202020%20in%20review_20210706.pdf>](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/cbpf%202020%20in%20review_20210706.pdf) in Somalia and West Africa to enable a greater flow of funds to local actors.

Recommendations

The localization process can only be effective if it truly accounts for the dynamics shaping both sides of the equation, the local and the international. As some humanitarian practitioners have suggested, the winning formula requires that the process be “as local as possible and as international as necessary <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/rethinking-capacity-and-complementarity-more-local-humanitarian-action>.” For the localization partnership and power-sharing to be truly representative, the following steps should be taken:

1. Donors should increase the allocation of direct financial support to African organizations to grow and sustain existing capacities and help them become independent of intermediary organizations with separate agendas.
 - a. To do so, donors should create smaller funding streams with simplified grants processes, allowing African CSOs to apply for direct institutional support instead of project funding or “capacity-building” projects.
 - b. Donors should also work with networks such as the Center for Development Policy and the Network for Empowered Aid Response as well as with the existing sub-partners of major NGOs to identify and engage with known trusted partners who can expeditiously receive funds in rapid-onset emergencies.

2. International organizations should increase the representation of African local and national organizations, activists, CSOs, and scientists who have a solid grasp of the dynamics and the drivers of crisis dynamics. These actors should be proportionally represented in all pertinent forums, from leadership in the field to the boards of directors at the headquarter level.
3. African local and national organizations should be treated as partners, not as proxies or sources of information to be repurposed in the strategy of international organizations without due credit. In the context of global health crises, African public health practitioners should be readily consulted and represented for effective policymaking.

African representation in humanitarian response should not be about checking boxes but should strive for meaningful and substantial solutions. The nature of localization within the globalization context is such that no one, rich or poor, holds all the keys to the world's challenges. From climate change to pandemics to armed conflicts, African organizations are a part of the solution. African voices cannot be ignored; they must be elevated.

Experts Interviewed



Eyokia Donna Juliet

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Oheneba Boateng

Research Associate, Global Public Policy Institute

Chilande Kuloba-Warria

Managing Director, Warande Advisory Center Partner, Local Coalition Accelerator



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Mvemba Phezo Dizolele is a senior fellow and director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He is also a lecturer in African studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Prior to CSIS, he was the Africa senior adviser at the International Republican Institute. Previously, he served as the course coordinator for central and southern Africa at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute. He was also a Peter J. Duignan distinguished visiting fellow and

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analyst on PBS's NewsHour and Foreign Exchange; NPR's Tell Me More, On Point, and the Diane Rehm Show; BBC's World News Update; and Al Jazeera's The Stream, NewsHour, and Inside Story. Dizolele holds an international MBA and an MPP from the University of Chicago. He is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve and is fluent in French, Norwegian, Spanish, Swahili, Kikongo, and Lingala and proficient in Danish and Swedish. He is the author of the forthcoming biography, *Mobutu: The Rise and Fall of the Leopard King* (Random House).

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Jacob Kurtzer is director and senior fellow with the Humanitarian Agenda, an initiative that leverages the expertise of CSIS programs to explore complex humanitarian challenges. Prior to joining CSIS, Mr. Kurtzer spent seven years with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), most recently as head of communications for the ICRC Delegation in Israel and the occupied territories. Previously, he served as head of public and congressional affairs for the Washington Delegation of the ICRC, representing the ICRC to a broad spectrum of audiences in the United States and Canada. In addition, he has conducted field missions in South Sudan, and Rakhine State, Myanmar and spent nearly three years as a consultant with the ICRC delegation in Pretoria, South Africa. From 2007-2009, he served as the congressional advocate at Refugees International (RI), a humanitarian advocacy organization based in Washington D.C. Mr. Kurtzer began his career as a legislative assistant to Congressman Robert Wexler of Florida covering domestic and foreign policy issues, including managing the Congressional Indonesia Caucus. Mr. Kurtzer earned an M.A. in peace and conflict studies from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, where he studied as a Rotary Foundation World Peace Fellow. He also holds a B.A. in philosophy from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a citation in religious studies, and is an alumnus of the College Park Scholars Public Leadership program.

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This feature was made possible through the generous support of Humanity United.



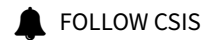
Special Thanks to:

- Marielle Harris, Former Associate Director, Africa Program
- Nicolas Jude Larnerd, Program Manager/Research Associate, Humanitarian Agenda
- Sarah Grace, Senior Producer and Multimedia Content Lead, iDeas Lab
- William Taylor, Senior Designer, iDeas Lab
- Jeeah Lee, Associate Director, Publications
- Michael Kohler, Multimedia Intern, iDeas Lab
- Laurel Weibezahn, Multimedia Producer, iDeas Lab

A product of the Andreas C. Dracopoulos iDeas Lab <<https://www.csis.org/programs/dracopoulos-ideas-lab>>, the in-house digital, multimedia, and design agency at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.



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