Save the Children

Turning the tables

Insights from locally-led humanitarian partnerships in conflict-affected situations

SAFERWORLD
PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

May 2020

FOREWORD

This report is published in a time when the world's attention is directed towards Covid-19, a pandemic that severely affects children and their communities, some of them already experiencing crisis caused by violent conflict or climate change. A pandemic that will have long-term effects on the realization of children's rights.

It is also a time when local actors' engagement is more important than ever; to respond to the crisis, to recover and build back better. It is an opportunity for us as international actors to support and strengthen existing initiatives carried out by resourceful local actors who are representing affected communities, who know their societies and who can find solutions that work for them.

Unfortunately, it is also a time when civil society actors' space is constrained. As international actors, we need to make sure our cooperation with local actors includes measures to support and protect the space for civil society to mobilize and respond to this crisis and beyond.

This report encourages us to reflect on what is hindering us from advancing localisation and if we are engaging with local actors for the right reasons and in the right way. It encourages us to think about our future role and complementarity, to listen to local actors on when and where we are needed, and how and what support is required from us. It encourages us to think about how we can better build on already existing capacity among a broad representation of local actors such as young people, women and people with disabilities.

It is our belief that shifting greater capacity, means and ownership to local actors, including a vibrant civil society, will result in more timely, appropriate and long lasting outcomes for children and their communities and better fulfil the rights of children.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This study was commissioned by Save the Children Sweden and builds on work Save the Children Sweden and Saferworld have been doing with local and national civil society actors and vulnerable crisis-affected people to re-imagine and re-design how we work together in conflict-affected situations. Both organisations have been piloting new ways of working to generate lessons that can inform changes in organisational practice. This study was carried out to consolidate and further learning within our organisations and the wider sector to inform our future work in conflict-affected situations.

This report was written by the research leads, Monica Stephen and Ariana Martini. Research began in August 2018 and was completed in September 2019. It was funded by Sida and the IKEA Foundation and forms part of Save the Children's global centenary efforts to better protect children in conflict. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sida and the IKEA Foundation.

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Abbreviations

CBO	Community-based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTP	Cash Transfer Programming
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisations
ELNHA	Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors Project (Bangladesh and Uganda)
GoM	Government of Myanmar
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
LNGO	Local Non-governmental Organisation
L2GP	Local to Global Protection Initiative
JST	Joint Support Team
KNU	Karen National Union
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders
NNGO	National Non-governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RISE	Remote Capacity Strengthening in Syria for Better Child Protection
SINGO	Southern International Non-governmental Organisation
TBC	The Border Consortium (Myanmar – Thai Border)
UN	United Nations
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit (2016)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report calls on international humanitarian actors to rethink their approaches to localisation in conflict-affected crisis situations. It draws together insights from a two-day meeting of policy specialists and practitioners from around the world as well as primary research from Myanmar, Syria and Uganda. It summarises learning from Civil Society Organisation (CSO) and International Non-governmental Organisation (INGO) partnership models that are structured in ways that promote principled, locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations. It offers an exploration of strategies and tactics used to overcome obstacles to localisation, derived from insights shared by CSO and INGO staff involved in these partnerships and others.

Examples of locally-led partnerships are relatively rare in the humanitarian aid system. In this system, the aim is to respond to crisis rapidly, at scale, and in a standardised and coordinated way, being accountable first and foremost to international donors. In conflict-affected crisis situations, local actors are more likely to be marginalised as donors and INGOs face additional pressure to uphold funding rules and principles, and often worry about local actors' capacity, respect of humanitarian principles, reinforcement of power relations, and space to operate.

However, from local and national NGOs to self-help groups emerging in communities impacted by emergencies, the immense capacity of people to help each other during crisis is well known. At a time when the humanitarian system is struggling to respond to the scale of human suffering amid increasing violent conflict, climate change and natural disasters, localisation promises to add capacity to the system. With better local access, contextual understanding, and long-term presence, locally-led crisis response is expected to deliver more relevant results more efficiently, and sustain them over time. However, local communities are often overruled by donors and INGOs who determine how aid is used, and as a result, their skills, leadership and knowledge are not only under-utilised but are being eroded.

This report helps remedy this imbalance by presenting cases where locally-led crisis response is working, illustrating that local leadership can fulfil its promise when a supportive environment is created. The research identified four CSO-INGO partnership models that support locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations, and four strategy areas that are critical for success. The models and strategies were identified through consultations, review of literature, interviews and a two-day international roundtable of practitioners and researchers from leading INGOs and CSOs. To structure the different perspectives, we developed a spectrum of localisation: from no localisation, to partial, to advanced, as well as best practice.

The models and strategies detailed here come mainly from Myanmar, Syria and Uganda. They show that locally-led aid delivery is not only possible in conflict-affected societies but can be more sensitive to conflict dynamics and more attuned to opportunities for building peace and social cohesion through aid delivery. The factors constraining locally-led responses come much more from within the humanitarian system itself. The recommendations therefore focus on system-level changes that would be needed for alternative models of CSO-INGO partnership to reach their full potential.

Ultimately, this research goes some way to demystifying what locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations could look like and the immense potential it has for enhancing the efficiency and capability of humanitarian action while maximising opportunities to address conflict drivers and build peace. The evidence in this report should encourage donors, but particularly INGOs, to reflect on the ways in which their partnerships hinder or promote locally-led crisis response and how they could transform their policies, procedures and role within the aid system to be more conducive to local leadership.

Keywords

humanitarian; crisis; conflict; localisation/localization; locally-led; civil society; partnerships; conflict sensitivity

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research identifies many progressive approaches to principled, locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations. Our findings indicate that INGOs can play an important intermediary role enabling locally-led crisis response. They can identify and secure different types of flexible funding from international sources and direct this to vulnerable crisis-affected communities and the CSOs that represent them. They can do this in ways that buffer CSOs from the crippling bureaucracy of international donor procedures while upholding compliance with necessary checks.

However, our findings also highlight the importance of aid system change. Progressive approaches have grown around the margins of the top-down transactional model of the current international humanitarian aid system. In this dominant model, there is a reliance on project-based interventions, rather than broad civil society strengthening that would provide local 'humanitarian public goods', contingency funding, risk sharing, and trust building. There is a damaging ambiguity about duty of care and security responsibilities, and a tendency for localisation efforts to unintentionally recreate the bureaucracy and hierarchical relationships of the international-local relationship between larger and smaller CSOs. These systemic blockages and weaknesses must be addressed before local communities and CSOs will realise their potential to respond in already-challenging conflict contexts. Below are recommendations on how this could be done. In line with the focus of the research, the recommendations are mostly for INGOs, though some are relevant to donors.

1. Actively advance a progressive vision of localisation

Ultimately, there has been too little progress against the targets and commitments set out in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The slow pace of change has many causes, from the significant structural incentives that make it so uncomfortable for INGOs to cede their role and the power that comes with it. Too much of the effort on these issues has been on technocratic solutions to funnel resources more efficiently to local responders without challenging the imbalanced aid system at its core. To achieve a more progressive vision, the aid system must see localisation as a fundamentally political endeavour, one that requires a loosening of the international grip over aid.

- **Engage in in-depth reflection on the degree to which international organisations and institutions are sustaining the marginalisation of locally-led crisis response.**
  This report presents some innovative cases of how INGOs are changing to cede space to local responders – but these are the exception. The tendency among international organisations is still to uphold the status quo of marginalising local responders. Legitimate concerns about the biases of, pressures on, and limitations of CSOs in conflict-affected situations should be balanced with a consideration of the biases, pressures, and limitations of international actors; such legitimate concerns are not a reason to despair of achieving any advancement of localisation in conflict. To accelerate the rebalancing of the aid system so that it supports the leadership of local organisations and communities, INGOs and their funders will have to question their own relevance and the future of their roles in a changing world. If INGOs cede power and resources more meaningfully to local actors, what role should they retain in the aid system? Reflections should explore diverse ways of reinforcing support for and solidarity with vulnerable crisis-affected people. Such questions are difficult for INGOs that are working to preserve their own revenues while managing donors that often prefer to avoid the perceived risks of funding local organisations. However, asking these difficult questions of and within INGOs is necessary to push the debate beyond technical approaches, which so far, have achieved very little.

- **Challenge the underlying prejudices that filter through procedures and partnership management systems and that inhibit local leadership.**
  Uncomfortable and frank conversations about racist, sexist and colonialist attitudes and approaches in the sector are sorely needed. However, such discussions can often become defensive in a way that prevents the overdue transformation and dismantling of learned behaviours. Immediate steps could

involve funded research or dialogues focused on local CSOs' experience and understanding of the prejudice and discrimination they face. Additionally, INGOs must reflect internally and open themselves up for uncomfortable scrutiny from their own partners as part of jointly identifying changes to procedures and partnership policy/practice. Since partnership practices are shaped by sector requirements for standardisation and donor requirements, this also requires INGOs to work together to advocate for system change across the sector and among donors.

- **Commitments to localisation should be reflected in organisational strategies and monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This is to track progress and enable local actors to hold international organisations to commitments.**
  To achieve this, strong political leadership and commitment from the top of INGOs is required. Such commitment would be bolstered by a move away from a model in which leaders measure their success based on how much the organisation has grown under their leadership or how many more 'beneficiaries' the organisation has reached. Such indicators are important, particularly in urgent crisis settings, but INGOs should be encouraged and held accountable on the basis of their ability to shift power to local organisations and groups in a way that is sustainable and conflict sensitive.

- **Support alternative and experimental models and structures of local-international collaboration, especially where these are locally-driven and not imposed on crisis-affected people from outside.**
  This study showcases four models of INGO partnerships with local and national civil society that support, rather than constrain, locally-led crisis response. The structural and cultural changes outlined above will determine whether these or other experimental models can spread, but their success in delivering crisis response and in building on pre-existing capacities shows what is possible. All humanitarian actors are still learning how to advance localised response and so it is worthwhile to seek out, support, and learn from more such alternative models. Donor funding mechanisms that enable principled, locally-led crisis response could then support the scale-up of successful alternative CSO-INGO models of collaboration.

- **Encourage spaces for diverse local civil society leaders to shape how partnerships with INGOs can best serve vulnerable crisis-affected people.**
  INGOs developing initiatives to support locally-led crisis response should first engage with diverse CSOs to determine whether they should establish a presence at all; is there any added value to a collaboration and, if so, what is it? Additionally, INGOs should genuinely be open to opportunities to play a supporting rather than leading role as determined by local organisations and groups. From such a starting point, partnerships should build in mechanisms to ensure that a range of CSOs help design the funding mechanisms, partnerships, organisational capacity and civil society strengthening strategies that come out of the initial engagement. The Border Consortium in Myanmar, for example, evolved in a way that ensured it became primarily accountable to its diverse local partners. This incentivised it to prioritise streamlined donor-funding and reporting requirements to serve CSOs. The various forms of participation and, more importantly, leadership of local actors must be sustained in the course of any resulting collaborative programme, with local organisations and communities participating in shaping INGO country strategies and planning processes. These participatory processes should be expected and reviewed as part of the programme's monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

2. **Understand and realise the potential that locally-led crisis response and progressive partnership models have for transforming conflict sensitivity in practice.**

Investing in the decision-making power of local organisations and structures over crisis response has raised some concern over conflict sensitivity risks. The main concern is that locals are more likely linked to the conflict and will therefore choose or be pressured to distribute support unevenly in ways that exacerbate grievances. However, such concerns may not be justified in all cases. In addition, INGOs are not immune to similar risks. Cases such as that of the Start network[1] indicate that the people with the

[1] H. James (2017). START Network Launches New Framework for Localisation: A challenge to the sector to move beyond financial targets, START Network

most knowledge about the context and with the biggest stake in peace are most able to identify and manage conflict risks and distribute aid across social boundaries to exploit peacebuilding opportunities.

- **Explore ways of conducting rapid, participatory analyses of the conflict context and civil society to inform funding and partnership decisions.**
  Such analyses would help replace an assumption that local actors cannot be conflict sensitive with a genuine assessment of their capacities for conflict sensitive crisis response. Such analyses could also outline how different parts of local civil society relate to each other so a conflict-sensitive collective response can be designed. This analysis should be ongoing and build on the partnerships that are established as a result of it. By helping donors and INGOs understand the environment better, it should pave the way for more relevant, conflict sensitive partnerships with a more diverse and creative range of civil society partners. These partnerships could improve the quality of conflict analysis over time, facilitating more effective crisis response with reduced risk of harm and enhanced opportunities for peacebuilding.

- **Create incentives within the structure of partnerships and coordination mechanisms (local-national-international) to improve the representation of diverse crisis-affected women, youth and other marginalised groups.**
  Conflict reinforces societal inequalities and divisions, increasing the vulnerability and violence experienced by marginalised groups. Broad and meaningful representation in programmes and coordination mechanisms is vital to responding to the needs of all groups. Progress on representation should be visible in: the issues that partnerships and coordination mechanisms prioritise and fund (the design of aid grants); participatory conflict analysis processes and outcomes, which should highlight and prioritise the perspectives and experiences of disenfranchised groups; and the design and systematic implementation of feedback systems that hold partnerships and coordination mechanisms accountable to diverse crisis-affected women, youth and other marginalised groups; these groups' perspectives and experiences should inform how partnership and coordination mechanisms are adapted over time.

- **Fund CSOs that specifically represent and serve women, youth or other marginalised groups.**
  As well as creating incentives for CSO partners to represent marginalised groups, INGOs and donors should seek out CSO partners who specifically represent and serve these groups. In conflict-affected situations, women, youth and other marginalised groups are often disenfranchised within wider civil society initiatives. At worst, the issues they confront are instrumentalised to serve political agendas that have little in common with the marginalised groups' actual priorities and interests. Seizing opportunities to financially support CSOs that truly represent and serve women, youth and other marginalised groups within conflict contexts can reduce their vulnerability and pave the way for empowerment. For example, locally-led gender discourse could emerge if the leaders of such initiatives are women with experience in feminist organising. More research on youth-led organisations and movement is a particular gap.

- **Donors should deploy resources in a more predictable, flexible and durable way that focuses on building understanding, trust and adaptation into local-international partnerships.**
  While many INGOs see the benefits of locally-led crisis response, counter-terrorism funding rules of donor governments push them to adopt ever tighter controls on how resources are used in conflict-affected situations. This reduces the predictable flexible funding available for locally-based organisations and groups to learn, develop and adapt to volatile environments. Covering the risk and security-related costs of local partners should be a priority for donors, though this is rarely practised even in the relatively progressive partnership models in this report. Such costs should be factored in at the early stages of the procurement process. The means support to local partners' own risk and security management strategies, for example to navigate aid diversion, should be prioritised. Beyond the contracts, terms and conditions, compliance and risks however, partnership practice would benefit from a focus on accompaniment, in which a sense of long-term commitment, strong solidarity and trust, and being a critical friend are more appreciated.

3. **Strengthen the broader ecosystem of local civil society rather than just individual organisations, even if conflict dynamics limit the range of support that can be given**

Civil society space is increasingly fraught in places affected by conflict. While donors and INGOs play an important role in protecting this space by supporting civil society partners, individual partner support can come at the expense of broad civil society. CSOs representing young people and women are most likely to lose out. Providing space and more substantial resources for broad civil society could remedy some of the damage done by repression, conflict and constrained funding.

- **Seek to understand and challenge the shrinking of civil society space in conflict contexts using influence in global, regional and national policy-making forums.**
The politicisation of aid, particularly in conflict-affected situations, is one of the biggest barriers to locally-led crisis response. As well as conflict actors' efforts to restrict civil society, national governments and international donors are using more restrictive, risk-averse funding modalities with extra compliance requirements and counter-terrorism assurances. To push back against this, it is important to highlight the impacts on locally-led crisis response to donor governments. Alternative approaches to countering aid diversion and to monitoring and evaluation are needed. In the short-term, INGOs should invest in local civil society capacity to navigate the complex regulatory environment and their own risk landscapes.

- **Broaden the distribution of resources for local capacities beyond a limited selection of formalised organisations.**
Informal structures and groups, as well as formal CSOs or NNGOs, have immense capabilities in crisis response. Women's and youth organisations are more likely to be informal. Rather than focusing on pre-determined, international conceptions of 'capacity', INGOs could learn from the Local to Global Protection model. This model engaged in a rapid participatory mapping of existing local crisis response mechanisms to identify and make use of strengths already there. To avoid the replication of typical INGO structures and capacities, the form of capacity building and the wider relationship was determined by CSOs themselves. In appreciating the full eco-system of local crisis response, some models creatively overcame the administrative challenges of direct funding to informal groups; as the Joint Strategy Team illustrates, providing 'public goods' like humanitarian libraries can alleviate potential frustrations between CSOs and promote greater CSO cooperation across social cleavages.

- **Support spaces for local-to-local learning, coordination and collective action.**
While INGOs and donors will have to change their own ways of working to advance a truly progressive and locally-led aid system, local organisations and structures will be vital to catalysing these changes. Resources for local organisations and networks to convene, strategise, identify and push for the changes they need in their national aid system and beyond will be key if the localisation process itself is to be locally-led.

- **Invest early to support locally-led crisis response systems and institutions within communities.**
Long-term support of existing community systems that already lead local responses can help prepare them to cope with the rapid scale-up and influx of resources that large-scale crises entail. Conscious investments could be made to create working local partnerships as part of humanitarian preparedness. Attention should also be paid to bolstering their capacity in dealing with the rest of the humanitarian architecture so they can secure and maintain leadership over responses in their context. Early investment in these systems can be used by them to monitor and address root causes of crisis by engaging in peacebuilding work or by supporting the ability of populations to protect themselves from the effects of crisis.

- **INGOs must learn to recognise and respect when local partners are 'pushing back' against partnership arrangements, as well as against national or international policies that may limit their future independence, capacity and relationships.**
In some contexts, CSOs have the bargaining power to demand flexible, sustained funding and partnership

arrangements. INGOs and donors should take steps to understand how they can support partners' attempts to extend their leadership over crisis response. Models such as The Border Consortium, which represents and links many CSOs, boosted the collective weight of CSOs to demand simplified administrative processes. Such a model could also provide a protective barrier to INGO-CSO power imbalances by taking the administrative burden off CSOs entirely.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the humanitarian community has placed great hope in the localisation agenda and in the potential of **vulnerable crisis-affected people**[2] to more capably fulfil their own humanitarian needs. Yet localisation means different things to different people, and prospects for localisation in **conflict-affected situations**[3] raise challenging questions for **humanitarian actors**[4] and other **civil society organisations (CSOs)**[5] responding to crises. This report consolidates learning from a range of different locally-led CSO-INGO partnerships in contexts impacted by conflict to inform more nuanced conversations and action on advancing locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations.

Calls for investment in locally-led responses to crisis have emerged at a time when conventional means of addressing humanitarian needs are being overwhelmed. Increasing numbers of people are in need of humanitarian support as the human impacts of violent conflict, food insecurity and climate-related hazards increase[6]. According to Save the Children's recent report 'War on Children': "the number of children living in a conflict zone has increased by more than 75 percent from the early 1990s when it was around 200 million, to more than 357 million children in 2016 – around 1 in 6 of the world's children. 165 million of these children are affected by high intensity conflicts. Children living in such conflict-impacted areas often lack access to school and health facilities, and are more exposed to violence".[7]

The international aid system is struggling to keep pace with the growing scale and complexity of crisis situations.[8] As the UN Secretary General's report for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit 'One Humanity, Shared Responsibility' highlights: "peacekeepers, peacemakers and humanitarian workers are being deployed for longer periods and at ever higher cost, even as violent extremism and targeted attacks severely hamper their ability to provide life-saving assistance". As the aid system stretches ever thinner to cover an increasingly turbulent world, crises are more likely to miss the headlines, and go under-served.[9] With this in mind, the aid community has been looking at ways to support the immense humanitarian capacity of local CSOs and crisis-affected communities themselves, who are usually the first responders to any crisis and the most capable. Yet mainstream approaches to partnership between CSOs and international actors within the aid system frequently end up undermining local leadership and capacity. Such partnerships are often **top-down and transactional** in character, positioning CSOs as merely 'implementing partners' or service providers with little influence over the direction of interventions. National and local organisations are left feeling dissatisfied and disempowered by their partnerships with INGOs[10]. Evidence suggests that these partnership models fail to enable CSOs to effectively meet the priorities of vulnerable crisis-affected people and limit the prospects for the development of local civil society.

The locally-led partnership models, strategies and tactics explored in this paper highlight alternative, more transformational ways of working in partnership that break away from more typical top-down partnership

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[2] **Vulnerable crisis-affected people** are people impacted directly or indirectly by natural or man-made disasters including conflict. Some crisis-affected people are more vulnerable than others because of inter-related cultural and structural inequalities.

[3] **Conflict-affected situations** - region, country or sub-national area where the existing problems are caused by ongoing or recent violent conflict, and/or existing problems are associated with past violent conflict. And countries or locations where there is a significant risk that underlying tensions could, if left unaddressed, spill into violent conflict.

[4] **Humanitarian actors** are identified by their explicit adherence to humanitarian principles, and can be local, national or international in character. The four humanitarian principles that govern how humanitarians operate are **humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence**. These principles have been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and hundreds of civil society organisations working in crisis response. More than 820 organisations have signed the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Code of Conduct and the SPHERE Handbook (which brings together the Humanitarian Charter, the Protection Principles, and the Core Humanitarian Standard) both include more than the four core humanitarian principles.

[5] **Civil Society Organisation (CSO)** for the purposes of this report will refer to **local and national civil society organisations and actors only.** CSOs can be international or transnational, but we are not referring to these groups when using CSO in this report. Our narrowed definition helps to juxtapose diverse local and national civil society actors alongside INGOs.

[6] UNOCHA (2019). 'US$21.9 billion needed in 2019 as average length of humanitarian crises climbs'.

[7] Save the Children International (2018). 'The War on Children: Time to end grave violations against children in conflict', p.7.

[8] United Nations (2016). Report of the United Nations Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit: One humanity: Shared responsibility. UN General Assembly A/70/709, p. 2.

[9] European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (2017). 'Addressing "forgotten crises" in today's global context'.

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

models. The findings of this research indicate that increasing support for more locally-led models of crisis response could improve the responsiveness of the international aid system in conflict-affected situations. Such locally-led approaches have the potential to access besieged and hard-to-reach crisis-affected groups, empower vulnerable crisis-affected people and the organisations and institutions that represent them, and contribute to building the foundations for long-term resilience to future crises, while also contributing to peacebuilding and development. Greater investment is needed to pilot locally-led initiatives in more places to assess if early indicators of success have wider validity.

About Civil Society Organisations and Actors (CSOs)
Civil society organisations include community groups, women's organisations, diaspora organisations, faith-based organisations, registered charities, non-governmental organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, first responders, social movements, business associations, and coalitions, networks, and advocacy groups thereof. They can be **registered or unregistered**, with varying degrees of formality, autonomy and power. Civil society organisations and actors are identifiable by their engagement in un-coerced collective activity around common interests, purposes and values. Their outlook can be traditional, conservative, modern, or progressive, and/or inclusive or exclusive. CSOs can be international or transnational but for the purposes of this report, CSO will refer to local and national civil society organisations and actors only.

Sometimes a firm line is drawn between civil society actors and political or private sector actors, but in practice civil society actors can move fluidly between different sectors, sometimes engaging in political parties and movements or business to pursue common interests, purposes and values.[11] Similarly local and national civil society groups can assume multiple roles, have multiple objectives and engage in diverse activities that cut across humanitarian, peacebuilding, development and human rights work simultaneously. They tend not to compartmentalise relief work into its own category of response[12].

While local, national and international NGOs are part of wider civil society, they are also distinct in that they are registered entities and officially recognised for their not-for-profit, non-governmental activities. NGOs have to operate according to the rules and regulations set out for NGOs in the country(ies) in which they are registered.

The report proceeds as follows. Section one takes a fresh and critical look at localisation; rethinking what it is, why it is important, and progress in translating international localisation commitments into practice so far. It also hones in on issues that arise in discussions about accelerating localisation in conflict-affected situations. Section two presents learning from practical experiences of locally-led crisis response in Myanmar, Syria and Uganda amongst other places, consolidating insights on different locally-led partnership models, strategies and tactics. The report ends with emerging conclusions and recommendations aimed at donors and INGOs committed to advancing localisation in conflict-affected situations.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research methods: literature review, preliminary consultations/interviews, desk-based case studies, and in-depth key informant interviews in two countries: Myanmar (Yangon, Hpa-An and on the Thai/Myanmar border) and Uganda (Kampala, Arua and Yumbe), as well as remotely from

[11] M. Stephen, E. Drew, C. Ellis, and R. Nusrat (2017). 'Partnerships in Conflict: How violent conflict impacts local civil society and how international partners respond'. Oxfam International and International Alert, p. 46-47.
[12] E. Svoboda (2017). 'The anatomy of local negotiations: Humanitarian access and local organisations in Syria'. Humanitarian Policy Group, p.11; R. Antequisa & J. Corbett (2018). 'Learning from survivor and community-led crisis responses in the Philippines', Local to Global Protection.

Syria. The analysis of the findings was aided by a two-day international gathering for round table discussions.[13] The preliminary consultations/interviews helped to identify the four partnership models taken as case studies in this report. Following a desk-based review of the partnership models, the research team selected case studies from Syria and Myanmar, and conducted more in-depth research via targeted key informant interviews. These interviews explored the way the partnership model worked, how it enabled/supported locally-led crisis response and how conflict-related challenges that arose were navigated in the partnership. The research prioritised perspectives from local and national civil society partners on the day-to-day workings of their partnership model with their INGO partner(s); INGO perspectives were gathered to round out the picture of how partnership models worked.

Research participants were selected on the basis of their role leading, funding, designing, implementing and/or analysing different principled, and locally-led models of partnership between CSOs and INGOs in conflict settings. Over two thirds of the research participants worked locally or nationally; the rest worked internationally/for INGOs. Overall, we consulted sixty-six civil society actors working locally or nationally, two local/national government officials, and twenty-nine civil society actors and donors working internationally/for INGOs. Between them, contributors represented thirty-two local or national CSOs, two Southern-based INGOs, one hybrid local-international NGO[14], and fourteen INGOs. Within this report, information about organisations involved in partnerships, their locations and their activities is sometimes anonymised. This was necessary to encourage frank reflections and to minimise risk of repercussions.

Limitations

The scope of this study did not extend to interviewing crisis-affected communities being served by the partnership models we researched. With greater resources (financial and time), including communities alongside local and national civil society and INGO partners would have strengthened the quality of the findings and recommendations. It was not possible to meaningfully engage with local youth organisations as planned. This is partly a reflection of the distance between youth-led movements, which tend to be informal, and the international aid system. Nonetheless, as many local and national civil society interviewees pointed out, they are themselves crisis-affected people, living in refugee camps or in host communities.

At the same time, the study pays less attention to the role of donors in CSO-INGO partnerships, despite their obvious influence over the sector. It would be worthwhile to explore donor funding models to better understand and raise awareness of the specific incentives and pressures donors face in supporting locally-led approaches. The report's contents and recommendations are focused primarily on INGOs. This is not to deny local or national CSOs' responsibility and agency in partnerships and in the shift towards localisation. Instead, this recognises the greater responsibility borne by organisations with disproportionate power and control over resources and policy. The alternative models presented in the report can be used by both CSOs and INGOs to challenge mainstream partnership approaches. The recommendations on altering the structures and policies of the humanitarian system as a whole however, are much more relevant for INGOs.

[13] The two-day international round table meeting took place in London (3-4 December 2018). The meeting and some issues it addressed are discussed in the Oxfam-hosted 'From Poverty to Power' blog under the title: 'Localization in Aid – why isn't it happening? What to do about it?'. This blog also included a video with one participant working in Northern Kenya under the title: 'How does Localization work on the ground? Podcast with Evans Onyiego and video of his work in Northern Kenya'.

[14] This organisation defined just as NGO – neither local nor international. It had characteristics of both. See section 2 on models.

SECTION 1. RETHINKING LOCALISATION: FROM RHETORICAL COMMITMENTS TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

1.1 What is it and why is it important?

Localisation means different things to different organisations and people. For this reason, it is not uncommon for different parts of the same sector and/or organisation to act according to very different understandings, approaches and principles of localisation. For the purposes of this study, **localisation entails a process that progressively increases the leadership and authority of vulnerable crisis-affected people in determining how local, national and international (financial and technical) crisis response resources are used within their communities to address their priorities.**

This definition intentionally varies from, and seeks to query and disrupt mainstream conversations about localisation. In this definition, the **core actors in localisation are 'vulnerable crisis-affected people' rather than 'national actors'**. This focuses lines of accountability on the people most in need of assistance – the vulnerable (some crisis-affected people are more negatively impacted than others due to inter-connected, locally-specific cultural and structural inequalities). By emphasising decision-making regarding **'local, national and international resources',** the definition acknowledges how even local/national crisis response efforts can be top-down and transactional, bypassing the priorities of vulnerable crisis-affected people. These distinctions are important as "language and practice can be used implicitly to frame the conversation within particular boundaries that, at the same time, tend to reinforce rather than upend power and privilege".[15] This framing of localisation brings in many issues from debates on inclusion, accountability to affected people and the 'participation revolution' within the humanitarian sector. Finally, the term **'crisis response' rather than 'humanitarian response'** is used to indicate that vulnerable crisis-affected people often prioritise issues that don't fit into the international aid system view of urgent humanitarian priorities. For example, crisis-affected people are more likely to prioritise preventive action, livelihoods, education, peacebuilding, exclusion, psychosocial wellbeing, governance, and advocacy over more typical humanitarian needs.[16]

Localisation processes can involve a wide range of different initiatives. For example, the Start Network highlights seven dimensions of localisation: local and national actors benefit from greater access to financial resources; leadership within coordination mechanisms such as 'clusters'; organisational capacity; policy influence; visibility; equitable partnerships; and a 'participation revolution' so that affected people are directly involved in localisation.[17] Crucially, one dimension calls for 'fuller', more diverse representation of local and national civil society that reflects affected communities at large, rather than groups that have historically held the most power.

[15] L. Fast (2017). 'Upending humanitarianism. Questions emerging 'from the ground up' Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute.
[16] R. Antequisa and J. Corbett (2018), p. 3. For preventive action specifically see A. Marc, J. Salmon, et al (2018). 'Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict' United Nations - World Bank Group.
[17] S. Patel & K. Van Brabant (2017). 'The Start Fund, Start Network and Localisation: current situation and future directions', START Network, Global Mentoring Initiative, p. 12.

For the purposes of this study, we developed a **localisation spectrum** to clarify what different researchers and interviewees meant when they used the term. The spectrum enables people to think beyond a simple binary distinction between partnerships that are essentially top-down transactional service contracts and partnerships that set out to be transformational by focusing on the nuances of power and control in partnership relationships.[18] It also creates space for fresh thinking on what approaches to localisation might look like.

No localisation	Limited localisation	Partial localisation	Advanced localisation	Locally-led
No systematic engagement with vulnerable crisis-affected people and/or the local CSOs and institutions that represent them over the use of aid directed to their area. INGOs and/or NNGOs implement directly.	Vulnerable crisis-affected people and/or the local CSOs and institutions that represent them are **engaged systematically, but irregularly** in externally-framed decision-making processes regarding use of aid directed to their area.	Vulnerable crisis-affected people and/or the local CSOs and institutions that represent them are **engaged systematically and regularly** in externally-framed decision-making processes regarding use of aid directed to their area.	Vulnerable crisis-affected people and/or the local CSOs and institutions that represent them **collaboratively determine decision-making processes** regarding use of aid directed to their area with NNGOs/INGOs/donors.	Vulnerable crisis-affected people and/or the local CSOs and institutions that represent them **lead in determining the use of aid directed to their area,** with NNGOs and/or INGOs offering support where requested/invited by local actors.

For this research, international roundtable discussions and key informant interviews began by asking participants/interviewees to locate their organisation's current practice on the above localisation spectrum and then to indicate where on the spectrum their organisation aspired to be. The answers to these questions revealed a lot about organisational approaches to localisation, the gap between current practice and aspirations, approaches to organisational change in different organisational contexts, and obstacles blocking pathways to change.

Most interviewees, whether from local or national civil society or international NGOs, acknowledged that their organisational approach to localisation was not consistent. Only a handful of organisations amongst those interviewed had a coherent organisation-wide understanding, commitment and practice underpinning their approach to localisation, or locally-led engagement specifically.

Most CSOs interviewed said that in their work with INGOs and international donors, they typically have very limited scope to negotiate let alone influence the terms of partnership and the framing of how aid is to be used in their area.[19] Respondents felt that decisions about broad priorities and processes were already made by INGOs and donors before INGOs began meeting with CSOs and communities. CSOs felt advanced forms of localisation were rare, and the examples of these became the focus of our field research.

Interviewees from most INGOs, and especially multi-mandate INGOs, indicated that progress on localisation was patchy across their organisation. They acknowledged that their organisations' global strategies and policies could be articulated in transformational terms, but that their translation into practice within the wider organisational context was challenging. There was regional variation in degrees of localisation, and this was attributed to factors including donor attitudes and interests vis-a-vis the given geographic area, the character of funding, the strength of local civil society, institutionalised attitudes and cultures within the INGO/aid community, and access to the area for internationals.

[18] K. Roepstorff (2020). 'A call for critical reflection on the localisation agenda in humanitarian action', Third World Quarterly, 41:2, pp. 284-301 and J. Glennie, A. Ali, M. King, A. McKechnie and G. Rabinowitz (2012). 'Localising aid: can using local actors strengthen them?', Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 352: Results of ODI research presented in preliminary form for discussion and critical comment, p. 29

[19] This was in relation to initiatives outside those locally-led initiatives that were the focus of this study.

Differences at the sectoral level within INGO country programmes were also acknowledged. For example, development, peacebuilding or advocacy work was often seen to demonstrate more advanced localisation than humanitarian work within some multi-mandate organisations. Even if interventions were designed to serve the same communities, different teams within the organisation could be using entirely different approaches to engagement. Sometimes one team would be working with a group of local and national CSOs but using entirely different methodologies and models of partnership across different projects, some transactional top-down service contract relationships, alongside the occasional locally-led partnership.

Localisation offers an opportunity to greatly enhance the capacity of global crisis response. **This is because locally-led crisis response can deliver more relevant results, more efficiently, and sustain them over the long-term**. As an interviewee from a refugee-led community-based organisation (CBO) points out, "we realise the culture of the refugees. It's what we know, it is part of us. And then also the language that they speak is what we also speak. It makes it a little bit simpler for us to reach the communities, and change them or transform them...for an NGO...it will take a long time to speak to the people. But for us we go directly to speak to the people and we comfort them".[20] Research on protracted humanitarian crises has found that early investment in locally-led crisis response systems and institutions can help ensure that relevant, efficient and effective support is available to vulnerable people when crises strike.[21] In such cases, the need for large-scale and expensive international support is reduced and with it, the risks associated with such external interventions. However, INGOs have little immediate incentive to invest strategically in locally-led crisis response due to the nature of the aid system, in which INGOs receive humanitarian funding based largely on their ability to provide rapid support at large scale.

Additionally, the more crisis response efforts are locally-led, the greater the chance they have of reinforcing local systems and institutions that vulnerable crisis-affected people rely on, which can help to strengthen local resilience and reduce the prospect of protracted human insecurity.[22] Locally-led processes place leadership and authority in the hands of crisis-affected people and the organisations, systems and institutions that serve them. They have been shown to build on diversity within society, and can involve multiple communities, and within these communities multiple CBOs, self-help groups, and active households. Members of the Local to Global Protection initiative argue that locally-led processes should generate multiple opportunities for local leadership and authority – "this is not a hierarchical leadership model but rather **a network with many leaders at different nodes**".[23] Supporting and developing these networks can strengthen inclusive models of local governance, which serve immediate crisis-related priorities while helping lay the foundations for long-term sustainable peacebuilding and development processes. As such, locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations is not just a pragmatic choice to offer immediate crisis response. It also has long-term transformative potential.[24]

[20] Interview 3B37
[21] A. Obrecht (2014). 'De-internationalising humanitarian action: rethinking the 'global-local' relationship'. Institut de Relations Internationales et Strategiques; I. Wall & K. Hedlund (2015). 'Localisation and Locally-led Crisis Response: A Literature Review', Local to Global Protection.
[22] Wall & Hedlund (2015).
[23] Antequisa & Corbett (2018), p. 3.
[24] World Bank (2011). 'World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development'.

1.2 Progress on localisation in the humanitarian community: from commitments to (slow and limited) action

Localisation is not new to the humanitarian community.[25] The 1994 Red Cross/Red Crescent/NGO Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief set out in Principle 6 that efforts should be made to build crisis response on local capacities.[26] There is a substantial body of literature on advancing localisation, including in conflict-affected situations[27] though documents sometimes use terms other than localisation for example: survivor-led; community-driven; people-centred; participatory; inclusive.

The prominence of localisation within the humanitarian community accelerated sharply in the lead up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). The WHS outlined several global commitments to advance localisation within its 'Agenda for Humanity'. The Agenda proposed "fundamental change" for the sector and a shift in focus "from delivering aid to ending need". It highlights the importance of local leadership and authority in anticipating, preventing and responding to crisis and therefore in any strategy designed to improve the safety, dignity and ability of vulnerable crisis-affected people to thrive.[28] In its 'Core Responsibilities', the Agenda set its intentions to transform the role of local actors in crisis response, advance the inclusion of diverse local groups and strengthen local systems.[29] For example, Core Responsibility 4 emphasises the need to "Reinforce local systems: International actors should enable people to be the central drivers in building resilience and be accountable to them through consistent community engagement and ensuring their involvement in decision-making. The international community should respect, support and strengthen local leadership and capacity in crises and not put in parallel structures that may undermine it".[30]

Alongside the Agenda for Humanity, the World Humanitarian Summit also involved the launch of the 'Grand Bargain' – a set of commitments agreed by over sixty aid donors and INGOs with the intention of making humanitarian aid more efficient in order to free up additional resources that could benefit crisis-affected populations. However, the Grand Bargain proposed a more incremental shift in the status quo than that envisaged in the Agenda for Humanity. While the Grand Bargain commits to a 'participation revolution' in the aid sector, it sets a very low standard for advancing localisation. For instance, it highlights the "need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions" and committed to "ensure that, by the end of 2017, all humanitarian response plans – and strategic monitoring of them – demonstrate analysis and consideration of inputs from affected communities". Yet the Grand Bargain proposes no means for systematic inclusion of vulnerable crisis-affected people in decision-making, offers no opportunity for them to shape decision-making processes, and no guarantee of influence over crisis response decisions that will shape their lives and communities (only 'consideration of input').

When it comes to the localisation of control over aid resources, Grand Bargain commitment 2.2 seeks to "get more means into the hands of people in need" and transfer "by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs".[31] The 25% target may seem low given the "fundamental change" envisaged in the Agenda for Humanity, but bear in mind that at the time of the WHS local and national responders[32] directly received less than 0.5% of the estimated US$ 16 billion of funding

[25] I. Wall & K. Hedlund (2015).
[26] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC (1994). 'The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief'.
[27]The World Bank (2006). Community Driven Development in the Context of Conflict-Affected Countries: Challenges and Opportunities; R. Antequisa & J. Corbett (2018). 'Learning from survivor and community-led crisis responses in the Philippines', Local to Global Protection; C. Schmalenbach (2019) 'Pathways to Localisation: A framework towards locally-led humanitarian response in partnership-based action'. Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam; Conciliation Resources (2018). 'Partnership in peacebuilding: Lessons from Conciliation Resources' practice'.
[28] Agenda for Humanity (2019).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Agenda for Humanity Core Responsibilities. : https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/
[31] The Grand Bargain, Workstream 2: Localisation, Commitment 4. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-local-and-national-responders
[32] Including local and national NGOs and Red Cross/Crescent societies and local and national governments in crisis-affected countries

from government signatories to the Grand Bargain.[33] The proportion going directly to local and national civil society is actually far less than 0.5% as this figure also includes aid transferred directly to local and national governments in crisis-affected countries. In 2015, local civil society received $18 million direct funding, while local and national governments in countries affected by crises received $48 million.[34]

As we enter 2020, the noise around localisation will intensify as the sixty-one donors and aid organisations that endorsed the Grand Bargain highlight their progress towards achieving commitment 2.2. However, recent Grand Bargain progress reports indicate that localisation initiatives have not produced any substantial increase in proportions of aid being transferred to the control of local and national responders.[35] In 2018, only seven of the sixty-one Grand Bargain signatories reported that they had met or exceeded the 25% transfer target set out in the Grand Bargain. In 2019, the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report found that direct funding to local and national actors still accounted for just 3.1% of total humanitarian assistance. The vast majority of this assistance goes to national governments, leaving only 0.4% of humanitarian assistance going directly to local or national NGOs and even less for unregistered organisations or those led by women and young people, which are more likely to be informal.[36] Country-based pooled funds can be an important source of funding for local and national NGOs, though in 2019 they still received a relatively small portion of these funds – $167 million out of $701 million of total allocations.[37]

In addition to limited progress on increasing the flow of funds to local actors, progress towards Grand Bargain commitment 6, the "participation revolution" is patchy. Signatories have self-reported on specific country-level initiatives and results rather than organisation-wide shifts towards participatory or locally-led approaches.[38] This finding is echoed in our own research that found organisational approaches to localisation were highly fragmented.

Signatories to the Grand Bargain were commended in progress reports for paying attention to **gender equality and women's empowerment** under some Grand Bargain commitments. However, progress on gender under commitment 6, the participation revolution, was reportedly weak.[39] This indicates that in the instances where decision-making is more participatory, attention to the interaction between identity (gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, sexuality), power and vulnerability in the given context has not informed the design of participatory processes.

[33] C. Els (2017). 'Funding to local and national humanitarian responders: Can Grand Bargain signatories reach the 25% target by 2020?' Local to Global Protection. Note: these figures focus on direct funds from donor governments and do not take into account funding flows to national and local responders that come through multilateral agencies and INGOs.
[34] Ibid. p.2.
[35] Note: local and national responders may not directly equate to vulnerable crisis-affected people and the organisations and institutions that represent them, especially in conflict-affected situations where exclusion and aid manipulation can be part of war strategies.
[36] Development Initiatives (2019). 'Global humanitarian assistance report 2019', p. 64; L. Alkanawati (2019) 'From Syria to Sudan, women rights defenders need more than likes', Women Deliver; J. Twigg & I. Mosel (2018) 'Informality in urban crisis response', Overseas Development Institute.
[37] OCHA (2020). Global Humanitarian Overview report 2020, p. 84
[38] V. Metcalfe-Hough, W. Fenton & L. Poole (2019). Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019: Executive Summary, Overseas Development Institute, p.3.
[39] Metcalfe-Hough et al. (2019), p.3.

The importance of including women-led organisations in decision-making about crisis-response has latterly risen up the localisation agenda. For example, at the first ever African Regional Conference on efforts to "localise" International Humanitarian Aid in July 2019, one of the top priorities identified was to increase support to women-led humanitarian organisations.[40] This is an important counter-measure when women-led organisations and those focusing on gender-related or women's issues face additional barriers to funding.[41] Such organisations commonly find themselves marginalised within broader civil society networks, alliances and consortia. They are sometimes not "in a position to influence other member organisations or the agenda of the network as a whole". As a result, they are often unable to secure the backing of wider civil society for the issues and people they represent and their work becomes marginalised, "seen as separate", rather than a core part of mainstream efforts to support and empower diverse groups of vulnerable crisis-affected people.[42]

Growing interest in localisation and concerns about slow progress against commitments have sparked important discussions about obstacles to localisation. In a recent blog, the Director of International Programmes at Saferworld, Susana Klien, argues, "we [as a sector] spend a lot of time discussing the external factors limiting our work …[b]ut we are less eager to reflect on or talk about (at least openly) the learnt behaviours and institutional norms and practices that hold us back from the critical changes we should be making".[43] Deep-rooted sexist, racist and colonial attitudes are often identified as important obstacles to fundamental change in the way the aid sector works.[44] A programme director involved in a large locally-led consortium and interviewed for this study shared an example of racism in day-to-day operations:

> *"we've always found the demands of some back donors [the initial donors in a chain] for independent monitoring, we've found these demands racist...the view seemed to be that if a non-white person conducted the monitoring then it wasn't independent. We had people from other organisations. We had people from the same organisations but other geographic areas. We had checks and balances in place. We had [our staff], but with some donors there was a sense that it is not the real thing, it's not independent enough."*[45]

Another interviewee who works for a leading INGO and manages a large locally-led project noted how some international aid workers want to be seen as saviours:

> *"The other thing that comes as a major challenge is dealing sometimes with staff who come from different backgrounds. Some come... having worked in partnership but you also have those that want to do direct implementation, who want to be seen as the one on the ground."*[46]

Anecdotes like these appear throughout research on local-international partnerships. The director for advocacy at the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, Angela Bruce-Raeburn highlights how, "calling out racism…as a systemic problem of international development" has "not honestly been embraced in polite company".[47] The Executive Director of Adeso, Degan Ali, explains how "people say 'I'm a good person.' But that doesn't mean they're not racist... But [racism] is where the conversation goes making it difficult to move forward — there is defensiveness and denial".[48]

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[40] African Union – IFRC Joint Press Release. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 17 July 2019. First ever African Regional Conference on efforts to "localise" International Humanitarian Aid.
[41] N. Abu-Assab & N. Nasser-Eddin (2019). 'Gender Dynamics within Syrian Civil Society: A Research Based on Gender-Sensitivity Assessment of Syrian Civil Society Organisations', IMPACT: Civil Society Research and Development.
[42] J. Enarsson (2013). A Push and a Shift: Light Strategic Gender Review; Stephen et al (2017).
[43] S. Klien (2019). 'Bold action on the path towards localisation', Saferworld.
[44] R. Peterson & J. Lentfer (2017) 'Grassroots means no brains': How to tackle racism in the aid sector', Guardian; Wall & Hedlund (2015), p. 22.
[45] Interview 6W122
[46] Interview 1B75
[47] A. Bruce-Raeburn (2019). "Opinion: International development has a race problem".
[48] D. Ali cited in L. Cornish (2019). "Q&A: Degan Ali on the systemic racism impacting humanitarian responses", Devex.

1.3 Localisation in conflict-affected situations – a challenging priority

For many CSOs from conflict-affected countries interviewed for this research, the lack of tangible changes on the ground makes a mockery of global localisation commitments. Numerous leading CSOs in conflict-affected contexts, including several leading women's organisations, either declined an interview or expressed their weariness at being interviewed 'on localisation yet again' while **mainstream partnership practices remain entrenched in processes and values that disempower vulnerable conflict-affected people and the CSOs and institutions that represent them.**[49]

Research conducted in Myanmar by the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships consortium of INGOs found that local and national NGOs in conflict contexts were less satisfied by their partnerships with INGOs and other international agencies compared to those in natural hazard contexts, "in the natural hazard context, L/NNGOs appeared to be relatively satisfied with the partnerships with INGOs, particularly with the financial support and capacity building provided. By contrast, in conflict-affected contexts there was a greater tension between L/NNGOs and their international partners. Here, they did not feel adequately respected by international agencies for their knowledge and skills, and they voiced concerns about INGOs' practices related to operating costs and financial management".[50]

Evidence that CSOs in conflict-affected situations are treated differently to CSOs in natural hazard situations reflects a wider global debate about localisation in conflict-affected situations. Many humanitarians are struggling with localisation in conflict-affected situations, and are concerned about the implications of adopting a categorical commitment to localisation.[51] Their reservations are reflected in a caveat in the Grand Bargain localisation commitments. Signatories commit to:

> *"making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary recognising that international humanitarian actors play a vital role* ***particularly in situations of armed conflict****".*[52]

The caveat within this commitment reflects a variety of issues but it especially reflects concerns about four areas of local actors' roles: capacity, humanitarian principles, reinforcement of unequal power relations, and restricted local civil society space.

The 'capacity constraints' argument

Some international humanitarian actors justify direct implementation or top-down partnership models by insisting that there is a lack of CSO capacity in some conflict-affected situations. For example, MSF point out that, "in certain situations, local humanitarian capacity is not even available...in the context of the Diffa region in Niger, all local human resources capacity was sucked up by international actors...in other remote areas...in CAR or Yemen, where chronic poverty and under-development are prevailing...MSF does not find local actors that can even act as first responders, let alone local systems on which it can build its programmes".[53]

Yet such accounts often fly in the face of CSOs' own self-assessments. They can be underpinned by narrow conceptions of what capacity means, where embedded power dynamics highlight the 'capacity' of international organisations while downplaying that of local actors.[54] One coordinator of a national humanitarian platform questioned why CSO capacities to lead crisis response remain limited over the course of protracted crises, "INGOs are saying that LNGOs don't have capacity, but some INGOs have been working with the same partners for over 10 years. So what is the problem? … INGOs can do more to recognise the good that is already in place. And surely after 10, 20 years of working together capacities of

[49] Interview 6V41, 3V62, 6W104, 3W152, 8W314, 4P29, 3P45
[50] Christian Aid, Tearfund, CARE, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam (2019), p.15
[51] E. Schenkenberg (2016). 'The challenges of localised humanitarian aid in armed conflict'. Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors without borders.
[52] The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need. 23 May 2016. Istanbul, Turkey.
[53] E. Schenkenberg (2016), p.19
[54] V. Barbelet (2018). ' As local as possible, as international as necessary: Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action', Overseas Development Institute/Humanitarian Policy Group, p. 11.

LNGOs cannot be at the same level [as they were at the beginning of the partnership]… Also, why does it not reflect more on INGOs if after working together for so long LNGO capacity levels do not improve – as stated by INGOs?"[55]

Instead of giving up on localisation where there seems to be no or very limited local systems to support, questions need to be asked about why this is the case and what international humanitarian actors can do or stop doing to cultivate the (re)emergence of local civil society capable of leading crisis response – perhaps not recruiting the full skilled local workforce or stopping poorly conceived training. This is especially important where a crisis is likely to become protracted.

A question of principles

Some international humanitarian actors **fear that CSOs are too embedded in their conflict context to apply a principled approach to crisis response.** In conflict-affected situations, humanitarian actors' adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality is the basis on which they gain access to support vulnerable crisis-affected people. The principles serve as a form of assurance that conflict parties will not gain advantage or suffer disadvantage as humanitarians engage in crisis response. The fear is that CSOs will not or cannot work in a principled way, which could in turn impact the wider reputation of humanitarian actors and their ability to access vulnerable crisis-affected people. The argument is that: "national and local humanitarian actors face several critical challenges in adhering to the core humanitarian principles when armed conflict is taking place in their country. These may be unintentional, because of the actors' various ties or affiliations with institutions, groups and communities, or because of their deliberate choice to favour a particular geographic area or population group".[56]

This argument usefully highlights the deeply politicised context in which aid is delivered in conflict-affected situations. However, it ignores the reality that international humanitarian actors also have ties and affiliations that impact the degree to which they can work in a principled way. Complying with OECD rules and regulations on counter-terrorism can threaten a principled response.[57] In internationalised conflicts, INGOs too can unintentionally find themselves affiliated with conflict actors or misidentified as being so. Research on the Syria crisis has highlighted that, "both traditional [UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and INGOs] and non-traditional [local organisations, diaspora groups, local councils] humanitarian actors…questioned whether any aid actor in Syria was able to deliver aid while maintaining strict compliance with humanitarian principles".[58] Local, national and international humanitarian actors can all be fiercely committed to working with a principled approach, can have well-established systems to support their staff to work according to principles, and may require the help of the humanitarian community to insist on their humanitarian status despite perceptions to the contrary. As a programme coordinator from a leading national NGO in Uganda says, "as much as we're part of this community, we are still driven by those humanitarian principles".[59]

There are issues beyond the core principles of humanitarianism when delivering aid in conflict. Such aid typically represents a major resource transfer into a low-resource environment; in a conflict, there are risks that this aid transfer will be used in ways that exacerbate the drivers and impacts of violent conflict.[60] For example, conflict actors may direct aid resources towards certain groups or areas, with the aim of either rewarding supporters or punishing opponents, or to encourage movements of people in ways that support their war strategies.[61] The potential for aid to do more harm than good in conflict-affected situations is

[55] Interview 3D26
[56] E. Schenkenberg (2016).
[57] S. Gordon, A. Robinson, H. Goulding & R. Mahyub (2018). 'The impact of bank de-risking on the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis', Overseas Development Institute/Humanitarian Policy Group; D. Keen (2017). 'Syria: Playing into their hands: Regime and international roles in fuelling violence and fundamentalism in the Syrian war', Saferworld.
[58] S. Haddad and E. Svoboda (2017). 'What's the magic word? Humanitarian access and local organisations in Syria', Overseas Development Institute/Humanitarian Practice Group.
[59] Interview 2P87
[60] J. Craze (2018). 'Displacement, Access, and Conflict in South Sudan: A Longitudinal Perspective', Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility.
[61] K. Dupuy, J. Ron & A. Prakash (2016). 'Hands Off My Regime! Governments' Restrictions on Foreign Aid to Non-Governmental Organizations in Poor and Middle-Income Countries'. World Development, vol. 84, pp. 299–311.

acknowledged by the importance of the 'do no harm' norm amongst humanitarian actors and the rise of conflict-sensitive approaches to humanitarian assistance.[62]

Conflict sensitive approaches help humanitarians to **avoid inadvertently driving conflict and escalating the insecurity of crisis-affected people.**[63] They are built on three key ideas: understand the conflict context; understand the interaction between the context and proposed interventions; and act on this understanding to minimise harm and maximise good. CSOs can be as aware as international organisations when it comes to conflict sensitivity. As the leader of a women and youth focused CSO interviewed as part of this study explained, "as a national organisation, we are aware of the humanitarian principles and we always train staff about them, and even make them sign a code of conduct commitment form before they go to the communities…However, standards are not an island in themselves. So, where we see a potential cause of conflict, we raise the flag and debate about it".[64] The partnership models below have more detail on how CSOs remain conflict sensitive.

Reinforcing local power structures?

Every society has power structures that determine the level of influence and access its members have. Often, women and youth are the ones excluded from power, though exclusion is very varied and is common for people with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, or lower castes in caste systems. In conflict contexts, these groups' exclusion can be a major part of the conflict dynamics or a major determinant of vulnerability. The discriminatory ideas associated with exclusion often run deep, and there is a concern that local actors will reproduce the exclusion of these groups in their crisis response. This would be contrary to a principled humanitarian response as well as a potential conflict sensitivity risk.

In reality, international humanitarian actors also have a poor track record when it comes to challenging the exclusion of marginalised groups.[65] Humanitarian relief may reach these people, but they have very rarely been sought out to influence decision-making about a crisis response. Even in the course of this research, researchers struggled to reach youth-led organisations. Their organisations are typically more informal, lack premises, lack funding, or are led by volunteers who juggle other commitments. They often operate on the periphery of local and national NGO coordination efforts meaning their experiences and priorities are rarely well represented in aid-related strategy, planning and coordination meetings. Young people are rarely recognised as agents of change that need to be active participants in decision-making around the use of international aid intended to benefit them and their communities.[66] Many 'Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism' (P/CVE) programmes depict adolescents/youth as a threat, "young, unemployed and dangerous" while women are understood only as tools to influence male relatives at risk of 'radicalisation', or as a gateway to access community networks.[67] In some conflict contexts, the demonisation of young people and securitised responses to youth mobilisation can be a strategy used by older generations to hold onto power. Refugee-led organisations can also struggle for representation within local civil society spaces, especially where the status of displaced people is limited, rights to work are restricted and there are tensions between host and refugee communities. The same goes for women-led organisations.

For both local and international humanitarian actors, it matters who is in the room when it comes to shaping planning processes, and then contributing to those planning processes from analysis to devising response strategies and action, monitoring and adapting actions to improve their effectiveness.[68] For

[62] Africa Peace Forum (APFO), Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), International Alert and Saferworld (2014). Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding: A Resource Pack.
[63] According to Saferworld's own guidelines, a conflict sensitive approach is one that entails: An understanding of the context they operate in, especially the conflict dynamics, an understanding of the nature of their engagement and how this affects the conflict context, and vice-versa, and acting on this understanding to avoid reinforcing conflict dynamics and to capitalise on opportunities to support peace. See Saferworld (2015). 'Conflict Sensitivity: Saferworld's Approach'.
[64] Interview 6B43
[65] D. Brown, A. Donini, & P. Knox Clarke (2014). Engagement of crisis-affected people in humanitarian action', Background Paper of ALNAP's 29th Annual Meeting, 11-12 March 2014, Addis Ababa. London: ALNAP/ODI. pp 14-16.
[66] M. Stephen (2018). 'Syria crisis response – paving the way for conflict-sensitive humanitarian action', Saferworld;
[67] Gender Action for Peace and Security (2019). Prioritise Peace: challenging approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Women, Peace and Security perspective, p. 8.
[68] M. Church (2016) 'Doing things differently: Rethinking monitoring and evaluation to understand change', Saferworld.

international actors, failure to take into account the way conflict can marginalise groups within local civil society spaces can mean international humanitarian assistance fails to serve the most vulnerable and/or inadvertently increases their insecurity.

Restricted local civil society space

Conflict parties (especially states) have strong control over local organisations. In many environments, this is exercised through benign or malign bureaucratic measures (registration and monitoring procedures, judicial harassment) but in conflict situations it is more likely to escalate to intimidation (detention, physical threats and violence, killings). In general, conflict parties have less control over international organisations. This is one reason that international actors argue that localisation in armed conflict should be minimised – why rely on systems that can be shut down by conflict actors? MSF highlighted a case where a state hijacked the localisation agenda to legitimise itself and advance its conflict interests: "in March 2009, the government of Sudan did not hesitate to stop more than a dozen international NGOs from operating in the country. It did so as part of its effort to "Sudanise the humanitarian activities" under the claim that Sudanese organisations had more than enough capacity to do the job of their international colleagues. The government neglected to mention that it had also stopped three leading local Sudanese NGOs from operating. These happened to be organisations working on human rights and protection issues".[69]

In these circumstances, commitment to locally-led crisis response needs to be nuanced by a pragmatic acknowledgement that international humanitarian actors have a role to play. However, international actors can still complement and reinforce the strength of CSOs that are able to operate and can help protect and widen civil society space and facilitate constructive engagement between local/national civil society actors and governing authorities. Take the case of Syria. The conflict context in Syria forced many INGOs to rethink their approaches to local-international partnerships. Even MSF, known for its "direct action" model of engagement that "puts great emphasis on having a physical presence on the ground, including international staff, close to the epicentre of the crisis",[70] adapted its approach and is working through remote partnerships after the government refused authorisation to operate inside Syria and insecurity limited their presence in non-government-controlled areas.[71] As a result, MSF is "increasingly providing technical, clinical and resource support to Syrian medical actors...assisting facilities to continue to function, especially by supplying them with drugs and resources" with a view to seeking "deeper partnerships where the quality of care provided can be monitored and improved" in the longer term.[72]

Intense conflicts with severe restrictions on civil society space are the most challenging to operate in, but in many other conflict-affected situations, **close collaboration between local, national and international humanitarian actors is possible and could form the foundation of a strategic, locally-led and principled approach to crisis response**. For example, the British Red Cross makes the case for complementarity. Drawing on the experiences of collaboration between local, national and international components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in conflict-affected situations, it argues that, "it is the complementary combination of strengths that each component [of the Movement] can bring that ensures the ability of each individual component, and the Movement as a whole, to respond to the humanitarian needs of those affected by conflict".[73] Similarly, faith-based organisations interviewed as part of this research emphasised the value of their long-term locally-led partnerships that span local, national and international arms of their movements, especially when it came to mobilising funding rapidly to address emerging crises on the ground in hard to reach conflict-affected communities.[74]

Clearly, crisis response in conflict-affected situations is complex. Diverse local actors need to play a leading role in directing crisis response given they are best positioned to understand and navigate complexity on the

[69] E. Schenkenberg (2016), p. 17.
[70] E. Schenkenberg (2016), p.20.
[71] Medecins Sans Frontieres (2019) https://www.msf.org/syria
[72] E. Schenkenberg (2016), p.22.
[73] L. Austin & S. Chessex (2018). 'The case for complementarity: Working together within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in armed conflict and other situations of violence', British Red Cross, p.31.
[74] Interviews 7W42 and 2A163.

ground in ways that do no harm. Supporting principled, locally-led crisis response also means finding new and locally-specific models of CSO-INGO partnership that on the one hand reinforce rather than undermine the strengths of local civil society, and on the other hand recognise that pragmatically, sometimes CSOs might want or need to draw on more or less support from international humanitarians in their areas of relative expertise. In the next section, learning from different experiences of locally-led CSO-INGO partnership in different conflict-affected situations is analysed to draw out insights on supporting locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations in practice.

SECTION 2: LEARNING FROM CSO-INGO PARTNERSHIP MODELS THAT ENABLE LOCALLY-LED CRISIS RESPONSE IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

The research process identified a series of different CSO-INGO partnership models that support principled, locally-led crisis response in different conflict-affected situations. The experiences and learning from these are discussed in the following section.

Table 1 Key characteristics of the partnership models

Save the Children's RISE project (Syria)	The Border Consortium (Myanmar/Thailand)	Oxfam and The Joint Strategy Team and the Durable Peace Partnership (Myanmar)	Local to Global Protection Christian Aid (Myanmar)
Developed in response to restrictions on INGO access Project based but long-term partnership agreement Emphasis on demand-led CSO organisational capacity strengthening Piloted standardised organisational capacity assessment Use of small grants to CSOs for flexibility	Developed organically out of long-term CSO-INGO relationships Hybrid NGO with characteristics of an NNGO and INGO Entity only operating in one context Standardised reporting mechanisms developed with CSOs Provides flexible funding to CSOs	Developed as an alternative to UN coordination mechanisms and structures CSO-led consortium coordinating crisis response CSOs set the strategic direction despite not being the lead agency in consortium Administration and donor compliance managed by the INGO	Emerged as a deliberate response to top-down partnership models INGO funded; NNGO managed INGO-NNGO jointly design and tailor approach to context Appreciative enquiry to map local capacities Provision of rapid, inclusive micro-grants to self-help groups within communities Demand-led capacity strengthening to self-help groups

These models stood out because of the uniqueness of their structures. Each has evolved in response to the complexity of operating in its conflict context. All four were developed to serve vulnerable crisis-affected people, including in areas that were largely inaccessible to international humanitarian actors. The priorities and capacities of CSOs in the given context also played an important role in shaping these partnership models. One model was developed as a pilot project strengthening the capacities of CSOs inside Syria remotely. Two others evolved organically out of long-term CSO-INGO relationships and INGOs' organisation-wide commitments to supporting locally-led crisis response. The fourth emerged from an initiative explicitly intending to document and promote local perspectives on protection in major humanitarian crises. The conflict contexts of the four models and the broad structure of the partnership models are outlined below.

2.1 A project-based partnership model – Save the Children's RISE project (partial localisation)

This project-based partnership model was developed as a direct response to restrictions on INGO access to crisis-affected people inside Syria, and the sudden growth of Syrian civil society. Since the Syria conflict began in 2011, INGO access has never been country-wide or sustained, and conflict parties, particularly the government, have repeatedly used siege tactics to deny assistance to crisis-affected people.[75] At the same time, international sanctions and restrictions on how international humanitarian aid can be used inside Syria have exacerbated problems. This has escalated conflict and played into the hands of the government and to a lesser extent rebel groups in different ways – from increasing pressure on communities to accept 'protection' from conflict parties, to fuelling recruitment into armed groups.[76]

Prior to the 2011 uprisings, the Syrian government's hold on civil society meant few organisations existed,[77] but since the uprising and the start of the conflict, a broad range of formal and informal groups, organisations and networks began working at the grassroots to support and respond to the priorities of conflict-affected people in "excruciatingly difficult circumstances".[78] In many cases, these groups emerged from networks of friends, activists, professionals, and communities that were active during the uprising. Many went on to institutionalise themselves as registered CSOs. Today these groups range in size "from a handful of volunteers on a small budget to multimillion-dollar operations with hundreds of staff and volunteers. Some provide direct assistance, while others do so through remote management...the range of ideologies, affiliations and agendas is similarly diverse".[79] Syrian CSOs deliver roughly 75% of all aid delivered inside Syria, but it is estimated that they receive less than 1% of all international aid funding in the country.[80] This indicates that few Syrian CSOs have any direct control over how international aid is used inside Syria.[81]

The Save the Children RISE project set out to support these new CSOs over three years (2016-2019) as they navigated extreme demands, rapid growth, complex international aid reporting and compliance regimes, and a deeply insecure working environment. The overall goal of the project was to "support the growth of a sustainable and active civil society in Syria capable of supporting humanitarian needs in the short term, and eventually recovery and reconstruction efforts". The project had three core objectives:

1. Build technical, programmatic, management and operational skills of Syrian organisations, through holistic capacity strengthening approaches tailored to address the specific needs of partners; including through remote capacity strengthening methodologies

2. Support local organisations with access to grants as part of capacity strengthening strategies and for Syrian organisations to be able to respond to protection needs of crisis affected children

3. Enhance child protection technical capacities of Syrian organisations through development and roll out of child protection capacity strengthening resources contextualised for Syria[82]

The structure of the partnership model used for the RISE project was not dissimilar to standard CSO-INGO project-specific partnerships. CSOs were invited to apply to the INGO for grants under the project and partnerships were established and managed directly by the INGO. However, unlike more traditional crisis-response projects, partnerships were approached with a view to long-term collaboration – three years not six months. This allowed for long-term relationship building with CSOs – establishing a deeper understanding of the organisations and the realities of their operating contexts, and allowing for learning

[75] E. Svoboda (2017). 'The anatomy of local negotiations Humanitarian access and local organisations in Syria'. Humanitarian Policy Group.
[76] Keen (2017).
[77] Pre-2011 Syria was a hostile environment for civil society, groups faced shut down and their members and volunteers risked arrest or imprisonment if they were perceived to challenge the state. For more on evolution of Syrian civil society. M. Collins. (2019) 'Syrian Civil Society: A Closing Door', Christian Aid.
[78] S. Kawakibi & B. Kodmani (2013). 'Syrian Voices From PreRevolution Syria: Civil Society Against all Odds', p.5
[79] E. Svoboda (2017). The anatomy of local negotiations Humanitarian access and local organisations in Syria', Humanitarian Policy Group.
[80] Collins (2019), p.23-24.
[81] Ibid.
[82] IKEA Rise Proposal, p. 2.

and adaptation within partnerships. Furthermore, the emphasis on CSO organisational development alongside providing humanitarian assistance made RISE distinct from more traditional crisis response projects, which tend to emphasise delivery. These differences were enabled in no small part by the project funding, which came from a foundation rather than a more traditional humanitarian donor, which are typically less open to covering costs for overheads or organisational development.

In addition, partnership approaches were tailored to different sub-national contexts inside Syria through a network of three Save the Children sub-offices or hubs. Structurally, the RISE project worked with CSOs in north west, north east and south central Syria, with all hubs managed from Amman in Jordan.[83] This structure allowed for tailored, context-specific support to partner organisations, taking into account the conflict and civil society context in each sub-national area. The devolved structure also produced firewalls between hubs, which were important for the security of aid workers and crisis-affected communities involved in the project in some areas. However, the structure also meant that coordinating work across hubs was challenging as relationships and ways of working were different. As a project lead from Save the Children explained, "it's a hugely complicated project, but we're managing this complication...the challenge is how to coordinate among all these different structures...every year there's a new strategy to adapt to context."[84]

One initiative adopted in north west Syria aimed to alleviate the intense pressure on CSOs working in partnership with multiple INGOs. Save the Children worked with a handful of other INGOs (including GOAL, Mercy Corps, World Vision) to develop and use **common Organisational Capacity Assessments and Organisational Development Plans**. This worked well at a number of levels – partners were relieved to do a single assessment rather than multiple versions with each INGO; between them, the INGOs offered different organisational capacity development support in response to CSOs' requests; and the process reduced the risk of duplicate trainings that might otherwise have diverted CSOs away from responding to the crisis. Several CSOs from north west and south central Syria went on to adapt the Organisational Capacity Assessment tool to monitor their own organisational development over time, which helped them to demonstrate their competencies to prospective donors, although this was primarily a practice adopted by the bigger and more ambitious NGOs.[85]

Overall, the RISE project contributed to strengthening a series of CSOs at an organisational level, enabling them to better fulfil their aspirations. Some have grown in independence and scope to the extent that they are now looking at working as Southern INGOs (SINGOs) in other conflict-affected crisis situations.

2.2. A three-layered partnership model – The Border Consortium's organisation-wide approach to locally-led crisis response (advanced localisation)

Between 1949 and 2012 the Government of Myanmar (GoM) and an ethnic armed organisation called the Karen National Union (KNU) engaged in an armed conflict across south east Myanmar.[86] The conflict in the south east drove significant displacement, and in 2005 the number of refugees that had fled over the border into Thailand peaked at 150,000.[87] Throughout this period, Myanmar's military governments restricted access for international aid workers to the south east of Myanmar. Even in the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, when it became clear that tens of thousands of people in the south east had been killed or were missing, and hundreds of thousands more were traumatised and at risk from flooding, international aid workers were initially denied access into Myanmar.[88] Restrictions on access to the south

[83] Interview with 6G13.
[84] Interview with 3C12.
[85] Interview with 3S22
[86] Numerous other ethnic armed organisations were also active across the south east, and some remain actively engaged in armed conflict with the GoM in parts of the south east today. K. Jolliffe. (2018). 'Security, justice and governance in south east Myanmar: a knowledge, attitudes and practices survey in Karen ceasefire areas', Saferworld
[87] The Border Consortium (2019). History of the Border.
[88] The New Humanitarian (2008). Offers of help face logistics and visa hurdles'.

east only began to lift as Myanmar began tentative steps towards democracy and the GoM and KNU became parties to the National Ceasefire Agreement in 2015.

In this context of shifting access for international humanitarians in south east Myanmar, The Border Consortium (TBC) emerged in 1984 as a south east Myanmar-focused NGO based in Thailand. It emerged from the work of a consortium of INGOs supporting people impacted by the conflict. It grew into an important partner to CSOs based in the Thai-Myanmar border areas serving vulnerable crisis-affected people displaced by conflict. **TBC's three-layered partnership model represents an entirely different approach to structuring CSO-INGO partnerships, and many of its features enable principled, locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected situations.** Essentially, TBC sits in the middle of a three-layered partnership structure – it is the interface organisation between a large coalition of CSOs and a wider group of INGOs. Over time, it has developed into a hybrid NGO in its own right with characteristics of both an international and a local NGO.

On the one hand, it is an INGO registered in the UK with headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, with a membership of nine INGOs, at least four of which are represented on the board. Executive Directors are international and attuned to the ways of working of the international aid system. Yet TBC also has many characteristics that are more typical of local and national NGOs. It works only in the Thai-Myanmar border areas, and is deeply aware of the shifting conflict context and actors involved as a result. Additionally, the majority of the staff are local employees with backgrounds that, on the whole, reflect the populations that TBC works with including Karen/Kayin, Karenni/Kayah, Burman, Shan, Thai, amongst others. Executive Directors are also based locally and have served for decades while the wider organisation has built and maintained long-term partnerships with CSOs having supported them for decades. While it is not uncommon for INGOs to work in consortia, especially in conflict-affected situations where pooling resources and expertise is helpful, the long-term character of this consortium and its organic evolution into a hybrid NGO make it an interesting model. The model could be considered when devising strategies for principled, locally-led crisis response in conflict-affected contexts where access for international humanitarian actors is variable.

Like other consortium models of partnership, the three-layered TBC model helps alleviate the pressure on individual CSOs to manage multiple INGO relationships and requirements that often distract from the core frontline relief work. It also helps mitigate the impacts of the usual power imbalance between local CSOs and INGOs by organising the CSOs together to pool their legitimacy and leverage. As a long-term partner to local organisations, TBC has **collaboratively evolved standard reporting mechanisms with partners that enable TBC to respond to donor reporting requirements without overburdening CSO staff.** As a TBC director explained, "we're managing the modalities: the needs assessment procedures, monitoring procedures, impact assessment procedures are standardised and they've been developed collaboratively based on experience".[89]

TBC's hybridity and its long-term partnerships with CSOs position it well to find creative ways to support CSOs when projectised institutional donor grants do not cover the wider costs of sustained crisis response. For example, not all donors allow sufficient budget to cover INGO and CSO contingency, security and risk management costs where they work in conflict-affected situations, and where they do, not all international organisations pass this on to their local partners.[90] Through close collaboration with local partners and international donors, TBC passes funding on to partners for these costs where it is available and draws on flexible funding from private sources to supplement where restricted funding falls short. As a locally-rooted NGO and long-term partner of CSOs, TBC is accountable to its local partners, it cannot ignore community priorities and the realities that partners face, but as a registered INGO it is also careful to work according to international donor rules and regulations.

[89] Interview 5W122
[90] A. Stoddard (2019), p.25

2.3 A CSO-led consortium-based partnership model – the Joint Strategy Team and the Durable Peace Partnership consortium in Kachin, northern Myanmar (advanced)

This partnership model evolved organically in response to the conflict-driven humanitarian crisis in Kachin, northern Myanmar. CSOs grew in size and strength rapidly and individually, and then collectively once they formed the Joint Strategy Team (JST) following long-term and flexible support from Oxfam Novib. One of the leading members of the JST, Metta, had worked together with Oxfam Novib for 15-20 years prior to the current consortium-based partnership.[91] JST member organisations play a leading role in directing international humanitarian assistance to areas of Kachin that are inaccessible to international humanitarian actors.

In June 2011, the 17-year old ceasefire agreement between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Government of Myanmar broke down. Well over 100,000 people were displaced[92] as the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's army) carried out offensives in KIO-controlled territory.[93] Kachin CSOs formed working groups to coordinate their response, assuming that people would only be displaced for a short time. However, it soon became clear that the conflict would continue and the crisis would be protracted. UN agencies got involved a year into the crisis, but humanitarian access for internationals was restricted by the Government of Myanmar. International humanitarian actors quickly realised that they would need to work with CSOs to respond in a principled manner serving the breadth of vulnerable crisis-affected people.[94]

The Joint Strategy Team (JST) emerged in 2011 and served as an informal platform amongst Kachin CSOs to coordinate their humanitarian responses. They conducted joint assessments and coordinated their operations on the ground. With the arrival of the UN and its humanitarian coordination structures, crisis response efforts became increasingly donor-driven. By 2013, JST members decided to work at a more strategic level, reaching beyond their original operational focus to establish a locally-led and comprehensive humanitarian strategy. To achieve this, they set out to promote local advocacy and more systematic resource sharing amongst the CSOs.[95]

Having benefitted initially from modest and very flexible funding from Oxfam Novib, the JST emerged as an influential locally-led and strategic platform that united nine different Kachin CSOs around a common strategy for crisis response. The shared experience of JST members in dealing with the international community helped to unify the group and was reflected in the stance of their strategy. Today the **work of the platform is financed in part by the EU-funded Durable Peace Consortium,** which includes several INGOs and JST member organisations. CSOs cannot lead the consortium under EU rules, however CSO and INGO consortium members agreed that the consortium's strategic direction comes from the JST, while the administration of the grant is carried out by Oxfam, the lead agency in the consortium and a long-term supporter of the JST. As the Consortium Manager at Oxfam explained, "Oxfam has the contractual responsibility, legally, whilst moral leadership is with JST members. DPP is a EUR 12 million programme, 20 million over the full seven years, so there are risks there...donors come to you [as contract lead] with questions. Internally also, our funding team, our auditors if there are ineligible costs. But I say to them this is the price of coordinating only, and not having full control".[96] This approach reflects Oxfam Myanmar's commitment to localisation, "strategically as Oxfam, we want to head to strong localisation [on the spectrum] even if it is not perfect yet".[97]

[91] Interview 5A57
[92] A. South (2018). 'Protecting civilians in the Kachin borderlands, Myanmar: Key threats and local responses', Humanitarian Practice Group Working Paper.
[93] K. Joliffe and A. South (2014). 'Ceasefires and durable solutions in Myanmar: a lessons learned review', UNHCR Policy Evaluation and Development Service, Research paper number 271.
[94] Interview 2V109
[95] Interview 8W104
[96] Interview 7W55.
[97] Interview 2A58.

2.4 Survivor and community-led crisis responses – Start network and Christian Aid pilots in north east and north west Myanmar (locally-led)

The Local to Global Protection (L2GP) Initiative's model to supporting locally-led crisis response emerged from some years of action-research with a range of local, national, and international NGOs in different contexts including Sudan, Palestine and the Philippines. Some of this action-research took the form of pilot projects as part of Christian Aid's 'Linking Preparedness Response and Resilience' (LPRR) project. In Myanmar, these pilots supported four organisations, two from north west Myanmar (Rakhine State) and two from south east Myanmar (Kayah and Kayin States). Rakhine State in particular was in the midst of a severe and complex political and humanitarian crisis in which largely Muslim Rohingya groups were being displaced in large numbers by the military that was moving into and often destroying settlements in the region.[98]

The L2GP approach to enabling community-led crisis response has four components, which are adapted and interpreted in each context: 1) rapid appreciative enquiry and community mobilisation in which INGOs and NNGOs collaboratively map existing crisis response mechanisms, however informal 2) rapid, inclusive micro-granting provided at scale 3) capacity strengthening based on organisational development and demands of NNGOs and CBOs 4) facilitating coordination systems and networks designed and led by local civil society.

The pilot commenced following co-design and training workshops. These workshops introduced the general approach while helping each NNGO identify its target area (typically between five and fifteen villages/camps) and design its own adaptation of the approach being tested. Next, each NNGO was given $10,000 by Christian Aid to cover all management and operational costs of its pilots. With the funds, the NNGO managed emergency micro-grant schemes for local CBOs as well as for established and new informal self-help groups. To make communities aware of the resources available, each NNGO held community-level meetings and distributed leaflets to explain their approach.

With control over the implementation of the schemes and the distribution of the micro grants, the NNGOs were able to respond to demand rapidly, efficiently and in a more targeted way. CBOs and self-help groups highlighted that their superior knowledge in procuring goods and services quickly and at a good price meant that they were better placed than INGOs to control the funds. Yet the absence of institutional procedures such as needs assessments also played an important role in reducing delays and costs of the approach. Aside from the short-term operational advantages of the approach, communities making use of the grants reported longer-term benefits, such as enhanced social cohesion and elements of psychosocial recovery, both of which could support better preparedness for crises in future. Such impacts were commonly attributed to the collective nature of the micro-grants, which were afforded at a community or CBO level rather than household level. As a result, the grants helped instil a spirit of collective and inclusive self-help.

NNGOs and CBOs were inclusive in how they distributed and used the grants. The groups that used the micro-grants were almost totally comprised of people often marginalised, including women-headed households, people who are illiterate, and people with disabilities. The grants proved especially empowering to women, who either led or were predominant in most cases, though the reasons for this remain unclear. Additionally, the grants were particularly able to support informal, unregistered groups that struggle to attain INGO funding. The initial co-design workshop specified the importance of involving a wide array of individuals and groups from different backgrounds in order to direct support in ways that do not simply reinforce hierarchical, male-dominated power systems.

[98] Human Rights Watch (2019). 'Rohingya Crisis'.

The main challenges faced by the approach stemmed from the inbuilt, externally-led ways of working of both the INGOs and NNGOs involved, which were often challenged by the approach. As the approach entails a shift in power, resources and control, it sometimes encountered resistance. In this regard, Christian Aid was careful to build its own confidence first by testing the approach with pilots with existing partners and flexible funding first, before using 'post-pilot' learning and re-design workshops to harvest lessons, understand the approach and see the value of scaling up the approach.

2.5 Reflections on the four partnership models

The four partnership models outlined above all piloted longer-term approaches to partnership and included (to different degrees) flexible funding for crisis response activities via sub-contracts, small grants, cash transfers or micro-grants and support for CSO organisational development. The flexible financing mechanisms recognise that people impacted by crisis prioritise a range of issues that do not always fit into what the international aid system recognises as humanitarian priorities. The focus on flexible funds for organisational development addressed a widely critiqued shortfall of projectised partnership approaches, which focus capacity building resources on equipping CSOs to deliver project objectives only. All four models also provided vital support to CSOs in areas that are traditionally more difficult to fund, including contingency funding, security and risk management, and CSO leadership and networking (see more detail in Section 3).

Three of the four models emerged out of INGO efforts to support principled, locally-led crisis response in areas where conflict actors sought to manipulate aid by restricting INGO access to vulnerable crisis-affected people. Despite this, **all four models could equally be adapted for use in more accessible conflict-affected areas.** For example, **the three-layered TBC partnership model if replicated in a context-specific way elsewhere has the potential to transform the role of INGOs in conflict-affected situations**. This could include scaling-back the in-country presence of INGOs, which could substantially reduce transaction costs of crisis response in conflict-affected situations, particularly those where security costs for INGO offices and large numbers of international staff based in-country take large proportions of aid budgets. In addition, all four partnership models **incorporate strategies and tactics designed to minimise the burden of international grant management on CSOs**. Importantly, the means of doing this were determined through processes of joint CSO-INGO planning. As the Oxfam DPP consortium manager explained, "we [Oxfam] offered them [national organisations] the opportunity to lead the consortium and to line manage the consortium manager, and to chair meetings, but they said they want Oxfam to provide the coordination, including from a contractual point of view. We are trying to find the right balance".[99]

A distinct difference emerged between locally-led partnership models that were established as part of a specific project/programme and those from an organisational approach to partnership. One INGO representative explained how the "ideas and practicalities of local humanitarian leadership amongst new staff, supporting partners and other [CSOs]...was initially underestimated." They also noted that, "[CSOs] they work with are often also working on sub-contracts for other departments within [an INGO] or for other INGOs. This can be confusing for [CSO staff] who are engaged in two different forms of working relationship within the same organisation".[100]

[99] Interview 8A53.
[100] INGO Mid-term evaluation.

SECTION 3: LEARNING FROM STRATEGIES AND TACTICS USED TO ADDRESS COMMON OBSTACLES TO LOCALLY-LED CRISIS RESPONSE

As well as the partnership models highlighted above, the research interviews highlighted strategies and tactics useful in overcoming common obstacles to locally-led crisis response in conflict situations. Sometimes these strategies and tactics were used and worked well, in others their absence was felt. This section summarises the four strategies and tactics most highlighted in interviews: strengthening civil society rather than individual partners; enabling flexibility and adaptiveness; building trust; and responsible risk-sharing.

3.1 Strengthening civil society, not just individual CSOs

The Joint Strategy Team (JST) in Kachin, Myanmar is a joint endeavour of nine CSOs with the aim to coordinate humanitarian operations and advocacy work. Following an intense experience of working with large-scale international aid following 2008's Cyclone Nargis, the members made a conscious decision to join together and offer support on improved crisis response to local civil society as a whole. Oxfam Novib, as well as another organisation called MANGO, helped them to adapt to crisis response by providing institutional and staff capacity building (including human resource and financial management), creating a strategic framework for crisis response, and developing crisis response mechanisms.[101] Now, JST members have "amongst ourselves come up with a plan for a humanitarian study centre. We invite experts and we learn together… We want to become a school, but in the meantime it is a study centre…we have two or three different types of courses, some of them are very basic, another is mid-level manager, and also humanitarian diplomacy and negotiation for senior level."[102] This strategy, to provide a humanitarian 'public good' that all local organisations can benefit from, is one way that INGO-CSOs collaboration can kickstart mutual CSO support and strengthen localised crisis response.

The JST ways of working have also had unanticipated peacebuilding effects in the midst of conflict. By working together on the JST, relations between diverse CSOs operating in Kachin have improved. A recent study that looked at the JST's evolution in the midst of armed conflict noted that working together "also seems to have improved Catholic-Baptist relations with differences continuing but being managed." [103] With the JST's plans for wider civil society strengthening via the study centre/school, there is scope for further peacebuilding dividends to emerge if CSO-CSO collaboration is enabled to spread further.

Where restrictions on civil society space are part of an armed conflict dynamic, this strategy of investing in civil society, not just individual CSOs, can be risky. In some regions of Syria, avoiding networks and associations is an important part of CSO security strategies. However, Save the Children's RISE project worked with individual organisations but had positive effects beyond them, resulting in a standardised approach to child protection – "all [RISE] partners have adopted a community-based approach to child protection…relating with other organisations and institutions at the local level (schools, local authorities and child protection related services, local and international NGOs). This ensures that the community is involved in finding responses to child protection issues, not only service-providing partners, creating local systems and networks more likely to be sustainable in the long-term; and eventually affecting the way the local system understands and responds to individual cases."[104] This did not happen quickly or easily. It took time for the Save the Children team to get to know the range of CSO partners, and develop a role as a

[101] Interview 2A108
[102] Interview 5A106
[103] M. Stephen et al (2017). 'Partnerships in Conflict: How violent conflict impacts local civil society and how international partners respond', International Alert/Oxfam.
[104] G. Sgobaro & S. Tawfiq Qasmieh (2019). 'Outcome Harvesting Report', RISE/IKEA Remote Capacity Strengthening in Syria for Better Child Protection, p.18.

connector between them. The CSOs differed in many ways, something that is inevitable when trying to work with a diversity of organisations. The first peer learning events came over two years into the project.[105]

Looking at civil society broadly takes in organisations of different size and formalisation. Oxfam Novib's Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) project in Bangladesh and Uganda included small CBOs of 5-15 people, and the experience of doing this brought several useful lessons. The project aimed to support the capacity of CSOs, promote their voice in defining the country's humanitarian agenda, and boost their influence on donors' and INGOs' localisation policies and practices. It worked through providing mutually-reinforcing grants for crisis-response, organisational development and civil society strengthening.

A CSO partner shared their appreciation for the accompaniment process: [The Humanitarian Response Grant Facility] "Oxfam walks with a partner...from the period when we were learning, until today when we can implement independently…You see organisations that started with limited budgets are now growing and it also helps small local and national organisations obtain operational space. We know very well in the settlements, local organisations in humanitarian have credible work, but they are not recognised and they are not directly trusted with funds".[106] However, in practice, it was larger CSOs that were better at securing grants from the facility. ELNHA evaluators found that: "the HRGF mechanism and/or guidance could better account for the smaller [CSOs]….there is scope to explore mechanisms that would empower smaller [CSOs] …who don't have financial resources to retain the necessary staff capacity for writing strong proposals." In Uganda "there is a large group of small CBOs (of 5-15 staff) involved in the project. A [funding] mechanism for these actors would need to involve smaller grants, simpler proposal writing and reporting processes, and support for creating and working in consortiums".[107] Crisis response grants that do not cater to a breadth of CSOs risk driving frustration and tension between CSOs, inadvertently marginalising small organisations and the crisis-affected people they represent, and recreating top-down transactional partnership models between larger and smaller CSOs. ELNHA evaluators highlighted that "[t]his is a particular risk in Bangladesh where supported partners expressed the desire to *deliver their responses through* the LNNGOs and CBOs."[108] This would mean success in localising to organisations, but at the expense of empowering vulnerable crisis-affected people. In conflict-affected situations, the risks could be even greater.

3.2 Enabling flexible and adaptive programming

In northern Uganda's BidiBidi refugee settlement, Caritas Arua and Caritas Uganda were among the first responders working with South Sudanese refugees as they arrived across the border. The organisations supported refugees "with tools and vegetable seeds… so that they were able to start cultivating small kitchen-gardens". When "there was conflict over the available natural resources – refugees were cutting trees … from the gardens of the host communities" they responded by setting up initiatives to encourage "peaceful co-existence among refugees and host communities in Bidibidi refugee settlement. 140 peace committees were formed". [109] The organisations were guided in their response by their long history and deep understanding of the refugee and host communities. Their staff acknowledged that much of their ability to respond flexibly stemmed from their access to public donations received through church communities.[110] This enabled them to address priorities, like peacebuilding, that do not fit into humanitarian action as defined by the international humanitarian system.

[105] StC Sweden staff member observation, 2020.
[106] Interview with 7B46
[107] Oxfam. (2019), p.8-9.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Interview 4B16
[110] Note, while these funds may not be restricted in terms of reaching beyond narrow humanitarian priorities defined by the international humanitarian system, they are restricted in other ways, including by the teachings of the specific faith-based communities concerned. For example, there can be restrictions around approaches to supporting issues relating to gender roles and relations, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing, or addressing the priorities of vulnerable crisis-affected people from sexual and gender minorities.

This research has shown that significant context changes are a real obstacle to INGO-CSO collaboration. Donor and INGO rules on adjusting activities were reported to be light, but bigger changes like shifting the geographic area of operation were major bureaucratic processes even though clearly-explained changes due to contextual shifts were generally accepted by INGOs and donors. As the director of a small-medium sized CSO explained, "if we can't work in [a certain area], then there needs to be a termination [of the partnership agreement]. [We] can't do something differently before closing the previous agreement."[111] Such mandatory processes took a lot of time out from frontline work, especially for smaller CSOs.[112] Similarly, CSO access to emergency contingency funds is considered underdeveloped by INGO and CSO respondents alike. The Oxfam ELNHA team said that even for leading CSOs in northern Uganda "their reserves can't handle the simplest of emergencies. We are trying to advocate for a civil society basket fund for this country. If it could be established for local and national actors to tap into."[113] Conflict-affected contexts are particularly marked by volatility so reserves and contingency funds are important for CSOs to manage risk and operate in conflict.

3.3 Trust = speed + scale: supporting CSO security management strategies and tactics

Most of the locally-led CSO-INGO partnership models explored as part of this research evolved out of long-term relationships and collaboration underpinned by mutual trust. Many of the partnership models had evolved over a decade, sometimes several decades, and they were strategic in character. Even where contracts between CSOs and INGOs involved sub-contracting-style arrangements focused around service delivery, the long-term strategic partnership between CSO and INGO meant CSOs enjoyed a good deal of influence over the work conducted. As a project coordinator from a leading NNGO in Uganda explained, "Consortiums are a better arrangement compared to sub-contracting. Nevertheless, sub-contracting is better, for example, where we have stayed with [the INGO] for a longer period of time...because we know one another a little better. Because they listen, they know that we are the ones who are actually scoring the goal on the ground."[114]

This research re-affirms previous findings that effective CSO-INGO partnerships in conflict-affected situations rely on long-term relationships, good communication, mutual understanding, respect and trust.[115] Studies that look at CSO-INGO partnerships across conflict-affected situations highlight that "the level of trust and communication between partners – specifically for local partners to be able to discuss, and not hide, challenges and problems encountered during implementation – is an important factor in successful partnerships that enable access".[116]

One of the partnership models explored in this study set out to support locally-led crisis response, but struggled with a lack of well-established trusting relationships. This restricted the speed and scale of the consortium's crisis response on the ground. A consortium of large INGOs set out to work collaboratively with a diverse group of CSOs. The plan was that after joint inception, the INGOs would release a series of grants to CSOs over several years. One of the consortium partners had pre-existing relationships in some of the programme areas, but others did not. With just a six-month inception period for the project, INGOs in the consortium struggled even to understand the context, reach out to prospective partners and build good communication and trust, let alone carry out the planned joint inception for the initiative. When the consortium put out their first call for proposals to CSOs, they failed to communicate the tightly restricted terms of the first grants. Over 60 CSOs applied for funding, but only nine were eligible. This created a wave of disillusionment among prospective CSO partners. The second call for proposals had more open and

[111] Interview with 5S13.
[112] Interview with 2C36.
[113] Interview with 2C36.
[114] Interview 5D88
[115] S. Pavanello with L. Fast & E. Svoboda (2018). 'Fostering local partnerships in remote management and high-threat settings: Emerging lessons from child protection programming in Syria', Humanitarian Policy Group; A. Stoddard, M. Czwarno & L. Hamsik (2019). 'NGOs and risk-managing uncertainty in local-international partnerships', Interaction/Humanitarian Outcomes, p.39.
[116] K. Haver & W. Carter (2016). 'What It Takes: Principled pragmatism to enable access and quality humanitarian aid in insecure environments', Humanitarian Outcomes; Save the Children (2019). 'Summarizing lessons learned of the IKEA funded programme RISE', internal document.

inclusive terms, but just over 20 applications were received; many leading CSOs chose not to apply. While significant learning was gathered from these experiences to inform the third round, the lack of trust at the heart of the project had seriously restricted the reach of the INGO consortium into the conflict-affected area, limited the pace and scale of the response, and set back the development of collaborative relationships.[117]

3.4 Transfer of risk and responsible partnering

National aid workers and CSOs often take on a disproportionate level of the security risk involved in operating in conflict-affected areas.[118] CSO partners commented that this risk is not typically discussed or reflected in partnership agreements. CSO interviewees said that typical unmet security needs are: equipment (safe vehicles, satellite phones, access to secure servers); organisational development on security (security strategies and policies, staff training on mine awareness, psycho-social support to help staff and volunteers manage the stress of their work); and contingency funds to cover everything from relocating staff (or whole offices) that are at risk to supporting families of staff members who are ill, injured, or killed. There is often uncertainty within INGOs about how to cover such costs, linked to ambiguous donor policy on spending for these items.[119] Interaction notes that "unlike fiduciary matters" there is "no strong line of accountability on security matters or repercussions for bad practice".[120] This leads to unequal treatment that erodes trust between national aid workers/CSOs and their international counterparts.[121]

The transfer of security risks to CSOs is most typically observed in top-down transactional partnership approaches with limited engagement, particularly not face-to-face.[122] An obvious conclusion is to have closer engagement, and it is notable that several interviewees said they were not engaging with their CSO partners on their approaches to security and wanted to explore further.[123] Others mentioned measures they have taken to advance security collaboration. Some INGOs have added security management questions into their partner assessments. However, these assessments are carried out at the start of a CSO-INGO partnership and are rarely revisited even if security conditions change.[124] As part of the RISE project, Save the Children developed a list of responsible partnering actions that ranged from capacity building on humanitarian principles, to psychosocial support for CSO staff, to HR policies that discourage 'headhunting' from CSO staff to Save the Children. Some of the piloted actions have been successful, but there has been no official policy change on any of these things so far. One INGO technical advisor who had been through a similar process articulated their frustration, "it's time to do something in practice and not just have a document in the drawer".[125]

[117] Interviews 3A72 and 3A147 and 4W96.
[118] C. Wille & L. Fast (2013). 'Security Facts for Humanitarian Aid Agencies. Shifting patterns in security incidents affecting humanitarian aid workers and agencies: An analysis of fifteen years of data (1996-2010)'. Insecurity Insight.
[119] Pavanello et al (2018).
[120] Ibid.
[121] Stephen et al (2017), p.18, 38; Stoddard et al (2019).
[122] Stoddard et al (2019), p.30-31.
[123] Interview 5P69
[124] Stoddard et al (2019), p.32. At least one donor now requires their INGO grantees and each sub grantee to submit security plans with project proposals
[125] Interview 3C45.

Clearly, the realm of risk and security is one of the least-developed realms of CSO-INGO partnerships for localisation in conflict-affected areas. Even with interviewees drawing heavily from innovative collaborative partnerships, most interviewees indicated that they struggle to find ways to fund frontline CSOs' security costs. However, the research did reveal some interesting 'work-arounds'. INGOs that had developed a deep understanding of a conflict context and its operational risks as well as strong trust with CSO partners, felt able to draw on more flexible funding sources to cover CSO security-related costs. Flexible funding came from Trusts and Foundations or other private channels. These flexible funds were often used in parallel with institutional donor funded initiatives.[126] In Syria, the RISE project adopted a devolved and multi-layered governance structure. This helped to enable responsiveness to frontline CSO needs including security needs. It also helped to insulate and protect information concerning frontline CSOs' activities. The devolved, multi-layered design consisted of management by three separate Save the Children hubs each focused on a different region, and under these further layers of management between the INGO and frontline CSOs.[127]

[126] Interview 8W126; Interview 5K43; Interview 4G19.
[127] Interview 8G14.