

ACCELERATING LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

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



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Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships consortium

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Front cover photo:

Communities come together to rebuild lives after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal.

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List of Acronyms

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
ECHO	European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department
HR	Human resources
INGO	International NGO
L/NNGO	Local and National NGOs
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UN	United Nations

Suggested reference:

Tearfund, Christian Aid, 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 Nepal*.

Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships* programme – a multi-agency consortium programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019) – to establish what operational elements of partnerships between local, national and international NGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action.

The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches. In-depth consultations were conducted in three locations across Nepal to reach a varied sample of local and national actors: Kathmandu, Dhading and surrounding districts, and Dhanusa and surrounding districts. In total, 88 NGOs were consulted for this research in Nepal; 88% of which were local or national NGOs.

The findings reflect experiences from a rich diversity of local and national NGOs in Nepal and provide valuable insights that can assist humanitarian organisations in ensuring partnership practices accelerate localisation of humanitarian action. Findings are also relevant for those funding humanitarian response, in particular signatories of the Grand Bargain.

Local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) in Nepal believe their own organisations have only limited influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and United Nations (UN) agencies. Partnerships, while not perceived as equitable, are still seen by the majority as instrumental in meeting the needs of crisis-affected people in disaster response operation.

The six core organisational capabilities important for effective partnerships in Nepal ranked highest by research participants were: project design, planning and management; financial management and reporting; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); human resources (HR) management; advocacy; and fundraising. Examples of partnership practices which are most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the report with relation to each of these six core organisational capabilities. Core values and principles highlighted as the most important for partnerships by research participants were: shared commitments to humanitarian programme quality, humanitarian principles, and accountability to affected populations. Trust and respect were voiced as critical to partnerships and many of the examples of partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation reflect a lack of these values.

National and local NGOs should continue to play an important leadership role in HR management and advocacy in partnerships, while INGOs can make the most important contribution to partnerships by supporting L/NNGOs with fundraising and technical expertise. Evidence suggests longer-term partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs reflect partnership practices most conducive to localisation. NGO and civil society organisations in Nepal will also need to align their operating models with new Government of Nepal legislation and the changes that a new Government structure may result in.

Ten key recommendations emerged from the research including: jointly review research findings and recommendations; identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships; review partnership agreements; assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors; assess capacity building skills of international actors; support organisational / policy development; invest in disaster preparedness; hold frank discussions on direct access to funding; support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies; and support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable.

The *Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships* consortium members will be testing these recommendations in a pilot phase; learning from which will inform a Localisation Framework for Nepal and a global Pathways to Localisation report. The consortium are keen to hear from organisations and agencies with feedback or learning from their own experiences of implementing these recommendations.

Introduction

1.1 Background

The essential role of local and national actors in humanitarian response has long been upheld in the humanitarian sector's key standards and codes, such as the Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, Sphere standards, and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). In recent years, the *Missed Opportunities* series of reports¹ has documented partnership experience with local actors in several humanitarian response programmes, providing insightful positions in support of the localisation of aid and humanitarian partnership. More recently, commitments to increase direct funding to, and improve partnerships with, local and national actors were predominant themes in discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, and in the Agenda for Humanity² (2016), the Grand Bargain³ (2016), and the Charter for Change⁴ (2015).

Since the WHS, hundreds of reports have been written on the subject of localisation – but very few on partnership practices in relation to localisation. Fewer still on the operational or practical partnership practices which can make up a partnership model. This research primarily focused on the capacities, resources and added value of each partner in humanitarian partnerships, rather than the relationship between partners. Partnership relationships have been studied in the *Missed Opportunities* series of research reports. Therefore, the key research question explored in this research is:

What operational elements of partnerships between NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster (effective, relevant, efficient, etc.) localisation of humanitarian action?

The research was commissioned by the *Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships* programme, a multi-agency consortium – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund – programme funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) over two years (2017-2019).

The research was conducted by an independent consultancy, Integrated Risk Management Associates (IRMA) through national researchers and guided by national steering committees and existing NGO Forums in the four programme focus countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan. *Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships* consortium agencies have committed to piloting the recommendations that have been identified in the country-specific research reports.

This report summarises the key findings and recommendations from the *Nepal Country Report: Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships* (November 2018). The recommendations, while not necessarily relevant for all actors, nevertheless provide a guide that can help agencies identify and prioritise recommendations to pilot in operational practice, based on a comprehensive evidence base. At the very least, the findings and recommendations can be the starting point for conversations between partners.

1.2 Definitions

It has to be acknowledged that there is no consensus in the humanitarian sector around the definitions of the key concepts under discussion here. The researchers adopted the following working definitions for the purpose of the research:

- **Local NGO or community-based organisation:** operating in one community or location within a country.
- **National NGO or community-based organisation:** operating across the whole country, but not outside.
- **International NGO (INGO):** operating in more than one country with country offices / country programmes.
- **Localisation:** local and national humanitarian actors increasingly empowered to take a greater role in the leadership, coordination and delivery of humanitarian preparedness and response in their countries.
- **Partnership:** the relationship between international humanitarian actors (especially international NGOs) and local and national actors (especially local and national NGOs), whereby the international actors work with, support and resource their local and/or national partners to design and implement humanitarian preparedness and response programming.

Research participants from local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) in in-depth consultations largely agreed with the definitions used by the researchers. Recent political changes in Nepal, designed to transfer power to local authorities also appeared to influence participants' understanding of, and commitment to, the goal of localisation, thereby associating localisation of humanitarian action with wider identity and governance issues. One research participant articulated it as follows:

“There should be leadership from the same local place, an organisation from the same local place and decision-making capacity and rights to make decisions. All this for saying ‘localisation’.”

The term ‘L/NNGO’ is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for local or national NGOs or community-based organisations. Where there were clear differences between what local or national actors were saying, these are highlighted. The term ‘INGO’ is used throughout the report to reflect the voices of research participants who identified themselves as working or volunteering for these organisations and/or reflecting what L/NNGO reflect participants were saying about them. In many cases, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, United Nations agencies, and even in some cases donor or funding agencies, were called INGOs. Therefore, the terms ‘INGO’, ‘international organisation’, and ‘international agency’ are used inter-changeably in the report, and partnership practice examples and recommendations are relevant for INGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and United Nations agencies alike.



Research validation and feedback workshop – Nepal

Methodology

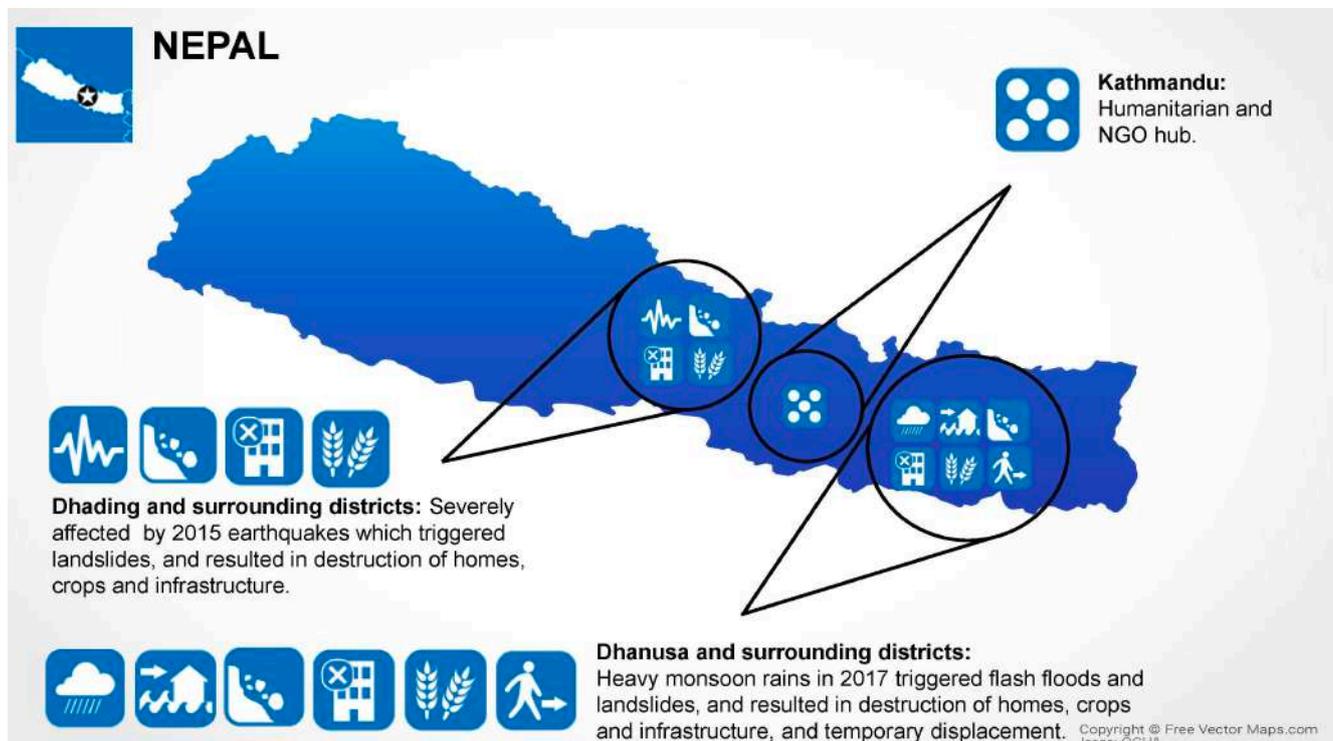
The research was underpinned by a mixed methods approach, including classic qualitative (systematic literature review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews) and quantitative (survey) collection techniques. During the analysis phase, all sources of evidence were triangulated to identify and document convergent and divergent trends.

To guide the research, an analytical framework was developed that represented an idealised operating model of INGOs in humanitarian action. This framework was the foundation that directed the scope of the research, and included all the factors that contribute to an INGO operating model, i.e. an agency’s capabilities and resources, values and principles, its unique identity (‘added value’), as well as external factors. All the different research methods referenced this framework and thereby allowed cross-referencing and triangulation of findings for the research overall.

2.1 Research locations

The in-depth consultations as part of the research in Nepal were conducted in three different contexts, identified in consultation with local and national NGOs (L/NGOs) conducted during the design phase of the research, and selected in close coordination with the National Research Associates and Programme Coordinators, and approved by the consortium Research Advisory Group. The goal of the overall sampling process was to capture diversity of humanitarian crises types (e.g. natural and human-induced), phases of humanitarian action (e.g. response, preparedness, recovery), and urban versus more remote locations.

The three contexts selected in Nepal, and the humanitarian situation in each, is outlined in the map below.



2.2 Quantitative: Survey

All actors (L/NNGO, INGO, UN or government partners and donors) were also invited to complete a survey. The survey was designed on Kobo Toolbox and also forms a baseline for the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* Programme. The survey was made available online and offline in English and Nepali; for low-bandwidth environments, print and enter-in-document versions were also disseminated and shared in both languages. Altogether 36 respondents completed the survey from Nepal; 78% (28) of them representatives of local or national NGOs.

2.3 Qualitative: In-depth consultations

In each context, between 10 and 20 L/NNGOs were invited to participate in a focus group discussion; a total of 3 were conducted in the locations outlined in the map. A sample of L/NNGOs was selected to ensure diversity: to include at least one organisation with no experience of working in partnership with another NGO in humanitarian action, at least one women-led organisation, and organisations from different networks/consortia and/or focusing on specific marginalised groups (e.g. persons with disability, disadvantaged castes/ethnicities). A few L/NNGOs invited to participate in focus group discussions were existing or previous partners of one or more of the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members, but the majority were not. Therefore, the research findings are not a direct reflection of partnership quality of the consortium members and their partners.

Following on from the focus group discussion in each context, a set of actors was invited to participate in key information interviews; a total of 27 were held in Nepal. These included representatives from different organisational departments/divisions within two L/NNGOs that reported unique or interesting actions or partnerships, as well as four local government, four INGO, and two network/federation officials. Additionally, donors and INGO partners of the interviewed local and national NGOs were contacted for interviews, but most who responded chose to complete the survey instead of taking part in an interview.

A total of 39 L/NNGOs were consulted through the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews in Nepal – including five women-led organisations – plus four local government authorities, four INGOs, and two networks/federations.

2.4 Research Validation

The results of the research were affirmed through a validation process. A research validation workshop was conducted in Kathmandu which allowed a large group of humanitarian stakeholders to discuss the findings, check for accuracy, provide feedback, and confirm that the preliminary findings and recommendations resonated with their realities. Further validation was conducted through meetings and email exchanges sharing the preliminary findings in Nepal, and were an opportunity to reach out beyond those who participated in the research. In total, 60 representatives of 51 NGOs (of which nine were INGOs), United Nations (UN), government, and donor entities were involved in the validation process.

In total, 88 NGOs were consulted for this research in Nepal; 88% of which were local or national NGOs.

2.5 Research Limitations

Although a wide range of voices were captured through the research, given the focus on local and national NGOs, some key humanitarian stakeholders are underrepresented in the research: funding, government and UN agencies. However, this research will be shared with these stakeholders and dialogue on how the findings and recommendations relate to them will be discussed.

Other challenges the research encountered include, amongst others: poor bandwidth environments, translation challenges, and difficulties in navigating Kobo Toolbox. While Kobo Toolbox is recognised as a powerful remote data collection tool, there was limited remote support for problem solving. It is also important to highlight that, this research was not intending to reach enough organisations to make the findings statistically significant; there are thousands of

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organisations operating in Nepal, and so the sampling strategy aimed to reach a representative and diverse sample to allow for some extrapolation and generalisation.

Despite those challenges, the research has succeeded in presenting the views and experiences from a rich diversity of NGO voices in Nepal, especially from local and national NGOs, whose voices are often not heard clearly enough in research conducted by INGOs. The research provides valuable insights into partnerships and beyond that can assist all humanitarian stakeholders in designing and co-creating strategies to accelerate localisation of humanitarian action.



Research validation and feedback workshop - Nepal

Findings

3.1 The status of local and national NGOs in Nepal

What is the status of local and national NGOs in Nepal?

When asked how well the international humanitarian system respects and promotes the role of local or national NGOs in managing and coordinating humanitarian response, the majority of survey respondents (94%) answered 'fair' (rather than 'good' or 'poor'). The majority of respondents also believed that their own organisations have only 'limited' or 'very limited' influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and UN agencies.

In Nepal, knowledge of the global debate and localisation agenda is growing fast. Survey respondents were divided almost evenly between being 'absolutely' confident in explaining what localisation means and being confident in explaining 'some' of what it means. This is promising as no respondent said they could not explain it at all.

3.2 Partnerships between INGOs and NGOs

What is the quality of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs in Nepal?

The research did not set out to explore satisfaction with partnerships, nor attempt to analyse the effectiveness or sustainability of any partnerships mentioned. Nevertheless, the following findings are important inputs to consider in discussions in Nepal about INGO-L/NNGO partnerships and localisation.

In Nepal, the majority of L/NNGO survey respondents said their organisation had experience working on a humanitarian response operation in partnership with an INGO. Their assessments of those partnerships are inconclusive as only 21% of NNGOs and 43% of LNGOs qualified their partnerships as 'a genuine partnership' but at the same time, for 72% of them, the collaboration had 'many' or at least 'a few' qualities that reflect an equitable partnership. A majority of respondents thought that those same partnerships were 'very' or 'moderately' instrumental to meeting needs in the response operation.

For the majority of survey respondents from Nepal, they believe that partnerships are indeed the best pathway towards localisation; yet about a fifth identified alternative pathways to localisation, many of them proposing that capacity development should suffice without the need for continued partnership.

3.3 Core Capabilities and Resources

What are the core capabilities most important to partnerships?

Survey respondents were asked to identify the core capabilities that had a significant influence on the quality of partnerships. Qualitative consultations were then used to elaborate on the results as participants in the in-depth consultations were requested to provide examples from their experiences of partnership practices that were most and least conducive to enabling localised humanitarian action against the top core capabilities and resources.

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

1. Project design, planning and management
2. Financial management and reporting
3. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
4. Human resources (HR) management
5. Advocacy
6. Fundraising

The following sections give more details of partnership practices which were deemed most and least conducive to localisation by the L/NNGO research participants under these top six organisational capabilities. Many practices, fit into more than one of the capabilities. Some also appear to be contradictory, e.g. that L/NNGOs design projects versus L/NNGOs co-design projects with their INGO partner. However, this reflects the fact that local and national NGOs in Nepal are not a homogenous group and have a variety of experience and capacity (as do their INGO partners).

Project design, planning and management

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ International organisations provide technical expertise to their L/NNGO partner to support co-designing and planning the project. ✓ L/NNGOs are responsible for project design, and their INGO partner is responsible for monitoring implementation of the project plan. ✓ In rapid responses, even if the INGO designs the initial immediate disaster response, the L/NNGO designs the recovery phase. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × When L/NNGOs are sub-contractors in practice, and given tasks to execute but no role in project design or management. × INGOs that make decisions which create tension in communities where L/NNGO operate and will continue to operate after the response (e.g. on targeting). × INGOs design projects alone, disregarding or undervaluing the L/NNGO's local knowledge (and often, longstanding presence) in the affected community.

Financial management and reporting

A number of the partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation came from discussions on capacity building and organizational development, but fit logically here.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ When the L/NNGO budgets use a maximum/parameters provided by the INGO, with the authority to decide the rest ✓ Pre-existing arrangements between an INGO and L/NNGO(s) about rapid access to funding for humanitarian response. ✓ During implementation, the L/NNGO identifies changes to the budget that will ensure the programme better meets communities' needs, and the INGO is willing to make modifications to the budget. ✓ International agencies willing to accept budgets that include a line for the L/NNGOs overhead expenses, and for the purchase of assets such as computers, office equipment, and vehicles. ✓ Partnership agreements that include a contribution to the L/NNGOs' overheads, giving them stability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Lack of transparency about the INGO's part of budget. × When communications, training or feedback from the INGO focuses only focuses on using its own reporting formats correctly rather than on good accounting practices. × In relation to the above, when the heavy workload of using different donors' formats demands more time and attention than responding appropriately to the disaster.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Joint monitoring visits to communities. ✓ Partners hold responsibility for monitoring at different levels (output, outcome, impact). ✓ Opportunities for reflection together on progress, obstacles and modifications needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Lack of transparency over INGO monitoring and evaluating performance of L/NNGO partner, potentially attributing blame inappropriately to implementing L/NNGO rather than accepting joint ownership of results or INGO responsibility for design mistakes.

Human Resources (HR)

Feedback relating to the importance of HR management seems to indicate that a majority (61%) of survey respondents feel that skilled people are a core capability of their own organisation, and just over half (56%) are confident in their own organisation's HR management skills, particularly L/NNGOs.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attempts to keep international agency and local/national organisation salaries and benefits within the same range. ✓ INGO give space to their L/NNGO partner to manage the recruitment process of project staff. ✓ Provision of training on HR in emergencies to support disaster preparedness. ✓ Skilled local staff are able to contribute their skills to designing programmes, budgets and systems. See also: <i>Project design, planning and implementation, and Financial management and reporting.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × INGOs discouraging growth and leadership within teams at L/NNGO partners. × Different transport arrangements for INGO and L/NNGO staff. × International agency interference in L/NNGO management. × INGOs dictating salaries of L/NNGO staff. See also: <i>Financial management and reporting.</i> × Highly qualified and experienced local staff needing to explain issues to international generalists who, as a result of imbalances in the partnership, have greater authority than them.

Advocacy

While INGOs ranked advocacy as a key value that L/NNGOs can add to a partnership, L/NNGOs do not rank it as highly themselves, emphasising instead their core capabilities in other areas.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ L/NNGOs use their local presence, relationships and expertise to connect affected communities, INGOs and government. ✓ L/NNGOs based in the capital, partner with INGOs working in the humanitarian response, contributing their specific experience to influence national government. 	No partnership practices highlighted here.

Fundraising

Although fundraising was ranked as a core capability which adds value to partnerships in Nepal, there was no mention of any positive partnership practices which are conducive to localisation related to fundraising in the in-depth consultations. In-depth discussions on fundraising focused on the frustrations that L/NNGOs have in relation to their limited access to direct funding from institutional donors. While this does not directly relate to partnership practices with international NGOs per se, there are actions outlined below which can support L/NNGOs in this process. In discussions on capacity building and organisational development, partnership practices which were identified as supporting localisation were often related to L/NNGO’s ability to mobilise funds.

Financial sustainability is also a major concern for L/NNGOs in Nepal: in all focus group discussions, participants mentioned the lack of income-generating capacity in their organisations as an impediment to their development, and suggested that international agencies should support income- generating initiatives or investment in office/meeting space that generates rental income.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ INGOs providing training on humanitarian donor requirements; to be prepared for future responses. ✓ INGOs supporting their L/NNGO partners to build relationships with donor agencies (e.g. joining relevant meetings, copying into emails etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Donors adding another tier in the funding architecture, e.g. by engaging a private sector company as a ‘contract manager’ to engage with INGOs, who partner with L/NNGOs. × Lack of access to institutional donors for L/NNGOs. × INGOs which appears to use the L/NNGO (and the affected community) to attract funding.

Other capabilities

In addition to the most highly ranked organisational capabilities for partnerships outlined in the sections above, other core capabilities ranked by a high number of survey respondents were: coordination, technical expertise, logistics management, and capacity building. Technical expertise and logistics management were not raised or discussed in detail in the in-depth consultations so there are limited details about how these were important in partnerships other than where they were discussed in relation to other capabilities such as project design, planning and management. Discussions around coordination and capacity building are outlined below.

Coordination

Coordination was ranked amongst the top five most important core capabilities to contribute to partnership by a number of survey respondents but was barely discussed during in-depth consultations. When the topic came up, it was focused on the firm assertion that L/NNGOs would be better placed to ensure successful coordination because they are so much more familiar with the local context than international agencies.

Capacity building

In response to the survey question ‘What is the most important contribution an INGO can make through partnership to strengthen L/NNGO ability to lead humanitarian action and meet humanitarian needs?’, the most frequent free-form response was ‘capacity- building’ (66%). However, organisational development, rather than capacity-building, was the main focus of discussions in in-depth consultations. Some of the partnership practices which research participants identified as most conducive to localisation with relation to capacity building and organisational development are outlined in the relevant sections above (for example, see human resources). Below are broader approaches which were identified:

- ✓ International agencies run joint training events for multiple partners, saving resources.
- ✓ INGOs allow all local staff to participate in training events so that all those interested can attend [not just those working on the project/response].
- ✓ Encouragement from longstanding INGO partner for their L/NNGO partners to be more assertive in requesting support for organisational development from them and other potential partners.

- ✓ Support for income-generating activities (see also Fundraising).
- ✓ Long-term support organisational development.

The issue of safety and security management did not feature highly in survey responses or in-depth consultations. This is interesting given the increasing discussions at international level about localisation resulting in a transfer of risk to local partners. However, given survey respondents did not rank conflict and insecurity highly as an external influencing factor for humanitarian partnerships, perhaps its omission in discussions in Nepal is not surprising.

The connection between short, medium and long-term programming and funding was also not mentioned in in-depth consultations. Again, this is interesting given the commitments to increase multi-year funding in the Grand Bargain in response to such a demand.

3.4 Values, Principles and Standards

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

The majority of survey respondents (83%) believe that the main value in partnerships lies in their own organisation's **commitment to humanitarian programme quality**. In in-depth consultations, even if the term 'programme quality' was never mentioned per se, almost all discussions about core capabilities and resources included issues of relevance/appropriateness and efficiency, which are key aspects of programme quality. Among those, the partnership practices related to programme quality that were considered conducive to localisation were:

- ✓ L/NNGOs implement, with guidance on humanitarian standards from more experienced organisations.
- ✓ INGO support L/NNGOs that identified gaps in aid and advocated to the humanitarian agencies in-country for them to be addressed.
- ✓ International agencies recognise the role L/NNGOs play in the partnership in relation to coordination with local government.
- ✓ Pre-disaster partnerships that enable L/NNGOs' to initiate the response.

Knowledge and application of **humanitarian principles** was selected among the top 10 values in partnerships for a large majority of survey respondents from local, national and international organisations. Similarly, **accountability to affected populations** also ranked in the top values or principles. Again, even though the term 'accountability' was never used in in-depth consultations, one key aspect – namely consultation with the affected population – was discussed frequently and passionately. Most examples of practices that L/NNGOs considered conducive to localisation focus on INGO responsiveness to their ideas and requests following their interactions with the affected communities. Inversely, the examples considered least conducive to localisation involve unwillingness or inability on the part of international organisations to recognise the importance and role of the local/national partner in dialogues about needs and programme choices with crisis-affected people.

By contrast to the themes above, **gender and inclusion** were rated highly only by approximately half of the survey respondents and these issues were not raised by L/NNGO representatives themselves in the in-depth discussions. Despite the well-documented inequalities (relating to gender, caste, ethnicity, disability and others) in Nepali society, remarkably little was said in in-depth consultations about the relationship between partnership practices, localisation and inclusion. One supposition could be that partnership practices relating to gender and inclusion are less important than other values and principles in localisation discussions in Nepal. However, another assumption could be that gender and inclusion has been mainstreamed so successfully in NGO, donor and government programmes in Nepal in recent years, that the topics are no longer at the forefront of L/NNGO staff's minds.

Trust and respect in a partnership for humanitarian response was not ranked highly by survey respondents. However, respectful attitudes and behaviours were voiced frequently as critical to good partnership in the in-

depth consultations. L/NNGOs were twice as likely as INGOs to rank the partner's respect for them as key to the partnership. The partnership practices related to trust and respect identified as most and least conducive to localisation are outlined in the table below.

Partnership practices which are most conducive to localisation	Partnership practices which are least conducive to localisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ INGOs and NGOs have a long-term relationship (preceding the disaster) that builds trust. ✓ A pragmatic approach from INGOs that accepts L/NNGOs' desire to lead on some aspects. ✓ A deliberate willingness on the part of international agencies to seek and accept L/NNGO's decisions. ✓ International organisations promote their partner L/NNGOs in public, giving them visibility. ✓ Agreements on the full roles and responsibilities of both partners are in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × INGOs pursue their own visibility above that of their local or national partner. × International agencies that invest disproportionate amounts of time pointing out faults in reports from L/NNGO partners. × International agency staff with attitudes of authority that make unreasonable demands such as demands for information in the middle of the night or other inconvenient times. × INGO imposition of policies on L/NNGOs without contextualisation. × INGOs do not share reports submitted to donors with their partners. × INGOs demand exclusivity agreements (e.g. L/NNGO is not allowed to partner with others for the duration of the agreement). × A general lack of transparency across multiple practices.

The research generally identified a deep sense of dissatisfaction among L/NNGOs with international agencies in relation to behaviours and attitudes. Many of the partnership practices least conducive to localisation mentioned above in relation to trust and respect, highlight examples of where international organisations have used power imbalances in their favour, shown a lack of respect, lacked transparency, and failed to recognise their partners' capacities. L/NNGOs' frustrations with international agencies might have originated with, or been exacerbated by, the massive influx of INGOs and humanitarian funding into the country following the 2015 earthquakes, but almost 4 years on many frustrations clearly remain.

3.5 External Elements

What are the key external factors that can affect partnerships?

For Nepali L/NNGOs, the **role of government** ranks very highly as an external factor affecting partnerships for humanitarian response. This is not particularly surprising given the Government of Nepal mandate that INGOs must work in partnership with local and national agencies and are not permitted to directly implement. L/NNGOs in Nepal rated the influence of government transparency among the top 5 external factors affecting partnerships. Survey respondents from organisations with no experience working in partnership felt that the most influential external factors to partnerships are: government capacity, government transparency and their own organisation's legal status.

In-depth consultation discussions about coordination with local government were closely related to recent changes to the national constitution, which strengthens the local level of government. In theory, stronger local authorities should also promote leadership of humanitarian action by local organisations, and 'localisation' in Nepal is commonly understood as the increased leadership of humanitarian action by local government.

Nepali L/NNGOs who participated in this research appear to be conscious of the challenges and opportunities of new legislation that limits INGO offices, presence, and timeframes, and aims to control information flow out of Nepal about humanitarian situations and aid actors' activities. However, recent developments suggest a trend

towards shrinking the space for all civil society organisations, not just international ones. Even if the legislation does strengthen national (and local) leadership of humanitarian response, implementation so far has not been conducive to partnership practices that genuinely support localisation; instead, as several participants reported, it has led to hasty handovers and less-than-transparent practices whereby INGOs have asked their L/NNGO partners to officially assume tasks or costs which they have not actually carried out or incurred.

For over half of the INGOs, and 33% of the L/NNGOs responding to the survey, the existence and application of a national **Disaster Risk Management/humanitarian policy** wields considerable external influence on humanitarian partnerships.

Many organisations also voiced concern about an increased **complexity in funding** arrangements, which adversely affects speed and access to humanitarian aid, and therefore affects partnerships for humanitarian response. A number of research participants highlighted the example of a large institutional donor funding an earthquake recovery programme through a private company as intermediary. Research participants believed that this additional layer of bureaucracy not only wastes resources but directly contradicts that donor agency's commitments to localisation through the Grand Bargain.

Conflict and insecurity was not ranked highly or raised as an external factor strongly affecting partnerships. This provides the explanation in relation to a lack of mention or importance placed on safety and security management capabilities in partnerships mentioned earlier in the report.

3.5.1 Natural hazard versus conflict contexts

Are partnership practices different in natural hazard and conflict contexts?

As all the contexts in which the research was conducted in Nepal are associated with natural hazards and rapid-onset events, it was not possible to reach any conclusion on differences between practices in natural hazard and conflict-related contexts, or rapid/slow-onset events at a national level respectively. See the global report for a deeper analysis of the influence the humanitarian context in relation to natural hazards and conflicts has on partnerships.

However, in Nepal, differences in experiences of partnerships were highlighted in relation to the differences in scale of recent disasters. The impact of the 2015 earthquakes was so great that old and new partnerships were needed, surge capacity and/or new staff were brought in by international and national NGOs alike, and there were many funding opportunities available. In contrast, the 2017 floods had a low international profile and aid was mainly provided for immediate humanitarian response by organisations already in situ. The impact these differences have on the partnership practices identified as most and least conducive to localisation through this research were not discussed in detail, however, the implications for future disasters are important. For example, when another major disaster occurs in Nepal, it is likely that new partnerships will be formed again with incoming international humanitarian agencies. These new partnerships will not have a history of trust, but they will now have the benefit of the findings of this research.

3.5.2 Length of partnership

The full cycle of disaster management includes phases of preparedness, disaster risk reduction, response, recovery, and transition to longer-term development (linking back to preparedness and resilience building) or exit. In Nepal, a large proportion of survey respondents consider their own organisation's level of preparedness as a key value to partnerships. However, in the in-depth discussions, little differentiation was made between response and recovery. For respondents, rather, it was the length of the partnership that came under scrutiny. The majority of the partnership practices considered conducive to localisation outlined in this research were examples from longer term partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs. Research participants mentioned partnerships of five or seven years or more, originating mainly through development programmes, as being exemplary of trust and flexibility. This raises a clear challenge for INGOs and international humanitarian organisations to think beyond the (often) short timeframe of humanitarian programmes and partnerships. The finding points to a key role for long-term development programmes and funders to integrate disaster preparedness, including capacity strengthening of local/national agencies and partnership development, into all aspects of developing in hazard-prone contexts.

Conclusions and recommendations

In what way can INGOs and L/NNGOs use the findings from the research to foster, accelerate or enable a greater role for L/NNGOs in humanitarian programming?

In conclusion, L/NNGO and international agency representatives who participated in this research identified the added value which agencies bring to partnerships for humanitarian response as follows:

L/NNGOs	Both L/NNGOs & international agencies	International agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR management • Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project design, planning & management • MEAL • Financial management & reporting • Coordination (at different levels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising • Technical expertise • Media & communication

The capabilities and value-added outlined in the diagram above should be discussed openly and built on so that as much as is practicably possible is under the leadership of L/NNGOs. International, national and local organisations and agencies responding to, and funding, humanitarian crises in Nepal now and in the future should use the findings and recommendations of this research to have frank and open discussions with their existing and/or potential partners/grantees about partnership practices which respond to the needs of crisis-affected people, while empowering local and national organisations – and local government where relevant – to take a greater lead in the response by recognising their existing capabilities.

Internationally, international agencies should also use their relationships with major donors and funding agencies to encourage them to evaluate current and new funding arrangements against localisation ambitions and commitments – most notably under the Grand Bargain – while considering for themselves a new role in which they do not necessarily operate as the direct funding recipient.

Nationally, given the changing environment for civil society organisations in Nepal demonstrated in new and draft legislation, NGOs should coordinate together closely within relevant international and national networks and forums to advocate for a fair deal for civil society organisations, and a protected space to reach those who are being left behind. Ultimately, capacity strengthening, planned phase out, and hand over strategies are also vital in partnerships between INGOs and L/NNGOs.

The following are key recommendations for accelerating localisation framed in the context of partnerships informed by the findings of the research, relevant for all humanitarian actors and stakeholders, including NGOs and civil society organisations, UN and funding agencies, and government.

1. **Jointly review research findings and recommendations:** Humanitarian partners should have open and frank discussions together about the findings and recommendations of this research and draw up an action plan on how to address partnership practices which are not conducive to localisation, identifying milestones, targets, resources needed, and a monitoring mechanism. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnership* consortium agencies will be following this process and developing action plans for a pilot phase. See Annex 2 for a template which could be used.
2. **Identify external factors restricting localisation through partnerships:** Humanitarian partners can identify where partnership practices which support localisation are restricted by external factors such as

donor policies and identify actions which might reduce or remove the restrictions. An advocacy strategy might be useful, along with discussions with humanitarian stakeholders presenting barriers to localisation in Nepal.

3. **Review partnership agreements:** Partners should review their partnership agreements together, with a view to redressing the power imbalances inherent in many agreements and revising them to reflect longer-term collaborations and support through the full disaster management cycle rather than project-focused agreements.
 - Roles, responsibilities and added value of both partners should be outlined, not just those of the implementing partner.
 - Commitments and funding for organisational development and capacity development should be outlined, along with a strategy for meeting the needs identified by the L/NNGO partner themselves (or as a minimum identified through a joint assessment process).
 - Include plans to shift power and decision-making through a phased approach if necessary.
 - Consider the potential for such revised agreements to be the basis for a standardised template for partnership agreements developed through relevant NGO fora and/or working groups in Nepal. These could ultimately replace agency-specific templates and be used by L/NNGOs as a negotiating tool when engaging with new partners.

4. **Assess capacity strengthening needs of local and national actors:** L/NNGOs should assess their own capacity strengthening needs – with support from international partners and/or NGO fora – and develop action plans for addressing these needs. These capacity strengthening plans can be used in conversations with existing and new partners to request the tailored technical expertise and support needed. They should be used to ensure similar training is not duplicated by each international partner and is tailored to the needs and increasing levels of capacity. Capacity strengthening plans should include the identification of learning opportunities on MEAL in particular that build technical skills, relationships and trust between L/NNGOs and INGOs to address some of the frustrations identified through this research. Preferences on the modality of capacity strengthening should be outlined, e.g. learning events, in-person or online training, mentoring, accompaniment or work shadowing, simulations and learning by doing. The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* programme is aiming to support L/NNGOs to conduct capacity self-assessments using formats such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) self-assessment.

5. **Assess capacity building skills of international actors:** It should not be assumed that people or organisations with expertise or experience have the necessary skills to be good trainers or mentors. As such, international agencies should assess their own internal capacity to provide capacity strengthening support to their partners. Based on the results of this assessment, actions should be taken to strengthen weaknesses, review staff training/mentoring skills (and attitudes), review and edit job profiles etc. Additionally, mapping of local training capacity in Nepal should be conducted and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning identified. The most effective approaches for capacity strengthening should be identified in consultation with partners out outlined above, and an honest assessment of whether such methods would be more effective if outsourced to specialised training providers should be conducted. A mentoring or coaching scheme could be established, identifying mentors in-house or through networks of peers.

6. **Support organisational / policy development:** International agencies should support their local partners to develop a basic set of organisational policies that meet their organisation's needs and those of potential donors, and are not only relevant for specific projects. These might include policies related to finance (including management, reporting, procurement) and HR (including safeguarding, inclusion, recruitment) as well as thematic strategies as requested / required.

7. **Invest in disaster preparedness and risk reduction:** International organisations and donor agencies should plan, develop and fund disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction programmes in hazard-prone areas of Nepal. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction should also be mainstreamed into development programmes, building on L/NNGOs' longstanding presence, strengthening their capacity for humanitarian response, and supporting them to establish close coordination with relevant local government and other local disaster management stakeholders.
8. **Hold frank discussions on direct access to funding:** All stakeholders to have open dialogue about the fact that localisation is a process and, in the short-term at least, realistically INGOs and UN agencies may continue to be the gatekeepers for large funds from institutional donor agencies while they build strategies and trust in new systems which enable them to fund L/NNGOs directly while still being accountable to the people the funds come from: taxpayers. Commitments made in the Grand Bargain enable all stakeholders to hold these donor agencies to account, and frank discussions about progress in Nepal will be vital.
9. **Support linkages and understanding between local actors and donor agencies:** International organisations and donor agencies should identify ways to support local and national NGOs to build up relationships between, and understanding of, donor agencies and L/NNGOs.
 - International organisations should ensure L/NNGO staff join key meetings with relevant donors, and that reports and conversations with these donors highlight the role of the L/NNGO partner.
 - Relevant agencies can run training for L/NNGOs on donor policies, expectations, proposal and reporting templates etc. and support them to understand, plan for, and meet due diligence and compliance requirements. Donor agencies themselves could run these training events as a route to meeting prospective future grant holders.
 - NGOs could conduct mapping to identify funding agencies that are open to funding L/NNGOs directly (or might in the near future).
 - INGOs can identify good practice examples of donor agencies which provide the flexible and direct funding needed to L/NNGOs while funding a key support role of INGOs for technical expertise, capacity building and communications.
 - Further efforts should be made to establish/increase pooled humanitarian funds which are accessible for L/NNGOs and can be used for small and large scale disasters.
 - International agencies should share reports submitted to donors with their partners for transparency and learning purposes.
10. **Support local and national organisations to be financially sustainable:** Project-based funds, staff contracts and capacity strengthening support create a real barrier for L/NNGOs to retain competent staff with good experience, invest in organisational development, and maintain presence in communities where they focus.
 - International agencies can support their L/NNGO partners to develop resource mobilisation plans. International agencies should support the development and implementation of such plans as much as is practicable either through capacity strengthening support and technical expertise and/or directly with funds.
 - Support for the establishment of income-generating activities have been mentioned by L/NNGOs throughout this research and international partners should consider supporting this. As with capacity building skills however, it must not be assumed that international agencies already have staff with the skillset required to establish such schemes and outsourcing to specialist organisations might be more effective.

- International agencies could support L/NNGOs to calculate a set of justifiable overhead rates to be used in future budget development with partners. This might include funds to retain key staff for low-intensity project activities between project-based funding, key assets required (e.g. laptops and vehicles), and/or contributions to office rent and running costs.
- NGOs should have honest conversations about what costs are eligible and which are not, and whether this is due to donor policy or organisational policy. Discussions on costs and budget lines which are reasonable and allowable should be open and honest to ensure a clear understanding between partners.

The recommendations here are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are offered to stimulate open discussion, provide an evidence base for dialogue, and support decision-making processes of humanitarian stakeholders. This research has confirmed a strong sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction amongst L/NNGOs in Nepal related to their partnership experiences with INGOs and other international agencies in recent humanitarian crises. It is vital this is taken seriously and used as a catalyst to review operating models and partnership approaches with a view to improving partnerships. L/NNGOs must be part of, or lead, this review process, along with the communities they represent. Ultimately, stronger partnerships and increasing leadership of local and national humanitarian actors is expected to reach crisis-affected people in the most effective manner possible.

The *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships* consortium members will be reviewing the research findings and recommendations with their local and national humanitarian response partners in Nepal and beyond; learning from which will inform the development of a Localisation Framework for Nepal and a global Pathways to Localisation document. The consortium is keen to hear from other organisations who have already implemented any of these recommendations and/or are willing to pilot them. The more agencies that share practical learning or feedback on these recommendations the better. This will strengthen the evidence for what operational elements of partnerships between L/NNGOs and INGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action

Annexes

Annex 1: Key references and more reading

Key references

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⁴ ***Charter for Change*** (2015). Available online: <https://charter4change.org/>.

More reading

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