

# LOCAL VOICES LOCAL CHOICES

What's preventing a genuine shift to local leadership in humanitarian response?



---

*Suggested citation: InterAction (2024) Local voices, local choices: What's preventing a genuine shift to local leadership in humanitarian response?*

*This publication is free for non-profit use with appropriate credits and citations.*

*Cover page photo credit: Migue Roth*

**This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA). The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of, nor are they necessarily endorsed by, the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA).**

InterAction would like to thank its Member organizations, Shelter and Settlements Working Group members, Global Shelter Cluster, Regional Shelter Forum participants, Shelter Center, and InterAction's Humanitarian Policy and Practice and Communication Team.

### **Disclaimers**

All opinions, findings, and conclusions in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of InterAction, its donors, affiliates, or Members.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the content of this publication, no liability can be accepted for any errors or omissions contained within it.

The series of publications on Local Leadership summarizes the consultation and research conducted by InterAction, independent principal consultants, and Country Consultants. Regional consultations primarily took place in Amman, Bogota, Dhaka, Dakar, and Geneva, as well as country consultations in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, and Jordan. Reports are published in several parts. Please see [www.interaction.org](http://www.interaction.org) for more details.

*In these case studies, all opinions and findings are derived from research, interviews, and consultations conducted and interpreted by the respective national consultants.*

---

# LOCAL VOICES LOCAL CHOICES

What's preventing a genuine shift to local leadership in humanitarian response?

**Global Researchers:**

**FIONA KELLING** and **SNEHA KRISHNAN**

**With inputs from:**

Dipti Hingorani, Nitesh Lohan and Kshirabdhi Tanaya Patra

**This research was managed and coordinated by:**

Juli King of *InterAction*

With support from Mohamed Hilmi, Madelyn Evans, Danielle Halprin and Shelter Centre

**Country Researchers:**

Zina Khoury (*Jordan*),  
Yves Badesire of Victim's Hope (*DRC*),  
Mahmuda Alam and Rubaiya Nasrin (*Bangladesh*),  
and Maria Carolina Rubio and Javier Olaya (*Colombia*)

**Copy Editor:**

Kate Murphy (*InWords*)

**Graphics and Layout:**

Livia Mikulec (*The Human Atelier*)

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Global research initiative</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Regional consultations</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1 Emerging themes from regional consultations.....	10
<b>3. Country case studies</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1 Emerging themes from country case studies.....	13
<b>4. Locally informed recommendations</b> .....	<b>15</b>
4.1 Redefine guiding principles and values for enhancing local leadership.....	15
4.2 Reform humanitarian systems for locally led shelter response.....	16
4.3 Recenter local voices and actors in operations.....	18
<b>5. References</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Annex A. Methodology</b> .....	<b>23</b>
A.1 Aims and objectives.....	23
A.2 Approach.....	23
A.3 Methods.....	25
A.4 Scope and limitations.....	27

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

InterAction’s Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative explores different approaches to localization in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. It draws on a literature review, thematic discussions at regional shelter consultations, four country case studies and a consultation in a fifth country to validate findings. The findings center the voices of a variety of actors at different levels and their experiences across a range of contexts. The approach adopted in this research acknowledges and attempts to address the prevailing tendency for localization research agenda to be led by the Global North and carried out in the Global South, by including diverse nationalities, languages, and ethnicities.

Drawing on the themes of inclusion, decolonization, accountability, and nexus-thinking by international humanitarian organizations, this research signifies the need for systemic changes in the humanitarian aid system. Discussions in the regional shelter forums highlighted the inherent power imbalances between various stakeholders. Every consultation challenged pre-existing notions of who is “local” and revealed differences in how the term is understood within each context. It was widely agreed that binary interpretations of “local” and “international” reinforced stereotypes and fostered inherent bias and mistrust between actors.

The country case studies were co-designed and led by in-country research teams who undertook stakeholder mapping and context analysis, and documented the experiences of relevant stakeholders active in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. Drawing on their analysis and conclusions, the recommendations propose actions to improve equity and inclusion, push for systemic changes, and suggest that those who hold decision-making authority require a value shift to be willing to relinquish control.

Several themes emerged from the regional consultations:

- **The determination of “local” requires contextual appreciation that influences the likelihood of positive outcomes.**
- **The most commonly identified barriers to local leadership speak to the need for attitude as well as systems change.**
- **Recognition of comparative strengths and complementarity offers possibilities for more equitable and effective partnership across diverse contexts.**
- **“Local” in the Shelter and Settlements Sector often translates to materiality, construction techniques, and cultural preferences in living arrangements.**
- **The influence of context on opportunities and outcomes cannot be underestimated.**

Other themes emerged from the country case studies:

- **Communication gaps widen the distance between international and local NGOs working in shelter response.**
- **Siloed approaches in conflict, humanitarian, and development programs result in unmet housing and well-being needs of the local population.**
- **Local actors do not have direct access to humanitarian funding.**
- **Local actors perceive an emphasis on lack of capacity, but the need for international NGOs and donors to be more inclusive and accountable to local populations is overlooked.**

The Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative acknowledges the essential role of local and national actors. However, in recognition of current dynamics and key decision makers in the humanitarian system, most of the recommendations are directed toward international actors.

The recommendations are synthesized into three categories:

**Redefine guiding principles and values for enhancing local leadership.**



**Reform humanitarian systems for locally led shelter responses.**

**Recenter local voices and actors in operations in shelter and settlements response.**

These are elaborated on further in the following table:

Redefine guiding principles and values for enhancing local leadership	
Actions	Examples
Amplify local voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek out and elevate the perspectives of local leaders</li> <li>Draw on knowledge and experience of frontline staff</li> </ul>
Acknowledge local contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name partner organizations in reporting and acknowledge their unique contribution and added value</li> <li>Approach partnerships or collaborations in a spirit of complementarity and relative strengths</li> </ul>
Prioritize community empowerment rather than assuming proximity is inherently better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize meaningful community participation to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability</li> <li>Commit to addressing underlying power dynamics and incentives that undermine recognition and implementation of community-identified priorities</li> </ul>

Reform humanitarian systems for locally led shelter responses	
Actions	Examples
Enhance access to humanitarian funding for local actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure overhead support for downstream partners rather than seeking decreased costs</li> <li>Allocate pooled funding toward local and national actors or measure percentage to local organizations against set targets</li> </ul>
Foster equitable partnerships across multiple actors and sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek strategic alliances that recognize and work toward complementarity, including development of exit strategies</li> <li>Support approaches that recognize local stakeholders and affected communities as first responders and the needs prioritized by them</li> </ul>
Facilitate self-determination in capacity strengthening for local actors as well as international approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let organizations define their own capacity-strengthening requirements and priorities</li> <li>Remove barriers to capacity-exchange and knowledge-sharing by increasing information sharing opportunities</li> </ul>
Institute relevant and appropriate coordination mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize hubs and sub-clusters to increase access, relevance, and participation</li> <li>Promote approaches that reconfigure coordination models or initiate direct access between donors and local organizations</li> </ul>
Co-develop a nurturing policy environment for local leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for and build capacity to foster supportive policies that can enable local leadership</li> <li>Strengthen coalitions between national NGOs, community-based organizations, and refugee-led organizations to increase visibility and influence</li> </ul>



### Recenter local voices and actors in operations in shelter and settlements response

Actions	Examples
Strengthen accountability for progress on defined localization goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a country working group to set a baseline and monitor the integration of localization</li> <li>Monitor progress on access to direct donor funding, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and leadership roles of local and national NGOs in humanitarian coordination structures</li> </ul>
Increase visibility of sub-national actors contributing to humanitarian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include a section on the contribution of local actors in all country-level reporting</li> <li>Report on localization indicators at sector, country and global level through Global Shelter Cluster information updates</li> </ul>
Facilitate inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders and address barriers to participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host coordination meetings in regional languages as well as in hybrid mode with interpretation</li> <li>Allow reports to be submitted in the local language, with the burden for translation shifted to donors/international NGOs</li> </ul>
Enhance opportunities for local actors to access funding and capacity strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take steps to address information asymmetry by publicly sharing information on funding opportunities, requirements, conditions, and eligibility – specifically reaching out to local NGOs and in local languages</li> <li>Offer technical and financial support to grassroots organizations for legal constitution and access to funding</li> </ul>



© Avijit Ghosh

---

# 1. GLOBAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE

With the increasing frequency of protracted humanitarian crises, there is heightened recognition of the need for local approaches that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to communities' needs. "Localization" offers opportunities to address this need. However, understanding of what this means in practice differs, because the implications for policies and programs are perceived according to varying social, political, and geographical contexts and interests.

Despite well-recognized difficulties identifying who counts as local, what the aims of localization are, what it aims to achieve, and what this would require, one aspect rings clear. It is not those who are local – however this is defined – who need to localize. The process of "becoming more local" inherently focuses on those who are not already local, and this simple recognition points to the key imbalance in the humanitarian system. Currently, those closest to a crisis are least able to influence decisions, resources, or the priorities in a response, inherently tying any discussion of localization to larger ethical agendas, including participation, accountability, efforts to shift power, and decolonization.

This research explores how these debates are understood in the Shelter and Settlements Sector and amplifies the voices and perspectives of local and national actors. By focusing on local leadership and prioritizing the term "locally led" it highlights the recognition, agency, voice, and decision-making power required – alongside any technical capacity – to be able to lead.

Notably, the evidence for locally led response in shelter and settlements responses is limited. The Shelter and Settlements Sector needs to be more equitable and responsive to priorities that have been set locally. Shelter and settlements stakeholders should incorporate the inputs of relevant stakeholders, and take steps to bridge the divide between the aspirations of Global South actors and the agenda as set in the Global North. As the humanitarian system sees slow progress across wider change (Alexander, 2023), there is a crucial need for greater understanding of challenges and opportunities specific to shelter and settlements response. The research therefore identifies relevant recommendations, based on the experiences of diverse local actors, that align with the action and support they think is required.

This research adopted a collaborative, consultative approach conducted in four phases:

- Literature review
- Stakeholder consultations at regional shelter forums covering Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa
- Case studies carried out by in-country research teams in Bangladesh, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Jordan.
- Synthesis of findings and validation exercise in South Sudan.

As the research progressed, the regional forums and global sector gatherings were also used to validate and iteratively improve findings.

The study used an inductive approach, using multi-country case studies to gather data on the differences in perceptions and aspirations between different stakeholders. It drew on country-specific case studies to analyze tensions in pursuing locally led responses in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. It did this through mapping local stakeholders and exploring how they operated within the policy frameworks and humanitarian or crisis coordination mechanisms in each setting. These in-depth case studies were selected based on literature review,





© Will Baxter

regional consultations, and interviews for identifying local collaborators. The criteria for selecting the country depended on geographic regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa), humanitarian contexts (i.e., conflict, disaster, and displacement), and governance situations (government, coordination, and civil society engagement).

The collaborative and participatory nature of the research facilitated an approach which acknowledged the role of language and interpretation across these country contexts. Translation was provided at the regional forums and during primary data collection within the case studies. This allowed participants to freely express themselves and participate in French, Bangla, Spanish, and Arabic respectively. The research team consisted of shelter and research professionals who could translate and interpret in these languages during the consultations as well as during data collection for the case studies.

The researchers recognize the role of language and the oft contentious use of different terminology when discussing local leadership. Several terms are problematic, are not easily translated into other languages, and can reflect a range of connotations and assumptions. This report uses terms such as “international” and “local” or “local humanitarian actor” as they arose in the research process, with an acknowledgment of the need to be cognizant of their limitations and to be more specific where possible.

Details of the methodology used in the research can be found in Annex 1.

---

# 2. REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Regional consultations were carried out in Senegal, Bangladesh, Colombia, and Jordan between September 2022 and February 2023. They explored understanding of local leadership in the Shelter and Settlements Sector and helped to identify potential case studies for the third phase. Discussions provided input on who is local, what capacity is missing in whom, and key barriers to locally led response faced by shelter practitioners and stakeholders. The outcomes report from each event summarizes the key discussions, including how local leadership is understood and worked out, what the intended or possible outcomes are, and what actions would be necessary to support this.

The thematic discussions at the regional shelter forums captured participants' responses, experiences, and perceptions of localization, providing insights on trends within each region. During break-out group discussions, participants shared examples of local leadership and decision making in the Shelter and Settlements Sector in their respective countries or regions.

Participants included national staff in UN agencies and international NGOs, national staff in local organizations, government officials, academia, international staff working in a third country, and representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs). The diversity of participants in these forums shared illustrations from the wide range of contexts in which these actors work, the mechanisms in place, and the approaches adopted for enabling locally led response in shelter and settlements programming. Although efforts were made to ground discussions in practical examples and experiences, the range of situations represented resulted in some generalization that has been recognized to “obscure important nuances” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023: 8). A synthesis of findings across the consultations identifies emerging themes and divergent perceptions and experiences between various actors, as well as prevalent challenges across these regions.

## 2.1 Emerging themes from regional consultations

### **The determination of “local” requires contextual appreciation that influences the likelihood of positive outcomes**

The survey responses in the consultations captured a wide range of responses about who is a “local actor.” This term was used subjectively and was conceptualized variously based on relative proximity to affected populations.

A local actor could be formal institutions, such as governments and local authorities, or NGOs registered at the national or sub-national level. Respondents also mentioned civil society organizations such as community-based organizations, citizen collectives, youth and women's groups, spontaneous volunteer groups, social networks, and religious organizations. They also identified community leaders such as religious figures, teachers, traditional leaders, elected representatives, and influential families. Some respondents included the private sector (particularly small businesses), academic institutions and researchers, National Societies in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and national or international organizations employing people from the area they are working in.

Responses also highlighted communities as important local actors, variously referred to as the “affected population,” “beneficiaries,” “host community,” and “IDPs<sup>1</sup> and refugees.” Some additional terms were also identified, such as “feet on the ground,” “first to respond,” or “nearest actors,” which recognize geographical presence over distinctions based on origin.

Additionally, responses acknowledged complex configurations, including national staff of international NGOs, Global South NGOs working outside their national context, local affiliations as part of an international structure, and long-term presence of international NGOs who are deeply embedded in a particular community.

<sup>1</sup> Internally displaced person

The consultations sought to raise awareness and challenge the notion of an international/local binary that “homogenizes the diverse set of actors that could be conceivably listed under both categories and erases the complex interactions and power dynamics within each category” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023: 10). Despite those intentions, participants sometimes fell into the trap of using comparatives or defining one actor according to what it is not in relation to another.

Across the forums, a common theme was that within the hierarchical aid system, amplifying the voices of those who are not being heard becomes the responsibility of those who currently have the power and authority. This was relevant whether it was to elevate national voices within an international organization, community members to local government, or self-organized collectives to nationally registered NGOs. Recognizing and responding to this responsibility is necessary if those with less power in matters that affect them – directly and indirectly – are enabled to have a say. It can also mitigate concerns related to reinforcement of existing inequalities and inclusion of marginalized groups, as well as shifting power (for example from international to national NGOs) without facilitating access to less prominent groups (for example, women’s community collectives).

Therefore, while seemingly semantic, how the term “local” is used and who it applies to can fundamentally influence if a local response is indeed more timely, appropriate, sustainable, or other potential positive outcomes. Recent critiques reiterate this, highlighting how the definition of “local” can prevent resources from reaching deeply rooted civil society groups (Tilly and Jenkins, 2023; Hirschfeld, 2024). The role of the community and their agency within humanitarian response was a key element to come out of these discussions, highlighting that locally led response builds on a clear understanding of the impact of conflict and disasters and the dynamic needs of the different social groups affected by them.

## **The most commonly identified barriers to local leadership speak to the need for attitude as well as systems change**

Access to funding was mentioned in every forum, alongside other key challenges widely identified in global literature, including disparities in access, recognition, skewed power relations in partnerships, and practical issues such as language barrier in coordination meeting, reporting, and proposal writing. The forum participants also suggested barriers in attitude, expressed by forum participants as distrust, lack of recognition, low risk tolerance, and desire to fulfill self-interested objectives or agendas. Actors in the Global South are increasingly pushing back against perceived bias and calling for recognition of a more fundamental shift required to address inequalities in power.

## **Recognition of comparative strengths and complementarity offers possibilities for more equitable and effective partnership across diverse contexts**

Literature identified concerns with the use of the term “capacity” (Barbelet et al., 2021), which were confirmed in many of the regional consultation discussions. Capacity has been largely formulated and discussed as being held in the Global North, undermining adequate recognition of the value of local knowledge, networks, and cultural processes. Participants highlighted the myriad strengths held by locally grounded organizations and the desire for their knowledge and skills to be recognized and equally valued. Similarly, participants challenged whose capacity was lacking – is it local organizations’ compliance with donor requirements, or lack of flexibility on the part of funders?

Despite, or maybe due to, a broader conception of capacity, there was wide consensus that certain capacities were lacking. In particular, this revolved around understanding of and adherence with grant management requirements, knowledge of humanitarian coordination structures and principles, and organizational governance. Some participants expressed a desire for increased knowledge and skills in specific areas – including integrated programming, spatial planning, community engagement, advocacy, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This indicates that there is a valuable role to be played by humanitarian technical specialists, although the extent to which these skills were felt to be available in other actors in the local context was less clear. Overall, there was a



---

focus on the need for longer-term partnerships, mentorship, demand-driven training, and administrative systems building, such as financial management or leadership development, that recognizes comparative advantages and works to each other's strengths.

## **“Local” in the Shelter and Settlements Sector often translates to materiality, construction techniques, and cultural preferences in living arrangements**

Many conversations addressed issues common to all sectors. This reveals that while, in particular contexts, shelter programming may face distinct challenges, the bigger barriers are more systemic. Shelter and settlements emerged most strongly in discussions in relation to local materials and building techniques, knowledge of vernacular construction and housing typologies, and cultural considerations in living arrangements. Frequently, discussions mentioned the need for adequate standards, posed from both an international perspective – in regard to quality of response – and a local perspective – in regard to them being adapted to particular contexts.

There were also strong links to specific approaches promoted in shelter response, including area-based approaches, that make more effort to engage with local stakeholders and harness their input to response efforts. Supporting self-recovery, by acknowledging affected household as the drivers of their own recovery, removing potential barriers, and providing required technical, financial, or legal inputs, was also suggested to support locally led response. There are also overlaps with participation and improved accountability to affected populations, although these were more often framed as good programming rather than supporting local leadership.

There were some notable but limited examples of self-defined locally led shelter and settlements responses. These tended to be more development focused, in contexts that involved fewer international actors or less international attention, and through initiatives that were less reliant on international funding, but were often smaller in scale or part of multi-year programs.

## **The influence of context on opportunities and outcomes cannot be underestimated**

In addition to the themes identified above that arose in all consultations – the role of community, funding, capacity, and context – some specific topics came out of breakout group discussion in the regional forums.

In the Africa forum, there was a greater desire for experience to be recognized and more emphasis on the fundamental role of donors. In Latin America, there was more focus on preparedness as well as the role of psychosocial support for first responders. In Asia, influenced by the strong Bangladeshi representation, discussions reflected on the role of government and their responsibilities, including the need for national government agencies to delegate decision making to local government bodies and include community representation in shelter rehabilitation programs. In the Middle East, there was greater recognition of the influence of politics, civil society restrictions, and the risk of fraud or corruption. The difficulties in translating key terms and concepts into Arabic was also highlighted.

While recognizing a variety of individual situations and examples in each region, these thematic differences also serve to highlight the influence of historical, environmental, and geo-political situations. It validated the need to situate recommendations to strengthen locally led response in a specific context, based on in-depth understanding and contextual analysis of various actors' roles and perspectives.

In summary, the regional consultations offered multiple viewpoints on the principles behind localization and the revealed the need for a wide range of stakeholders to collaborate and complement each other, working to key strengths. The potential for more locally led responses to achieve positive outcomes is understood to be closely tied to how well this occurs within the limitations or opportunities available in a specific context.





© Abed Zaout

# 3. COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

The country case studies were led by local teams in Bangladesh, Colombia, DRC, and Jordan between March and September 2023. They provide an understanding of the nature of locally led responses within these contexts and different interpretations of localization by the various actors involved. The findings presented in the country case studies arise from a deep dive into the socio-political and geographical context that influences the reality and potential for local leadership in these countries.

There are several synergies and differences in how shelter and settlement responses have been undertaken. Three of the four countries have faced political instability, all four are post-colonial countries, and three are classed as low income or lower-middle income nations by the World Bank. Despite their ethnic, cultural, and geographical diversity, these countries share challenges in responding to several humanitarian crises, both conflict-related and environmental. Bangladesh is affected by natural hazards such as floods, cyclones, and mass displacement of Rohingya refugees. Colombia has dealt with decades of armed conflict and faces regular environmental disasters. DRC suffers from decades of civil war resulting in recurrent displacement as well as environmental hazards such as flooding and volcanic action. Jordan hosts the largest refugee population in the Middle East region.

The tensions and opportunities for locally led responses in these case studies underline the persistent, systemic challenges of the humanitarian aid system. At the same time, they provide different possibilities, considering the political and governance mechanisms within each country. These trends are presented not to compare these cases, but to collate and synthesize emerging themes, reflect on their application in the Shelter and Settlements Sector, and suggest practical approaches for more locally led humanitarian response.

## 3.1 Emerging themes from country case studies

### Communication gaps widen the distance between international and local NGOs working in shelter response

Across these countries, a lack of communication acts as a primary barrier for local leadership. It fosters divergent views, results in misunderstandings, and impedes effective collaboration among various stakeholders involved in humanitarian response. For instance, in Bangladesh, it emerged that although the Shelter Cluster coordinates with key stakeholders, many organizations, especially those not focused on shelter, remain outside regular channels. This makes it difficult to identify, document, and understand initiatives and capacities for leading local responses.

**“Everyone wants coordination, but no one wants to be coordinated.”** (B2, male, UN/IO, Bangladesh, June 2023)

Across contexts, several participants shared that international NGOs perceived local NGOs as threats rather than partners. This perception hampers effective cooperation and undermines the valuable knowledge and presence that local NGOs bring to the table. Therefore, the expertise and contributions of local NGOs are disregarded, creating barriers to a more integrated and collaborative humanitarian approach. In Jordan and in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, research participants noted the increasing conflicts between host and refugee communities. This was because humanitarian attention was on refugees and forcibly displaced groups, who are considered more vulnerable than host communities.

### Siloed approaches in conflict, humanitarian, and development programs result in unmet housing and well-being needs of the local population

The humanitarian system grapples with an emergency-oriented approach marked by a swift and unpredictable change in dynamics. This urgency often leads to tensions and insecurity, posing significant challenges in conflict

zones. The rapid response required in emergencies can unintentionally escalate tensions and hinder effective conflict management. Navigating these complexities is crucial to ensuring successful humanitarian interventions amidst dynamic circumstances.

“Our district is a poverty pocket, many families are eligible when it comes to aid and shelter, there’s a big need among refugees as well as local communities, hundreds of homes need rehabilitation, and choosing the most vulnerable is not an easy task, particularly in light of the limited resources.” (J14, male, CBO, Jordan, June2023)

There is a need to integrate conflict, humanitarian, and development approaches – the triple nexus. This is more likely to be achieved when local stakeholders design and lead the response. When local actors have access to sufficient funding, they can start to address longer-term needs that go beyond routine emergency shelter and NFI kit distribution. This integration should be done in partnership with critical national stakeholders to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

### **Local actors do not have direct access to humanitarian funding**

Across the countries investigated, the biggest barrier to locally led response was funding. Participants, particularly local NGOs working in shelter and settlements, noted a lack of access to humanitarian funding and a lack of direct engagement and financial arrangements with international donors. They also perceived and observed limitations in financial planning and management of resources. This results in uncertainty and frustrations as local NGOs cannot plan and sustain operations, or even prepare and respond to changing needs and dynamics of the communities. The lack of funding greatly inhibits local leadership: when local and national NGOs have inadequate finances, their ability to effectively respond during crises, to ensure preparedness, or to engage in coordination is limited. Such a financial deficit often leads to a lack of resources for essential activities, which makes it impossible for the organizations to fulfill their mandates and serve affected populations.

The lack of funding also prevents local and national responders from participating in capacity-strengthening projects which negatively affects their development. This can slow down the process of improving preparedness for future crises and reducing vulnerability in communities. Further, the absence of funding may prevent collaboration and coordination between different stakeholders because it becomes difficult for local actors to engage in humanitarian processes.

### **Local actors perceive an emphasis on lack of capacity, but the need for international NGOs and donors to be more inclusive and accountable to local populations is overlooked**

Evidence from Colombia and Jordan indicates that the program management skills and technical capacities of the local NGOs need to be strengthened. However, their skills in working with communities and their ability to engage and ensure participatory approaches often surpass those of international NGOs. As the DRC report highlights, international NGOs and the UN should adopt the “ToGETHER model,”<sup>2</sup> whereby local and national NGOs can determine the areas for strengthening and improving their capacities, with the help of multi-year funding and a partnership with international NGOs.

Lack of access to internationally led coordination mechanisms poses barriers to building relationships and capacity-exchange between local, national, and international actors, and restricts opportunities for knowledge-sharing and cross-learning between actors. Local organizations recognize lack of internal resources or staff availability can limit their engagement in the plethora of coordination meetings. However, the predominance of the English language in communications, meetings, and reporting excludes local NGOs and community-based organizations from leading or participating in key decisions regarding shelter response. Rather than reflecting lack of capacity on their part, respondents mentioned that the onus should be on INGOs and donors to be more accessible, inclusive, and accountable to affected populations.

<sup>2</sup> Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response



---

# 4. LOCALLY INFORMED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative acknowledges the essential role of local and national actors. However, in recognition of current dynamics and key decision makers in the humanitarian system, most of the recommendations are directed toward international actors.

The recommendations are synthesized into three categories:

- Redefine guiding principles and values for enhancing local leadership.
- Reform humanitarian systems for locally led shelter responses.
- Recenter local voices and actors in operations in shelter and settlements response.

While the first two categories address deeply embedded practices and require multi-stakeholder inputs to see structural transformation, the third category contains practical suggestions that are more immediately implementable.

## 4.1 Redefine guiding principles and values for enhancing local leadership

### Amplify local voices

The current system augments the input of international actors. To shift to an emancipatory and localized shelter response, humanitarian actors must be willing to seek out and amplify the perspectives and priorities of leaders in local authorities and civil society. Individuals and organizations must listen more and better to their frontline staff, who have a crucial role to play in improving contextual knowledge.

**“As qualified CBOs and NGOs, we feel humiliated by the government and the international community. We are not only implementers, we have a voice and we’re at the forefront in the local communities in which refugees reside.”** (J13, female, local NGO, Jordan, June 2023)

At the same time, agencies should be conscious of not substituting staff voices for those of the communities, who still need to be the starting point for understanding needs and expectations (ALNAP, 2023). Locally embedded NGOs and community-based organizations emphasize the voice of communities they serve in shelter programs. Drawing upon the experience and expertise of frontline staff as well as community members, they ensure that affected people are part of the process or intervention and are not just at the receiving end of programs and initiatives.

### Acknowledge local contributions

Local actors indicated that they did not feel they were offered the respect and recognition that they deserved. The UN, international NGOs, and donors should ensure that reports and publications acknowledge implementing partners and include the names of the frontline staff who have contributed to the project deliverables. In the DRC study, participants shared that this could potentially reduce frustrations felt by national NGOs that are on the frontline delivering assistance, yet whose names are rarely mentioned in the report submitted to donors. Similar studies on humanitarian research recognize the unique contributions of local organizations, such as their



positionality, contextual knowledge, and potentially more impactful innovative approaches. Such recognition can address the existing inequities in access to humanitarian funding, capacities, and power imbalances between Global South and Global North organizations (Fitzpatrick et al. 2023).

Acknowledging local actor contributions will help ensure dignity and respect for local actors' contributions during emergencies. Localization does not mean international actors have no role to play in preventing, preparing for, and responding to crises. On the contrary, increasing needs and more complex crises require all actors to work better together. The role played by national as well as international NGOs in supporting communities and local actors should be recognized and maximized within a spirit of trust, equity, solidarity, and complementarity (NEAR, nd).

## **Prioritize community empowerment rather than assuming that proximity is inherently better**

Being a “local organization” doesn’t guarantee fostering community empowerment. The partnership between international NGOs and local organizations should prioritize community engagement through recognized processes (IFRC, 2011) and ensure people’s genuine participation beyond a project checklist. The process should empower communities, where the most vulnerable groups – including women, the elderly, and children – participate in co-designing shelter solutions, and their voices contribute to the development of shelter programs. Communities, as experts in their cultural contexts, should be engaged in decision making for long-term sustainability.

Several participants across the case studies explained how approaches and strategies were embedded within their organizations to enhance and promote community participation. These included community committees, refugee-led initiatives, and youth-led initiatives. However, the evidence indicates that current localization strategies avoid meaningfully challenging the existing, inequitable humanitarian aid architecture. Efforts to make strategies more cohesive and responsive to affected people do not alter the fact that the sector’s power structures, bureaucratic incentives, and core business model all tilt toward donors and aid providers (Saez et al., 2021). UN agencies, international NGOs and donors need to commit themselves to addressing the underlying power dynamics and incentives that undermine recognition and implementation of community-identified priorities.

## **4.2 Reform humanitarian systems for locally led shelter response**

### **Enhance access to humanitarian funding for local actors**

Accessing adequate quantity and quality of funding in a timely manner remains a significant challenge for local and national NGOs. Under the localization agenda, there is a widely held assumption by donors that funding local actors means decreasing costs. Humanitarian funding continues to be largely directed to international actors who too often do not extend the same quality and quantity of funding to local and national NGOs. During the prioritization workshop in South Sudan, local NGO participants claimed that provision of overhead costs ensures an equitable approach to humanitarian funding, allowing local NGOs to pay their staff well, retain them for multiple projects and provide them with insurance and other basic services in accordance with local government regulations. Local and national NGOs that remain in communities affected by crisis once acute shocks have passed must build preparedness capacity, for which overheads are particularly critical.

There is growing consensus that overhead expenses are necessary for local partners’ sustainability, growth, and capacity building (IASC, 2023). UN agencies and international NGOs should provide or share overheads with local partners, include overheads in each new funding agreement with partners, and support the indirect cost recovery for local and national NGOs with the help of their donors. As well as providing overheads, organizations should also support local partners, where relevant, to develop their own internal indirect cost policies and systems for

---

the allocation and use of overhead funding (IASC, 2022). International NGOs or UN agencies who partner with local NGOs can also offer support and guidance in proposal development, help undertake due diligence, and set up basic grant management systems to meet donor requirements.

International donors and government authorities can set up and support national and local pooled funds which can be available to local and national NGOs for local response. The DRC case study recommended that certain funds remain earmarked for national organizations, with eligibility criteria tailored to include national and civil society organizations and providing additional support to design and develop locally led responses beyond the Shelter and Settlements Sector.

## **Foster equitable partnerships across multiple actors and sectors**

Partnering with local communities, as well as with local organizations, is crucial, involving time, resources, active listening, and mutual respect. Based on the needs of a particular partnership, existing resources propose several roles international intermediaries can play (Peace Direct, 2023a) as well as actions that can be taken to create more equitable partnerships (Peace Direct 2023b). Respondents highlighted the importance of commitment and longevity in establishing fruitful working relationships. Formal organizations may need new systems to partner with informal or non-registered community groups, irrespective of legal registration.

Area-based approaches have also been promoted as a way of identifying and engaging with local stakeholders and placing local capacity and considerations at the forefront of humanitarian response (Global Shelter Cluster, 2020). Research on the wider impacts of shelter and settlements (InterAction, 2020) indicates that the Shelter and Settlements Sector has strong correlations with other sectors such as Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Health, Livelihoods, Protection, and Environment/DRR. Shelter and settlement practitioners can strengthen these connections through partnership with non-traditional actors, including local community groups, organizations, or institutions.

## **Facilitate self-determination in capacity strengthening for local actors as well as international approaches**

Capacity building emerged as a key barrier to localization. Capacity building in regard to localization efforts is often portrayed as “isomorphism,” whereby local organizations are supported to become more like their international counterparts (Robillard et al., 2021: 23). This is driven by what the international NGO or donor needs from their partners, rather than by the priorities of the local organizations themselves, or the needs of the people they serve. Self-determination should be fundamental to capacity strengthening, so that local and national NGOs have the agency to define their required areas for growth, including to invest in hiring staff and enhancing their capacities to work independently, manage programs, and build their technical capacities.

There is also scope for donors and international NGOs to strengthen capacity exchange and sectoral learning, for example, through gathering evidence on the effectiveness of multi-year collaborative models in shelter and settlements programming. Existing agency reports document initiatives such as Survivor and Community Led Response and the Area-Based Coordination Model, which reconfigure the pre-existing partnership mechanisms (Corbett, 2021; Saez et al., 2021) and present examples to learn from.

## **Institute relevant and appropriate coordination mechanisms**

Coordination is vital to increasing awareness of who is active in a humanitarian response and to balance distribution of assistance. In Jordan, local actors faced barriers to inclusion at coordination meetings, including location, language, and respect for their contributions. Sub-national hubs can increase accessibility and participation of geographically proximate actors, as highlighted by the Global Shelter Cluster, as part of its approach to localization. Coordination models which prioritize the vital role of local authorities and civil society and strengthen their capacities should be pursued. As seen in Bangladesh, the introduction of sub-clusters can increase sub-national coordination and communication with implementing organizations. Cluster coordinators

should also consider how to reduce the pressure on actors needing to provide the same information to multiple coordination bodies and how to address access barriers, provide support and ensure relevance to local organizations to validate their participation.

In DRC, the German embassy established a dinner to discuss the issue of localization with national organizations directly. Other donors and foreign governments could similarly create spaces for increased exchanges with local NGOs. The practice of giving space to local NGOs to listen to them, as demonstrated in DRC, can increase coordination, collaboration, and mutual understanding in the particular context.

### **Co-develop a nurturing policy environment for local leadership**

A critical factor in enabling locally led response remains the policy environment created by governments and institutions in crisis countries. Civil society organizations are bound by restrictions, oversight, or support in their context (Dupras, 2023). In South Sudan, the government mandates that international NGOs partner with local NGOs, who represent the needs of the communities. Conversely, in Jordan, increasing administrative controls, unwarranted inspections, and restrictions on civil society organizations limit their ability and willingness to collaborate with the humanitarian sector or invest in internal growth and development. In enabling contexts, CBOs are encouraged to build coalitions across different organizations to strengthen fundraising and project implementation.

Humanitarian actors – national and international NGOs, and UN agencies – should consider how they can support local organizations initiatives to advocate for civic space that can facilitate impactful, sustainable interventions. The continued presence of local stakeholders supports the triple-nexus approach to bridge gaps in programming across conflict, humanitarian, and development interventions. In Colombia, government departments are tasked with leading responses, yet their own resources and capacities are limited. International actors should support the development of policies that foster local leadership and that facilitate coalitions or partnerships that can be mobilized to serve both humanitarian and development objectives.

## **4.3 Recenter local voices and actors in operations**

### **Strengthen accountability on progress towards greater local leadership**

At a country level, OCHA or NGO forums should establish a country working group to monitor the integration of localization into the humanitarian response. The lead agency of the Shelter Cluster or cluster-like mechanism should consider how to incorporate similar goals into their Shelter strategy, either based on country developed plans or global guidance from the Shelter Cluster.

Progress should be monitored on how many local and national organizations accessed donor funds directly every year, how many international NGO- or UN agency-supported capacity-strengthening initiatives were determined by the local and national NGOs they work with, and how many local and national NGOs are cluster leaders or co-leaders, members of humanitarian coordination committees or the Humanitarian Country Team.

### **Increase visibility of local implementing partners**

All organizations producing reports on project implementation should include a section on progress towards localization and the contribution of local actors, to hold both international NGOs and donors accountable to sustain efforts to increase local leadership.

Humanitarian Country Team reporting should include indicators on localization and share progress updates as part of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (IASC, 2015).

The Shelter Cluster should promote information on active local partners in country-produced newsletters and the Shelter Cluster dashboard.



---

## Facilitate inclusion of local stakeholders in coordination and decision-making

Lead agencies should host coordination meetings in regional languages, as well as in hybrid mode with interpretation, to enhance participation and inclusion of local partner staff, frontline workers, and refugee representatives.

Responsibility for translation should shift to donors and international NGOs to allow local organizations to focus on the design and implementation of their work and prepare reports in their local language.

## Enhance opportunities to access information, funding and technical support

Donors should address information asymmetry and take active steps to publicly share information on funding opportunities, requirements, conditions, and eligibility with local NGOs and not only with international NGOs and UN agencies.

International NGOs, donors, and well-established national NGOs should offer technical and financial support to grassroots organizations for legal constitution and access to funds.



© Sohel Chowdhury



---

# 5. REFERENCES

- Alexander, J. (2023, June 15).** As the Grand Bargain gets a reboot, the limits of aid reform come into focus. The New Humanitarian. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/06/15/grand-bargain-3-reboot-limits-aid-reform>
- Barbelet, V., Davies, G., Flint, J., and Davey, E. (2021).** Interrogating the Evidence Base on Humanitarian Localisation: A Literature Study. Executive Summary. HPG literature review. ODI. [https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/EXEC\\_SUMM\\_Localisation\\_lit\\_review\\_WEB.pdf](https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/EXEC_SUMM_Localisation_lit_review_WEB.pdf)
- Corbett, J., Carstensen, N., and Di Vicenz, S. (2021).** Survivor- and Community-Led Crisis Response Practical Experience and Learning, Network Paper 84, April 2021. HPN and ODI. [https://usercontent.one/wp/www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/HPN\\_SCLR-Network-Paper\\_WEB.pdf](https://usercontent.one/wp/www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/HPN_SCLR-Network-Paper_WEB.pdf)
- Dupras, A. (2023, August 23).** Shrinking civic spaces and the localization of aid: Dilemmas. The Other Alternative. <https://theotheralternative.net/shrinking-civic-spaces-and-the-localization-of-aid-dilemmas/>
- Fitzpatrick, M., Cordua, I., Atim, T., Kattakuzhy, A., and Conciatori, K. (2023).** “Co-investigators But With Different Power”: Local Voices on the Localization of Humanitarian Research. Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and Network for Empowered Aid Response. <https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/LocalizationOfHumResearchFinal2.pdf>
- IASC. (2023).** Overhead Cost Allocation in the Humanitarian Sector. Development Initiatives in collaboration with UNICEF and Oxfam, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Results Group (RG) 5 workstream. [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2022-11/IASC%20Research%20report\\_Overhead%20Cost%20Allocation%20in%20the%20Humanitarian%20Sector.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2022-11/IASC%20Research%20report_Overhead%20Cost%20Allocation%20in%20the%20Humanitarian%20Sector.pdf)
- Global Shelter Cluster. (2020).** Settlements Approach Guidance Note. Global Shelter Cluster. <https://sheltercluster.org/settlements-approaches-urban-areas-working-group/documents/settlement-approach-guidance-note>
- Hirschfeld, K. (2024, January 8).** What is a local organization? The answer matters. Politics of Poverty. <https://politicsofpoverty.oxfamamerica.org/what-is-a-local-organization-the-answer-matters/>
- IASC. (2015).** IASC Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda/iasc-reference-module-implementation-humanitarian-programme-cycle-2015>
- IFRC. (2011).** Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) Manual. International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. <https://www.ifrc.org/document/participatory-approach-safe-shelter-awareness-passa-manual>
- InterAction. (2020).** The Wider Impacts of Shelter and Settlements Assistance. Key Findings Report. InterAction. [https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1.-Wider-Impacts-of-Shelter-Key-Findings\\_Final1.pdf](https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1.-Wider-Impacts-of-Shelter-Key-Findings_Final1.pdf)
- InterAction. (2022).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative. Outcomes of the Africa Shelter & Settlements Forum. InterAction. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Final-Africa-Shelter-Forum-Outcomes-Report.pdf>
- InterAction. (2022).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative. Outcomes of the Asia Shelter & Settlements Forum. InterAction. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Final-Asia-Shelter-Forum-Outcomes-Report.pdf>

- 
- InterAction. (2023).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative. Outcomes of the Latin America and Caribbean Shelter & Settlements Forum. InterAction. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Final-LAC-Shelter-Forum-Outcomes-Report.pdf>
- InterAction. (2023).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response Initiative. Outcomes of the Middle East and North Africa Shelter & Settlements Forum. InterAction. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Final-MENA-Shelter-Forum-Outcomes-Report-2.pdf>
- InterAction. (2024).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response. Case Study: Bangladesh. InterAction.
- InterAction. (2024).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response. Case Study: Colombia. InterAction.
- InterAction. (2024).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response. Case Study: Democratic Republic of Congo. InterAction.
- InterAction. (2024).** Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response. Case Study: Jordan. InterAction.
- NEAR (no date).** NEAR Localization Policy, Network for Empowered Aid Response <https://www.near.ngo/localisation-policy>
- Peace Direct (2023a, January 11).** The nine roles that intermediaries can play international cooperation. Peace Direct. <https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/>
- Peace Direct (2023b, September 23).** Transforming Partnership in International Cooperation. Peace Direct. <https://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships/>
- Saez, P., Konyndyk, J., and Worden, R., (2021).** Rethinking Humanitarian Reform: What Will it Take to Truly Change the System? CGD Brief, September 2021. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Rethinking-humanitarian-reform-what-will-it-take.pdf>
- Tilley, A. and Jenkins. E. (2023).** Metrics Matter: How USAID counts “local” will have a big impact on funding for local partners. Full research Report, March 2023. Publish What You Fund. <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/metrics-matter-how-usaid-counts-%E2%80%9Clocal%E2%80%9D-will-have-a-big-impact-on-funding-for-local>
- Visvanathan, V. (2023).** Learning to Be More ‘Locally Led’?: Current Practice and Evidence Gaps in the International Humanitarian Sector. ALNAP. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/learning-be-more-locally-led-current-practice-and-evidence-gaps-international-humanitarian-sector>

---

# ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

This study was initiated by InterAction and carried out by a global research team initially comprised of three researchers, working alongside in-country research teams in their respective case study countries, from a variety of professional backgrounds.

## A.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research was to build an understanding of what locally led response looks like in the shelter and settlements sector and what actions are needed by various shelter and settlements actors to get there.

The research set out to fulfil four objectives:

- 1. Explore how different stakeholders in the humanitarian shelter and settlements sector understand and experience localization**
- 2. Critically reflect on examples of locally led shelter and settlements response and the conditions or processes that enabled them, including tensions or conflicts faced by different actors and how they were navigated**
- 3. Compare the potential outcomes of locally led response with reported outcomes from locally-led responses in various contexts**
- 4. Analyze how these factors differ across contexts and examine the implications on the roles played by different actors**

The development of the research objectives was informed by a literature review carried out by the global research team which were then reviewed and agreed with the country-based researchers. Case study research questions were developed by the national research teams in line with the overall objective.

## A.2 Approach

This research took a critical lens that recognizes the inherent power dynamics present in international humanitarian aid architecture and the risks of replicating and perpetuating this in any research process. The global research team aimed as far as possible to mitigate these dynamics by ensuring team members based in the global south had self-determination in their own research context and approach, and that their voice was maintained in the publication of individual country reports. Recommendations were synthesized by the global team and validated through a consultation exercise in South Sudan, as well as shared with country-based teams.

A case study approach was chosen to situate findings and recommendations and to examine them within specific geographic, historical, political, and humanitarian contexts. The case studies examine how local is understood in each context, who the local actors were and how they worked with other stakeholders; the tensions and challenges faced; the availability and allocation of resources; the processes involved in and outcomes of the response; and the roles different actors played, to what effect.

The case studies are situated within a wider exploration into efforts being made by Shelter Cluster partners and the drivers behind their actions, through which the sectoral context and understanding of localization and perceived priorities could be gained.

	Bangladesh	Colombia	DRC	Jordan
Geographic scope	National with specific focus on Cox's Bazar		North Kivu and South Kivu	Amman, Irbid and Mafraq governorates
Crisis type considered	Floods, cyclone and mass displacement	Violence, displacement and natural hazards	Armed conflict and floods	Mass displacement and natural hazards
Timeframe of KIIs	June – August 2023	June – September 2023	July - August 2023	March – August 2023
Profile of researchers	Two female Bangladeshi architects with research backgrounds	Female Colombian humanitarian	Male Congolese working for research organisation	Female Jordanian researcher
Research support	Global team consisting of Female British humanitarian and researcher working as independent consultant, Female Indian academic working as independent consultant supervised by Female American and Male American-Sri Lankan working for global policy network.			

Table A1: Background information on each case study context

The study was carried out in four phases:

1. Literature review
2. Consultations at regional shelter fora
3. Multi-country case studies
4. Synthesis and validation

Mixed methods were used to answer the different research objectives. A wide literature review and regional and global consultations inform the overview of localization efforts within the shelter sector. Consultations utilize the use of surveys, group discussions - where the tools used were updated from one forum to the next - and KIIs, supplemented by online focus group discussions and KIIs with Global Shelter Cluster representatives and country-level coordinators. Within each case study, multiple methods will be employed, including actor mapping, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and context-specific literature review.

	Sub-Research Theme	Lit Review (Document collation, review and analysis)	Consultations (Fora: menti survey, plenary discussion, FGDs + KIIs)	Multi-country case studies (Actor mapping, KIIs, FGD, observation, literature review)
1	Perceptions		X	X
2	Experiences	X	X	X
3	Outcomes	X	X	X
4	Implications			X

Table A2: The relationship between phases and research objectives



## A.3 Methods

### Literature review

The desktop literature review included published agency reports, peer-reviewed articles and websites focused on highlighting localization efforts. While initially used to inform the development of the research objectives, newly arising literature over the course of the research period continued to be reviewed and indirectly guided the evolution of the global research team's position.

### Regional consultations

Regional consultations were carried out in:

- Africa (7th-8th September 2022 - Dakar, Senegal)
- Asia (28th-30th November 2022 - Dhaka, Bangladesh)
- LAC (7th-8th February 2023 - Bogotá, Colombia)
- MENA (22nd-23rd February 2023- Amman, Jordan)

The regional consultations were used to identify key informants and FGD participants, as well as inform the selection of possible case study countries. As the research progressed, the regional fora were used to test and refine key findings.

Over the four regional consultations, 191 people took part in a Menti survey, of which 40% were female, 56% male and 4% prefer not to say (excluding Africa where gender data was not gathered). 75% of participants represented UN, IO RCRC or INGOs, 12% represented local or national organizations or government, and 9% represented academia the private sector or other, with 4% unknown. However, 63% of the participants considered themselves to be national or local staff (considering LAC and MENA forums only) – the total is likely to be higher when including Africa and Asia, where this data was not gathered. This indicates a strong national representation in international organizations.

An outcome report from each consultation is available at [interaction.org](https://interaction.org), or see References.

### Case studies

Case studies were identified through literature review, regional consultations and KIIs and selected based on the level of available information and possible access by an appropriate local consultant. The selection of case studies was not random – they were selected to consider a range of different regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, LAC, MENA), contexts (conflict, disaster, complex crisis) and circumstances (government, decentralization, civil society) and on the basis of the availability of a suitable and willing national consultant or team.

Case study reports are available at [interaction.org](https://interaction.org), or see References.

### KIIs

Key informant interviews formed the main research method. In total, 72 KIIs were carried out with 77 people, of which 51 were male (66%) and 26 were female (34%). In total, 60% of the KIIs represented national or local organizations, with a further 10% representatives of nationally registered organizations which were part of an international network, and 30% representing international NGOs or UN agencies. In addition, one FGD was carried out with affected community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

A list of interview questions is included in each case study report.

The following table lays out the interviews carried out per context.

	<b>Working definition</b>	<b>BGD</b>	<b>COL</b>	<b>DRC</b>	<b>JOR</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Affected population</b>	Members of a community convened based on their affectedness by a particular crisis	<b>1</b>				<b>1 FGD</b>
<b>Community leader</b>	No formal organization or role but representative of community, tribe, or self-defined group			<b>8</b>		<b>8</b>
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations, including academia, professional institutions, formal associations, or religious groups	<b>1</b>			<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Gov</b>	Government ministry, department, or organization	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>RLO</b>	Refugee-led organization, formal or informal group comprised of refugees in case study country				<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CBO</b>	Community-based organizations, can be unregistered or informal and operating only in/ with one specific area or group within case study country, e.g. women's or youth groups				<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>LNGO</b>	A formal NGO registered and operating in sub-region/district of case study country	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NNGO</b>	National NGO registered in case study country operating (or permitted to) throughout the country	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>11</b>
<b>I-NNGO</b>	NGO registered in case study country but part of an international network e.g. CARE Bangladesh	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>RCRC</b>	Local chapter of IFRC or ICRC movement	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>INGO</b>	International NGO, registered or headquartered in a different country from the case study	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>UN/IO</b>	United Nations Agency or International Organisation e.g. UNHCR, IOM, WFP	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>72</b>

Table A3: Types of actors interviewed in each context

## Dissemination and validation workshop

Following synthesis of the findings, primarily by one consultant, in December 2023, the final phase of the study included a dissemination and validation workshop held in Juba, South Sudan with 18 participants from the local NGO forum. The purpose of the workshop was to disseminate findings from the case studies across Jordan, Colombia, Bangladesh, and DRC, explore how localization is perceived by local stakeholders in Juba, and to prioritize the various recommendations emerging from these case studies to suggest the way forward. During the workshop, a local NGO representative from Juba presented their experiences of localization in the humanitarian sector. This was followed by a presentation of the findings from Jordan, Bangladesh, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. An online survey was undertaken to gather inputs from the participants and to document examples from South Sudan. Using breakout group discussions the participants ranked and discussed the various recommendations emerging from various case studies and suggested how they related to and could be applied in the context of South Sudan.

### A.4 Scope and limitations

While recognizing the Grand Bargain focus on increasing direct funding to local organizations, this study did not aim to carry out in-depth analysis of funding levels, instead focusing on where access to funding has implications on decision-making, capacity or ability to sustain operations.

This study did not evaluate shelter programming; where outcomes of a response are discussed, it is in relation to the influence of locally led efforts and comparison with potential outcomes, rather than a critique of any response or individual program itself.

The focus on this study is on humanitarian shelter and settlements response, but it recognizes similar or parallel efforts being made in development and peacekeeping and the links and overlaps between them. It also considers outcomes and opportunities of locally led response that occur beyond a humanitarian timeframe.

A key limitation of this study is the generalizability of findings from the case studies. In addition, although efforts were made to work in local languages, the majority of literature that exists and discussions at different events occurred in English, which heavily influences the conclusions reached and may have limited the voices heard, although specific steps were taken to mitigate this.

It should be noted that the duration of the research was originally intended to be nine months. The timeframe was initially extended by six months to account for scheduling of regional forums outside the control of the research initiative, as well as the time required to identify case study countries and consultants. It was extended by a further four months due to the time required for in-country research and to carry out the validation exercise in South Sudan.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE