

# 2021 Economic and Social Committee Humanitarian Affairs Segment

## FINAL REPORT

**Title:** Locally-led humanitarian action – How to advance the Localization Agenda

**Sponsored by:** Switzerland

**Organizers by:** UNFPA, Start Network, UNICEF, IFRC and Center for Global Development

### Background

Engaging Local/National Actors (L/NAs) is critical to the success of every humanitarian action but local expertise and leadership are often overlooked. L/NAs are often the first responders and provide an invaluable understanding of local challenges and potential solutions. They are able to easily mobilize local networks and offer greater access to affected populations, contributing to a more effective, efficient, and accountable humanitarian. Most of them work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus on preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience building and remain after international actors withdraw.

In the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and ensuing Grand Bargain, a commitment was made for ‘More support and funding to local responders’ and to make humanitarian work ‘as local as possible and as international as necessary.’ While some progress has been made to deliver the commitments around financing, capacity strengthening, coordination and partnership, transformative change is yet to happen in shifting the balance to a more locally led humanitarian action. The COVID-19 pandemic and the broader climate crises have further accentuated the need to strengthen the role and leadership of L/NAs as localisation has become both a necessity and opportunity to effectively meet humanitarian needs as well as in preparedness, adaptation and resilience building.

### Objectives

This side event was organised to present and discuss the key areas of progress to date as well as work that requires further action from the perspectives of the different stakeholder groups including L/NAs themselves. The objective of the event was to share practical experiences in advancing the localisation agenda and reflect on specific localisation issues such as capacity strengthening and complementarity, cascading quality funding and risk management, coordination, leadership, and decision making, and locally led early action.

### Structure of the event

**Chair:** Mr. Philippe Besson, Head of Multilateral Division, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation

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**Moderator:** Nimo Hassan, Somalia NGO consortium

**Setting the scene:** Ms. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Shifting the Power Coalition, Fiji (video presentation)

### Panel composition

1. Ms. Farzana Ahmed, Start Fund Bangladesh (SFB) representative,
2. Ms. Jennifer Miguel, Head of UNFPA's Regional Syria Response Hub, Jordan,
3. Mr. Edmon Gharios, President Chiyah council, Chiyah, Lebanon
4. Mr. Patrick Saez, Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development
5. Ms. Margarita Arias Sanchez, Colombia Red Cross
6. Dr. Linah Jebii Kilimo, Chief Administrative Secretary, State Department for Gender, Ministry of Public Service and Gender Affairs, Government of Kenya

Final remarks delivered by Ms. Emilia Saiz, Secretary-General, United Cities and Local Governments.

### Main points:

**Chair: Mr. Philippe Besson, Head of Multilateral Division, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation**

- Important to think in terms of capacity sharing and build upon the respective strengths of the respective actors on the scene

### Setting the scene: Ms. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Shifting the Power Coalition, Fiji

- The increasing intensity and frequency of natural disasters bring considerable costs.
- Women agencies and leadership lack resources: only 1.2% of humanitarian assistance goes to local and national NGOs, and even less reaches women organisations.
- The Shifting the Power coalition supports local women led leadership and brings together experiences responding to health pandemics and climate change.

### Farzana Ahmed, Start Fund Bangladesh

- Start Fund Bangladesh has been able to shift power to build a locally led humanitarian action, by providing more funding and decision making to local organisations.
- Humanitarian agencies should provide space for local NGOs to engage, represent, and lead.
- We should co-create equal partnerships (local organisations take the lead and partner with INGOs providing technical support); minimum percentage of funding direct to local organisations that is tracked; long-term and predictable funding).

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- Humanitarian agencies should support local organisations needs by indirect cost and risk sharing; tailor-made training in dual direction (to and from local organisation to and from INGOs), and peer learning.

### **Ms. Jennifer Miguel, Head of UNFPA's Regional Syria Response Hub, Jordan**

- In the Syrian context, UNFPA supports the capacity of local organisations and also engages them throughout the humanitarian programme cycle process.
- As GBV coordination lead, UNFPA has ensured that in Syria almost 70% of the GBV subcluster's members are local organisations, and they lead specific task forces and are part of decision-making processes.

### **Mr. Edmon Gharios, President, Chiyah council, Chiyah, Lebanon**

- The social department coordinated efficient interventions of local and international donors.
- The permanent contact with the population provided important data on population needs.
- The municipality council has a clear policy in a 5-year plan to improve the social activities based on the feedback received.
- Challenges include a lack of skilled social workers due to the economic crisis and reduction of municipality resources.
- The social department should coordinate both international and local NGOs but also conduct needs assessments to identify the needs of the population.

### **Ms. Margarita Arias Sanchez, Colombia Red Cross (CRC)**

- The Covid-19 response experience of Colombia Red Cross (CRC) provided several lessons: The CRC were the first to interact with the communities allowing flexibility
- Importance of establishing partnerships with alternate partners. The private sector trust local actors such as CRC because of their access and knowledge to communities
- By establishing country level dialogues, the work of the localization agenda was placed in the discussion.
- Funding and interest in going local in the funding.
- National workshops and making a strong socialisation strategy of country level dialogues with donors and governments.

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### **Mr. Patrick Saez, Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development**

- Coordination is a key area to make humanitarian action more people driven.
- Most clusters are weak at the frontlines and are organized around what large international organisations supply rather than what the local level supplies.
- Cluster led agencies dominate the appeals for funding. Shifting to a more area-based coordination, by organizing the programme cycle on geographical areas rather than sectors, has the potential to improve needs assessments and reduce intermediaries.
- For international agencies, recommendation to scale up area-based programming
- For the IASC, piloting area-based coordination in a number of countries.
- Funding: shift funding to one that reduces the number of intermediaries.

### **Dr. Linah Jebii Kilimo, Chief Administrative Secretary, State Department for Gender, Ministry of Public Service and Gender Affairs, Government of Kenya**

- Very important to include women-led organisations (WLOs) in humanitarian responses. Drawing from Kenyan experience, central to address issues of discrimination against WLOs where women are seen solely as vulnerable and victims and not frontline aid actors.
- Critical to include WLO's voices in humanitarian decision-making to ensure that womens' needs are met in the response.
- More focus should be on training of women leading local aid organisations and grass-root organisations, including on humanitarian preparedness.
- Need for more predictable funding for women-led organisations.

### **Ms. Emilia Saiz, Secretary-General, United Cities and Local Governments**

- In the last 10 years, there has been significant progress. Great to hear the alignment of all stakeholders around direct access to funding for local actors.
- Investing in women and women leadership is extremely critical.
- Involvement of local governments and subnational government authorities critical in delivery of humanitarian assistance at the subnational level.

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### Key messages of the side event

- Engaging Local/National Actors (L/NAs), including women-led organisations, is critical to the success of every humanitarian action but local expertise and leadership are often overlooked.
- Flexible and quality funding for local and national NGOs, and addressing the challenges faced by women-led organisations critical in advancing the localization agenda.
- Capacity sharing and different types of partnerships are encouraged to ensure quality humanitarian intervention.

### Resources shared at the side event

- I. [Development of mechanism for accountability to affected population in rapid response](#)
- II. [IASC Interim guidance on localization and COVID-19 response](#)
- III. [Grand Bargain practical actions on operationalizing the localization commitments](#)
- IV. [UNICEF internal assessment on cascading quality fund to implementing partners](#)
- V. [GBV AOR: Promising practices for partnerships supporting national and local women's organizations and groups undertaking Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) prevention and response programming in emergencies](#)
- VI. [A national start fund: Start Fund Bangladesh](#)
- VII. [Inclusive coordination: Building an area-based humanitarian coordination model](#)
- VIII. ['How can we contribute if we can't participate?' The accessibility of humanitarian guidance to local and national organisations](#)
- IX. [Adapting humanitarian aid coordination to an area-based model could improve future responses](#)
- X. [Localization in COVID-19- Experience of Caritas national organisations with humanitarian funding, partnerships and coordination in the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

### Outcomes of the side event

- Call for member states and humanitarian agencies to strengthen engagement with local actors and women-led organisations (WLOs) by increasing their representation and influence in humanitarian structures.
- Panellists called for international humanitarian agencies to explore different types of partnership with local actors for example in North West Syria where UNFPA facilitated a partnership where the WLO was the main partner and the INGO a sub grantee providing specific GBV technical support to the WLO.
- Call for Member states and resource partners to increase quality funding and access to humanitarian funding streams for local actors including women rights organisations

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and women led organisation and consider funding for institutional capacity strengthening.

- Call for strengthening the collaboration between humanitarian agencies and local governments authorities in delivery of humanitarian assistance at the subnational level.
- Member states and humanitarian agencies were encouraged to rethink the current humanitarian architecture and consider a system which make delivery of humanitarian response through local actors as the default for programming.