**Background Note/Non-paper on Localization**

**16TH ANNUAL SOUTHEAST ASIA - RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT LEADERSHIP MEETING**

**Session 5: Localization of Actions**

*Local humanitarian action has an enormous life-saving impact around the world. It could do even more – in particular, it could be the key to bridging the growing gap (currently over $15 billion) between humanitarian needs and available funds – if properly supported. No actor is better placed than the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to deliver a local humanitarian response. Localization is not new to the Red Cross and Red Crescent; it is fundamentally how we work.*

The Grand Bargain is an agreement signed in 2016 between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations who committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action. The signatories agreed on 51 commitments distilled in 9 thematic workstreams and one cross-cutting area.



Figure 1 – The nine Thematic Workstreams from the Grand Bargain

Localization is the second of these workstreams, co-convened by the IFRC and the Swiss Government. There has never been an agreed definition of what localization is. It was stated that the workstream on localization should focus on actions aiming at providing “more support and funding tools to local and national responders,” and to “making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary”. At the same time the signatories reconfirmed the vital role of international actors, in particular in situations of armed conflict. [[1]](#footnote-2)

Some actors have developed their own definitions and localization objectives. For example, local actors in the Pacific (government, national societies and local and national NGOs) developed their own definition of localization as “a process of recognizing, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations”[[2]](#footnote-3).

The overall objective of localization is improved humanitarian response, ensuring access for all in need to fast, quality, impactful and sustainable humanitarian assistance that is efficient, effective and fit for purpose. Local actors are key for this and have distinct strengths, as they often play a crucial role in ensuring early response and access, acceptance, cost effectiveness, and link with development (i.e. reducing the impact of future crises). In order to achieve these benefits, the specific objectives of localization are to increase investment in local actors and to improve partnerships and coordination between international and local responders.

Localization is about complementarity, which looks to a balance between local and international action in order to maximize the comparative advantages of both and increase effectiveness of the humanitarian response in a given context. International humanitarian action remains extremely important. However there needs to be far greater recognition of the role of local actors.

The ambitions of the localization agenda are in line with and reinforces the “raison d’être” of National Societies. The need to see international and national engagement as complementary to each other is also found in the Movements´ internal arrangements as per the 1997 Seville Agreement. In the Seville Agreement it was recognized that effective collaboration on mobilization of resources must be based on mutual trust and on a clear sense of purpose. Therefore, the National Societies remain at the center of the humanitarian activities. The SMCC process has moved the intra-movement cooperation further. However, the importance of the capacity and principled humanitarian action of the National Societies must remain at the center. Humanitarian activities will never be fully locally anchored and sustained through its international components. It is the National Societies in their role as auxiliary to their states which allows the Red Cross and Red Crescent a unique national humanitarian platform to act from and the branches and volunteers who make localization fully integrated into the operations of the National Societies.

**This proximity and permanent** presence of National Societies allows for rapid response, such as the PMI´s response to the Sulawesi and Lombok earthquakes. The permanent presence allows National Societies to be uniquely positioned to link disaster relief work with preventions and resilience work.

The sustained presence of National Societies within the communities, through branches and volunteers, is a prerequisite for **the incomparable access** National Societies have to communities. The lifesaving operations of the Myanmar Red Cross in Rakhine is dependent on the trust and acceptance from both the government as well as the vulnerable populations in a challenged environment. This trust needs to be gained and maintained. Furthermore, the combination of access and presence allows National Societies to have a genuine understanding of the social, cultural and political contexts they are part of.

There are systems in place for National Societies to access unique financing such as the DREF and to implement forecasts-based financing. Furthermore, the IFRC Strategy 2030, which was recently accepted by the Governing Board and will be put forward at the General Assembly in December 2019, focuses on **“Supporting and developing National Societies as strong and effective local actors”.**

The localization agenda brings significant **opportunities for National Societies**, including for more funding – particularly for capacity strengthening – as well as for promoting more equal and supportive partnerships between National Societies and international stakeholders. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, donors and partners need to be educated about Red Cross and Red Crescent’s existing ways of working which address many of the goals of the localization agenda as well as be provided with easily accessible platforms for engagement. As such, “The One Billion Coalition for Resilience“ provides opportunities to engage partners and stakeholders to support localized humanitarian assistance and the ASEAN Coalition for Resilience anchors this ambition at a regional institutional level. In addition, there are areas where National Societies can strengthen their approaches and capacities to better empower local response. Many of these are identified in the Manila Call for Action.

The Manila Call for Action can be seen in the light of “localization” and then provides a broad platform from which to strengthen our work. There is nothing in the Manila Call for Action which does not add to the internationally formulated ambitions of localization. However, the Manila Call for Action articulates the ambitions and strategic directions as formulated by the leaders of the National Societies. Some examples could be the target that 60% of National Societies are to be “cash ready” as well as the efforts of enhancing national and local income generating activities and social entrepreneurship.

Several programs are ongoing to strengthen the implementation of the ambitions expressed in the Manila Call for Action. The USAID funded program Red Ready is one example which includes several National Societies. Red Ready aims at increasing the capacity, readiness, and resilience of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Asia Pacific to respond to local disasters. The National Societies which are currently involved are Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Timor Leste, Viet Nam. The Red Ready program brings together the processes in OCAC[[3]](#footnote-4), BOCA[[4]](#footnote-5) as well as PER[[5]](#footnote-6). In addition, the program aims at establishing a Local Emergency Response Fund, fully managed by National Societies.

**IFRC co-convenes the Localization Workstream of the Grand Bargain**, alongside the Swiss government. In this role, it has organized consultations and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders. A series of regional conferences were organized in the summer of 2019 to share experiences and facilitate dialogues. The Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific took place in Jakarta at the end of August 2019 and several examples from the Red Ready Program were shared as examples of strengthened localization.

1. The text of the Grand Bargain is available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Grand\_Bargain\_final\_22\_May\_FINAL-2.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Australian Red Cross, Going Local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem

   in the Pacific, https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/fa37f8eb-51e7-4ecd-ba2fd1587574d6d5/ARCLocalization-report-Electronic-301017.pdf.aspx, October 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Organizational Capacity and Assessment Certification [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Preparedness for Effective Response [↑](#footnote-ref-6)