

# UK Dialogue on Locally Led Humanitarian Action: Report

**Thursday, 7 September 2023**

Hosted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, British Red Cross and the  
Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

## Contents

Executive summary.....	3
1. Overview.....	6
1.1. Background .....	6
1.2. Dialogue objectives .....	7
1.3. Methodology – hosting the dialogue .....	7
2. ODI country survey findings .....	10
3. Theme 1: Quality partnerships .....	11
3.1. Overview .....	11
3.2. Findings.....	11
4. Theme 2: Locally led coordination .....	16
4.1 Overview .....	16
4.2. Findings.....	16
5. Theme 3: Quality funding .....	19
5.1. Overview .....	19
5.2. Findings.....	19
6. Closing session and next steps .....	23
6.1 Final reflections .....	23
6.2 Next Steps.....	24
Annex A - Agenda .....	25

## Executive summary

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), in collaboration with the British Red Cross (BRC) and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), hosted a dialogue to reflect on and inform the UK's evolving approach to locally led humanitarian action.

The event aimed to draw on learning from across three humanitarian responses – **Myanmar, Northwest Syria, and Ukraine**, bringing together stakeholders from local and national actors (LNAs) in these three contexts, as well as international NGOs, and UK government officials. The dialogue focussed on three interconnected themes: 1) **quality and accountable partnerships** 2) **locally led coordination** and 3) **quality funding**. In addition to addressing these key themes, the dialogue placed an emphasis on the specific barriers that organisations representing marginalised groups face and opportunities to progress a more **inclusive approach to locally led humanitarian action**.

This report sets out a summary of the discussion with views from participants, and is not intended to represent government policy. The findings will help inform the UK's future approach to locally led humanitarian action, working together with NGOs, multilateral organisations and other stakeholders.

The dialogue was held under the Chatham House Rule, and as such, no remarks in this report will be attributed to a specific person or organisation, with the exception of the case studies where permission has been sought to do so.

### Summary of findings across the three themes:

1. Long-term, collaborative relationships based on trust, mutual support, knowledge sharing, and respect are key to building good quality partnerships between donors, intermediary agencies, (such as UN agencies, INGOs, IFRC, pooled funds) and LNAs.
2. There can be a tendency for quality partnerships to be reliant on individual approaches or behaviours; an effort should be made to invest at an organisational/system wide level.
3. It is important for donors, intermediaries and LNAs to be clear what a 'quality' partnership looks like and how to hold each other accountable to achieve it. Suggestions for how to promote mutual accountability included a proposal for FCDO to set out an action plan detailing commitments on locally led humanitarian action, including identifying clear principles and metrics around quality partnerships. The

'Humanitarian Baseline for Ukraine' was given as an example of a mechanism to track localisation commitments in partnerships.

4. Donors could support a move away from sub-contractor/contractee relationships between international organisations and LNAs, enabling LNAs to select who they work and partner with – seeking the 'right to choose, not be chosen'.
5. Effective communication is key to enabling quality partnerships. Open communication channels between donors and local/national (L/N) partners – at both Headquarters and country level – can help to build trust and accountability. Donors should communicate to LNAs how their input has informed programme design/delivery. Regular channels for dialogue between donors and LNAs about quality of partnership and localisation should be established (both around specific grants, but also at the response/country-level) and follow-up to this conveyed so that L/N partners can see how their feedback is recognised and acted on.
6. Quality funding and quality partnerships are interlinked. Funding that is inflexible or short-term can lead to poorer quality partnerships. Donors should seek to provide multi-year, flexible funding with adequate support costs, and where funding is channelled through intermediaries, donors should ensure these characteristics are passed down to the L/N partners. FCDO could build on their NGO Humanitarian Funding guidelines to establish clear policies on passing down quality funding.
7. There is a need for awareness and sensitivity to the specific needs of marginalised people in all stages of programme design and delivery. Partnering with LNAs that represent these people can help provide this knowledge and understanding. The partnership relationship must be equitable and accountable. Flexible funding was seen as particularly important for enabling community participatory approaches by LNAs, including for organisations representing marginalised groups, such as Women Led and Women's Rights Organisations (WLOs/WROs), Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and organisations representing LGBTQ+ communities. Flexible funding creates the space for LNAs to work with communities and survivors when shaping programmes that offer more relevant solutions, meeting the specific needs of affected people in challenging operating environments.
8. A more equitable approach to capacity 'building' would be capacity 'sharing' – whereby all partners are assessed for areas they could either support or be supported to develop. Where FCDO finances intermediaries to support L/N partners on strengthening their institutional capacity, the intermediary should be held accountable for demonstrating how the L/N partner has grown in its capacity to exercise leadership, including through establishing an exit plan that centres the L/N partner transitioning to

take on leadership or co-leadership of programmes, partnerships and consortia. Furthermore local actors' ownership of the changes that they are working towards should be demonstrated (including through use of self-assessment methods to analyse, prioritise and drive capacity strengthening plans owned by L/N actors, rather than conceived and led by the intermediary partner).

9. The FCDO should consider revising their approach to risk at both HQ and country level, looking at risk appetite, management and sharing. It was felt this should be central to FCDO's future approach to supporting locally led humanitarian action, drawing on learning from other donors (e.g. USAID/Netherlands).
10. FCDO support to initiatives promoting local leadership and decision making are seen as important, this could include supporting local civil society platforms which enable LNAs to organise, prioritise and advocate effectively in humanitarian coordination and decision-making processes. Donors should also support and empower local leadership in international coordination mechanisms, including by helping to remove some of the barriers to participation (e.g. language).
11. FCDO could consider expanding support to funding mechanisms that are locally managed, investing in these where they exist and helping (where appropriate) to set them up where they do not. Pooled or multi-donor trust funds were seen as useful models.

These findings will be used to help inform the UK's future approach to locally led humanitarian action, working in collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders.

## 1. Overview

### 1.1. Background

There is growing evidence that locally led humanitarian approaches are more timely, agile, accountable and sustainable models of delivering aid.<sup>1</sup> As the gap between global humanitarian needs and funding worsens, ensuring humanitarian action is effective and adapted to local contexts through a more people-centred approach and localised coordination is key. Despite the growing recognition that strong local-level coordination, participation and leadership is critical for effective humanitarian action, the core humanitarian coordination and planning architecture continues to be dominated by large international aid organisations. Over the past few years, there has been a push towards including local and national actors (LNAs) more in formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms, with consequent opportunities to share information and influence decision-making. However, meaningful leadership roles remain rare.<sup>2</sup>

Intermediary relationships can have a significant role in supporting strong, effective and empowered coordination at the local level. However, in a study commissioned by the Swiss Government on behalf of the Localisation Workstream, it emerged that ‘the existing role of intermediaries needs to fundamentally shift to better support locally led action’ and that ‘barriers preventing change are more powerful than the triggers that motivate change’.<sup>3 4</sup> While some intermediary organisations have made partner modalities with LNAs more equitable, meaningful change in policies and practices around partnerships and collaboration has been limited, and more needs to be done to achieve the ambitions of the Grand Bargain. Critically, most intermediary organisations have not yet made steps to institutionalise localisation as a critical element to improve humanitarian aid, in particular at the country level.

The Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream undertook various initiatives to promote wider understanding and delivery of the localisation commitments at country level, recommending that donor agencies organise donor state dialogues on locally led humanitarian action with their main humanitarian partners and LNAs, to discuss their plans and directions related to localisation, including on how to promote intermediary relationships that support LNAs.

Co-convened by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), British Red Cross (BRC) and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), the UK Dialogue on Locally Led Humanitarian Action sought to catalyse this, drawing on learning from across three humanitarian current responses – Syria, Myanmar, and Ukraine - inviting partners and

<sup>1</sup> <https://odihpn.org/publication/unpacking-the-value-of-locally-led-humanitarian-action/>

<sup>2</sup> [2022 The State of the Humanitarian System \(SOHS\) – Full report | SOHS \(alnep.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Bridging the intention to action gap - the future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action.pdf \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> The GB framework (GB 2.0) also identified the role of intermediaries as key, and a corresponding ‘caucus’ (a group of high-level representatives of Grand Bargain signatories) was formed to develop recommended steps for address the barriers identified in the above study. [Outcome Paper Towards Co-ownership - Caucus on Intermediaries - August 2022.pdf \(interagencystandingcommittee.org\)](#)

stakeholders for a day of discussion to reflect on and inform the UK's approach to locally led humanitarian action.

This is in line with the vision and commitments made in FCDO's International Development Strategy<sup>5</sup> and Humanitarian Framework<sup>6</sup> to supporting locally led humanitarian action.

## 1.2. Dialogue objectives

There were four key objectives in delivering the dialogue:

- 1) To listen to and reflect on the views of FCDO's local and national (L/N) partners and to centre their voice in discussions.
- 2) To evidence and build on examples of good practice to promote locally led humanitarian action that FCDO is or has been supporting at the local and national level, as well as exploring good practices beyond FCDO.
- 3) To unpack the elements that make a certain 'good' practice work in a specific setting; the challenges and barriers faced; and how successful approaches could be replicated or scaled in other contexts.
- 4) To recognise the diversity of LNAs and provide an opportunity to explore the specific barriers that organisations representing marginalised groups face – in particular Women Led and Women's Rights Organisations, Organisations of People with Disabilities and organisations representing LGBTQ+ communities – and opportunities to progress a more inclusive approach to locally led humanitarian action.

By delivering on these objectives, the findings from the dialogue can be used to inform the UK's future approach to locally led humanitarian action.

## 1.3. Methodology – hosting the dialogue

### Preparatory work

Preparatory work for the dialogue commenced in Spring 2023. The co-convenors agreed a concept note, timeline and identified three humanitarian contexts that would be the focus of the dialogue.

FCDO worked in conjunction with their country teams in the chosen contexts to identify a lead NGO network to help facilitate the involvement of LNAs in the dialogue. This included

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-governments-strategy-for-international-development/the-uk-governments-strategy-for-international-development>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-humanitarian-framework/uk-humanitarian-framework>

identifying L/N partners to take part in a preparatory survey and attend the dialogue, as well as consultation on the key themes and agenda.

A key objective for the dialogue was to hear from LNAs directly and to be able to reflect on their contributions. In order to foster an environment for frank and open discussion, a decision was made to run the event as a workshop as opposed to a larger conference-style event. That meant that there would be a limit on the number of participants, and, recognising this would be disappointing to those organisations unable to join, the co-convenors worked with ODI to conduct a pre-dialogue survey, the findings of which would be presented at the event.

#### ODI country survey

ODI conducted a preparatory survey in July 2023, which was distributed by FCDO country teams, the lead NGO network in each of the contexts, and global NGO networks. It was distributed to local and national civil society stakeholders in each focus context, including NGO networks, as well as international NGOs (INGOs), to gather their views, examples of good practice and challenges faced, in relation to three key themes (quality partnerships; locally led coordination and quality funding). Respondents had the option to respond to the survey questions anonymously and only ODI had access to the raw data from the survey. The ODI Humanitarian Policy Group analysed the survey results during August 2023, and presented the findings at the dialogue in September.

#### The event

The dialogue itself took place on Thursday, 7 September and was attended by around 50 participants, with a combination of in-person participation at FCDO's London office and virtual attendance using Microsoft Teams. Participation included a diverse group of local and national representatives from the three contexts, including networks (with in-person travel of these actors sponsored by BRC and CAFOD); INGOs; FCDO country representatives; and central FCDO policy and programme teams.

The format of the agenda was designed to maximise opportunities for open dialogue between these different actors, using break-out groups, plenary discussions and pre-arranged interventions to showcase particular examples of good practice.

A full agenda can be found at **Annex A**.

#### Limitations and lessons learned

*[This section has been included in the report for those who may be wishing to host a similar dialogue]*

There were limitations with hosting the dialogue, particularly due to time and budgetary constraints – for instance, the survey was only available in English, and we were unable to



provide interpretation services to all participants during the dialogue itself. Although an effort was made to mitigate the risk of excluding participants – for instance, national NGO networks were identified to represent the views from LNAs, often facilitating in-country discussions to capture a range of perspectives, and some participants had access to real-time interpretation – it was noted that in some cases these barriers prevented their meaningful participation. It is also therefore acknowledged that the dialogue findings may not reflect the experiences of all LNAs.

The language used in the survey questions could have been perceived as too technical, again excluding certain actors from understanding and responding to the survey questions.

For those wishing to host similar dialogues, ensuring access to translation services and budget for interpretation would be recommended. Factoring additional time to allow for translation of materials would also be advised.

## 2. ODI country survey findings

The survey responses reflected existing evidence, research, and guidance as well as well-established challenges and good practices on locally led humanitarian action.

ODI's analysis found that survey responses, in particular looking at the barriers to quality partnerships, leadership and coordination and funding, were very similar in substance across different types of respondents whether they were local civil society organisations, local NGOs, national NGOs or international NGOs. The analysis found that often women led, women's rights organisations, organisations of people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ organisations as well as smaller local organisations faced barriers the most acutely.

The survey responses also clearly articulated that the three themes covered – partnership, coordination and funding – are interlinked and have an impact on each other.

- Quality partnerships need quality funding
- More localised coordination needs quality funding and quality partnerships
- Quality funding relies on quality partnerships

This was discussed in more detail following the presentation of the survey findings, when participants were invited to provide reflections. Participants discussed the relationship between LNAs and intermediaries, noting that quality partnerships are dependent on actors having a mind-set that is open to sharing responsibility, coupled with quality funding and support to strengthen the institutional capacity of L/N partners.

Whilst participants welcomed the findings, the limitations of the survey were noted, with the need for local language translation in surveys to capture the views from a wider range of LNAs.

## 3. Theme 1: Quality partnerships

### 3.1. Overview

This session explored how to **promote equitable partnerships and accountability for quality partnerships**. In particular, looking at what a ‘good quality’ partnership looks like when it comes to relationships between intermediary agencies (such as UN agencies, INGOs, IFRC, pooled funds) and LNAs, with an emphasis on how to shift unequal power imbalances. It also examined the role that donors, such as FCDO, have in promoting equitable partnerships and accountability for quality partnerships.

Recognising the diversity of LNAs, this session also looked at best practices and specific barriers faced by organisations representing marginalised groups, such as Women Led and Women’s Rights Organisations (WLOs/WROs), Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) and LGBTQ+ organisations in achieving equitable access to support, and their experience of ‘quality’ partnership.

### 3.2. Findings

#### **Accountability and transparency**

In order to establish successful, quality partnerships, participants felt that two-way - or mutual - accountability was key. Suggestions were put forward on how to achieve this, including establishing a clear framework to promote accountability for quality of partnership across the design, implementation, governance and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) programmes, consortia and partnerships, particularly those funded by FCDO. This could include key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics, which would need to be developed but could include factors such as access to quality funding (including coverage of overhead costs; cascading of flexible, multi-year funding etc.), and the extent to which local coordination is enabled. By monitoring progress against established commitments this would hold both sides of the partnership mutually accountable.

The **Humanitarian Localization Baseline for Ukraine** was presented as an example of good practice for tracking progress on partnerships with clear indicators to measure commitments. It was suggested that this approach - supporting country-level localisation baselines at an inter-agency level – could be replicable in other contexts. Such baselines could be implemented by independent national research/learning institutions; with the TORs developed on a consultative basis involving LNAs, donors, UN agencies and INGOs. A representative from FCDO Post could join the advisory committee to such exercises, and encourage other donors, UN agencies and INGOs to do so, as a means of building in donor input, feedback and buy-in to the research findings and actions to address these.

### **Good Practice: Humanitarian Localization Baseline for Ukraine**

The **Humanitarian Localization Baseline for Ukraine** was co-created with input from LNAs, donors, including the FCDO, and UN agencies and has been developed as a strategic tool for participants to carry out a holistic measurement of progress in localisation across seven indicators: partnership, leadership, coordination and complementarity, funding, capacity, policy influence, and participation.

The use of the baseline provides a way in which to track progress against localisation and benchmarking at the country level. The baseline can be used as a catalyst for change by various national and international stakeholders active in Ukraine, and a starting point for dialogue and discussion, setting targets, and tracking change.

There are, however, limitations of the baseline, with the most notable being that the data may be influenced by differing interpretations of key terms used during the survey process.

Further details can be found here: [Humanitarian Localization Baseline for Ukraine](#).

Linked to the importance of accountability was the need for transparency and clear communication within partnership arrangements. In particular, it was suggested that intermediary agencies should be required to inform their L/N partners about who the 'back donor' on a grant is and provide transparency to L/N partners about the budget and donor provisions in terms of cascading overheads costs and other aspects of quality partnership. The 'back donor' could support this by holding the intermediary to account. It was felt that a clear channel for L/N partners to provide feedback on quality of partnership/support to local leadership directly to the 'back-donor' would also be important in establishing greater transparency, mutual trust and accountability – this is covered in more detail below.

### **Collaboration**

It was felt that developing quality partnerships takes time as trust needs to be built and it requires an openness to learn and collaborate between all parties, and across all stages of the project/initiative – including in the early decision-making stages.

In some cases, there may be existing civil society networks or partnership relationships which could be recognised and supported. In other cases, there may need to be a cultural and mind-set shift to build new relationships and centre the voices of LNAs.

There were different suggestions for how to promote improved collaboration at all stages of the programme cycle, for instance encouraging intermediary agencies to invite L/N partners to participate in strategic meetings on programmes and consortia funded by FCDO.

The FCDO funded **Locally led, Inclusive and Versatile Emergency Support to Conflict Affected Populations in Ukraine and Poland programme (LIVES)** was highlighted as a good practice example in fostering a collaborative partnership approach between an intermediary and LNAs in Ukraine.

**Good Practice: LIVES (Ukraine)**

The **Locally led, Inclusive and Versatile Emergency Support to Conflict Affected Populations in Ukraine and Poland (LIVES)** programme was launched in 2022 with funding from the FCDO and is led by Mercy Corps, delivering a comprehensive package of emergency assistance.

The overall outcome of the LIVES programme is to enable the *'most vulnerable conflict-affected Ukrainians to meet their basic needs through rapid, localised and appropriate humanitarian assistance, delivered in a gender, age, and ability responsive way'*. Local partners are supported with the resources they need to grow their knowledge and capacity to deliver a response.

Through the LIVES programme, local partners are consulted throughout the assessment and design of programming, with these consultations influencing the direction of the programme's approach.

This complementarity model of partnership is one which disrupts the top down 'internationally-designed and locally delivered' projects model and, instead, creates programmes that are led by partners that understand communities and needs, supported by intermediary with technical expertise, welfare insurance, risk management.

Now in its second phase, LIVES 2.0 aims to commit 22% of its total budget to LNAs, with a large proportion supporting self-identified, prioritised running costs, staff development, welfare, and institutional capacity.

## **Communication**

Effective communication was seen by participants as fundamental to building trust and promoting increased collaboration. As mentioned above, suggestions included establishing direct communication between L/N partners and the 'back-donor'. This could take the form of regular dialogue between Post and local civil society, in collaboration with other donor embassies to promote an aligned approach.

However, it was noted that even with direct access to ‘back donors’, L/N partners can become dis-incentivised to provide feedback when there is a perceived lack of action or update resulting from it. Donors were encouraged to ensure strong, two-way feedback mechanisms are in place - ensuring they communicate to L/N partners how their input has informed programme design/delivery.

It was also noted that often rapport and trust take time to build, and sometimes successful relationships can be attributed to the behaviours and approaches of certain individuals, rather than the organisations as a whole. Identifying ways to ensure there is some continuity when individuals move on, and that relationship building was more systematised across organisations, were therefore seen as important.

‘Soft skills’, such as empathy, active listening, and effective communication, were emphasised as being key to achieving quality partnerships but greater awareness and focus on these areas are needed by both donors and intermediaries. Participants also noted practical barriers to effective communication, such as language barriers, which should be addressed.

## **Funding**

Although the question of quality funding was explored in detail in a later session (see section 5), it was noted that in order to achieve quality partnerships, this must go hand in hand with quality funding.

Short-term, inflexible funding with rigid requirements set by either the donor or the intermediary were seen as failing to foster the conditions for a quality partnership. On the other hand, providing long-term, un-earmarked funding was seen as a demonstration of trust and collaboration.

## **Capacity strengthening**

Capacity strengthening was seen as important in promoting partnerships that are more equitable. It was felt amongst participants that we should avoid using the term ‘capacity building’, in recognition of the fact that often L/N partners have knowledge or skills that others do not. It was suggested that when entering into a partnership relationship, there should be a capacity assessment of all partners (including the intermediary) to identify areas that each could either support or be supported to develop.

The need for exit planning was also raised by participants, noting how L/N partners can sometimes feel trapped in an ongoing ‘capacity building’ exercise. Donors, intermediaries and L/N partners should consider what the end-result should be. If locally led humanitarian action is the goal, then capacity-sharing should be assessed in terms of a shift towards local leadership of partnerships, programmes and consortia. Examples from other contexts, such as the FCDO-funded NGO Twinning Programme in Afghanistan, were cited that have adopted

an intentional approach to capacity-strengthening aimed at transitioning the L/N partners from being sub-implementing partners towards them becoming the lead partner in accessing funding and managing programming.

**Inclusion**

The need for awareness, and sensitivity to, the specific vulnerabilities and needs of marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ communities, was discussed in this session. Some participants expressed concern that marginalised people, and the organisations representing them, are often not included or visible in the mechanisms through which needs are assessed or humanitarian responses planned, meaning they are often left behind. Intermediaries were encouraged to partner with LNAs that could provide this knowledge and understanding, and thus facilitate a more tailored humanitarian response that meets the needs of affected communities.

## 4. Theme 2: Locally led coordination

### 4.1 Overview

This session explored how to support meaningful local leadership and participation in the coordination of humanitarian responses. ‘Coordination’ structures could include the Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters, pooled funds advisory boards, donor coordination groups, or other localised coordination mechanisms. The session highlighted examples of existing good practice where LNAs are able to meaningfully participate in and/or lead the coordination of humanitarian responses. It looked at some of the enablers and barriers affecting LNAs participating in coordination mechanisms, and the role that donors can play in supporting local leadership. It also explored the specific experiences and barriers faced by organisations representing more marginalised groups, including WLO/WROs, OPDs and LGBTQ+ organisations.

### 4.2. Findings

#### Local coordination

The session considered how to recognise and support the role of local leadership, in particular by nurturing, promoting and investing in existing local civil society infrastructure. This could include country-level LNA civil society platforms, which are important in enabling LNAs to organise, prioritise and advocate effectively in humanitarian coordination and decision-making processes. Support could be provided to these platforms through quality funding (multi-year), for instance to support secretariat staff and basic infrastructure (IT/ technical guidance on safe convening of meetings and management of information online), commissioning of research and monitoring (e.g. see above case study on baseline metrics), or the organisation of meetings of members.

How INGOs could support local leadership was also considered in the session, with the former being encouraged to engage in peer-to-peer support and support the capacity-strengthening of LNAs to enable their financial resilience and self-sustainability.

There were clear links to the earlier session on equitable partnerships, with the importance of building strong and accountable partnerships with LNAs highlighted as key to fostering trust and empowering LNAs to take meaningful leadership roles in coordination.

Examples of FCDO support to local coordination mechanisms and civil society platforms are outlined below in the case studies on the **Joint Strategy Team** and **Local Intermediary Actors Network** in Myanmar, and the **Alliance of Ukrainian Civil Society Organisations**.



**Good Practice: Joint Strategy Team (Myanmar)**

The Joint Strategy Team's (JST) consortium controls funds through a governing body of 10 JST leaders. The grant system has shown localised governance and decentralised decision-making, making it flexible, relevant, and adaptable as well as respecting and operationalising the localisation and equitable partnership ideals. Through this funding mechanism, over 200,000 internally displaced persons have been reached through 48 CSOs grantees (as of July 2023).

In response to the 2021 coup, the JST convened a coordination meeting among civil society leaders, resulting in the formation of the Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network (MLHN) – a network of members which are able to operate within a challenging political environment.

Since August 2021, the JST has worked directly with local civil society organisations (CSO) in Kachin and Northern Shan to respond to emerging crisis and build resilience with support from the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) and the FCDO.

**Good Practice: Local Intermediary Actors Network (Myanmar)**

The Local Intermediary Actors Network (LIA) is a platform to coordinate and promote common systems, protocols, and ways of working by national NGOs that are already playing an intermediary role. LIA brings together the national NGOs that already directly receive funding from international donors to agree on common approaches to risk sharing, sub granting, and mutually accountable partnerships.

Amongst other initiatives, LIA conducted evidence-based research on '*Localizing aid and the role of Local Intermediary Actors in Myanmar*'. A 'Good Localisation Partnership Index' is being developed by LIA which will outline practical indicators and a process for monitoring intermediary agencies on partnership and localisation metrics.

**Good Practice: Alliance of Ukrainian Civil Society Organisations (Ukraine)**

Established in September 2023 in response to the humanitarian crisis, the Alliance of Ukrainian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), is comprised of 16 CSOs (correct as of Dec 2023), and was formed with the intention of uniting, empowering, and strengthening the role of CSOs operating in Ukraine.

FCDO Ukraine has supported the establishment of the Alliance through our partnership with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society and is working closely with the collective on feedback from Ukrainian organisations on FCDO approaches and strategies to contribute to the wider localisation agenda through strategic workshops and specific collaborations to build the evidence base of localisation approaches in Ukraine.

Members of the Alliance have identified broad areas of common interest, including a collective, stronger voice for the Ukrainian civil society in the international community, facilitating access for Ukrainian CSOs to information and funding, developing quality partnerships and accountability within the humanitarian response, and building a bridge between national and local organisations in Ukraine. The Alliance is currently working alongside other stakeholders, including international actors, to develop a localisation strategy in Ukraine which will lead to an action plan of activities for 2024.

### **International coordination**

Whilst exploring ways to support local coordination mechanisms, there should also be some attention paid to supporting and empowering local leadership in international coordination mechanisms. Suggestions for how to do this included holding accountable those UN agencies with coordination responsibilities for the quality of their engagement with LNAs, including LNA civil society platforms. This could also involve supporting international agencies to convene with LNAs and L/N platforms to develop Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), Inter-Cluster Coordination Group or Cluster specific locally led humanitarian action plans/roadmaps/frameworks with clear measurable indicators to track progress. It could also involve supporting independent analysis at country level to assess how UN-led or other international agency-led coordination processes are shaped by context-specific dynamics, and how this should inform the donor's strategy to support coordination efforts. Donors were seen as having a critical role in advocating for local leadership to have a voice and seat at the table in coordination fora and structures.

The language in which coordination activities are conducted and the lack of translation services were seen as critical barriers to LNAs meaningfully participating and leading in international coordination mechanisms, with support to all actors required to ensure effective communication including in local languages.

### **Inclusive coordination**

Prioritising the meaningful engagement of LNAs representing some of the most marginalised groups (including WLOs, LGBTQ+ organisations, OPDs) was seen as critical in both local and international coordination mechanisms. International agencies that have a mandate to address their needs should be held accountable for quality partnership with them – encompassing both engagement in coordination and wider programme support. It was noted by participants that if recommendations relating to the specific needs of groups had been included in planning, this was not always obvious. As in previous sessions, the importance of quality funding (multi-year, flexible) was raised, being seen as essential to enable these LNAs to support effective community organising, learning and adapting to the humanitarian situation.

## 5. Theme 3: Quality funding

### 5.1. Overview

This session explored what ‘quality’ funding looks like for participants, and how donors and intermediaries can create the conditions that allow direct or ‘direct as possible’<sup>7</sup> funding to L/N partners.

### 5.2. Findings

#### Quality funding

Participants saw funding as being quality when it was predictable, multi-year and flexible, and – crucially – when these characteristics were cascaded to the L/N partners where funding was channelled through an intermediary.

The role and responsibility of intermediaries in passing down quality funding was highlighted, with a suggestion that FCDO should require adequate support costs to be passed down to L/N partners involved in humanitarian response, building on the guidance outlined in the [FCDO NGO Humanitarian Funding Guidelines](#). This could include overhead costs, duty of care, staff wellbeing, capacity building, legal coverage, and third-party monitoring amongst others and would be critical in building the overall resilience and institutional capacity of an organisation, leading to more sustainable and developed delivery models.

It was also noted that in some cases the donor might fund INGO-led consortia on a multi-year basis, however the L/N partners only receive grants shorter than one year. It was suggested that whilst the programmatic allocations might be re-assessed and allocated on an annual basis as the context evolves and humanitarian needs change, scope to guarantee local partners core cost support on a multi-year basis could be considered.

Flexible funding was seen as particularly important for enabling community participatory approaches by LNAs, including for organisations representing marginalised groups, such as WROs and LGBTQ+ organisations. Flexible funding creates the space for LNAs to work with communities and survivors when shaping programmes that offer more relevant solutions, meeting the specific needs of affected people in challenging operating environments. Enabling L/N partners to shape adaptable programmes that meet the needs of the community would help ensure funds are not wasted through ineffective programming.

Transparency was also raised as a barrier to quality funding. Participants noted that in some cases, where a LNA is deemed as ineligible to receive funds, they are not necessarily told the reasons why. Likewise, in cases where funding was suspended, participants noted that often

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the Grand Bargain definition of ‘direct as possible’

LNAs were not told the reason why. Participants noted the negative impact this has and the potential for it to harm their reputation and create challenges for accessing future funding.

It was also noted that the ability to track and report funding flows to LNAs across all FCDO's funding channels would help to improve accountability and transparency.

### **Good Practice: Myanmar Humanitarian Assistance Programme (Myanmar)**

The Myanmar Humanitarian Assistance Programme (MHAP) is an FCDO designed and funded programme, part of which is managed from a UNOPS platform. MHAP's provides prioritised local humanitarian assistance and protection for highly vulnerable people, such as IDPs and refugees, in the most crisis affected areas of Myanmar. It further aims to strengthen capacity, leadership, and voice of national NGOs and civil society in the humanitarian response.

MHAP enables the funding of LNAs, aiming to provide flexible funding that is adapted to the challenges of the Myanmar context and responsive to the needs of partners. MHAP works with FCDO, UNOPS and our partners, to effectively manage and share the risks of operating in an increasingly restrictive context, including through adaptations to grant processes, context analysis that centres the voices and perspectives of the local community, and building strong, long-term relationships with key partners.

## **Risk**

Throughout the dialogue the issue of risk<sup>8</sup> and how donors approach it was a recurring theme. The current risk appetite of many donors, their approach to risk management (including due diligence processes), and risk sharing<sup>9</sup> were raised as barriers to establishing equitable partnership arrangements with LNAs.

The current system of donor risk management, including that of the FCDO, was considered by many participants as being predominantly 'top-down', with risks often transferred to L/N partners rather than shared. For instance, LNAs may be required to absorb any financial losses within their budget, especially if they are unable to negotiate cost recovery or build reserves, thus leaving them at risk of bankruptcy. A suggestion to mitigate this was for donors

<sup>8</sup> To be consistent with existing risk sharing initiatives, this report uses a categorisation of risk developed by Interaction with NGO partners, considering risk areas of - security, fiduciary, legal and compliance, operational, information, reputational, and ethical <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Risk-Global-Study.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> The sharing of risk is considered as a 'reasonable sharing of the burden of preventative measures and reasonable sharing of responsibility for materialising risks' <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2023-06/Risk%20Sharing%20Framework.pdf>

and intermediaries to establish reserve-funding pools for cost recovery purposes, which could reduce the indemnity on LNAs.

It was also proposed that donors and intermediaries should have a greater understanding of the risks LNAs face and build a partnership model based on risk sharing. This would require open and frank discussions about risk, working together to mitigate them and manage contingencies. The [Risk Sharing Framework](#) developed through the Grand Bargain could assist with these conversations.

Participants also discussed whether donor due diligence requirements were effective in assessing and managing risk and proposed a move towards a tiered approach to due diligence (tailored by type of actor). It was felt that this would be more proportionate. It was also noted that where donors build strong, quality partnerships with local networks, their ability to identify and manage risk, as well as track delivery of programmes, is significantly improved. This, combined, with a shift towards community accountability mechanisms that are built on strong feedback loops, could offer alternative risk management and reporting methods.

### **Funding mechanisms**

The discussion highlighted good practice examples of global and country level funding instruments which are locally managed or support L/N partners to access funding as directly as possible from donors. There are opportunities to explore how these mechanisms can be scaled up or replicated in other contexts.

#### **Good Practice: Aid Fund for Northern Syria**

Established in 2022 with the assistance of the FCDO, the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) is a multi-donor pooled fund (around \$56mil allocated as of October 2023), which complements the UN's pooled fund (Syria Cross Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF)) and provides continuity of funding to national and international NGOs in Syria in the event of the UN losing cross border access.

During the creation of the AFNS, LNAs and INGOs were consulted to build procedures based on the feedback of NGOs receiving funding from other pooled funds and donors. AFNS involves civil society in advisory and decision-making roles, with the steering board comprised of nine seats – three donors, three Syrian NGOs (SNGOs), and three INGOs- and also includes a Women Advocacy Group (WAG).

The primary focus of AFNS is funding SNGOs, with INGOs receiving grants only on an exceptional basis, when there is clear added value and unique ability to deliver, with the vast majority of funding going to SNGOs (72% direct funding to SNGOs in 2023). AFNS is

able to provide longer-term support, complementing the SCHF which has a short-term emergency focus due to 6-month UNSCR mandates.

Further details on AFNS can be found here: [Aid Fund for Northern Syria](#).

The Ukrainian Red Cross Society Emergency Pooled Fund provides an example of a flexible funding mechanism which was established to respond quickly to crises/shocks.

#### **Good Practice: Ukrainian Red Cross Society Emergency Pooled Fund**

The **Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS)** created the Emergency Pooled Fund to address the barriers it faced in meeting the rigidly defined budget lines and indicators in pooled fund mechanisms.

The URCS' Emergency Pooled Fund operates as a locally led multi-donor fund, supported by the dedicated Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) of the URCS. To date, the total amount channelled by international partners and donors towards the EPF is more than 7.9 million EUR (as of July 2023).

The EPF mechanism was first activated in November 2022, immediately after the de-occupation of the city of Kherson, when URCS received a substantial influx of humanitarian requests from its local branches in the area, further highlighting the critical need for such a mechanism.

The EPF allows for greater flexibility and swifter action compared to traditional project approaches and is a good example of a funding mechanism which can enable direct and impactful funding for local organisations with fewer requirements.

Where country-level pooled funds managed by INGOs, UN agencies or contractors are used, participants suggested that there should be clear plans on how to transition their governance and/or management to appropriate LNAs and outlined the importance of advisory committees of LNAs to such funds.

## 6. Closing session and next steps

### 6.1 Final reflections

During the plenary session, participants were invited to reflect on the discussions during the course of the day and identify the priority areas for FCDO to take forward. There were different perspectives from participants, but key themes that came out of this session are summarised below:

**Accountability, trust and communication:** All should be two-way, and arguably one cannot exist without the others. Suggestions for how to promote mutual accountability included a proposal for FCDO to set out an action plan detailing commitments on locally led humanitarian action, including identifying clear principles and metrics around quality partnerships to hold all parties accountable. It was also suggested that donors could encourage an assessment of how actors (particularly intermediaries) behave as a partner, and this could lead to a reversal in the sub-contractor/contractee relationship, whereby L/N partners are able to select who they will work with – seeking the ‘**right to choose, not be chosen**’.

The importance of communication channels between donors and LNAs was also raised – both at HQ level (through processes such as this dialogue), as well as sustained engagement at country level. Participants felt these conversations helped to build trust, but this needs to be a continued effort.

**Risk:** A consensus that further conversations are needed on risk, looking at a donor’s risk appetite, approaches to risk management and risk sharing. It was felt this should be central to FCDO’s future approach to supporting locally led humanitarian action, drawing on learning from other donors (e.g. USAID/Netherlands).

**FCDO support to initiatives promoting local leadership and decision-making:** Further efforts are needed to increase support for LNAs in decision-making spaces and encouraging a locally led coordination system. There was a suggestion for donors to play a role in supporting initiatives such as the Grand Bargain National Reference Groups and/or establishing people centred advisory groups comprised of LNAs that inform decision making during all stages of response design and delivery.

**Funding:** Participants also encouraged FCDO’s role in supporting funding mechanisms that are locally managed, investing in these where they exist and helping (where appropriate) to set them up where they do not.

**Flexibility:** It was noted that exploring and identifying what works in practice can take time, particularly when it comes to building relationships, trust and cultural understanding, and one

size does not fit all. Therefore, there is a need to approach policy and programmes with flexibility and a willingness to adapt.

## **6.2 Next Steps**

The reflections and views of participants in this report, in conjunction with engagement with other stakeholders, will help to inform the UK's approach to supporting locally led humanitarian action.

Hearing first hand from LNAs about the challenges they face and opportunities to overcome these is crucial, and FCDO officials have committed to further engagement with the participants of the dialogue.



## Annex A - Agenda

Time	Agenda Item
09:15-10:00	<b>Arrival</b> <i>Please note you will need to go through security and be escorted to the room. Please bring photo ID.</i>
10:00-10:25	<b>Welcome and introductory remarks</b>  <b>Speakers:</b> Colum Wilson, Head of Humanitarian Department, FCDO Shareefa Choudhury, Head of Humanitarian Policy Group, FCDO Claire Clement, Director of International Law and Policy, British Red Cross Rhea Tariq, Humanitarian Director, CAFOD
10:25-11:00	<b>Presentation of ODI country survey findings</b>  <b>Speakers:</b> Veronique Barbelet, Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI Zainab Moallin, Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI
11:00-12:15	<b>Theme 1: Quality Partnerships</b>  <b>Aim:</b> To explore how to promote equitable partnerships and accountability for quality partnerships.  In this session we will explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What a good ‘quality’ partnership looks like when it comes to relationships between intermediary agencies (such as UN agencies, INGOs, IFRC, pooled funds etc) and local and national actors, with a particular emphasis on how to shift unequal power imbalances.</li> <li>• Best practices and specific barriers faced by organisations representing marginalised groups, such as Women Led and Women’s Rights Organisations (WLOs/WROs), Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and LGBTQ+ organisations in achieving equitable access to support and their experience of ‘quality’ partnership.</li> <li>• The role that donors, such as FCDO, have in promoting equitable partnerships and accountability for quality partnerships.</li> </ul> <b>Facilitator:</b> Claire Clement, BRC  <b>Format:</b> 11:00-11:25 – Interventions from Ukraine 11:25-11:50 – Breakout group discussion 11:50-12:15 – Group discussion

12:15-13:15	<b>Lunch</b> Sandwiches provided
13:15-14:30	<b>Theme 2: Locally Led Coordination</b>  <b>Aim:</b> To explore how to support meaningful local leadership and participation in the coordination of humanitarian responses. ‘Coordination’ structures could include the Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters, pooled funds advisory boards, donor coordination groups, or other localised coordination mechanisms.  In this session we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at examples of good practice where local and national actors are able to meaningfully participate in and/or lead the coordination of humanitarian responses.</li> <li>• Explore some of the enablers and barriers affecting leadership and participation in coordination mechanisms by local and national actors, and the role that donors can play.</li> <li>• Explore the specific experiences and barriers faced by organisations representing more marginalised groups, including WLO/WROs, OPDs and LGBTQ+ organisations.</li> </ul> <b>Facilitator:</b> Howard Mollett, CAFOD  <b>Format:</b> 13:15-13:40 – Interventions from Myanmar 13:40-14:30 – Group discussion
14:30-14:45	<b>Break - Tea &amp; coffee provided</b>
14:45-16:00	<b>Theme 3: Quality Funding</b>  <b>Aim:</b> Explore what ‘quality’ funding looks like, and how to create the conditions that allow direct or ‘direct as possible’ funding to local and national actors.  In this session we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the barriers facing local and national actors to accessing donor funding as directly as possible.</li> <li>• Explore the specific experiences and barriers faced by organisations representing more marginalised groups, including WLO/WROs, OPDs and LGBTQ+ organisations.</li> <li>• Consider what ‘quality’ funding means for local and national actors and best practice examples.</li> <li>• Look at the conditions and role of donors in delivering quality funding, provided directly or as directly as possible.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Facilitator:</b> Barbara Lecq, FCDO</p> <p><b>Format:</b> 14:45-15:05 – Group discussion 15:05-15:35 – Interventions from Syria 15:35-16:00 – Breakout group discussion</p>
16:00-16:10	<b>Break</b>
16:10-16:50	<p><b>Plenary session: Reflections from the dialogue</b></p> <p><b>Facilitator:</b> Elloise Gordon, FCDO</p>
16:50-17:00	<p><b>Closing remarks</b></p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> Colum Wilson, FCDO</p>