



INTERMEDIARY MODELS TO ADVANCE LOCALLY LED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Alejandro Posada
Alice Obrecht
Courtenay Cabot Venton
Sarah Selby
Edith Macharia

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About the authors:

Alejandro Posada is Research Fellow - System Change at ALNAP

Alice Obrecht is Head of Research at ALNAP

Courtenay Cabot Venton is founder and CEO at The Share Trust

Sarah Selby is Research and learning Director at The Share Trust

Edith Macharia is Research Associate at The Share Trust

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Alice Hale

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INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian donors can support the shift toward locally led response in various ways, including advocating for local leadership and empowering local actors to take on greater roles in system architecture, such as coordination and policy fora. Yet the primary way in which donors can influence local leadership in humanitarian action is through their decisions on who, and how, to fund.

Since the early days of the rise of localisation on the humanitarian policy agenda, local civil society actors have called for a shift toward more direct funding for national and local actors (LNA), reducing reliance on international intermediaries. While some funders have increased their direct partnerships and funding to LNAs, most—especially bilateral donors—face significant barriers to scaling their direct investments in individual LNAs.

Unfortunately, to realise localisation commitments, it is not as simple as shifting the humanitarian system from direct grants currently paid to very large multilateral organisations and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), to direct grants paid to the many thousands of LNAs working in their countries of origin. Evidence suggests the administrative, compliance and due diligence costs of doing so would be significant, and bilateral donors cannot manage more than a handful of large grants per country (OECD and Share Trust, 2024). Consequently, intermediary structures remain key channels to fund many LNAs.

This does not mean, however, that donors must remain limited to working through international intermediaries. A growing number of LNAs can perform the same intermediary role as their INGO counterparts. This includes national actor-managed pooled funds, as well as direct funding received by a single national NGO or LNA network that then disperses small grants to grassroots organisations.

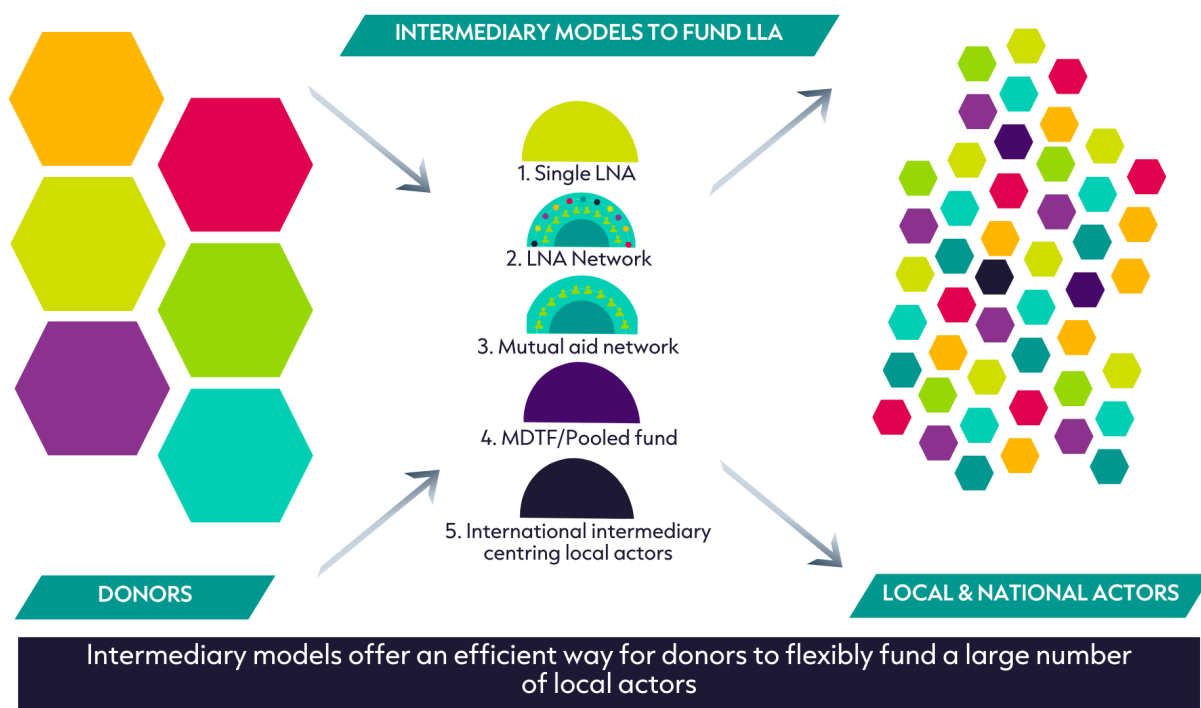
This has given rise to two key investment tracks for locally led action (LLA): 1) strengthening and scaling local intermediaries, and 2) reforming international intermediaries where local options are not immediately available.

This paper summarises the most promising models for intermediary structures that support locally led action in humanitarian settings. This includes locally led intermediary structures (both LNAs acting as intermediaries and locally owned/managed pooled funds) and reformed international intermediary structures that are most conducive to locally led action.

The examples provided in this paper were identified through three short country case studies undertaken by ALNAP (focused on Sudan, the Philippines and Myanmar) and existing research on local and international intermediaries by the Share Trust. This paper aims to focus on examples that are not well known or have been underrepresented in existing studies, and are therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive. Widely recognised mechanisms – such as the country-based pooled funds of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA) or the Start Fund, for example, are not included. A separate annex provides a more detailed account of local intermediary examples identified in this study, including their models, challenges, scope and the opportunities they present. Further useful examples could be identified in a more thorough review.

Figure 1: Funding locally led action – the role of intermediaries



Adapted from The Share Trust design

1 LOCAL INTERMEDIARIES

1.1 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

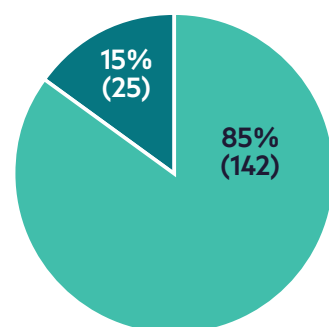
Local intermediaries exhibit diverse structures, functions and capacities, reflecting the variability within the sector. Their operational models and sources of support differ, which influences their ability to implement programmes and sustain their work.

A forthcoming mapping by the Share Trust summarises the characteristics of local intermediaries.¹ It examines the origin, leadership structures, functions, type, focus and capacities of these diverse entities. Of 167 local intermediaries that have been mapped, 37 were surveyed as part of country deep dives.

¹ This study will be published in February 2025. It recognises the complexity of defining 'local' and uses a spectrum to classify intermediaries. The mapping includes regional, national, subnational and community entities established and led in Global Majority contexts. However, the study also recognises that some local intermediaries have had to relocate to neighbouring countries, are internationally grown but have transitioned to local leadership, are supported by diaspora, or are in the process of transitioning their leadership. Likewise, the term 'intermediary' is contested and often challenged by Global Majority civil society.

- **ORIGIN:** 85% (142) of the mapped local intermediaries are 'home-grown' and have been created by a Global Majority community or subnational, national or regional actors; 15% (25) are 'internationally grown', established by or with significant support from Global Minority donors/INGOs. While 17 of these are now locally led in terms of Global Majority decision making, the research aimed to distinguish these from home-grown entities. Of the 37 local intermediaries surveyed for the deep dives, 16 have been operating for over 20 years. All except four of these (which have been established more recently) are registered in their country of origin.

Figure 2: Origins of the mapped local intermediaries



 'home-grown'*
 'internationally grown'

**Created by a Global Majority community or subnational, national or regional actors*

- **LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING:** 84% (31) of the surveyed local intermediaries have leadership teams composed entirely of nationals. Only one indicated that their staff comprise both international and national personnel. Over 75% (28) have governance boards, which average 12 members, often structured to reflect the communities they serve.
- **FUNCTIONS:** Funding is a prime function for 65% (109) of the mapped local intermediaries; however, capacity-sharing is also a prime function of 60% (100), and programming a function for most (84% or 140) entities. Among survey respondents, 35% (13) rely solely on international funding.

Figure 3. Prime functions of the mapped local intermediaries



- **TYPE:** 30% (50) of the mapped local intermediaries are NGOs, 25% (42) are foundations, 15% (25) are funds, 13% (21) are networks, 9% (15) are coalitions or consortia, 6% (10) are trusts, 1% (2) are consultancies and 1% (2) are inter-governmental entities.
- **FOCUS:** Local intermediaries tend to have a specific thematic focus, for which they secure donor funding before regranteeing to local initiatives aligned with the same themes. Among survey respondents reporting funding as a prime function (16), 75% (12) focus on women and girls, 88% (14) on children and youth, 31% (5) on refugees, and 88% (14) work on food security, livelihoods and agriculture programmes. Local intermediaries that focus on capacity sharing primarily aim to support local actors and NGOs to access donor funds.
- **CAPACITY:** The survey examined the capacity of local intermediaries to absorb and disburse funds at scale, using entity size, size of grants received and redistributed, and systems and processes for equitable partnerships as criteria. Nearly half of survey respondents employ more than 40 staff, while 25% (9) of survey respondents (e.g., networks, coalitions) have more than 15 members. In

terms of financial capacity, 43% (16) of survey respondents have received grants exceeding \$500,000 in the past five years, including 11 regranting local intermediaries. 25 survey respondents have implemented mechanisms to streamline and simplify grant application processes for grantees.

The following four sub-sections provide case studies of four main operational models for local intermediaries, highlighting their respective advantages and challenges. The models are:

1. [Single local intermediary](#)
2. [Local actor intermediary networks](#)
3. [Network of mutual aid practitioners](#)
4. [Multi-country pooled funds managed by local actor network.](#)

1.2 MODEL 1: SINGLE LOCAL INTERMEDIARY

Some individual national actors have internal capacity to meet risk and due diligence requirements so they can disburse funds to local and community-based organisations across their territory. The reach and scope of a national actor's influence depend on their size, relationships and partnerships throughout the country, and experience with fund disbursement, which can vary significantly by context.

By operating as a single organisation, as opposed to an LNA network, administrative and fiscal processes become more streamlined, which makes it logistically easier to establish and manage a funding mechanism. It also simplifies the process for donors to establish a relationship with a single intermediary structure. However, there are risks. Depending on their size, mandate, scope and institutional capacity, single-actor intermediaries may have limited ability to absorb significant funding or scale operations effectively compared to a network of intermediaries. There is also a risk that they may primarily represent a single sector or segment of the population. It is essential to identify single intermediaries with well-established, trusted partnerships across diverse community groups and the broader region of focus.

Box 1: The Abot-Kamay Solidarity Fund in the Philippines

The Abot-Kamay Community Solidarity Fund (ACSF), hosted by Filipino NGO the Centre for Disaster Preparedness Foundation (CDPF), is a locally-led intermediary mechanism that enables grassroots organisations in the Philippines to pursue self-determined priorities. Supported originally by the Assets, Agency and Trust (AAT) consortium, ACSF provides tailored financial and non-financial solutions and support, with an accessible application process, community-driven decision making and conversational due diligence. Focusing on bottom-up capacity building, learning-centred monitoring and sustainability through local resource mobilisation, ACSF has disbursed \$375,000 to 33

grantees/awardees. However, by empowering local organisations as co-investors, ACSF has leveraged an additional \$529,440 in community contributions in the form of labour, cash, venues and resources. Despite challenges such as securing buy-in from donors who prefer rigid compliance systems and the reliance on USAID's Local Works programme – which ended without a clear continuation plan – the pilot phase has shown strong potential. To scale, the model requires strategic growth to preserve trust-based partnerships and community-centred impacts, and access to resources from trusting donors. CDPF also hosts the Philippines Localisation Lab and is planning to serve as fiscal sponsor for a regional pooled fund for eight countries in the Asia Pacific with members of the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR).

More information

Box 2: Sudanese Development Call Organisation (NIDAA)

NIDAA, founded by a Sudanese national with a leadership team composed entirely of nationals including a Sudanese woman Chief Executive Officer, was established to address both humanitarian and development challenges within Sudan. Registered in multiple countries, including Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania, its core functions are regranteeing, capacity strengthening and programme implementation. The organisation focuses on distributing multi-purpose cash assistance to households affected by the Sudan crisis, emphasising sectors such as health, education, food security and livelihoods, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). As a larger local intermediary, NIDAA has received funding exceeding \$500,000 and issues grants ranging from \$4,000 to \$9,000, with calls for proposals twice a year.

More information

Box 3: Friendship Support Association (FSA) in Ethiopia

Founded by an Ethiopian human rights activist and scholar, FSA focuses on social development and support for marginalised individuals in Ethiopia. The board comprises nationals with expertise across various sectors, and its primary functions include providing grants to local organisations, building networks and connections with local actors, programming and capacity-strengthening for project sustainability. The organisation focuses on education, water, health and livelihoods. As a larger local intermediary, it has received grants exceeding \$500,000, and as a regranteeing entity its average grant size exceeds \$50,000. Grants are issued to grassroots organisations, self-help groups and women's organisations with open calls for proposals. Capacity strengthening is provided to grantees on risk management and compliance processes plus donor requirements. FSA's general assembly is integral to its governance system and ensures accountability to local communities.

More information

1.3 MODEL 2: NETWORK OF LOCAL INTERMEDIARIES



In some contexts, national or local NGOs that already function as intermediaries for other local, informal grassroots organisations come together to form a unified funding mechanism. The level of formality within these networks varies significantly. Some are registered officially and maintain a formal secretariat with designated staff, while others remain informal, relying on bilateral coordination and dialogue among members. Some networks aim to establish and operate a centralised funding mechanism, while others also offer a platform for collective advocacy and coordination.

Strong examples of this intermediary network approach have emerged in contexts where high volatility severely impedes the operations of international actors, often leaving local actors as the sole point of access to communities. Benefits of this model include the scale, reach and scope resulting from the collective efforts of multiple LNAs. This increases both the geographic and representative reach of the funding mechanism. However, these intermediary structures face risks and challenges. Networks often lack the financial and administrative infrastructure to manage a funding mechanism, in many cases relying on one of their members to handle fund disbursement. This may reflect the limited resources provided to networks of intermediaries to build financial and administrative infrastructure. Another challenge is that decision making among multiple actors – each with unique perspectives and approaches – can complicate and slow down fund management and disbursement unless a clear, structured, yet participatory system is in place.

Box 4: Joint Strategy Team (JST) and the Local Flexible Funding Mechanism (LFFM) in Myanmar

Launched in 2021 by Myanmar's JST, the LFFM is a locally-led intermediary funding model designed to support organisations in Kachin and Northern Shan states through flexible, responsive grants and institutional support. Underpinned by a network of LNAs with decision-making autonomy, simplified application processes and rapid fund disbursement, LFFM prioritises women-led, ethnically diverse and community-driven groups. Despite challenges such as the instability of operating in conflict zones, extreme access restrictions and highly variable capacities amongst grant recipients, the LFFM has successfully reached over 245,000 people and grown from a \$600,000 pilot to a \$2.4 million initiative that aims to expand further. The mechanism's ability to navigate Myanmar's volatile environment, to foster trust and to provide tailored capacity-sharing opportunities makes it a scalable model for localisation in humanitarian responses. It offers donors an opportunity to collaborate on alternatives to traditional funding routes, and it has also proven the ability of LNAs to absorb funds and deliver programmes successfully at scale.

Box 5: Local Intermediary Actor Network (LIAN) in Myanmar

Established in 2022, LIAN is a national advocacy and coordination platform uniting 14 of Myanmar's largest NNGOs which act as local intermediaries to channel donor funding to grassroots organisations. LIAN advocates for

improved systems, supports sub-granting, promotes risk sharing and conducts localisation research. By simplifying compliance, reducing due diligence burdens and prioritising 'capacity to grow' over 'capacity to comply', LIAN enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of local actors. It also uses the Grand Bargain and localisation to influence aid architecture transformation in collaboration with local actors, INGOs and the UN. However, LIAN faces challenges balancing visibility with security risks and navigating strict international compliance requirements. To strengthen localisation efforts, LIAN is launching the Local Perceptions on Partnering Index, a locally-led tool to measure partnership progress. By emphasising capacity sharing, advocacy and coordination, LIAN highlights the critical role of local intermediaries beyond funding. Greater donor collaboration on compliance, regulatory support and evaluation would further enhance this impact.

More information

Box 6: Humanitarian Aid International (HAI) in India

HAI is an Indian organisation and a fund aggregator that pools resources from multiple sources to support specific causes and initiatives. Grantees are involved in the governance of HAI through several consultative committees. Through its Local Organisation's Coalition for Advancing Localisation (LOCAL) platform it works with more than 15 local organisations to leverage their strengths and navigate complex donor requirements. HAI bring Indian home-grown and grassroots NGOs, corporates and other stakeholders under one platform to support coordinated humanitarian response. As a non-profit, it has been supporting communities at risk and those affected by disasters across the country. HAI's strategy focuses on reducing disaster risk through anticipatory risk mitigation programmes and technology-enabled environments. It raises funds from individual donations, public donations, private philanthropy and INGOs, and receives grants of up to \$500,000. These funds are then regranted to local grassroots organisations through thematic-focused calls for proposals, with individual grants typically ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000 at least three times a year. Grantees are supported through technical assistance, mentorship and guidance.

More information

Box 7: Nigeria Local Coalition Accelerator (NLCA)

NLCA is spearheaded by the Share Trust and Warande Advisory Center (Kenya). It comprises nine member organisations of diverse sizes and experience who are working as a coalition to provide a single entry point for donors to fund coordinated action and holistic solutions. They have democratically agreed on governance structures and set rules of engagement. Each organisation brings its own sectoral experience, and together they have designed two Joint Action Plans, guided by community priorities, to shift the focus from externally driven programmes to solutions designed and led by local actors and their community. In 2024, the Joint Action Plans reached 29,878 individuals with services across health, climate change, resilient livelihoods and education. In partnership with

UNOCHA, the NLCA piloted a new approach to humanitarian funding—providing capacity sharing for local actors to access pooled funding structures to enable more adaptive and community-driven responses. However, structural barriers to funding continue to create challenges for structures such as the NLCA; the holistic approach to meeting community priorities does not neatly fit into a log-frame, and as a result, fundraising can be difficult. To scale, the NLCA will need to galvanise direct donor funding founded on advocacy highlighting the demonstrated capacity of local actors to deliver humanitarian response activities if local actors are provided access to pooled funds.

More information

1.4 MODEL 3: NETWORK OF MUTUAL AID/COMMUNITY EFFORTS

Despite being under-researched, there is growing recognition that the voluntary and informal support provided by individuals within a community during crises play a critical role in humanitarian response. This mutual aid is often grassroots, community driven, decentralised and self organised, emerging from individuals or informal groups within the community. These informal structures make them difficult for most international agencies to partner with, although there are exceptions (see [2.3](#)).

In some contexts, mutual aid groups have organised themselves to create a central, democratic and flexible body to channel international funds to mutual aid initiatives. These structures function as local intermediaries but they operate largely outside the leadership of formal LNAs, aiming to reach informal networks that are often overlooked.

The benefit of this mechanism is its ability to tap into existing community efforts outside the formal humanitarian system, offering the potential to reach actors and spaces often excluded, yet highly relevant in humanitarian response. However, the informal, often unregistered and hyper-grassroots nature of these efforts also presents challenges and risks, as their funding requires a significant degree of flexibility.

Box 8: The Localisation Coordination Council for the Emergency Response Room (ERR) System in Sudan

The ERR system, rooted in Sudan's tradition of social mobilisation, is a decentralised yet highly organised data-driven network of community-led mutual aid groups run by volunteers. ERRs leverage local resources and volunteer networks to provide immediate and effective crisis response. Structured around base response rooms with decision-making power over response design, the system ensures separation of power through local parliaments, executive working groups and a governing constitution. The network extends to a democratically elected Localisation Coordination Council (LCC), which acts as an intermediary to coordinate international donors, NNGOs and the ERR system while advocating for localisation. Complementing this, the soon-to-be-established Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (CCU), administered by Shebaka, will

function as a learning and information hub to connect donors with innovative strategies that support mutual aid across Sudan, including the ERR system. Despite challenges (informal structure, unregistered status, complex donor requirements, volunteer burnout, significant funding gaps and fragmented funding), the ERR system operates in 17 of Sudan's 18 states with over 10,000 volunteers. In 2024 alone, it disbursed more than \$10.9 million and reached 2.7 million people. To scale its impact, the system seeks donor coordination around flexible, unearmarked funding to support decentralised decision-making and mitigate risks.

More information

1.5 MODEL 4: MULTI-COUNTRY LNA NETWORKED POOLED FUNDS

The final model is when a multi-national network of LNAs establishes a multi-country funding mechanism to disburse funds directly to local and national organisations. This structure operates as a global or multi-country pooled fund, offering a platform for a multi-donor funding mechanism led by a coalition of local organisations spanning multiple countries.

The benefits of this arrangement lie in its broad reach and scalability. The multi-country (or even global) scope makes it an attractive option for donors, as it simplifies collective financing and enables coordinated funding across diverse contexts. However, as networks become global, they can lose the contextual benefits of having LNAs from the country of focus driving regranting and capacity sharing. Depending on how the granting structures are set up, the concern is that a local actor from one country may lack the context and understanding of another, which raises questions of legitimacy (similar to those surrounding international actors) when leading sub-granting.

Box 9: The NEAR Change Fund

The NEAR Change Fund is a global funding mechanism that channels resources directly to local actors in emergency contexts, prioritising locally led humanitarian action. Governed entirely by a network of LNAs from the Global Majority, it promotes participatory, culturally-sensitive decision making. The Fund's rapid crisis response model allows grants to be awarded within days in emerging or protracted crisis settings, and the streamlined application process minimises bureaucracy. By emphasising collaboration among local actors, equity-focused criteria and human-centred design, it fosters flexible, community-based solutions. Despite its success, challenges such as donor trust, compliance requirements and recognition of local actors' capacity hinder scalability. With an initial budget of \$1.9 million funded by the Hilton Foundation, the Fund has supported 13 grantees across 11 countries, reaching over 239,000 beneficiaries to date. The Fund plans to expand its global reach while maintaining its agile, inclusive approach.

More information

REFORMING INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARY STRUCTURES

International intermediaries – the UN, INGOs, private contractors and other international organisations – have traditionally acted as a ‘prime’ for donor funding, designing and delivering programming with a range of actors and providing due diligence, compliance and financial reporting, among other functions, for large donor-funded projects.

As part of a wider shift on equitable partnerships, some international intermediaries are redefining their role in delivering assistance to fulfil more of a technical assistance and backend role. Here, we provide examples of how international intermediaries are reforming – much due to individual and collective donor action – and the different ways of working that are required.

Examples are categorised into the following groups:

- International intermediaries structuring incentives to advance equitable partnerships
- International intermediaries that provide backend support while ceding programmatic functions to local actors
- International intermediaries that centre local networks – e.g., mutual aid/Self-help groups

2.1 INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES STRUCTURING INCENTIVES TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

Some international intermediaries are implementing reforms to incentivise equitable partnerships with local actors – a fundamental aspect of locally led action. These incentives can serve as building blocks that gradually transition full programmes to local actors over time. This approach is particularly relevant where local intermediaries are not yet fully developed to manage large-scale bilateral donor funding. Such reforms can also help build trust between bilateral donors and local actors, with the support of international intermediary organisations.

Features of an international intermediary model that aims to reform partnerships with local actors should:

1. **Ensure that all funded programmes have a localisation strategy/framework** that outlines how the international intermediary plans to strengthen equitable partnerships with local actors, including local intermediaries. The strategy should be developed in conjunction with local partners, and it should: i) define what a local actor is, ii) map existing local intermediary structures and initiatives in the country/region, iii) identify the current/potential level of local actor agency across

programming,² iv) evaluate capacity for engaging directly or building capacity as required (for example using a 'separation of functions' framework), and v) include a clear plan for transitioning the 'prime' function locally.

Box 10: The Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) Localisation Strategy

The AFNS is a relatively new, \$80 million multi-donor pooled funding mechanism that is spearheaded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and supported by multiple donors. It channels funding to local actors, primed by an INGO – Adam Smith International. The AFNS Localisation Strategy, developed with support from the Share Trust, aims to: i) increase funding flows to local actors, ii) enhance the quality of funding for local actors, iii) secure equitable partnerships and strengthen collaboration between local actors, iv) support knowledge and capacity sharing between actors, and v) secure locally-led decision making and governance. It includes an assessment of funding flows, quality of funding, partnerships and collaboration, knowledge and capacities, and decision making and governance. The AFNS has made significant progress on locally led action in Syria by shifting increasing amounts of funding to local actors and by mandating full pass through of overheads. Local, primarily Syrian 'anchor' organisations already registered with the AFNS will help prioritise and channel funding to smaller, grassroots organisations not registered in Türkiye, enabling them to bypass eligibility criteria for direct AFNS funding. The AFNS will also support all partners with capacity strengthening.

More information

2. **Undertake a 'separation of functions' analysis to define tiered membership in internationally-led consortia.** FCDO developed a 'separation of functions' analysis as part of its COVID-19 response (SPACE, 2021) to evaluate large-scale programming and introduce greater competition into consortia. It identified programme functions that would sit more readily with local actors, INGOs and the UN. This analysis has been applied to multiple FCDO-funded programmes to identify: a) how local actors can be given greater authority and seniority in tiered consortium structures, b) where local actors would like capacity building to take on leadership of additional functions, and c) functions where local actors would prefer not to lead.
3. **Mandate full pass through of overheads** so local organisations have these added to their project budgets. Overhead costs are critical for any budget (also known as Indirect Support Costs (ISC), Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), Non-Project Attributable Costs (NPAC), etc.) as they provide unrestricted funds that can be used for capacity needs and unexpected costs, for example. However, local organisations rarely receive overhead costs. International intermediaries that are seeking to transition out must ensure

² The Share Trust worked with OECD on an Agency Compass to help identify and measure the current/potential agency of diverse local actors across programme framing, design, delivery and learning (OECD, 2024).

consistent pass through of overheads so their local partners (be these individual partnerships or a consortium) get a share of allowable overheads in proportion to their implementation budget.

Box 11: UN OCHA Ukraine

The UN OCHA pooled fund in Ukraine facilitated an analysis of a representative sample of their project budgets for the humanitarian response, allowing a cost comparison between UN, INGO and local agency cost structures. Local actors were able to provide response activities at a 16% cost efficiency compared to international agencies, and while INGOs and local organisations were passing through their overheads in full to downstream partners, UN agencies were not. In tandem with the study, UN OCHA tied full pass through of overheads to the scoring criteria to determine if a project could be funded through the pooled fund. This resulted in a significant decrease in the number of UN projects funded through the pooled fund and a significant increase in local projects.

More information

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- 4. Extend core, multi-year funding to LNAs to invest in self-determined organisational development and strategic priorities.** As a corollary to the full pass through of overheads, core multi-year funding to local actors can provide critically-needed, flexible funding to grow their systems, adapt processes and invest in staff development. It can also help build an ecosystem of local actors who are too small to engage in bilateral systems and mechanisms, but who play a critical role by providing grassroots initiatives and connections to local communities.

Box 12: Save the Children's core multi-year funding to local actors

Designed and piloted as part of Save the Children Sweden's Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Programme, the Core Support Model supports local and national CSOs to develop long-term strategic plans, extend demand-driven capacity assistance and foster collective action advancing the rights of children. Central to this model, Save the Children extends three-year unearmarked 'core' grants to local and national partners – ranging from \$60,000 to \$100,000 per year – for CSO partners to invest in self-determined operational or programmatic needs and priorities. This partnership modality has significantly impacted local partners' approaches to financial management, which traditionally focus on short-term projectised revenue streams, towards a more strategic fundraising model.

More information

2.2 INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES THAT PROVIDE BACKEND SUPPORT

Many local actors highlight that international organisations have a clear partnership role to play in backend support, for example in technical assistance, compliance and financial management functions, especially when funding comes from a bilateral donor that has onerous requirements. Such support can provide the space for local actors to engage with their communities and lean into their key strengths, rather than become bogged down by compliance.

Box 13: Save the Children and the Local Response Pooled Fund (LRPF) in South Sudan

Conceived by LNAs in South Sudan in 2021, the LRPF elevates local voices in humanitarian decision making, increases access to funding for local humanitarian responders, and empowers local leadership to determine how and where humanitarian resources should be allocated. Save the Children was invited to partner with the LRPF to support fundraising, provide administrative backstopping (e.g., as a temporary fund custodian) and deliver technical support to professionalise the LRPF's administrative structure. The LRPF General Assembly comprises 196 LNA members, and it is governed by a nine-member Steering Committee. This Committee has four representatives of the NGO Forum, four LRPF General Assembly members (elected by peers), and Save the Children – whose role is strictly observational, with no voting rights. With investments from the Danish International Development Agency, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy and Save the Children, the LRPF has funded locally-led humanitarian responses with a combined value of \$1.7 million, reaching over 50,000 beneficiaries with non-food items and food basket distribution, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, WASH services, and more. An exit strategy is in place for 2025 to institutionalise the LRPF as a fully independent and legally registered funding platform.

More information

Box 14: Local Coalition Accelerators (LCA)

LCA, spearheaded by the Share Trust and Warande Advisory Center, facilitates coalitions of local actors to design and implement joint programming. Thus, it provides a single entry point for donors to fund coordinated action, while enabling local actors to stay centred on their communities but deliver holistic programming at the same time.

Uganda's LCA includes 13 LNAs operating within the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area. Now in its fourth year, the coalition has implemented two Joint Community Action Plans (JAPs) funded by the Hilton Foundation that target underserved communities across Kampala. In collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the LCA delivers programmes addressing the needs of refugees and host communities, focusing on education, health, child protection and livelihoods. After graduating from the LCA

programme in 2024 and registering as an individual entity, Uganda's LCA now receives direct funding from the Hilton Foundation to implement its third JAP. The coalition uses a standardised approach to livelihoods and entrepreneurship training, is integrating self-help groups into its programming, and is leveraging a tested curriculum developed by one member that is being scaled across the network.

Bangladesh's LCA comprises 16 member organisations in coastal communities of the Sundarbans region. These LNAs focus on building resilient, disaster-ready communities, prioritising small-scale climate resilience interventions, securing livelihoods, and reversing the impact of severe salinity, WASH, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Ethiopia's LCA – the Yenege Tesfa Self Help Collaboratives – is a coalition of 273 self-help groups in the Adama region, collectively impacting approximately 53,325 people directly.

More information

2.3 INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES THAT CENTRE LOCAL NETWORKS

As with the case of self-organised local intermediaries supporting mutual aid groups, an increasing number of international intermediary programmes are being redesigned to centre mutual aid groups that operate outside formal LNA structures. Local networks – such as self-help groups and other community-based structures – are engaged intentionally by international intermediaries to lead the design and delivery of programming. Elsewhere, international intermediaries are distributing funds through micro-grants directly to local grassroots groups and networks. For example, the survivor- and community-led (sclr) approach distributes micro-grants directly to self-help groups responding in crisis contexts.

Box 15: Micro-grants to support women's self-help groups in Afghanistan

Afghanaid, an international intermediary, is delivering micro-grants to women's self-help groups, in partnership with the Share Trust. The first phase focused on reviving self-help groups in Ghor province (given these had stopped when the Taliban came to power in 2021), to reach women with programmes to address food insecurity, women's rights and GBV. The second phase is operating in Samangan province, using informal networks to strengthen the economic and psycho-social capacities and resilience of women. This is particularly important given the 2022 national ban on Afghan women working for N/INGOs and the removal of a direct channel to respond to the needs of women and girls. The programme is testing self-help groups as a conduit to: i) channel cash to meet immediate needs and implement small-scale development initiatives; and ii) self-replicate the model and cascade training between groups.

More information

Box 16: Building Resilience in Somalia (BRCiS III) project

BRCiS takes a holistic approach to build the capacity of Somali communities to understand and manage hazards and shocks so that they can build a better future for themselves. The Share Trust is working with the Norwegian Refugee Council and a consortium of INGOs and local organisations to better integrate self-help groups and Somali local and national organisations into the programme. BRCiS is: i) developing minimum standards and best practices for transitioning to and implementing the self-help group model across the consortium; ii) supporting clustering and federating, and researching linkages with formal microfinance systems and other stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of self-help groups; iii) embedding the integration of self-help groups across all BRCiS III workstreams; iv) providing micro-grants to self-help groups; and v) designing strategies to amplify community voices, increase funding to the groups and scale localised responses in Somalia, focusing on outcomes grounded in community priorities.

More information

CONCLUSION

The current humanitarian funding model is dominated by international intermediaries. This often stifles the potential of LNAs due to rigid compliance requirements, risk-averse systems and a lack of flexibility.

At the same time, however, direct investments in hundreds of individual local actors at scale is largely not feasible for bilateral donors and funders due to high administrative, compliance and due diligence costs. Consequently, intermediary structures are essential to channel funding efficiently to LNAs.

Local intermediaries can operate under four models: 1) single-actor intermediaries, 2) networks of local intermediary organisations, 3) networks of mutual aid and community efforts and 4) multi-country pooled fund mechanisms led and managed by LNAs. These models have the potential to enhance both the efficiency and quality of aid delivery, yet there are tensions between donor expectations and the needs of LNAs. Donors tend to prioritise scalability, replicability and minimal risk, yet LNAs require flexibility, equitable decision making and context-driven solutions. This misalignment creates friction throughout the funding cycle and stifles local intermediaries so they cannot scale and thrive.

Donor coordination is crucial to address these challenges. Without it, local intermediaries must navigate fragmented pilot initiatives and localisation efforts, which often lack the momentum and incentives for structural adaptation and transformative change. Aligning financial and regulatory incentives – for example by standardising, simplifying and increasing flexibility in compliance processes, risk

sharing and reporting across donors in a responsive context – can reduce administrative burdens and foster equitable partnerships.

Equally important is the reform of international intermediary models. As global actors transition to support locally led mechanisms, they must prioritise strategies that empower local leadership. For example, they should provide technical support while ensuring autonomy for local decision making. Donors can collectively incentivize international intermediaries to establish trust-based partnerships and risk-sharing frameworks with LNAs, enabling more responsive and context-specific humanitarian responses.

Myanmar's LFFM (see [Box 4](#)) and South Sudan's LRPf (see [Box 14](#)) illustrate the potential of locally-led models when donors commit to flexible, context-driven funding. However, scaling these models requires collective donor action, sustained trust in local actors and recognition of their capacity to lead. Local response structures could be strengthened further by integrating community collectives – such as self-help or mutual aid groups – into programming.

A holistic approach is needed to advance locally led action – one that strengthens local intermediaries while reforming international funding structures. Through donor collaboration, streamlined processes and a commitment to local leadership, the humanitarian sector can move towards an equitable, efficient and sustainable funding system that reflects and responds to the priorities of communities. Achieving this systemic shift is essential so that local voices shape the future of humanitarian action.

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