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REPORT

WHO DECIDES, WHO DELIVERS?

Exploring Local Agency
and Humanitarian
Effectiveness in Nigeria
and Ukraine



Acronyms

BAY	Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states of the Northeast Nigeria
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DMAT	Decision Mapping Tool
ECDE	Early Childhood Development and Education
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MMI	Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (Nigeria)
MPCA	Multipurpose Cash Assistance
NFI	Non-Food Item
NHF	Nigeria Humanitarian Fund
NNGO	National Non-governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
R2P	Right to Protection
SNGO	Subnational Non-Government Organization
STAAR	Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources
UHF	Ukraine Humanitarian Fund
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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Any errors, omissions or inaccuracies are the sole responsibility of the co-authors.

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Summary

There is widespread agreement across the development and humanitarian sector that devolving funding and decision-making power to those whose lives are most affected by internationally funded action is both a moral imperative and a driver of better outcomes. This commitment is reflected in a wide range of international cooperation policies and effectiveness frameworks. Yet despite these commitments, the sector has not systematically tried to measure the relationship between local agency – the degree to which local actors hold decision-making power across the project cycle – and the effectiveness of humanitarian action. This gap is not simply an oversight: the relationship between the two is genuinely difficult to study; it requires nuanced measurement tools, comparable samples, and controlled conditions that are rarely available in humanitarian settings and has not been prioritised by most donors and implementing partners. As a result, the evidence base for this linkage remains scarce.

The Share Trust attempted to address this gap through a study examining the relationship between local agency and perceived effectiveness across ten humanitarian projects in Nigeria and Ukraine. The results of this study should be interpreted with caution. The sample is small – only five projects per country. In Ukraine, effectiveness data was gathered through surveys of local partner organizations rather than community members directly, meaning that for half the sample the organizations being assessed for agency were also self-reporting on effectiveness. The study examines correlation only and cannot demonstrate causation between local agency and effectiveness, but it does identify some of the enabling conditions for local agency and decision, such as funding quality, organizational capacity, or contextual dynamics.

Despite these limitations, our combined quantitative and qualitative evidence does point to several findings that deserve further investigation. These are summarized below, organized around what we learned about local agency across the project cycle and across different lead partners, what we observed in terms of perceived effectiveness, whether the two appear to be related, and what enablers shape both. We present these findings not as definitive conclusions but as signals that merit more systematic study.

Local Agency and Perceived Effectiveness

In both Nigeria and Ukraine, local and subnational organizations held the lowest levels of agency in project funding and design, and the highest in delivery and learning. This pattern reflects persistent structural constraints: too often local actors are brought in to implement externally designed projects rather than to shape them from the outset. In Ukraine, projects with direct funding to local organizations were associated with higher levels of local agency overall. In Nigeria, the picture was more nuanced: under the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF), both directly and indirectly funded projects showed similarly high levels of local agency, pointing to the quality and conditions of funding – rather than funding modality alone – as the more important driver.

In Ukraine, local organizations as prime partners were rated more highly than international primes across most effectiveness criteria, based on surveys of local partner organizations. Local primes were perceived to be stronger on **responsiveness** to local priorities, the extent of project **reach**, **connectedness** of assistance across priorities and sectors, **inclusiveness**, **timeliness**, and **sustainability**. International primes scored marginally higher on the **quality** of goods and services provided.

In Nigeria, local and international primes were perceived as similarly effective across most criteria.

Local primes showed increased project **reach** into remote communities; international primes were perceived as more **sustainable**. Taken together, the two countries present a mixed picture: the Ukraine pattern is suggestive of a positive relationship between local agency and perceived effectiveness, but the Nigeria findings are inconclusive. The most honest reading of the evidence is that local agency is one factor among several, and that more rigorous research – with larger samples and community-level data – is needed before stronger claims can be made.

Key informants in both countries identified a clear division of roles that would strengthen locally led action. Local and national organizations were seen as best placed to lead project design, community engagement, needs assessments, monitoring, and local advocacy – functions where proximity, trust, and contextual knowledge matter most. International organizations were seen as most valuable in enabling roles: resource mobilization, technical capacity strengthening, coordination, and oversight.

Enablers of Local Agency

- **Funding quality, equity, and flexibility** were consistently identified as more important to local agency than whether funding was direct or indirect. The NHF projects – with equitable overhead allocations, jointly designed budgets, and transparent grant conditions applied to local and international primes alike – were associated with high local agency regardless of whether local organizations were in lead partner positions.
- **Intentional partnership practices** including agreements that clarify roles and decision-making rights, consortium models that assign meaningful budget lines and leadership responsibilities to local partners, and early involvement of local organizations in design, were identified as enabling genuine co-leadership rather than instrumental sub-contracting.
- **Recognition of local capacities and contextual knowledge** by funders and international agencies was identified as enabling local organizations to gain influence over coordination structures, targeting decisions, and project design – and to adapt more rapidly to shifting contexts.
- **Networked and decentralized partnership structures** were associated with the highest levels of both local agency and perceived effectiveness in Ukraine, pointing to federated and networked models as promising structures for locally led action.
- **Adequate investment in institutional strengthening** was identified as a shared enabler and mutual priority by both local and international actors since questions or concerns about capacity are often cited as a limiting factor for devolving decision making to local actors.

Recommendations

1. **Measure local agency systematically – and use the evidence to strengthen it**, using tools such as the Share Trust’s Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass to assess and track decision-making responsibilities across the project cycle.
2. **Prioritize funding and partnership quality, equity and flexibility – not just direct funding**, by applying equitable conditions across all partners, creating space for local decision-making from the outset, and scaling up flexible multi-year funding.
3. **Prioritize equitable partnerships that align agency with comparative strengths of different actors**, including when establishing partnerships, use a separation of functions analysis to align roles with local knowledge and capacities, rather than defaulting to international actors.
4. **Support subnational organizations to access resources and decision-making spaces**, including through consortium and coalition models, and by ensuring coordination mechanisms are financially accessible to subnational actors.

Taken together, these findings point to a central message that locally led action is ultimately a question of who decides, not merely who delivers, or who holds the prime position. Realizing this, through better measurement, equitable funding conditions, and more deliberate partnership design – will require sustained commitment from donors, INGOs, and local actors alike to put the recommendations into practice and more systematic evidence.

1. Introduction

There is widespread agreement that local actors should lead decision making on issues that affect them. The importance of locally led development and humanitarian action for the effectiveness of international cooperation is reflected in a wide range of aid effectiveness agreements and policy objectives.¹ Some studies have demonstrated that local and national organizations have comparative advantages in speed, relevance, and accountability (Yehdego, 2026; Altamont Group, 2025). Local actors may also be more cost-efficient. The Share Trust's 'Passing the Buck' analyzed budget data from four UNOCHA country based pooled funds and found that local partners were 10-19 percent more cost efficient than international partners (The Share Trust, 2026).

However, there is less evidence of how locally led development and humanitarian action affect outcomes and impact. The evidence base for the effectiveness of locally led humanitarian action has strengthened considerably in recent years, but it remains uneven in rigor and scope. Beyond the sustainability, moral and political case, large-scale and methodologically robust evidence of relative impact remains limited and findings on the question of relative effectiveness are mixed (Start Network, 2024; Altamont Group, 2025; Odell et al, 2025). On this basis, a recent systematic review cautions against setting expectations about relative cost effectiveness² and promotes, instead, a focus on other reasons for supporting locally led development (Odell et al, 2025).

Moreover, existing comparative effectiveness studies have not used analysis of decision-making, agency or power to determine which projects count as 'locally led'. They rely instead on lead-partner categorization – that is, whether the organization receiving the primary grant is local or international – as the basis for this distinction (Altamont Group, 2025; Start Network, 2024; White et al, 2023). As the findings of this study illustrate, lead-partner categorization does not capture the quality of local leadership and decision-making, which can remain concentrated with the funder even in direct funding relationships. It also overlooks the possibility that projects with international lead partners can be locally led if the right systems and practices are in place.

¹ These include: the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011), Grand Bargain (2016), OECD Practical Guidelines for Supporting Locally Led Development (2026), and the Call to Action on Locally Led Development (2026).

² Compares the relative costs and outcomes.

2. Approach

2.1 Research Aims and Questions

This study aimed to address one specific aspect of understanding the effectiveness of locally led action: the relationship between local agency – the degree to which local organizations hold decision-making power across the project cycle – and perceived effectiveness as reported by local respondents. It did so through analysing decision-making processes and assessing perceived effectiveness across seven criteria in a small number of humanitarian projects in Nigeria and Ukraine. It is important to note what the study could and could not do. Local agency is one dimension of locally led action, albeit a central; effectiveness can be defined and measured in many ways; and the study was only able to gather program actor and community perceptions of effectiveness – it was not designed to assess actual outcomes or attribute results to specific interventions. Nonetheless, the study advances learning around the effectiveness of locally led action and its measurement and identifies areas for future research.

This study addressed the following research questions.

- **What is the level of local agency (decision-making)** in a particular project and how does this differ if a local organization is a direct grant awardee ("prime") or an indirect awardee ("sub-prime")?
- **What is the effectiveness (across seven criteria)** of assessed projects, as perceived by local actors (targeted communities and local organizations)?
- **Is there a link between levels of local agency and levels of effectiveness** across programs?
- **What are the enablers of local agency and effectiveness, and what are the barriers?**
- **What roles should different types of actors play** to leverage their comparative strengths?

2.2 Framing and Assessing Local Agency and Effectiveness

The conceptual framing and indicators of both local agency and effectiveness draw on earlier Share Trust research, as well as a review of existing measurement frameworks.³ The framing for each was then developed further with Nigerian and Ukrainian research collaborators to contextualize the approach and ensure that it was fit-for-purpose.⁴

³ In 2024, The Share Trust conducted research in Nigeria that assessed the effectiveness of the Nigeria Local Coalition Accelerator in responding to a flood event, as well as examining the agency and role of local actors in social protection across six countries under FCDO's Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) project. This enabled us to co-develop and pilot the framework iteratively. The criteria in the framing of effectiveness also drew on existing frameworks for assessing development and humanitarian action, including the OECD evaluation criteria and the HAG model for measuring community-level impact. The focus on local decision making as a reflection of local agency is reflected in several other models for understanding power dynamics in efforts to support locally led development. These include the *OECD Spectrum of Local Actor Agency* (OECD, 2024), which the Share Trust co-developed; the *Partos Power Awareness Tool* (Rana et al., 2025); and the *Decision Mapping Tool (DMAT)* (King et al., 2023).

⁴ As well as some shifts in language, the decision was taken to integrate open-ended questions on what communities and local organizations perceived as 'effective' (and ineffective) assistance in the research. This created space for participants to define the term according to their own understanding and experience. Further adaptation and tailoring to different contexts in Ukraine and Nigeria were facilitated by keeping effectiveness parameters high level and sufficiently broad to accommodate different variables (see *Tables 1 and 2*).

The study assessed the level of local partner **agency** across four stages of the project cycle: design, delivery, funding, and learning using the Share Trust’s “*Local Agency Compass*” (see *Table 1* and *Annex A*).

Table 1: Criteria for Assessing Local Partner Agency Across Key Programming Processes

DESIGN	DELIVERY	FUNDING	LEARNING
 PLANNING PROCESSES e.g., Identifying priorities, locations, target groups, accountability standards, challenges, and partnerships	 IMPLEMENTING & MANAGEMENT PROCESSES e.g., procurement, auditing, risk management, distribution of goods and delivery of services	 FUNDING PROCESSES e.g., accessing quality funding, determining allocations and funding modalities, distributing cash grants	 OVERSIGHT PROCESSES e.g., monitoring, evaluation, learning, adapting, providing ongoing support and capacity sharing across the nexus

Source: The Share Trust (see the [Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass Tool](#))

The study also examined community and project actor (local and international) perceptions on the **effectiveness** of each project across seven criteria: quality, inclusiveness, reach, responsiveness, connectedness, timeliness, and sustainability using the “*Local Effectiveness Compass*” (see *Table 2* and *Annex A*).

Table 2: Outcome Criteria for Assessing Effectiveness

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
 INCLUSIVE of the most marginalized and most affected	 RESPONSIVE to community priorities and relevant to contexts, power dynamics & cultural norms (e.g., does no harm)	 TIMELY information & support
 REACHING community members - extent of support including in remote/hard to reach areas	 CONNECTED support provided across a range of priority needs & sectors and alignment/ connection (e.g., across the nexus)	 SUSTAINABLE results through long-term support across the nexus & integrated with support from other local actors and institutions e.g., local government
 QUALITY support provided including high quality goods and services that produce the desired/successful results		

Source: The Share Trust will update these criteria based on learning from conducting this study – see the [Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass Tool](#))

The study also examined the factors that support or constrain local agency and effectiveness in humanitarian action. **Barriers and enablers** were specifically framed around donor requirements and flexibility, quality of partnerships, capacity of organizations, and contextual dynamics affecting the projects.

2.3 Key Definitions

Working definitions for the study are as follows.

- **Local agency** is defined using the OECD definition of ‘locally led development cooperation’⁵, which The Share Trust contributed to developing, using local agency as an indicator of local leadership. Local agency is assessed through analysing decision-making processes across the program cycle to determine the level of local partner autonomy and influence in decisions related to design, delivery, funding, and learning (see *Table 1*). The study also examines the enablers and barriers to local decision-making, including funding flexibility, knowledge and capacity, time and resources.
- **Prime and sub-prime** are used in the study for purposefully selected projects that include both local organizations in lead partner positions with funding directly from the funder, termed as ‘prime’ roles, and where local organizations are sub-granted by INGOs, termed as ‘sub-prime’ roles.
- **Locally led action** is when local partner organizations have agency (decision-making roles and influence) across the project cycle.⁶ The question of agency or decision-making power is distinct from the question of funding; local actors may have decision making power (or not) in contexts of direct or indirect funding. A key hypothesis of the study is that local actors are likely to have more decision-making power when they are in “prime” positions and receive direct funding from the funder.
- **By contrast, internationally led action** is when international organizations control decision-making, and local organizations primarily engage as implementers of externally designed and managed projects. A key hypothesis of the study is that local organizations will have less decision-making power when international organizations are in “prime” positions and receive direct funding from the funder.
- **Local organization** in this report refers to both national non-governmental organizations (NNGO) and sub-national NGOs (SNGO). The focus on local non-governmental partner organizations in this paper stems from the prevalence of this type of entity as implementers of the humanitarian projects assessed; however, The Share Trust recognizes that other types of “local actors” can (and do) also receive funding and implement projects in humanitarian action.
- **Local actor** includes local organizations as well as other actors such as national and sub-national governments, community based groups, and the private sector.

⁵ See: [Practical Guidelines for Supporting Locally Led Development](#) (OECD, 2026) & [Framing DAC member approaches to enabling locally led development](#) (OECD, 2023), which were supported by The Share Trust.

⁶ [Practical Guidelines for Supporting Locally Led Development](#) (OECD, 2026)

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed-methods design was used to examine the potential link between local agency and effectiveness in the humanitarian response in Nigeria and Ukraine. The analysis triangulated findings from key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs),⁷ partner surveys, and community surveys. The Share Trust worked with researchers in Ukraine and Nigeria,⁸ who led country level data collection and analysis. Data collection was conducted between April 2025 and February 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained by the local researchers from all research participants, and data stored securely in alignment with Share Trust research standards and organizational policies.

This study did not have a large enough sample or variable control to draw any conclusions around causality between agency and effectiveness. However, it does provide important insights to begin to draw inferences, including from local partners on the specific barriers and enablers that facilitate both agency and effectiveness.

2.4.1. Country and Project Selection

The study was undertaken in Ukraine and Nigeria. At the start of this study, The Share Trust had completed cost efficiency studies of UNOCHA Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) in these two countries – and hence the research team had detailed information about a range of projects led by local and international actors, both as primes and sub-primes.

Using this information and the existing networks of the in-country researchers, projects funded by the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) and Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) were purposively selected, alongside others, to include local organizations as both prime and sub-prime. A core hypothesis of the study is that prime grant recipients (direct funding) have greater agency than sub-prime grant recipients (indirect funding); purposive sampling was important to include variation in potential for local agency, although a larger sample of projects would be needed to make robust conclusions. Ten projects were selected for the research – five in Nigeria and five in Ukraine (see *Annex B* for more information).

The Ukraine study selected:

- **Five humanitarian projects** involving eight implementing organizations, including: two projects with international NGO (INGO) primes (P1 and P2); one project with a sub-national NGO (SNGO) prime (P3); one project involving both SNGO and national NGO (NNGO) primes (P4); and one project being led by an NNGO confederation (P5).

All five projects were implemented across multiple Ukrainian oblasts in the context of the ongoing conflict, spanning both frontline and displacement-affected regions. They covered cash assistance, child protection, education, psychosocial support, and community-based protection, delivered through a mix of international and local actors ranging from a large INGO managing multipurpose cash transfers at scale to locally embedded organizations providing home visits, legal aid, and

⁷ FGDs were only conducted in Nigeria due to larger sample sizes in this study.

⁸ Andrew Onwuebele (Nigeria consultant) and Dmytro Kondratenko (Ukraine consultant).

community outreach to the most vulnerable (see *Annex B*).

- **In these projects the UNHCR is included as a funder** because the local organizations viewed their role as implementing partners of the UNHCR as direct funding. This points to the complexity of defining ‘direct’ funding, as well as the importance of local partner perspectives when doing so.

The Nigeria study selected:

- **Five humanitarian projects**, including three NHF projects: one with an SNGO prime (P1); one with an NNGO prime (P2); and another with an INGO prime (P3). In January and February 2026 further data collection was conducted to capture more variation in the partnership modalities. This resulted in two further projects being included in the analysis involving the same large INGO: one with the INGO in the prime position with local partners (P4); and one where the INGO was conducting direct delivery (P5).

All five projects were implemented in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria, in the context of protracted conflict and recurrent flooding. They spanned emergency response across shelter, WASH, food, cash, and child protection sectors, with one notable outlier: a longer-term early childhood development and education pilot implemented solely by a large INGO (P5) (see *Annex B*).

2.4.2. Data Collection

Data collection used Key Informant Interviews (KII), Partner Surveys, Community Surveys, and Community Focus Group Discussions (FDG) to gather data between June 2025 and February 2026 (see *Box 1* and *Tables C1* and *C2* in *Annex C* for greater detail):

- **In Ukraine**, a total of 14 KIIs with local and international organizations involved in implementing the projects, and 12 partner surveys with local implementing partners were conducted;
In Nigeria, 57 KIIs with local and international organizations involved in implementing the projects, 20 FDGs with community members and local leaders, and a community survey involving 1,513 community members who had received humanitarian assistance from the projects being assessed were conducted.

Box 1: Data Collection Tools

- **Tool 1 (KII Guide for Local NGO Partners)** – with national and subnational NGO staff, involving semi-structured questions to gather qualitative and quantitative data around: i) decision making roles across each area of the project cycle (design, delivery, funding, learning), ii) enablers and barriers to local decision-making and effectiveness; and iii) roles and comparative advantages of different humanitarian actors (local and international).
- **Tool 2 (KII Guide for International Partners: UN Agencies and INGOs)** – with INGO and UN staff; covering the same project cycle stages as Tool 1 but from the international actor perspective, providing a cross-check on agency assessments and capturing international perspectives on local leadership and systemic barriers, as well as perspectives on the effectiveness of the project. Included a matching question on ideal role division between local and international actors, as well as broader reflections on what systemic changes are needed to enable stronger local leadership.
- **Tool 3 (FDG/KII Guide for Community Leaders & Affected Communities)** – with traditional leaders, CBO heads, and local council members, as well as affected IDP communities accessing humanitarian assistance under the projects in Nigeria. Captured community-level perspectives on whether local voices shaped project design and delivery, and perspectives on project effectiveness, including sensitivity to cultural norms. Not conducted in Ukraine due to the security situation.

- **Tool 4 (Target Community Survey)** – with the communities that had received humanitarian assistance under each project; the primary source of effectiveness data in Nigeria, supporting the generation of structured scores across all seven effectiveness criteria. Not used with communities in Ukraine due to the security situation.
- **Tool 5 (Local Partner Questionnaire)** – an alternative to *Tool 4* but asking local partners and local/subnational staff involved in the last-mile delivery of the projects to share their perspectives on effectiveness, with a much smaller sample, which is why Ukraine effectiveness scores rest on self-reporting (*Tool 5 & Tool 1*) rather than community perceptions.

2.4.3. Data Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data was triangulated to give each project a score for both i) local agency and ii) effectiveness based on survey and interview evidence. The Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass was used to allocate structured scores (0-3) for local agency across the project cycle as well as for levels of effectiveness across the seven criteria (see *Figure A1, Annex A*). This enabled examination of whether higher levels of agency corresponded with greater effectiveness.

2.5 Study Limitations

Due to the security situation in Ukraine, the community perceptions survey was not conducted with communities. Rather, it was carried out with a smaller sample of staff from local organizations and offices involved in the last-mile delivery of the projects being assessed. This approach provided localized perspectives from delivery contexts but meant that there was a much smaller sample to draw on for assessing effectiveness, as well as a gap in direct community perspectives. This gap was partially addressed by drawing on secondary data, specifically monitoring and evaluation surveys of target communities conducted by the organizations, but it did not capture the full range of effectiveness parameters under investigation. Without a community perceptions study, the Ukraine study is more vulnerable to bias from the self-reporting of effectiveness.

This study cannot demonstrate causation between local agency and the seven measures of effectiveness because the design and sample size did not enable it to isolate causal variables through controlled comparisons. The research offers insights from a small number of projects without enough similarities to control for other influencing factors on effectiveness. Further research involving a more systematic, controlled analysis of more projects, in more contexts, is needed to draw firmer conclusions about the relationship between local agency and effectiveness.

Finally, the study does not draw on in-depth, impact evaluations for determining effectiveness, and there are broad and varying ways in which ‘effectiveness’ can be defined. The study offers one approach with its seven criteria, developed iteratively based on previous Share Trust research, as well as a literature review of existing effectiveness frameworks, in collaboration with local researchers in each country.⁹

⁹ In 2024, The Share Trust conducted research examining how local actors engage in social protection across six countries as part of FCDO's STAAR project and further research in Nigeria on the effectiveness of the Nigeria Local Coalition Accelerator's response to flooding (The Share Trust, 2025). This research helped co-develop and pilot the effectiveness framework used in this study. The effectiveness criteria also drew on existing tools, including the OECD evaluation criteria.

3. Findings

3.1 Local Agency Across the Project Cycle

As a first step, the analysis assessed levels of local partner agency across the project cycle, drawing on key informant interviews with local and international project actors about decision-making processes.

In Ukraine, the findings indicated that by far the lowest level of agency for local partners was in decision-making related to funding (see *Figure 1*). Unsurprisingly, local actors highlighted that this area was dominated by funder-controlled decisions, including budget allocations, timeframes, and funding availability. Local agency was scored highest in project delivery where local organizations controlled day-to-day decision-making. Several key informants noted that programmatic decision making and adaptation was supported by the proximity of subnational actors to communities, their strong community connections and feedback mechanisms. This degree of responsiveness to community priorities was higher in projects with local primes than those with international primes (see *Figure 3*).

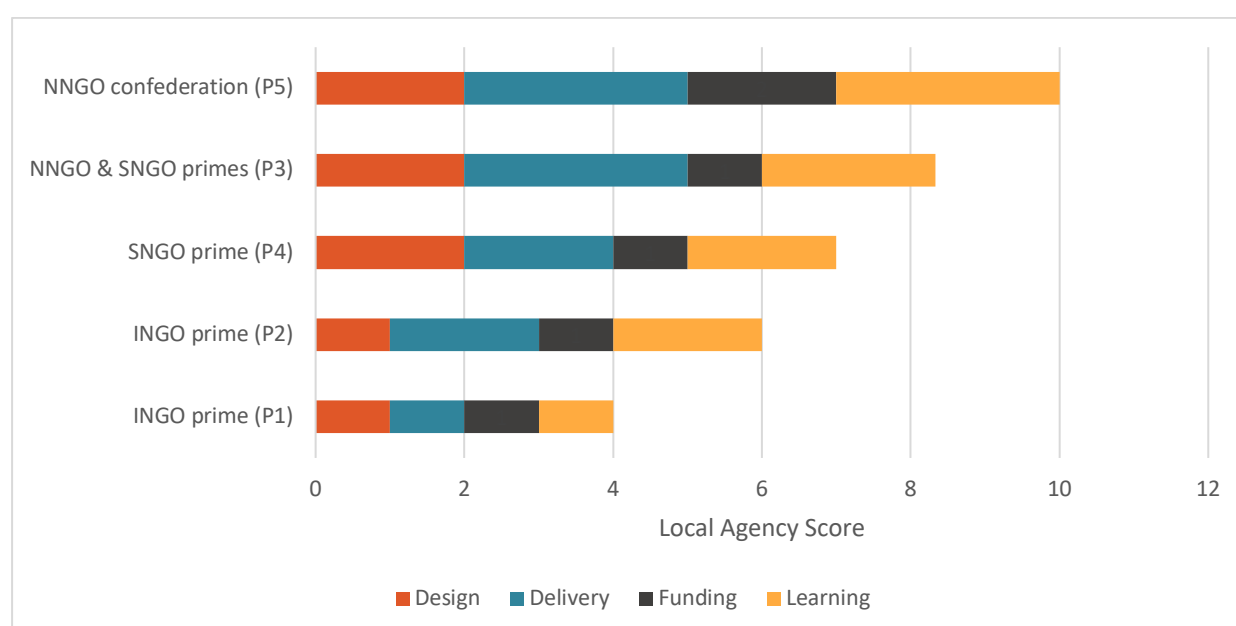
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“There are constant changes in projects... because we work in regions where the situation can change rapidly... We can change the territory of the project implementation... change the categories of vulnerability... We make all key decisions on the project cycle ourselves.” – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

“I believe that local partners have better ability to adapt than INGOs... Local partners are able to adapt [and they are] timely.” – KII, UN, Ukraine

“We always collect feedback during the implementation of the project and after the implementation of the project, and incorporate them into the design of future projects... We involve beneficiaries at each stage, the same roundtables, and this is closer to assessing needs.” – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

Figure 1. Local Agency Across the Program Cycle by Project, Ukraine



Note: See *Annex A* for further information on scoring scales.

In Ukraine, local agency was scored highest in funding arrangements where national and/or subnational local organizations are the main delivery partner (prime). Local partner key respondents highlighted several restrictions connected to working as a sub-prime partner, particularly when local partners were instrumentalized to implement an externally designed project.

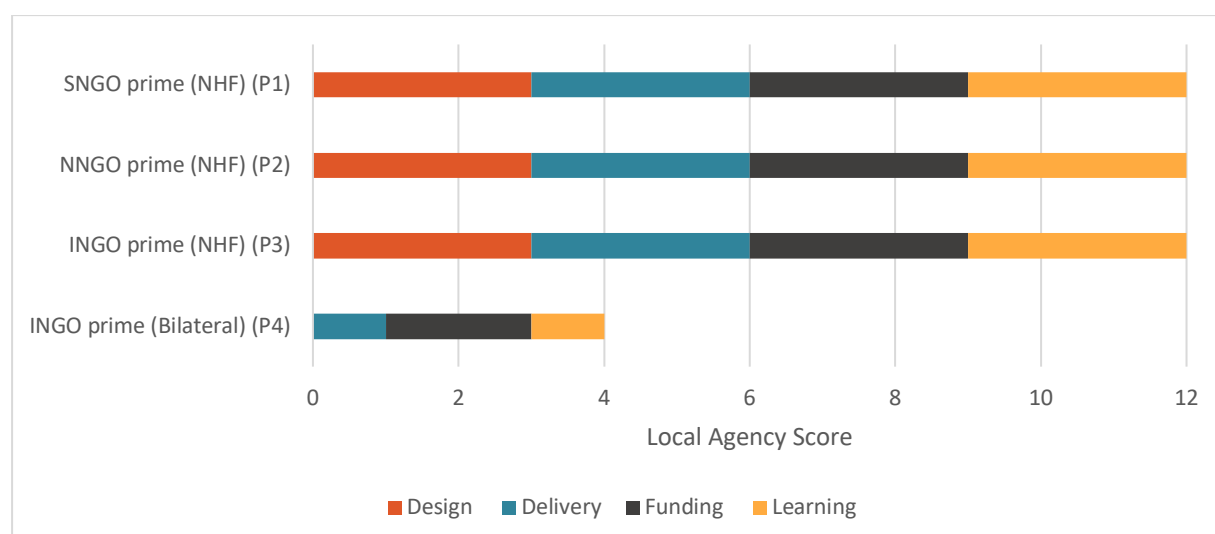


“We have also worked with an INGO [...] and [we were] sub-granted. But here, we did not have any input in the project design. They provided an already developed concept note with all the activities already outlined, and they asked us to identify activities that we could implement from the concept note, which we did.” – KII, SNGO, Nigeria

“International organizations come to us with ready-made projects... they already have projects, they have a target and they simply offer us to work together... In such projects, we have the right to choose the criteria of vulnerability, territory, activity... but the direction is proposed by them.” – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

In Nigeria, local agency was rated as “high” across all parts of the program cycle, except in the case of the non-NHF project (see Figure 2). The difference when compared with the Ukraine findings, where funding decisions were consistently lower in local agency, can potentially be explained by the NHF’s funding processes; the local NHF partner organizations reported being given high levels of discretion over how to use their funding, including within co-design processes with international partners.

Figure 2. Local Agency Across the Program Cycle by Project, Nigeria



Note: local partner agency not assessed in case of 5th Nigeria project (P5 - INGO direct delivery) due to absence of a local partner. See Annex A for further information on scoring scales.

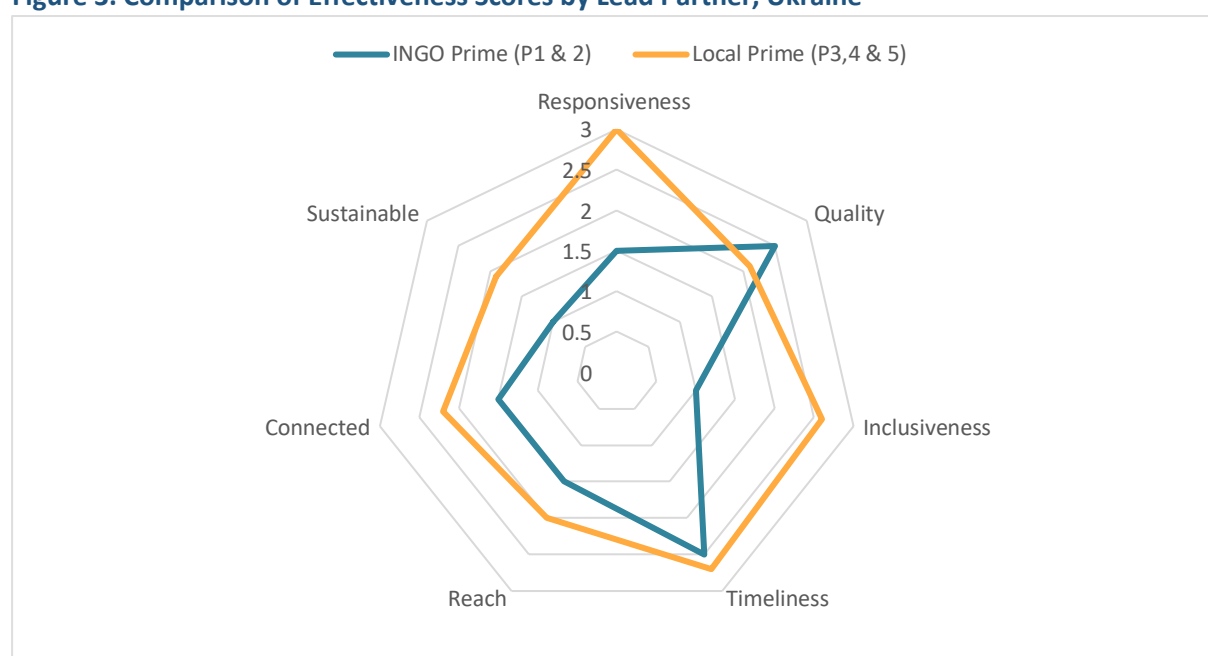
Nigeria’s findings show that levels of local partner agency can be high in both prime and sub-prime positions. In the three NHF projects (P1-P3), local agency was equally high, even when an international prime was in place, while it was much lower in the non-NHF international prime example. This could point to the important role played by the funder in creating an enabling environment for more locally led partnerships and/or the approaches used by the lead partner. The NHF created space for local decision-making by requiring local partner autonomy in design stages, including budgets and measurement frameworks, as well as ensuring equitable allocation of flexible (overhead) funding, so that both local and international primes worked under the same conditions.

3.2 Perceptions of Effectiveness

The next step in the analysis involved examining perceptions on the effectiveness of the projects based on the survey, focus group, and interview data.

In Ukraine, projects with local organizations as primes were rated more highly than projects with international primes across all but one of the effectiveness criteria (see Figure 3). Projects with local organization primes (both subnational and national) were rated highest in perceived **responsiveness** to local priorities. Similarly, projects with local organization primes (subnational and national) outperformed INGO primes in relation to the extent to which assistance was perceived to be **inclusive** of marginalized or minority groups, the extent or **reach** of the project (including underserved areas), the **connectedness** of assistance (across priorities and sectors) and the **timeliness** and **sustainability** of their assistance. The two projects with international primes scored highest (2.5) in relation to the **quality** of goods and services provided, marginally outperforming projects with local primes.

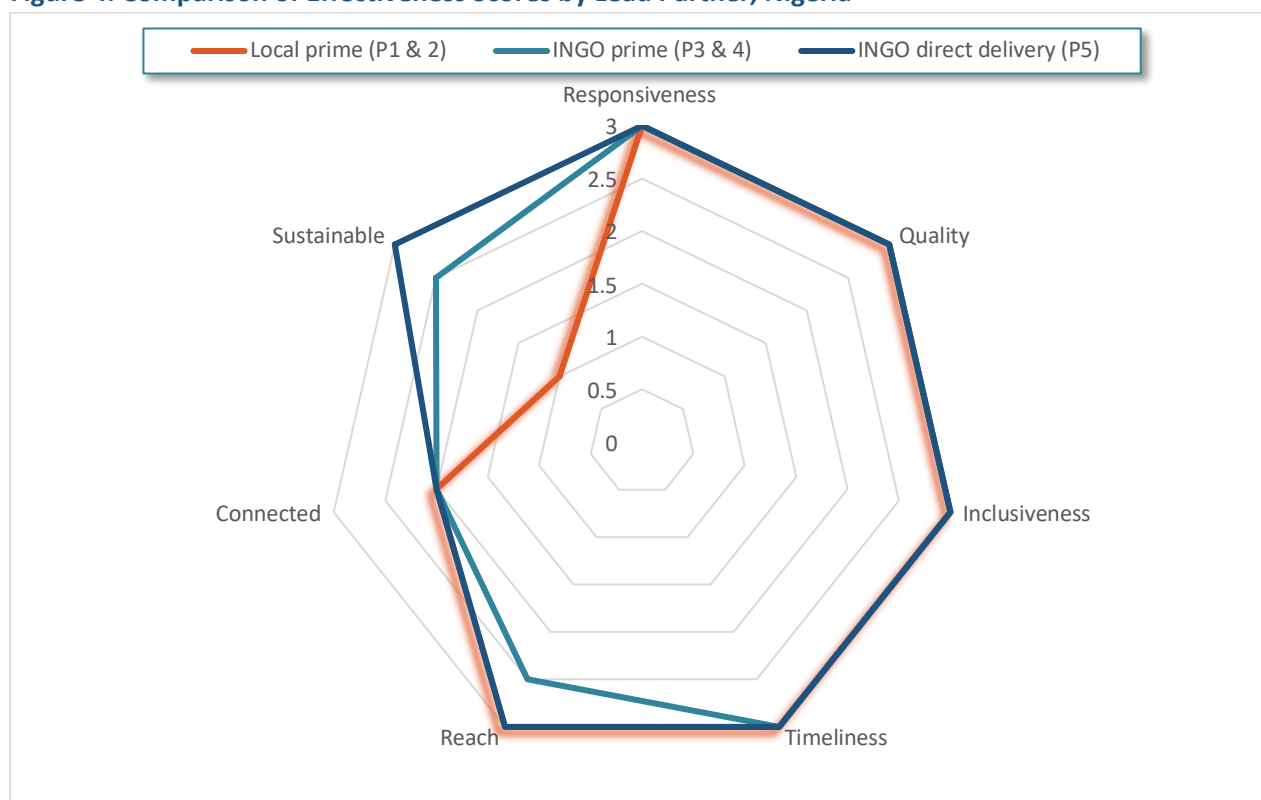
Figure 3. Comparison of Effectiveness Scores by Lead Partner, Ukraine



Note: see Annex B for details on effectiveness scores.

In Nigeria, interventions with international (INGO) and local (NNGO and SNGO) primes scored equally across most effectiveness criteria. Variation across the different actors was only seen in the sustainability and reach of projects. The intervention where an INGO was engaged in direct delivery was perceived by communities to be more **sustainable** than those with a local (NNGO or SNGO) prime/ sub-prime. Conversely, projects with local primes (NNGOs and SNGOs) were rated more highly than those with international primes in the extent of their support or project **reach**, except for the INGO doing direct delivery, which also rated as high (3). Although the sample of projects is too small to generalize, project analysis by prime partner does suggest some variation in community perceptions on the sustainability of INGO versus LNGO primes. This variation potentially reflects the instability of local funding access and consequent abilities to sustainably support communities. However, this variation may also stem from type of project; one INGO project was more focused on longer-term livelihood support.

Figure 4. Comparison of Effectiveness Scores by Lead Partner, Nigeria



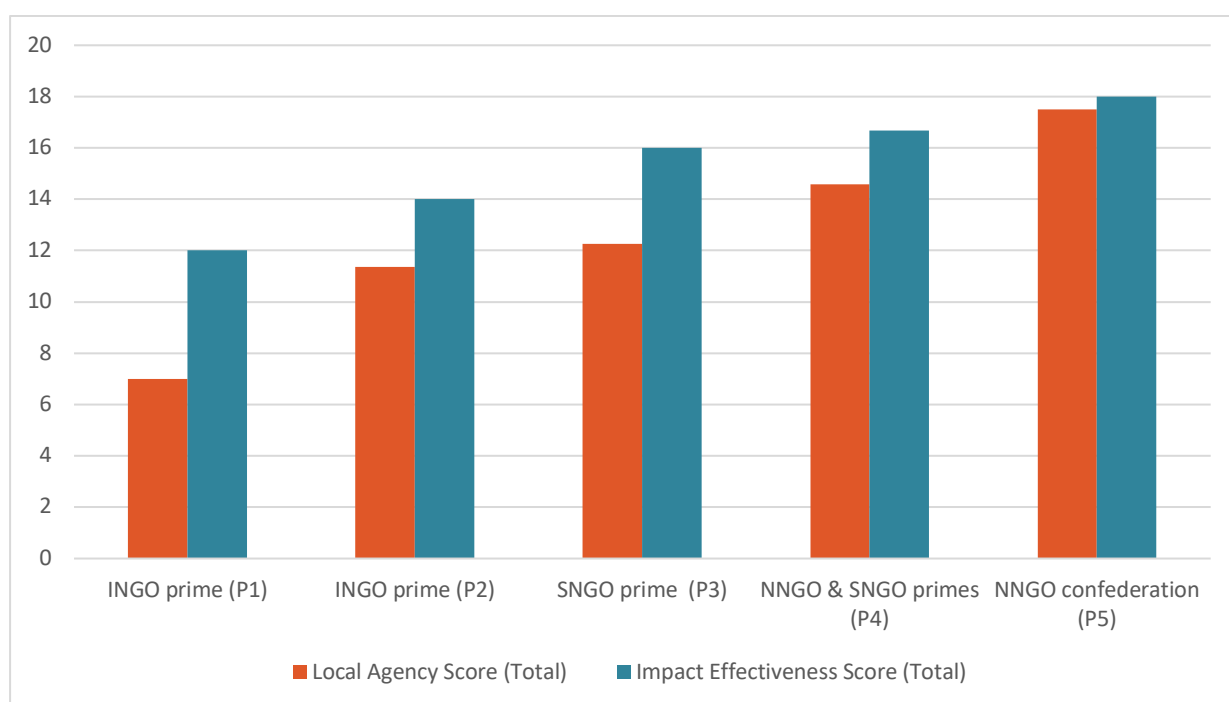
Note: see Annex B for details on effectiveness scores.

3.3 The Relationship Between Local Agency and Perceived Effectiveness

The third step in the analysis looked to unpack the relationship between local actor agency and perceived effectiveness by comparing the scores for both, based on the survey and interview data. The analysis is based on a comparison of total local agency and total effectiveness scores calculated for each project.

In Ukraine, projects with higher levels of local agency also had higher levels of perceived effectiveness (Figure 5). The NNGO confederation, working on protection and psychosocial support (PSS) through a national network, had the highest level of perceived effectiveness, as well as the highest aggregated level of local agency in decision-making across the project cycle. This is potentially enabled by its decentralized network of local organizations coordinated at the national level, allowing aid to be delivered close to communities while maintaining shared standards and strategy. The two projects involving INGO primes were found to have the lowest levels of local agency *and* the lowest effectiveness scores.

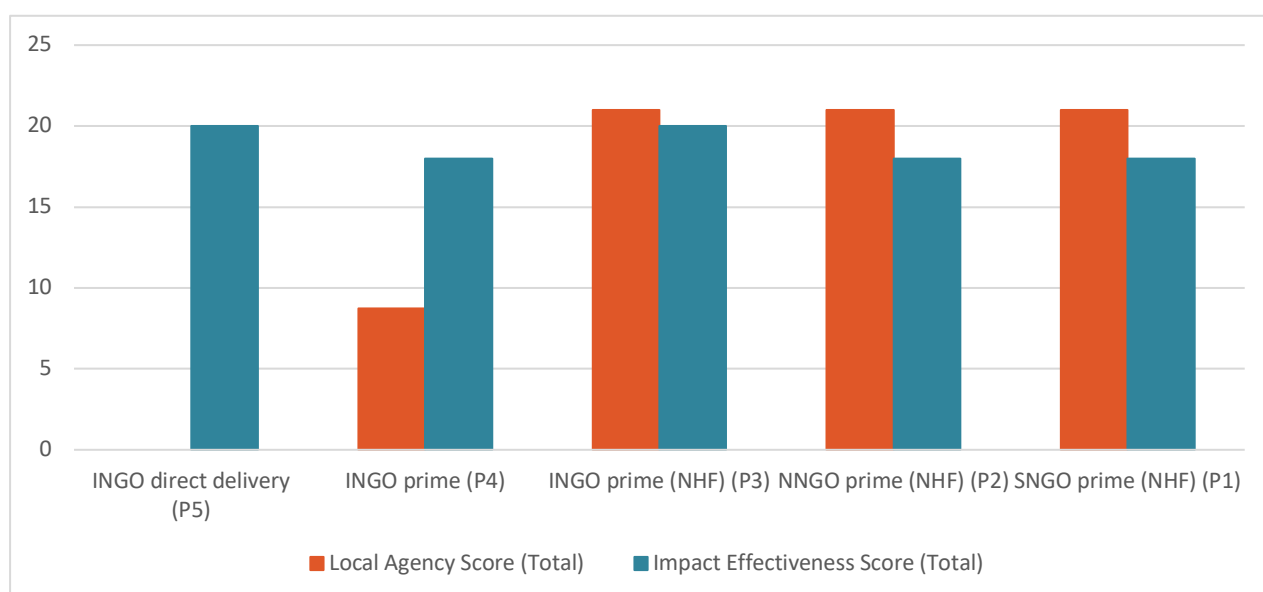
Figure 5. Projects with Higher Local Agency also had Higher Levels of Perceived Effectiveness in Ukraine



Note: See *Annex B* for more details on each project. Local Agency score was weighted for purposes of comparison with Effectiveness scoring. INGO: International NGO; NNGO: National NGO; SNGO: Sub-national NGO.

In Nigeria, interventions with higher and lower levels of local agency were perceived as equally effective. Levels of local agency and levels of effectiveness differed and did not show any clear pattern, indicating that there were many other factors affecting perceptions of effectiveness, beyond the role of local decision-making (see *Figure 6*).

Figure 6. Projects with High and Low Levels of Local Agency are Perceived as Equally Effective in Nigeria



Note: See *Annex B* for more details on each project. Local Agency score weighted for purposes of comparison with Effectiveness scoring. INGO: International NGO; NNGO: National NGO; SNGO: Sub-national NGO. Local partner agency scored 0 for P1 due to absence of local partner.

Taken together, the findings from Ukraine and Nigeria indicate that more systematic analysis of the relationship between local leadership and perceptions of effectiveness is required. In Ukraine, the projects that are more locally led are also perceived to be more effective by local actors, but in Nigeria the relationship is less clear cut and projects with both high and low local agency were perceived to be equally effective. This points to other contributing factors, including project type (e.g., long-term support versus crisis response) that this study was unable to control for.

3.4 Enablers of Local Agency & Effectiveness

The fourth element of the analysis was to review the perceptions shared by key informants on the key factors that enable as well as challenge local agency in humanitarian programming. The findings suggest that the enablers identified by respondents across both countries largely reflect themes that are well-established in the wider localization literature (i.e., OECD, 2024), verified and augmented here with direct testimony from implementing organizations about how these factors played out in practice. The most prominent themes are summarized below.

- **Access to direct funding.** Direct funding was highlighted as a key driver of local agency by local organizations. In Ukraine, organizations with direct funding, from any funding source, highlighted the greater autonomy that comes with direct funding versus sub-grants. They reported that, with direct funding, they exercised greater control over project design and community targeting, enabling them to align projects with local realities. In Nigeria, local organizations valued the NHF's emphasis on direct funding and highlighted the increased space for local decision-making compared with their experiences as sub-grantees to INGOs or UN agencies.¹⁰
- **Equitable funding practices.** Practices that promote transparent financial decision-making were highlighted by local actors as key enablers. In Nigeria, the NHF promoted equitable and transparent budgeting and funding allocation processes, with budgets being determined and co-designed by prime and sub-prime partners together. Partners transparently developed their budgets to match their own project designs, with the amount of funding available to each partner being determined by the NHF on this basis. Local partners also valued NHF policy on overheads (project support costs) being allocated equitably at 7 percent across both prime and sub-prime partners.



"The donor makes a big consideration here. NHF has played a major role, particularly in advocating for localization and ensuring that grant requirements are favorable to local partners." – KII, SNGO, Nigeria

- **Intentionally creating space for local decision making in partnerships.** Local organizations indicated that intentionality around high-quality partnerships with INGOs can lead to substantial agency. When INGOs form equitable partnerships with national and subnational NGOs rather than instrumentalizing them to implement one piece of a broader body of work, it was reported that this can foster joint design of projects where local actors contribute to needs assessments and targeting criteria, as well as activity planning and co-implementation toward shared goals. Key informants

¹⁰ In 2025, a record 70 percent of funding of NHF funding was given directly to Nigerian NGOs in key allocations (Doro and Fall, 2026). Similarly, 58 percent of NHF funds was allocated directly to local partners in 2023; 70 percent was allocated directly to local partners for the 2025 Lean Season Response (OCHA, 2025).

suggested that Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and partnership agreements that clarify mutual roles, rights, and decision-making authority can help support this type of intentional partnership. For example, one INGO in Nigeria, funded via the NHF, adopted a consortium-based localization model, where it serves as the lead agency but assigns substantial budget lines and leadership roles to local organizations. This model, it was reported, supported local organizations to take on decision-making roles and fostered their operational independence.



"We could do more, but we're not included in the strategic planning conversations." - KII, NNGO, Ukraine

"International organizations come to us with ready-made projects... they already have projects, they have a target and they simply offer us to work together... In such projects, we have the right to choose the criteria of vulnerability, territory, activity... but the direction is proposed by them." - KII, SNGO, Ukraine

- **Leveraging local knowledge and capacities.** International organizations admitted that the effectiveness of their assistance was dependent on local capacities. In Ukraine, when local organizations were seen as legitimate humanitarian actors based on their relative knowledge and skills, they gained influence over local coordination structures, informing community targeting priorities and referral pathways. Most of the local organizations participating in the study had worked in the intervention communities for over five years and had already established relationships with local leaders and gained their trust. Their deep relationships with communities ensured that the projects met the priority needs of the affected communities, whilst aligning respectfully with their religious and cultural environments.



"We work with CBOs to find the most vulnerable, invisible people.... In many cases, the local partners are our only way into non-accessible zones." – KII, UN, Ukraine

"Our organization has been here for more than five years, working closely with community leaders. People here know us, they trust us, so when this project came, it was easy for them to support it fully. Because [local organizations] understand the culture and religion in these communities, we know the right way to engage with the people. This made the project more acceptable to everyone." – KII, SNGO, Nigeria

"We offer services in communities that are entirely cut off. People trust us because we were there before others." – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

"We trust them because they live here too and understand our problems." – KII, Male IDP (SNGO monitoring data), Ukraine

- **Supporting institutional strengthening.** Both international and national actors highlighted the importance of investing in the sustainability of local actors. International organizations cited local capacity constraints as a barrier to local leadership and decision making, while local organizations called for better investment in local systems strengthening (including financial, safeguarding, and MEAL systems) to enable access to direct funding, more effective programming, and organisational sustainability.



"One of the main challenges was the limited capacity of the local partner. For example, [they] could not manage the conditional cash transfer on [their] own and had to rely on support from other organizations, which caused significant delays. Human resources were also stretched — sometimes,

one person was acting as M&E officer, procurement officer, and project officer simultaneously. In addition, there were no clear policies in place to guide the partner's operations." – KII, INGO, Nigeria
"We dream of building local capacity... but there is no stable process. There is no plan or clear steps." – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

"People who knew English left for UN agencies to earn four times more." – KII, SNGO, Ukraine

"The idea of subcontracting should be changed to co-leadership and joint decision-making. There is a need for deliberate investment in local capacity strengthening, rather than just project-based capacity development. Areas such as governance, human resources systems, and compliance frameworks require strengthening." – KII, INGO, Nigeria

- **Supporting networked and decentralized structures.** The confederation model in Ukraine was identified as having the highest local agency and effectiveness. Caritas Ukraine, a networked model, balanced national coordination with local autonomy of field offices and leveraged volunteers and long-term community presence, which was found to support sustainability and local legitimacy. The Caritas model in Ukraine is a decentralized network of local organizations coordinated at the national level, allowing aid to be delivered close to communities while maintaining shared standards and strategy. It combines immediate humanitarian relief with longer-term recovery and development, offering integrated support such as cash assistance, psychosocial care, and community rebuilding. Other examples of similarly federated structures include the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), which works through National Societies drawing on vast local volunteer networks to drive humanitarian impact (IFRC, 2022).

3.5 Division of Roles

The final step in the analysis assessed the perspectives of international and local project actor key informants – gathered through key informant interviews – on which functions and activities should sit with different actors, based on their comparative advantages.

Perspectives of project actors from both Nigeria and Ukraine converged on a clear division of roles that would strengthen locally led humanitarian action. Across both local and international project actors, local organizations were seen as best placed to lead direct implementation, community engagement, needs assessments, data collection, monitoring, and local advocacy, drawing on their contextual knowledge, community trust, and presence on the ground. They were also viewed as well-positioned to lead assessments that frame project design, develop operational methodologies, as well as support smaller grassroots actors as they grow in capacity and reach.



"First, for UN agencies, I think that if they plan to involve local partners in any project, they should do so at the beginning of the project design and incorporate the input of local partners into the project design. This is very important." – KII, INGO, Nigeria

"Local actors should lead implementation, community engagement, advocacy, and peer support, while international organizations should fund, mentor, coordinate, and advocate internationally – but avoid direct implementation." – KII, NNGO, Ukraine

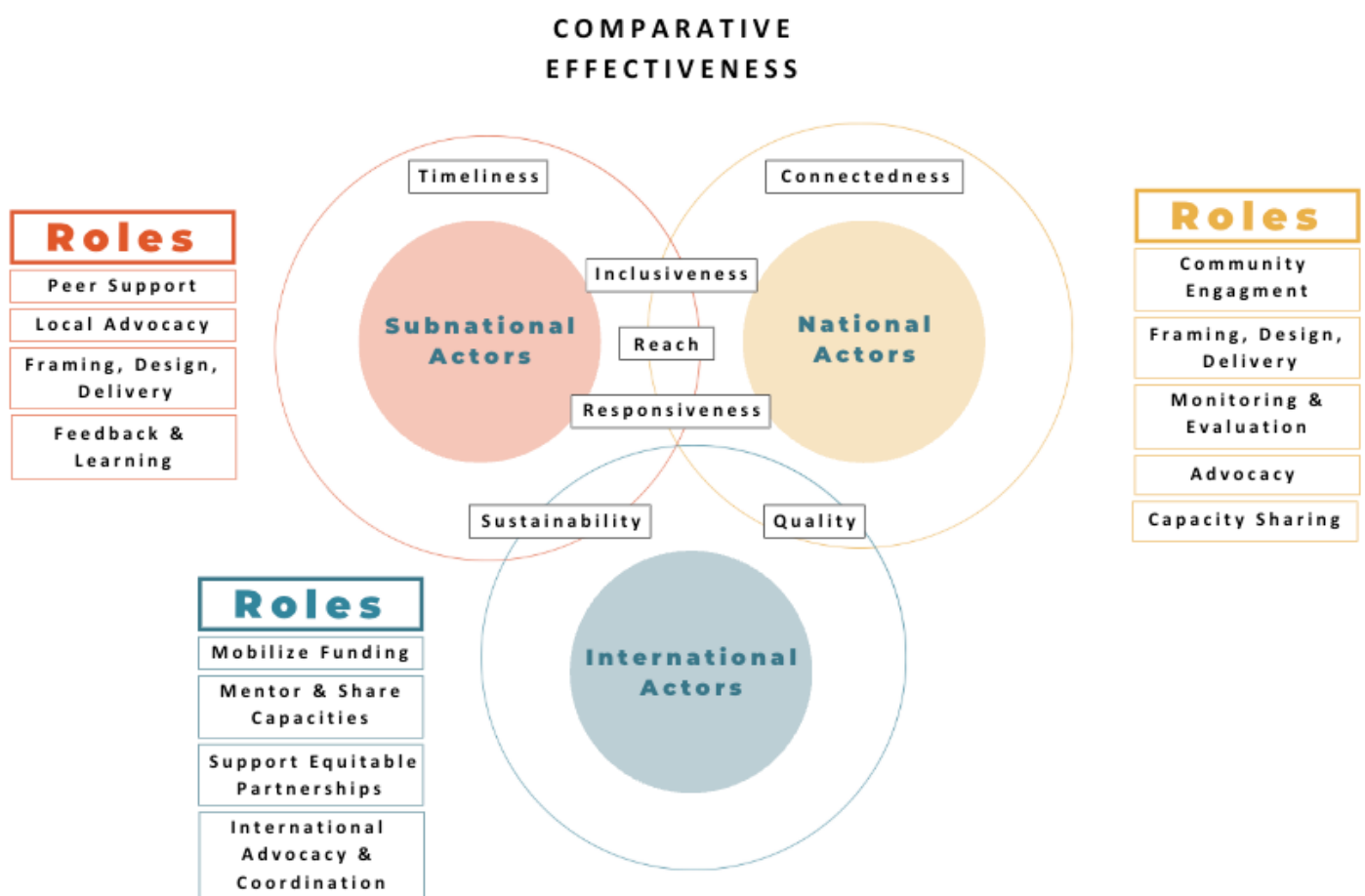
International organizations are seen as most valuable when operating in enabling rather than implementing roles. Their perceived comparative advantage lies in resource mobilization, channeling financing to local partners, providing technical and institutional capacity strengthening, and conducting

coordination and oversight functions. The clearest path forward, as reflected across both contexts, is for international actors to expand their enabling partnership functions, to think carefully about when direct implementation is necessary, and to invest meaningfully in strengthening the systems, policies, and capacities that allow local organizations to lead.



“For future projects, I think the local partners have more access to local communities than INGOs... It will be good if they support community entry activities and needs assessment activities in the communities. The INGOs, on the other hand, can support in capacity building and help in strengthening their policies.” – KII, INGO, Nigeria

Figure 7: Indicative Local and International Perspectives on Effectiveness and Roles of Different Actors*



*This graphic represents findings across both countries, noting effectiveness strengths differed across each.

4. Recommendations

The findings of this study are exploratory, and the recommendations below are framed accordingly – as directions for further investment and inquiry rather than conclusions firmly established by the data. They are organized around two priorities that the evidence supports: first, local agency is a central dimension of locally led action but the ‘lead partner’ category is an insufficient indicator for the level and quality of local decision-making; and second, local agency is affected by key enabling factors including the quality of funding and partnerships. Projects with international lead partners can be locally led if the right systems and practices are present, but more systematic analysis of these enabling good practices for local agency and their relationship with effectiveness is required.

1) Measure local agency systematically – and use the evidence to strengthen it

The humanitarian sector needs a shared, systematic approach to measuring the degree to which local organizations hold genuine decision-making power across the project cycle, and to understand how that agency relates to effectiveness. Measurement is not only diagnostic: what gets measured gets done, and a systematic approach can ascribe visibility and value to dimensions of local leadership that currently go unrecognized alongside more easily quantified metrics like direct funding. This study is one of the first attempts to move in that direction.¹¹ While it was not designed to test a causal relationship between agency and effectiveness, it contributed a working framework for thinking about both concepts, piloted tools for gathering this kind of data, and generated findings on each. Notably, agency and effectiveness did not always move in tandem: eight of the ten projects evaluated showed both high local agency and high perceived effectiveness, but the remaining two diverged. These outliers may be as instructive as the pattern itself, pointing to a wider set of enabling conditions, for both agency and effectiveness, which future research should seek to investigate.



➤ **All actors** should:

- **measure agency intentionally** as a leading indicator for locally led action, and as a dimension of programming quality in its own right;
- **support controlled comparative research with larger samples** designed specifically to investigate outlier cases, where agency and effectiveness diverge, to understand what drives those divergences; as well as controlled comparisons (e.g., with consistency in sector and project type) that allow causal variables to be isolated;
- **develop shared, systematic measures for both local agency and effectiveness** that can be applied and compared across contexts.



- **Donors and pooled funds** should require implementing partners to demonstrate how local organizations will hold meaningful decision-making authority across the project cycle (in design, delivery, funding, and learning) not just in implementation. This should be a requirement in proposal assessment and partner selection, not an afterthought.

¹¹ The Share Trust also reviewed the agency and role of different local actors in social protection across six countries (see The Share Trust, 2025).



- **INGOs and UN agencies** should adopt agency/decision-mapping tools such as: i) the Share Trust's Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass, to make agency visible and drive accountability for improving local agency over time across programming; or ii) the Decision Mapping Tool (DMAT)¹², which uses participatory processes to map decision-making roles across the program cycle, as well as identify bottlenecks for local actor decision making and establish concrete action plans to address them.



- **National and subnational local organizations** can use recent funder commitments to advocate for adequate resources for learning and evidence generation in partnerships – to document locally led action and its links to effectiveness.



TOOL: The Share Trust's *Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass*, as well as power analysis tools like the Decision Mapping Tool (DMAT), can help measure and track progress in devolving decision-making to local actors at the policy, programming, and/or operational level.

2) Prioritize funding quality, equity and flexibility – not just direct funding

The Nigeria findings suggest that direct funding alone does not guarantee local leadership. The Nigeria Humanitarian Fund's approach – equitable overhead allocations, joint budget design, and transparent grant conditions applied consistently across local and international primes – was associated with high local agency across all three NHF projects, regardless of whether the prime was a local or international organization. This points to the quality and conditions of funding as enablers of local agency. Local organizations themselves reported that sub-granting arrangements constrained their agency most severely when projects arrived pre-designed, with limited scope for local input. Whereas funding that is flexible and co-designed from the outset creates better conditions for local agency. Stakeholder-specific recommended actions include the following:



- **Donors and pooled funds** should invest in the enabling conditions for local agency, many of which were identified in the NHF funding model. Rather than continuing to debate direct versus indirect funding, donors should invest in identifying and replicating good practices that create space for and incentivize and support local decision-making in partnerships including assigning providing budget for participatory processes, allowing time for co-creation in the pre-award process or in an inception phase, and providing local partners meaningful budget lines and leadership responsibilities within consortium and partnership models.



- **INGOs and UN agencies** should:
 - **Allocate overheads equitably to local partners**, using the NHF's model of a shared rate (7%) applied equally to local and international partners as a reference point.
 - **Ensure that institutional strengthening** builds systems that serve local organizations' own needs for sustainability, not solely donor compliance requirements, by fostering quality funding for capacity sharing and peer-to-peer learning.

¹² See: [The Decision Mapping Tool: Understanding 'local' decision-making in aid interventions](#) (King et al, 2023) & [Resources for Using the DMAT](#) (Decision Mapping Tool, n.d.)

3) Prioritise equitable partnerships that align agency with comparative strengths of different actors

In any given context, subnational, national, and international actors will have comparative advantages. Rather than defaulting to international partnerships, partnerships should begin with a deliberate process to map roles across the project cycle, identifying where local actors can and want to lead, now or in future. Decision-making authority should follow comparative strengths, not default hierarchies, so that project design better reflects what each actor is best placed to lead on and deliver. Stakeholder-specific recommended actions include the following:

-  ➤ **Donors and pooled funds** should revise prime partner selection criteria to explicitly weight demonstrated local performance across the study's effectiveness criteria (responsiveness, inclusion, timeliness, reach, connectedness, quality, sustainability) and require justification where international prime partnerships are proposed in contexts where local actors have shown comparable capacities or have comparative advantages.
-  ➤ **INGOs and UN agencies** should:
 - **Explicitly define local decision-making roles** based on local partner input and interest across design, delivery, funding, and learning in sub-granting relationships with local partners
 - **Use tools such as the Separation of Functions Analysis¹³** to leverage local knowledge and capacities to identify where local actors hold comparative advantages and structure partnerships accordingly as a practical mechanism for more equitable partnerships, rather than defaulting to international actors.



TOOL: *[The Separation of Functions Tool](#) co-designed by The Share Trust can help actors identify the most appropriate roles for local and international actors leveraging their comparative advantages.*

4) Support subnational organizations to access resources and decision-making spaces

Subnational organizations consistently reported the lowest levels of agency in project design and funding, and the greatest barriers to accessing coordination spaces and direct financing. Consortium, network, and coalition approaches offer one practical route for subnational organizations to access resources and decision-making spaces that they cannot reach individually, without requiring them to scale up in ways that may compromise their local rootedness. Funders and implementing partners should explore how these models can be better supported. Stakeholder-specific recommended actions include the following:

¹³ See this Share Trust insight on [leveraging the competitive advantage of different actors](#).



- **Donors and pooled funds** should invest in, and resource consortium, network, and coalition models that enable subnational organizations to access direct funding and coordination spaces collectively. This approach includes ensuring that coordination mechanisms are financially accessible to subnational actors, not just to UN agencies and INGOs with dedicated representation budgets.



- **INGOs and UN agencies** should actively support subnational organizations to lead strategic planning and coordination, including by covering representation costs and advocating for their inclusion in priority-setting processes from which they are currently excluded.



- **Subnational and national organizations** should explore coalition and consortium approaches that combine local legitimacy with the institutional systems and scale needed to access direct funding – while documenting and communicating their comparative strengths to build the evidence base for their role as prime partners.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between local agency and perceived effectiveness across ten humanitarian projects in Nigeria and Ukraine. The **findings should be interpreted with caution** given the small sample, but they point to several signals worth further investigation.

Across both contexts, **local actors held the least agency in project design and funding**, and the most in delivery and learning, reflecting a persistent tendency to engage local partners as implementers rather than decision-makers. Where funding conditions were equitable and partnership practices intentional, local organizations exercised meaningful agency even within sub-granting arrangements. This points to **funding quality as a more important driver of local agency than whether funding is direct or indirect**.

On effectiveness, Ukraine showed a clearer pattern: **projects with local and subnational primes were perceived as more effective** than those with international primes on responsiveness, reach, inclusion, timeliness, and sustainability. In Nigeria, perceived **effectiveness was broadly similar across projects** with local and international primes, although local primes performed better on reach and international primes on sustainability.

The **relationship between agency and effectiveness is suggestive but not conclusive**. Ukraine points to a positive association; Nigeria is less clear. What the evidence does establish more firmly is that **locally led action cannot be measured by who holds the prime position alone**. Local organizations can exercise high agency under indirect funding when conditions support it, and very little even as prime recipients when they do not. **Locally led action is ultimately a question of who decides, not merely who delivers**.

More systematic evidence is needed before stronger claims can be made. Yet the stakes of getting this right are high: if local agency is a meaningful driver of effectiveness, then measuring it systematically is not an academic exercise but a practical necessity for a sector under pressure to demonstrate impact. Applied consistently and at scale, the Share Trust's [Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass](#) offers a means to track decision-making authority across the project cycle, build a more robust evidence base, and shift the conversation from whether to localise to how to do it well. A study with larger samples and a design that can make controlled comparisons (potentially sector-focused) would strengthen the ability to make more robust conclusions about the relationship between local agency and effectiveness. A study like this would potentially be easier in a development or resilience building context, where projects are more likely to be structured around specific sectors and projects, with longer funding cycles to assess outcomes.

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Annex A. Effectiveness Scoring Frameworks

Table A1: Scoring Local Actor Agency in Programming (design, delivery, funding, learning)

Agency Level* (& score)	Level of Agency	Explanation
3	High	Full control/responsibility. The Local actor/organization is primarily responsible, leads decisions, manages all processes and resources, and acts independently.
2	Medium	Partnership/joint decision making. The Local actor/organization is part of a formal system and programming processes and takes decisions jointly. Power is redistributed through negotiation.
1	Low	Consulted/informed. The Local actor/organization receives information and is informed and/or “consulted” through meetings, hearings, surveys and feedback is sought but input is one-off without meaningful participation & assurance that their views will be considered.
0	None	No involvement. The local actor/organization is unaware of opportunities for engagement and support (i.e., funding) and is omitted from any programming decision making.

*High (2.1-3); Medium (1.1-2); Low (0.1-1)

Figure A1: The Local Agency and Effectiveness Compass

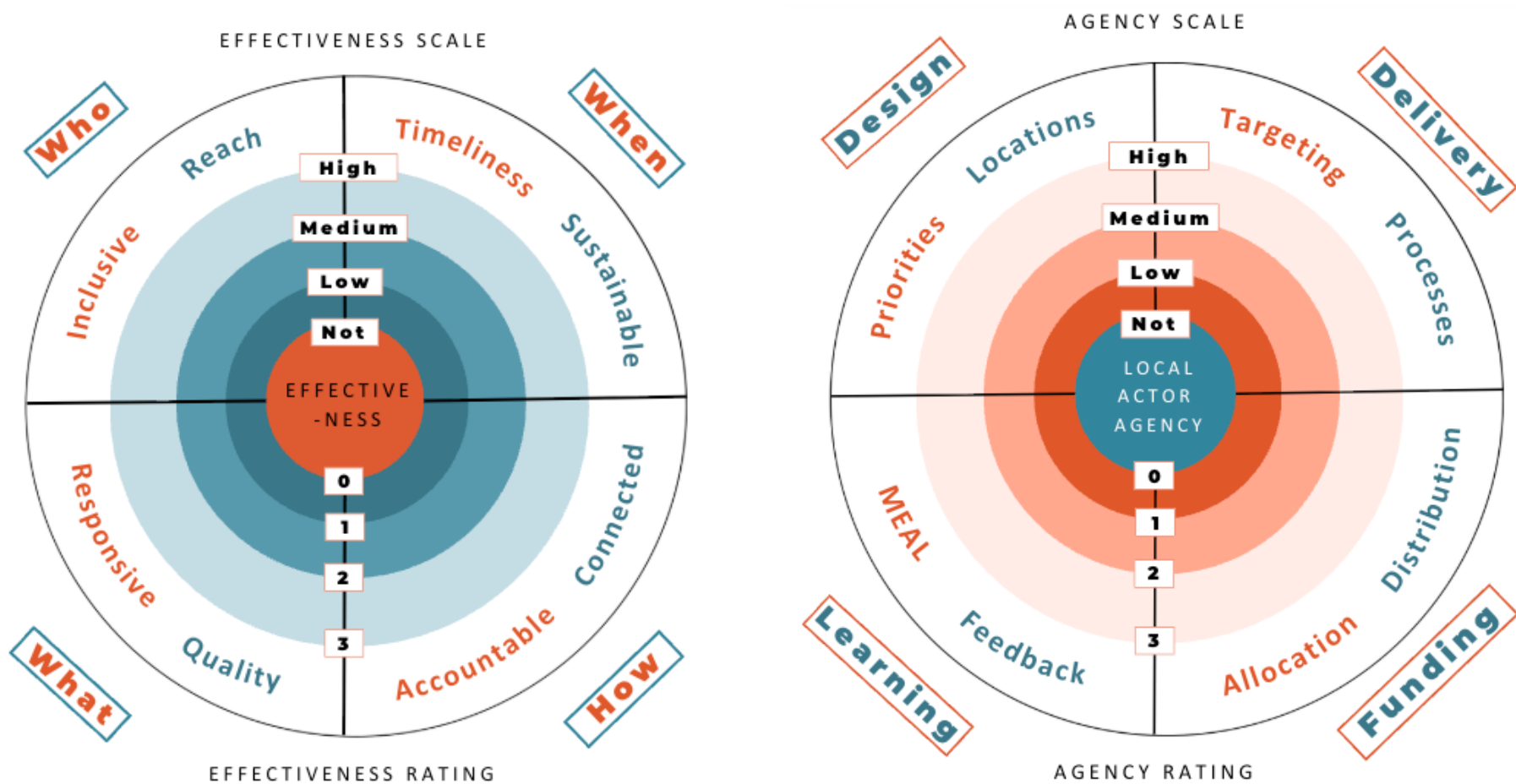


Table A2. Rating Program Effectiveness

Effectiveness Level *		WHO receives support?		WHAT support is provided?			WHEN is support provided?	
		Inclusive	Reach	Responsive	Connected	Quality	Timely	Sustained
3	High	All marginalized/ vulnerable groups are systematically identified & supported including hidden groups	Individuals in the most remote, hard to reach, and impacted areas are systematically reached	Support is tailored to the specific priority needs of different marginalized groups based on ongoing assessments	Comprehensive support across the nexus addressing economic, social, psychological, and political priorities of marginalized groups	Support is high quality, meeting established standards and best practices	Support is provided promptly in response to emerging needs and crises	Long-term support with limited dependency mechanisms in place to ensure ongoing benefits
2	Medium	Individuals from some marginalized groups (but not all) supported	Individuals in the most impacted and accessible areas reached but those in less accessible regions are missed	Support is piecemeal and considers some specific needs but is not fully tailored to all groups	Partial support focusing on key priorities but limited connection to longer-term needs nor anticipatory	Moderate quality support, meeting some but not all best practice standards	Support is provided within a reasonable timeframe but may have some delays	Intermittent support with some long-term benefits but lacking full continuity and less independence
1	Low	<i>Ad hoc</i> support of some marginalized individuals but not comprehensive	Reach is limited with a focus on those in accessible areas	Limited adaptation to the specific needs of marginalized groups	Support is fragmented and does not address multiple dimensions of need and is not connected across the nexus	Basic support provided with inconsistencies in quality	Support is delayed or unpredictable	Short-term interventions with no long-term sustainability plans
0	Not effective	No marginalized groups are supported	No hard-to-reach individuals are supported	No effort to tailor support to specific needs	Support is entirely lacking or focused only on one narrow area	Poor or no support provided	No support provided in a timely	No sustainability mechanisms in place

*High (0-7), Medium (8-14), Low (15-21).

Annex B: Initiative selection

Tables B1 and B2 share the projects included in the research for Ukraine and Nigeria respectively.

Table B1: Ukraine Case Selection

#	Initiative	Organization Type/s & Role/s	Funder/s	Initiative Activities	Rationale for Selection
P1	Social Care Services (children) - Education & Child Protection	INGO prime - recipient with local partners as sub-prime implementing partners	EU & Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)	Non-formal education, psychosocial support, youth empowerment	Example of INGO-led protection/education project with local delivery component
P2	Social Assistance (MPCA) - multipurpose cash assistance	INGO prime - International NGO with National NGO (NNGO) (subprime) implementing partner	UNHCR & ECHO	INGO: Cash transfers, vulnerability assessments, hotlines, feedback mechanisms NNGO: Outreach, registration, accountability mechanisms, legal assistance	- Representative of a large-scale INGO-led cash intervention with some local decision-making - Illustrates national NGO functioning as sub-prime implementer under international management
P3	Protection cluster	NNGOs & SNGOs (cluster) - a mix of national & subnational NGOs	UNHCR (with institutional/ core funding & some UHF funding)	- Legal counselling - Small grants, livelihood support - Protection, evacuations - Psychosocial support - Community outreach	Example of locally designed and delivered humanitarian protection projects (using the cluster model)
P4	Social care services (family) - Child Protection and Family Support	SNGO prime - Subnational NGO	Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF)	Home visits, psychosocial counselling, outreach to vulnerable families	Illustrates locally delivered project embedded in communities as a prime UHF implementer
P5	Social Assistance & Psychosocial support (National network)	NNGO (Confederation) National NGO with subnational volunteer network	Caritas Austria / Catholic Relief services / UNDP / semi-independent funding/ UHF (via the central office Caritas Ukraine)	- Cash and in-kind assistance - Psychosocial and social services - Volunteer mobilization	Illustrates network-based national structure balancing local agency and donor compliance

Table B2: Nigeria Case Selection

#	Initiative	Organization Type/s & Role/s	Funder/s	Initiative activities	Rationale for selection
P1	Provision of integrated Camp coordination & camp management	SNGO (prime) , in partnership with another SNGO	Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF)	Reduce immediate protection and humanitarian needs and improve living conditions of internationally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and vulnerable host-community households through integrated, area-based CCCM, shelter and non-food-item (NFI) assistance	Illustrates a locally delivered project embedded in communities with a subnational NGO as a prime NHF implementer
P2	Emergency Response to Flood Disaster	NNGO (prime) with local implementing partners	NHF	Rapidly reduce mortality, morbidity and protection risks among flood-affected populations by delivering coordinated, life-saving multisector assistance and restoring access to essential services and safe shelter	Illustrates a locally delivered project with a national NGO as a prime NHF implementer working in partnership with subnational NGOs
P3	Rapid Response Allocation for Floods	INGO (prime) with local, subnational NGO implementing partner (subprime)	NHF	- Part of the Rapid Response Fund (RRF) providing small grants to humanitarian organizations (both local and international) to quickly respond to sudden disasters – in this case, floods. - Rapid distribution of life-saving essentials, including clean water and sanitation, camp management and coordination, shelter, and healthcare, provided, as well as bolstered disease prevention efforts to minimize the threat of waterborne diseases	Illustrates international NGO functioning as prime NHF implementer with local, subnational NGO sub-prime partner
P4	Integrated Lifesaving Assistance	INGO (prime) with local SNGO sub-prime implementing partners	Bilateral	Reduce morbidity and mortality by providing integrated life-saving food distribution to the most “vulnerable” and in-need children and families.	Example of internationally led intervention with local SNGO subprime implementing partners
P5	Childhood Development and Education	INGO (direct delivery) without local implementing partners	Foundation/philanthropy	Education projects in schools to build an evidence base demonstrating the impact and value of supporting the development needs of children ages 3-5 across all income levels, races, ethnicities, and cultures, thereby promoting their learning, development, and resilience	Example of an internationally led project, with little or no local partner involvement

Annex C: Data Collection

A mixed-methods design was used to examine the relationship between local agency and effectiveness in the humanitarian response in both Nigeria and Ukraine. The analysis triangulated findings from key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs),¹⁴ and a survey of local partners and implementing organizations in Ukraine and community participants in Nigeria. The Share Trust worked with researchers in Ukraine and Nigeria,¹⁵ who led country level data collection and analysis. **Participation was voluntary and anonymous**, with informed consent obtained by the local researchers from all research participants, and data stored securely in alignment with Share Trust research standards and organizational policies.

Case Selection and Sampling

The Ukraine study comprised a review of five humanitarian projects, involving eight implementing organizations between April and December 2025 with direct funding to: i) two international NGOs (INGO prime); ii) one subnational NGO (SNGO prime); and iii) one NNGO confederation with a volunteer network (Caritas) and one NNGO & SNGO cluster (social protection cluster). The projects represent diverse humanitarian modalities, including cash assistance and social care services (e.g., child protection and education, family psychosocial support) implemented by international, national and subnational actors as prime (see *Annex B, Table B1*). These cases were purposively selected to capture variation in organizational type, partnership model, and potential for local decision-making.

The Nigeria study involved the review of five Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) projects between April 2025 and February 2026. Initially three NHF projects in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria were included: i) direct funding to one subnational NGO partnering with a second SNGO (SNGO prime); ii) direct funding to one national NGO (NNGO prime); and iii) direct funding to an INGO partnering with a local NGO (INGO prime). In January and February further data collection was conducted in Nigeria to capture more variation in the partnership modalities. This resulted in two further projects being included in the analysis: i) direct delivery by a large INGO (INGO direct delivery); and ii) indirect delivery involving the same INGO partnering with local organizations (INGO prime). Both projects were also being conducted in Northeast Nigeria (see *Annex B, Table B2*).

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Group Discussions

In Ukraine, a total of 14 KIIs and 12 questionnaires were conducted between June and September 2025 and, in Nigeria 57 KIIs and 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted between June 2025 to February 2026 (see *Tables C1 and C2*). A semi-structured interview guide explored decision-making authority, funding arrangements, learning processes, and perceived effectiveness. The

¹⁴ FGDs were only conducted in Nigeria due to larger sample sizes in this study.

¹⁵ Andrew Onwuebele (Nigeria consultant) and Dymtro Kondratenko (Ukraine consultant).

interviews were held in Ukrainian or English, via Zoom or in-person and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Table C1: Ukraine Data Collection Summary

#	Initiative	Prime/type	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	Partner Survey
P1	Social Care Services (children) – education & projection	INGO prime	1x INGO project actor 1 x local implementing partner	1x local implementing partner
P2	Social Assistance (MPCA) - multipurpose cash assistance	INGO prime	1 x INGO project actor 2 x NNGO project actors	1 x NNGO partner 1 x local implementing partner
P3	UNHCR protection cluster	NNGOs & SNGO (cluster)	3x SNGO project actors 1x UN funder/ social protection coordinator	1x SNGO project actor
P4	Social care services (family)	SNGO prime	1x SNGO project actor	1x SNGO project actor
P5	Social Assistance & PSS (Psychosocial Support)	NNGO (Confederation) with volunteer network - Caritas	4x project actors (national and subnational)	7x subnational field offices
TOTAL			14	12

Table C2: Nigeria Data Collection Summary

PROJECT		Prime	Community Survey	KII*	Community FGDs
P1	Area-based integrated: integrated CCCM / Shelter/ NFI and Area-based approach package of assistance for people of concern (PoC) in newly accessible & displacement-affected areas of Borno State (NHF)	SNGO prime	264 (internally displaced persons (IDP), returnees, and vulnerable host-community households)	15	4 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community households; 2 women and 2 men)
P2	Emergency response (flood): Emergency Response to Flood Disaster in MMC and Jere LGAs, Borno State (NHF)	NNGO (prime)	273 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community households)	15	4 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community households; 2 women and 2 men)
P3	Rapid response (flood): Rapid Response Allocation for Floods in BAY States (NHF)	INGO (prime)	300 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community households)	15	4 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community households; 2 women and 2 men)
P4	Integrated lifesaving (conflict): the Integrated Lifesaving Assistance for Conflict-Affected HHs in Mafa and Konduga, Nigeria, with Humanitarian	INGO (prime)	332 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-	6	4 (IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host-community

PROJECT		Prime	Community Survey	KII*	Community FGDs
	Coordination and Localization in BAY States		community households)		households; 2 women and 2 men)
P5	ECDE: The Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE)	INGO (direct delivery)	344 (Caregivers of school children aged 3-5 in Konduga Local Government Areas in Borno State)	6	4 (Caregivers of school children aged 3-5 in Konduga Local Government Areas in Borno State; 2 women and 2 men)
TOTAL			1513	57	20

*Program actors & local leaders

Partner and Community Survey

In Ukraine, a structured online survey (using Kobo Toolbox) was administered to 11 participating local organizations across multiple oblasts and to 1,513 community respondents across 5 projects in Nigeria. The survey measured perceived effectiveness across each of the seven parameters: quality, responsiveness, inclusiveness, timeliness, connectedness, sustainability, and reach. The responses were aggregated by case and triangulated with KII and FGD data. Quantitative scoring was converted to a 0–3 scale for comparative analysis (see *Annex A*). Due to the smaller sample size in Ukraine, survey data was not quantified but rather used to inform the scoring researchers applied for effectiveness alongside the qualitative interview data. In Nigeria, where the community perceptions survey was integrated, larger sample sizes for each project supported statistical analysis that underpinned the effectiveness scoring.

All qualitative and quantitative inputs were triangulated in a case-comparison matrix. Each project received a score for both: i) Local Agency; and ii) Effectiveness based on survey and interview evidence. This enabled examination of whether higher levels of agency corresponded with greater effectiveness, as well as an analysis of differentiated scores across the project cycle for different types of actors and differentiated scores for the various effectiveness criteria (see *Annex A*).