LOCALISATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Plan International's Position

The term localisation, as used in the humanitarian sector, refers to the process of better engaging local and national actors in all phases of humanitarian action, including greater support for locally-led action. This paper sets out Plan International's position on the localisation of humanitarian action. It explains why and how Plan International works with local actors, in humanitarian contexts, including youth led organisations and those focused on girls' and young women's rights. It also sets out Plan International's commitments to strengthen our work with local actors in humanitarian settings.

Plan International is committed to:

- **Working towards ensuring that all of our humanitarian response programming meets all Core Humanitarian Standard commitments of quality and accountability. This includes commitments to strengthen local capacities and avoid negative effects and to ensure that our humanitarian response interventions are coordinated and complementary.**

- **Working in a way that strengthens the ability of local government and civil society to deal with the risks and consequences of disasters and protracted crises. This includes supporting partners' preparedness and integrating efforts to strengthen resilience across all our Areas of Global Distinctiveness and within our humanitarian response and recovery.**

- **Increasing our collaboration with and support for local youth-led and particularly young women-led organisations, and organisations specifically focused on the promotion of girls' and women's rights in all phases of humanitarian action. This includes strengthening their capacities to be effective humanitarian actors in line with our commitments to the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, and enabling their access to humanitarian decision making spaces**

- **Applying and upholding Plan International's Building Better Partnerships principles in all our partnerships in humanitarian settings. We will progressively move away from sub-contracting relationships in humanitarian response and increase our emphasis on strategic, more equal partnerships which involve collaboration around shared goals and responsibilities.**

- **Increasing our tracking of and transparency around our humanitarian resource transfers to national and local NGOs. We commit to documenting and reporting on the types of organisations we work with and transfer funds to in humanitarian contexts. We commit to progressively increasing the proportion of our own humanitarian funding we pass to our national and local partners [1] and that we will**

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[1] In FY20, we transferred 6.9% of our total humanitarian expenditure to local and national partners

- **budget for and fairly fund our partners' organisational support costs and capacity building.**

- **Fair recruitment of surge capacity and discouraging the poaching of staff from national and local NGOs.**

- **Increasing the visibility of local organisations' contributions to humanitarian response in our communications and advocacy, with a particular focus on providing a platform for and profiling the work of youth-led organisations and those focused on girls' rights.**

- **Documenting, sharing and building our collective experience and knowledge about working with and through local actors in humanitarian contexts, with a particular focus on modalities of working with youth-led organisations and those focused on girls' rights.**

The localisation agenda in the humanitarian sector

The concept of localisation in the humanitarian sector is not new - the importance of strengthening local capacities and improving partnerships between international and local humanitarian actors has been widely recognised for a long time. However, the prominence of localisation as an agenda rose significantly in the lead up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), with calls for the humanitarian system to be more inclusive of local actors being a key theme of the pre-summit consultations. The United Nation's Secretary General's report to the WHS, 'One Humanity, Shared Responsibility',[2] identified the need to reinforce, not replace, national and local systems as one of the fundamental shifts in the international aid system demanded by a proposed new paradigm. This has subsequently taken the form of the New Way of Working (NWOW).[3]

Key humanitarian donors have made commitments to localisation; the Grand Bargain, a package of reforms to humanitarian financing, and one of the most concrete outcomes of the WHS, includes a set of six commitments on localisation, including a target to increase the proportion of funding going to local and national responders to 25 per cent by 2020.

Localisation is central to discourse on gender transformative and feminist humanitarian action. This draws attention to the roles of women, and local women's organisations in humanitarian response, and calls for increased support and space for local women's leadership as a key element of gender transformative work in crisis affected countries.[4]

There is also increasing recognition of the range of essential roles played by youth-led organisations, groups and networks in humanitarian response and the importance of partnering with and strengthening the capacity of youth. The goals of Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action include supporting systematic engagement and partnership with youth in all phases of humanitarian action and strengthening young people's capacities to be effective humanitarian actors, including supporting local youth-led initiatives and organizations in humanitarian response.

Localisation is also an important aspect of efforts to work more effectively across the humanitarian – development nexus. Most local and national actors who deliver humanitarian assistance are also closely linked to development, and at times peacebuilding activities. Strengthening their preparedness and supporting their capacity to respond to and recover from crises can not only make humanitarian response more effective but could also help to protect development gains.[5] While the term 'localisation' is used in the humanitarian sector, there are many parallels with similar long-standing agendas within the development sector such as civil society strengthening.

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[2] UN Secretary General (2016) One humanity: shared responsibility Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit
[3] OCHA (2017) New Way of Working
[4] See, for example: https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/a-feminist-approach-to-localization.pdf
[5] ICVA (2018) Localisation examined: an ICVA briefing paper

> *Note about localisation in Plan*: Plan International has been undertaking an internal process of 'localisation', with a number of offices becoming locally governed. While this process is valuable and important for us in terms of shifting power internally, it should not be conflated with or seen as the expression of our commitment to localisation within the humanitarian sector.

How Plan International defines local actors

> Plan International considers local actors to include **formal and informal civil society at national and local levels**, including established civil society organisations (local and national non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, coalitions and networks of organisations) and 'Informal civil society' (e.g. community-based organisations, youth/women's (and other) networks or movements, youth clubs, residents' committees who are not registered formally); **local and national private sector actors**; and **local or municipal government authorities** .
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> Local actors may have a specific humanitarian focus/mandate, or may have a focus on, for example longer term development, human rights or peacebuilding.
>
> Local actors do not include national government authorities.

We recognise that what is considered a 'local actor' differs between contexts. What may be considered 'local' by international actors may also not be understood as such by affected communities. We also understand that actors at national, regional and local levels within crisis affected countries, while often conflated or grouped together, operate differently and according to different rules.[6]

Much of the focus of localisation discussions in the humanitarian sector has focused on local and national civil society, and in particular national and local NGOs. However, we recognise that the interpretation, composition and official categorisation of civil society differs between countries.[7] Beyond established civil-society organisations, 'informal civil society' including youth groups, networks and movements also play a range of important roles in humanitarian contexts but have not been a focus of the localisation debate to date. Many of these actors are important partners for Plan International.

Our definition of local actors excludes work with national governments. This is in recognition of the nature of the relationship that Plan International as an INGO and a humanitarian actor has with national governments. However, recognising that the roles of, and Plan International's relationship with local government authorities differs to that of national authorities, we do consider local government bodies, including municipal authorities to be local actors.[8]

Why do we work with local actors in humanitarian settings?

Plan International is committed to making a lasting impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and excluded children while creating greater equality for girls. In order to catalyse the sustainable, transformative change we seek, we partner with and influence a wide range of actors across humanitarian and development contexts at all levels, including in the countries in which we operate.

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[6] ICVA and ODI (nd) Localisation in Humanitarian Practice
[7] Plan International Sweden (forthcoming) Draft report: Strengthening and supporting civil society in fragile, conflict affected and disaster-prone settings
[8] In line with the definition under of the Grand Bargain:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf

This includes formal and informal civil society at national and local levels, including youth groups networks and associations, local and national private sector actors and local government authorities.

In disaster-prone, fragile and conflict affected contexts, we recognise that local and national civil society actors and local authorities play a range of essential roles in humanitarian response, strengthening resilience, peacebuilding, governance and accountability processes. Local actors are first responders and are on the frontline of the response to protracted conflicts. Local actors often have access to and deep networks with affected people, legitimacy with communities and an in-depth understanding of the areas in which they work. We recognise that these are essential capacities which should be built upon and that local actors are key to humanitarian effectiveness.

Local actors of various types are therefore critical partners for Plan International in achieving the outcomes we seek in humanitarian settings We have strong and long-lasting relationships with many local actors, including local civil society organisations and local governments and we have a particular strategic focus on strengthening our engagement and partnership with youth groups, associations and networks. Strengthening the capacity of and operating environment and space for local and national civil society to perform their essential roles, including in disaster prone, fragile and conflict affected contexts is one of our key programme and influence strategies.[9]

We also recognise that as governments and non-state actors are increasingly questioning the role of international actors, and space for civil society to operate is becoming more constrained, strengthening partnerships with local and national actors may be a way to increase acceptance of international support. Strengthening coordination of and unity within civil society, including between local, national and international organisations, is also an important way to mitigate many of the problems of reduced civic space.[10]

Complementing local actors in humanitarian response

During times of acute crisis, Plan International's priority is that children, and particularly girls, have their needs met and rights upheld through principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action. As a humanitarian actor, Plan International is committed to supporting emergency interventions to deliver immediate life-saving assistance to and ensuring the protection of children and their communities. We are also committed to ensuring that our humanitarian response programming meets all Core Humanitarian Standard commitments of quality and accountability. This includes ensuring that humanitarian responses strengthen local capacities and avoids negative effects (CHS commitment 3) and is coordinated and complementary (CHS commitment 6).

We recognise the primary responsibility of states and other relevant authorities to protect and assist those affected by disasters or conflicts within their territories[11] and we ensure that our humanitarian interventions do not undermine these responsibilities. We believe that governments must be accountable to affected populations and meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children affected by crisis. Whenever possible, our actions support efforts to strengthen leadership of the humanitarian response by national and local governments.

However, we also maintain that in many conflict-affected contexts, where the ability of governments to provide neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance and protection is compromised, there is a vital role for independent international humanitarian assistance.

We recognise that our role within humanitarian responses will differ depending on the context. As a partner we bring expertise within our technical areas of focus, access to duty bearers and donors, global reach, networks and experience and organisational capacities. Wherever possible we will use our skills, knowledge and resources in humanitarian response to complement and support those of local actors in order to improve humanitarian outcomes for children. Depending on the context, this

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[9] Plan International (2018) Advancing Children's Rights and Equality for Girls: our programme and influence approach
[10] Cunningham, A and Tibbett, S (2018) Scoping Study on Civil Society Space in Humanitarian Action
[11] As set out in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) and in numerous international frameworks and initiatives

might mean providing training and capacity building in specific technical areas or humanitarian principles and standards, strengthening local organisations' organisational capacities or facilitating access to local duty bearers and donors.

Strengthening resilience across the humanitarian-development continuum

Plan International's approach to Disaster Risk Management (DRM) goes beyond humanitarian response and encompasses efforts to address the drivers of risk and strengthen communities' resilience and preparedness through our development, response and recovery work.

We are committed to ensuring that our work across the humanitarian-development continuum strengthens the ability of local actors, including government and civil society, to deal with the risks and consequences of disasters and protracted crises. Strengthening community leadership and building the capacity of local authorities and local civil society, including children and youth groups, are essential for building resilient communities and helps to ensure emergency preparedness, response and recovery are locally relevant, ongoing and embedded within local community life. As disasters become more frequent and conflicts more protracted, we believe that these capacities are increasingly critical in order to ensure the safety and resilience of children, and particularly girls during crises.

Focusing on youth-led and girls' rights focused actors

As part of our commitment to ensure that all our disaster risk management programming contributes to gender equality, where possible, we will explicitly target local girls- and youth-led, particularly young women-led organisations, and organisations specifically focused on the promotion of girls' and women's rights in crises. As signatories to the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, we are committed to strengthening young people's capacities to be effective humanitarian actors and enabling their access to humanitarian decision making spaces. We believe that supporting and enabling the leadership and other actions of girls' and young women led groups and organisations is critical, not only for ensuring that humanitarian responses better meets their needs, but also as a means to challenge and shift gendered social norms.

How do we work with local actors in humanitarian settings?

Plan International recognises that how we engage with local actors matters. In all relationships with local actors we are guided by our values: we strive for lasting impact; we are open and accountable; we work well together; and we are inclusive and empowering. While the humanitarian contexts in which Plan International operates are diverse, and the extent and nature of our work with local actors in each context will vary significantly, in all cases we will apply our values and principles.

In many cases, our relationships with local actors are formalised as partnerships, which means that we work together on equal terms in a formal, mutually agreed collaboration with shared goals and responsibilities. We will strive to uphold Plan International's Building Better Partnerships principles in all our partnerships in humanitarian settings. In the context of humanitarian response, this includes collaborating with our partners in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation our response programmes on an equal footing, drawing on our respective skills, knowledge and resources and

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Plan International's partnership principles:

1. Mutual respect and listening
2. Knowing yourself and your partner
3. Clearly defined objectives for your relationship and non-negotiables
4. Sharing responsibility and risk
5. Learning from each other and striving for mutual growth
6. Good judgement

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respecting our partners' priorities and perspectives. Plan International seeks to practise mutual decision-making within all its partnerships.

Most of Plan International's partnerships with local actors in humanitarian settings involve some degree of capacity building. In all cases where we aim to build partners' capacities, this is based on a thorough understanding of the partner's history, ambition and context and recognises that capacity building requires adequate time and resources to be dedicated. Wherever possible, we will strive to build the capacity of our partners to meet their own goals. We also recognise that we can learn from local partners and we understand that continuous learning and improvement will promote mutual growth and will add value to the partnership.

We recognise that power imbalances are inherent the international humanitarian system. As an international actor operating in this system, we acknowledge that our access to resources and global position and relationships put us in a position of power. We are committed to being mindful of power imbalances within partnerships, to being open and honest about the power that each partner has and put in place mechanisms to balance power within the relationship. This may involve ceding power to local organisations where this will enhance humanitarian outcomes for children, and particularly girls.

We also recognise that local organisations have much more limited access to resources and receive a considerably smaller share of international humanitarian funding, and that this often undermines their sustainability. Wherever our work with local organisations involves transferring funds, we are committed to budgeting for and fairly funding organisational support costs and capacity building.

Plan International recognises that, particularly during rapid onset crises requiring surge capacity, recruitment of staff from local organisations by INGOs undermines their capacity to operate within the emergency response and affects their longer-term sustainability.[12] We commit to fair recruitment and to discourage the poaching of staff from national and local NGOs.

Plan International acknowledges that local organisations face barriers to participating in and influencing humanitarian coordination mechanisms and other decision-making spaces. We are committed to enabling access to decision making spaces, including humanitarian coordination mechanisms, for local organisations, particularly local girls- and youth led-led, particularly young-women-led organisations, or organisations specifically focused on the promotion of girls' and women's rights in crises.

We also recognise that the contributions of local actors are often not reflected in communications to the media and donors and in our advocacy work. In line with our global brand guidelines,[13] Plan International is committed to increasing the visibility given to our 'work in powerful partnerships', including with local organisations in humanitarian responses, with a particular focus on providing a platform for and profiling the work of youth-led organisations and those focused on girls' rights.

Working in effective and meaningful partnerships in humanitarian responses requires both Plan International and our partners to be prepared before the onset of an emergency. This means that we identify potential humanitarian partners and put in place agreements as part of our own preparedness, and the we work with partners to assess and build their capacity to respond, aligned to our gender aware approach in emergencies.

In conflict affected and insecure contexts, we understand that the local organisations we work with face heightened security risks, and we acknowledge that we have responsibilities to support and resource local organisations to manage risks. In situations where we are transferring risk to local

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[12] Featherstone, A. (2017) Time to move on: national perspectives on transforming surge capacity. AFOD, Christian Aid, Tearfund and Islamic Relief Worldwide
[13] Plan International (2018) Global Brand Manual 2.0

organisations, we commit to discuss, agree and manage risk transference with the local actors involved.

We also understand that working in conflict affected contexts requires sensitivity to, and navigation of conflict dynamics and a heightened significance of humanitarian principles. We recognise that our own engagement, including who we partner with, can interact with the dynamics of the conflict and that this can in turn affect risks for Plan International, partners and communities. We are therefore committed to ensuring that all work done with and through local actors is conflict sensitive, particularly in conflict affected contexts.

Annex:

Core Humanitarian Standard commitments most relevant to localisation

3. Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.

Key Actions

3.1 Ensure programmes build on local capacities and work towards improving the resilience of communities and people affected by crisis.

3.2 Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities.

3.3 Enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first-responders in the event of future crises, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented.

3.4 Plan a transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme that ensures longer-term positive effects and reduces the risk of dependency.

3.5 Design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy.

3.6 Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner, including in the areas of: a. people's safety, security, dignity and rights; b. sexual exploitation and abuse by staff; c. culture, gender, and social and political relationships; d. livelihoods; e. the local economy; and f. the environment.

Organisational Responsibilities

3.7 Policies, strategies and guidance are designed to: a. prevent programmes having any negative effects, such as, for example, exploitation, abuse or discrimination by staff against communities and people affected by crisis; and b. strengthen local capacities.

3.8 Systems are in place to safeguard any personal information collected from communities and people affected by crisis that could put them at risk.

6. Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.

Key Actions:

6.1 Identify the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of different stakeholders.

6.2 Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other humanitarian organisations.

6.3 Participate in relevant coordination bodies and collaborate with others in order to minimise demands on communities and maximise the coverage and service provision of the wider humanitarian effort.

6.4 Share necessary information with partners, coordination groups and other relevant actors through appropriate communication channels.

Organisational Responsibilities:

6.5 Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles.

6.6 Work with partners is governed by clear and consistent agreements that respect each partner's mandate, obligations and independence, and recognises their respective constraints and commitments.