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GLOBAL INSIGHTS UNVEILED: EXPLORING AAP, LOCALIZATION, AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS FROM SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVES

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The following report is a summary of a larger research project produced by MSc students in the International Development and Humanitarian Emergencies program at the London School of Economics. This report is intended for UNICEF's internal use only and may be distributed to appropriate partner agencies and individuals at the discretion of UNICEF.



For decades, the humanitarian sector has faced significant challenges in upholding its fundamental principles and methods. Concepts like Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Localization, and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus have emerged as promising strategies to enhance responses to crises and promote better development outcomes. This research aims to delve into the role of the local and national actors in the implementation and development of these strategies based upon the perspectives of local actors themselves and the communities they serve in the Global South.

This report analyzes the following research questions:

1. In what ways do institutions in the Global South contribute to and broaden dominant policy discourses related to accountability to affected populations and localization?
2. To what extent, if any, do these institutions actively shape and inform policies related to AAP, localization, and the nexus? As such, what impact do they perceive themselves as having?

The research aimed to move beyond an assessment of local organizations' effectiveness in order to understand how the agendas of AAP, localization, and the HDP Nexus are successfully amplifying local voices in global humanitarian efforts. While there is a growing consensus on involving the Global South, implementing this is complex. The report identifies power imbalances, local capacity gaps and funding disparities as the main obstacles to the successful implementation of these agendas.

Fourteen structured interviews were conducted for this study, with representatives from various humanitarian and development agencies and NGOs across Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

This study has potential limitations. Due to the limited sample size of interviewees, we acknowledge that this report may not necessarily reflect the views of each respective region in its entirety. Overall, the many challenges faced by local organizations and practitioners in the Global South are unique to specific contexts and cannot be adequately captured in this report, but multiple structured interviews proved valuable in shedding light on the experiences of practitioners working on issues related to the agendas of localization, AAP, and the HDP Nexus throughout the Global South.

Obstacles to Implementation

Power Imbalances

A persistent discourse pervades discussions within the humanitarian sector, shedding light on deeply entrenched and often unequal power dynamics inherent in the international aid system. This dialogue has been increasingly amplified by voices of local activists, who strongly criticize the dominance of select organizations primarily situated in regions of the Global North. Across interviews with local practitioners, language barriers were emphasized as a major obstacle to the advancement of localisation agendas, sustaining significant knowledge gaps between local actors and INGOs. Amongst interviewees, two Mexican practitioners highlighted that key policy documents containing information on such agendas are not translated from English to accommodate local populations who may only speak Spanish. Similarly, in Mexico, official meetings with international actors are often conducted in English, meaning a lot of local actors cannot participate in such initiatives. In the Africa region, an executive from the Nigerian Network of NGOs highlighted that power imbalances manifest in the form of insufficient accountability from the bottom up, as local organizations in Nigeria frequently encounter difficulties in monitoring the use of feedback systems by larger INGOs. As such, despite significant strides made on multiple fronts, power disparities continue to dominate, casting doubt on the efficacy of AAP initiatives and impeding the efficient implementation of localization, AAP, and HDP Nexus agendas.

Funding Issues

Relying on intermediaries primarily from the Global North restricts funding opportunities for local actors, thus perpetuating power imbalances. The rigidity of grants and funding given to local NGOs is highlighted by practitioners in Syria, Somalia, and Nigeria, who face difficulty covering overhead costs and maintaining staff salaries. This funding disparity is similarly captured by UNOCHA, which reported a global aid funding gap of \$33.4 billion for 2023. As such, multi-year funding is crucial to reduce local NGOs' financial vulnerability. Further, practitioners who work as direct implementers at NGOs in India expressed frustration in regard to the lack of flexible, long-term or pooled funding. HAI India addresses this with the Dashboard for Aid Transparency and Accountability, aiming to enhance financial transparency between actors. In Mexico, numerous local organizations operate within both the humanitarian and development sectors, often unclear on their roles, negatively affecting funding applications and donor requests regarding development or peace-related projects. Overall, moving towards a higher risk tolerance from donors and further investment in local capacities would empower local actors more effectively and advance genuine localization efforts.

Capacity Strengthening

To achieve localization and equal partnership between large international organizations and regional or local organizations, local actors must have the capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and to address their own development needs as they arise. The key challenges encountered when improving the capacity of local actors are the lack of policy direction necessary to implement localization as well as a perceived lack of local capacity, which results in the unintentional marginalization of local actors. In Syria, a localization advocate stressed that the risk of operating in protracted crises reflects the need to increase local capacity as local actors are often more aware of cultural norms and best situated to access remote areas and conflict zones. In Asia, interviewees mentioned the importance of organizations and networks such as ICVA, NEAR, the A4EP, and START to advance equitable partnerships. Across all regions, local-local partnership was emphasized as an approach to ensure compliance to professional standards and improve program outcomes. In India, Humanitarian Aid International has created the 'Local Organizations' Coalition for Advancing Localization (LOCAL)', a collaborative platform of NGOs to enhance local capacity and partnership including in areas of operational shortcomings and funding disparities. There was also an overarching emphasis on the desire to move away from a subcontractor relationship and towards shared capacity with larger INGOs, with practitioners in Somalia and Nigeria emphasizing the need to account for local knowledge within development programming and crisis response.

To strengthen the implementation of these agendas among local actors in the Global South, the following issues should be addressed:

1. Clarify the definitions of and links between AAP, localization, and the HDP Nexus

The links between AAP, localization, and the HDP Nexus are often unclear to practitioners in the Global South although AAP and localization seem more closely related than the HDP Nexus. Many practitioners expressed the definitions of Localization and AAP remain largely contested within their regions. Turning to the HDP Nexus, practitioners expressed greater understanding of the Humanitarian and Development Nexus and noted an overall lack of understanding and engagement with the peace sector. The disconnect of information and understanding surrounding these agendas between donors and INGOs in the Global North and local actors in the Global South acts as a barrier to successful implementation.

2. Increase access to direct funding for local actors

The overarching similarities across regions include a need to improve the current funding system so that organizations are able to and cover their own overhead costs and can afford to sustain their operations within their communities long-term.

3. Address power imbalances

The challenge of addressing power imbalances may prove to be the most difficult barrier to address as it will require transformative systematic change that is necessary to create equal partnership between large international organizations and regional or local actors. In order to empower local actors, INGOs and Northern donors should recognize the need to establish just relationships with local stakeholders that are marked by balanced power dynamics and cooperative decision-making.

Overall, there is a general lack of optimism within the Global South around achieving the transformative change promised by the Grand Bargain. Before these agendas can be successfully implemented, there is a critical need to address ongoing power imbalances, funding issues, and capacity gaps all of which are inherent to the humanitarian system and difficult to overcome.



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