INTERSOS LOCALISATION PAPER

2023

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1 GLOSSARY

AAP: Accountability for Affected Populations

BCSP: Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan

CAR: Central African Republic

CaR: Capacity and Risk assessment

CBO: Community Based Organisation

CBPC: Community Based Protection Committees

CHS: Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability

CP: Child Protection

CPP: Comprehensive Planning Process

CS: Capacity-Strengthening

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

DD: Due Diligence

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GCR: Global Compact on Refugees

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation

L/NA: Local / National Actors

LNGO: Local Non-Governmental Organisation

LSI: Localisation Strategic Initiative

MEAL: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NNGO: National Non-Governmental Organisation

OH: Overheads

OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PAT: Project Appraisal Tool

PSEA: Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure

SSRA: Safety and Security Risk Assessment

SV: Stichting Vluchteling

TPM: Third Party Monitoring

Local and National Actors (L/NAs) is the term adopted throughout the paper to identify national, sub-national organisations, community-based associations, civil society institutions, private sector actors, formal, and informal entities. INTERSOS is aware that L/NAs present unique identities, structures, and shapes that can't easily be resumed or simplified in a single statement or definition. The analysis and recommendations contained in this paper need to be evaluated and applied according to the local scenario. Knowing that "local" can have different meaning according to the complexity and number of the factors playing a role in the dynamic of the intervention.

2 GOAL OF THIS PAPER

The goal of this paper is to define INTERSOS' vision and approach to Localisation and equitable partnerships.

While doing so, this document tries to:

- inform about the existing global localisation framework, its opportunities, and challenges;
- provide guidance and clarify the priorities and criteria to be followed by INTERSOS when engaging in local partnerships;
- offers a set of tools to identify, develop, and manage the collaborations;
- define risk factors and possible mitigation measures;
- set INTERSOS related commitments and pave the way for the next steps.

The paper was developed with the contribution of INTERSOS HQ, regional offices, technical experts, and missions who provided essential perspectives over the challenges and opportunities offered by local partnerships. The document is addressed to INTERSOS staff at field and HQ level, who are working every day with communities and local actors: INTERSOS capitalised their experiences and tried to guide their next steps. The paper is also a manifesto of INTERSOS' commitment for localisation: demonstrating its vision on this important topic to donors, international stakeholders, and other INGOs engaged in the same effort. Lastly, this paper is a letter to INTERSOS' local partners, to underline their importance and its willingness to strengthen the collaboration.

3 LOCALISATION – GLOBAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Grand Bargain and Grand Bargain 2.0

During the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), the global aid community committed to the 'Grand Bargain': ten commitments to find more efficient solutions to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of humanitarian aid for the direct benefit of affected populations.

The Grand Bargain generated a call for greater inclusion of national organisations in pooled funding mechanisms and coordination systems at country levels. In addition, the ongoing humanitarian and development nexus discussion is looking to engage national and local capacities. This is particularly highlighted in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) that encourages a "whole-of-society" approach in the refugee response and anticipates greater roles for local organisations and businesses.

The Grand Bargain has significantly contributed to some system-wide shifts in policy or practice in a number of areas. Localisation-wise, the targets identified have yet to be reached: there was no real increase in funding for local actors, and for the most part local and national humanitarian actors (L/NAs) continued to operate as sub-contractors, with limited influence[1]. The Grand Bargain should get closer and more centred around the affected communities, addressing the structural barriers and the status quo inherited by the system's past. In 2021, the Grand Bargain 2.0 reframes the overall objective to achieve "Better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations through enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and greater accountability, in the spirit of "Quid pro Quo as relevant to all" reducing the goals to two priorities: quality funding and localisation[2]. To do so, there is a perceived need to elevate the political level of commitment and decision-making, adding a political caucuses approach to monitor progress, and dedicating resources to engage local actors.

In the last 5 years, INTERSOS witnessed a debate about power and diversity, connecting to the ongoing push for localisation, and giving new vigour to previously marginalised discussions about decolonisation[3]. Local actors have been the frontliners in the Covid-19 and in the Ukraine response, proving the power of localisation in action and the value of volunteer networks to reach people in the most vulnerable situations. Big crises such as the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine enabled some progress towards localisation to occur quickly, organically, and effectively. However, during the Covid-19 humanitarian response, there was very limited change in the overall power dynamics and interaction between local actors and international agencies and donors. Local actors highlighted continued inequities in terms of power dynamics and decision-making authority as a proof that localisation has not yet been delivered. In addition, the funding allocated to L/NAs decreased in 2021, showing that once the Covid-19 crisis was under control, the system did not invest in the progress made, but returned to the existing western-centric power-dynamics[4].

Given the critical moment we are living in, it is now time to seize the opportunity, advocate, and commit for genuine change in the humanitarian system, starting from the way the communities are involved in actions and decisions. INTERSOS' values stress a neat attention to local capacities, and aim to ensure that the programmes, internal and external processes reflect INTERSOS' willingness to change the power dynamics, increasing the ownership and accountability to affected populations.

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[1] ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System.

[2] IASC, About the Grand Bargain

[3] ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System.

[4] Is Aid Really Changing? What the COVID-19 Response Tells Us about Localisation, Decolonisation and the Humanitarian System (London: British Red Cross, 2021)

3.2 Local actors: Capacities vs Opportunities

One of the main challenges to equitable partnerships is related to the fact that some "international organisations are reluctant to work with national organisations, often perceiving them as lacking in capacity and accountability mechanisms"[5]. At the same time, **the persistent critique of L/NAs having 'low capacity' functions as a catch-all for the very structural imbalances that localisation aims to address**; without adequate resources, L/NAs are unable to invest in the systems, structures, and human resources that would enable them to improve their capacities. Furthermore, L/NAs face barriers to meaningful decision-making and participation. This further complicates efforts to gain access to coordination bodies, and ultimately limits their ability to be recognised for the value they add and to access funds from institutional donors.

Funding opportunities are very limited for L/NAs and conditioned by some strict legal and administrative parameters. **In 2021, just 1,2% of global aid funds were given directly to L/NAs**, while the Grand Bargain commitment aimed to reach 25% in 2020. Donors are imposing very strict compliance regulations - including counter terrorism measures, complex financial requirements, and similar - requiring expensive and well-resourced internal control departments. In a vicious circle, smaller organisations cannot meet the standards required to obtain funding because they cannot afford the human and material resources to do so. Heavy vetting and due diligence requirements also have an impact on the delay and the inclusiveness of the response of INGOs choosing to partner with L/NAs. The assessment and building of capacities are often one-directional, based on generic parameters not considering contextual specificities. L/NAs are evaluated multiple times creating unnecessary costs and assessment fatigue. On the contrary, a collaborative and sectoral-connected approach would not only improve partnership in the short-term, but would enhance ownership and sustainability of the intervention.

> **From the field - Ukraine:**
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> "During 2022, our organisation and the project "Kharkiv Volunteer Logistics Center for Humanitarian Aid" HAB VOKZAL passed more than 6 assessments, with the aim to obtain new funding agreements. Each assessment exercise takes from 2 to 4 working days of preparation involving many of our specialists who are forced to be distracted from solving immediate humanitarian tasks. Please, if possible, help reduce the number of audits in order to focus on providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict"

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[5] Missed Out: The role of local actors in the humanitarian response in the South Sudan conflict (CAFOD, Catholic Agency For Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Tearfund, 2016)

4 LOCALISATION – INTERSOS BACKGROUND

4.1 Community-based Approach

INTERSOS has more than 15 years of experience adopting a community-based approach in numerous projects, valuing the involvement of community workers, mobilisers, and community-based organisations in informing, mobilising, and sensitising on issues such as Mine risk education (as in Southern Lebanon in 2006), Disaster risk management (as in Herat in 2014), Child Protection (as in 2014 Upper Nile State intervention), or GBV (as in Jonglei State in 2015). INTERSOS vision aims at building safe and protective environments by responding to emergency protection needs and enabling communities to prevent and respond to protection Issues. In this perspective, INTERSOS adopts a Community-based approach to programming, specifically to address Protection and Health and other needs that a community faces. INTERSOS aims at adopting in all missions a Strengths-based Community Engagement Approach which is a bottom-up way of working with communities that focuses on community strengths and assets rather than on weaknesses and problems, and identifies and mobilises individual and community assets, skills, and passions. INTERSOS ensures a community-led approach tailored to the local context and needs, to maximise population's engagement and ownership.

From the field - Syria:

In Syria, INTERSOS have been working with communities to organise Community-Based Committees, trained to conduct activities such as Community Risk Mapping exercises and Community led initiative proposal development, based on their own identified needs. In the case of protection, Community Based Protection Committees (CBPCs) are context specific and respond to needs identified by the community; for Education, Parent-Teachers Associations act as a bridge, provide a valuable contribution to the learning, and teaching environment encourages parent and community involvement in children's education and interests; and for Health, the three components (Community Service Delivery, Community Capacity Strengthening, and Community Social and Behaviour Change) allows to achieve a common goal of health promotion, disease prevention, and curative services on a participatory and sustained basis.

INTERSOS' vision on localisation is a continuation of decades of work alongside the affected populations and is deeply entrenched with the concept of accountability to affected populations and their participation.

As stated as first objective of its 2022-2024 Strategic Plan, INTERSOS aims to enhance its reach to the communities, where through a structured system of community engagement, each INTERSOS Mission will identify ways to put the local population at the centre of the response and guarantee legitimacy and adequate representation of target groups. In line with this, INTERSOS will strengthen and build new equitable partnerships with local NGOs, CBOs, grassroots organisations, and volunteer networks in further operational contexts, to collectively empower INTERSOS' emergency responses based on the principle of complementarity.

The Localisation Strategic Initiative:

With the support of SV (Stichting Vluchteling), INTERSOS has started its efforts to strengthen its localisation agenda by adopting internal policies to enhance their localisation strategy. In July 2021, INTERSOS launched the first phase of a joint Localisation Strategic Initiative (LSI), targeting 3 countries - Chad, South Sudan, and Lebanon, aiming at developing strategic and equitable partnerships with national and local partners. In 2022, the LSI was extended to Colombia, Burkina Faso and Central African Republic, ensuring a new national and global focus on capacity strengthening. Organisational development of selected partners was promoted through need-based and demand-driven empowerment actions. At global level, toolboxes (inclusive of guidance, learning material, tools and templates) were developed for Safeguarding and Security topics. In June 2023 the LSI will be extended also to Mali and Yemen in order to pilot innovative and participative approaches to crisis response in very hard to reach areas.

4.2 Supporting local authorities and public institutions

The term localisation is often associated only with non-governmental organisations, but ministries, public institutions, and authorities are also part of the process. Local governments are the first responsible for providing assistance to the populations in need. INTERSOS has been coordinating with them, providing support when needed while avoiding overlap. In countries affected by internal conflicts, working side-to-side with the government can compromise the population's perception over INTERSOS' neutrality and jeopardise access, therefore any kind of collaboration with the authority is always planned and evaluated according to the local context and the impact over the communities INTERSOS assists.

Although INTERSOS mandate does not include institutional capacity building, INTERSOS supports governmental systems strengthening when it has a direct humanitarian impact over the assisted population.

From the field - Central African Republic

In CAR, INTERSOS teams empower the local authorities' capacity to assist GBV survivors. The SENI project financed by the World Bank was implemented by the Ministry of Health and Population in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender equality. The initiative aims at improving access to prevention services and quality holistic care (medical, psychosocial) for GBV survivors. Through this initiative INTERSOS worked with political, administrative, religious and civil society leaders contributing to a safer reporting of GBV and an easier access to needed services. The INTERSOS team trained police and public officers involved in the GBV survivors' legal assistance ensuring better confidentiality and fighting stigmatisation.

Through constant coordination, sealed by operational or long-term MoUs, INTERSOS Missions collaborate with the existing governmental structures according to the context and needs. This allows for the improving of sustainability through jointly-planned exit strategies and facilitates a reasoned and coordinated humanitarian response.

5 STRATEGIC VISION

INTERSOS wants to assist and support the affected communities, leaving them the leading role in their own healing and empowerment process.

INTERSOS' vision on localisation is a continuation of decades of work alongside the affected populations and is deeply entrenched with the concept of participation and accountability to affected populations. INTERSOS aims to enhance its reach to the communities where, through a structured system of community engagement, each INTERSOS mission will identify ways to **put the local population at the centre of the response** and guarantee legitimacy and adequate representation of target groups.

INTERSOS will strengthen and build **new equitable partnerships with L/NAs** in further operational contexts, to collectively empower INTERSOS' emergency responses based on the principle of complementarity. In the same way, INTERSOS is willing to better shape the involvement of local communities, securing a real shift of power in the decision-making, and becoming a bridge linking funding opportunities to CBOs, grassroots organisations, and volunteer networks who are usually excluded from directly accessing the aid system.

Localisation is not a synonym of local partnerships, but is rooted in the ownership, accountability, and sustainability principles and ensures a transversal perspective on power shift and "decolonisation" of the aid system.

5.1 Equitable partnerships

Whether it is for short-term collaboration or for strategic multi year agreements, it is important to ensure that INTERSOS commits to equitable partnerships with local actors, following the principles below:


Collaboration: Collaboration between INTERSOS and local organisations must be based on complementarity of skills and capacities. Furthermore, localisation requires a shift in the power dynamics, for this reason it is important that all the partnerships components - from decision-making, to monitoring, to capacity strengthening – ensure the participation and collaboration of all parties as equals (as to avoid a top-down approach). This is particularly important in the development of new proposals; partners should be included from the assessment to the design of the response. In the same way capacity strengthening actions should be bidirectional as L/NAs have much to share in terms of knowledge and skills.

Trust: trust is not a usual word in this sector, as it appears in contradiction with the increasing monitoring requirements, but it is still possible to establish partnership relationships based on mutual confidence and respect. It starts from mutual interests (vs forced consortia) and long-term agreements based on the recognition of each-other expertise and strategic value. In a partnership relationship based on trust, even monitoring is more effective, as difficulties are shared and discussed.
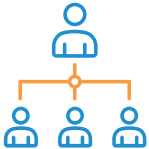
Learning and organisational development: in equitable partnerships, it is essential to keep a good level of communication, information, and skills sharing. For this reason, capacity strengthening activities are essential; they offer the opportunity to reinforce the partner while mitigating operational risks and allowing INTERSOS to monitor in an informal - but still effective - way. Capacity strengthening should not be strictly project-related but oriented to the development of the whole mission/organisation. Choosing the good learning pathway is also very important; it is essential to focus on long-term outcomes and system strengthening, more than on individuals' skills. For this reason, INTERSOS should rethink 'regular' training methods and combine mentoring, shadowing/secondment of staff, and peer learning that are often more effective approaches, promoting collaboration and communication.

Complementarity: complementarity should be one of the main leading principles when partnering with local organisations, where different skills and resources could be used to achieve common objectives and to improve the quality of INTERSOS' -joint- assistance. This complementarity can be based on geographical and/or sectoral coverage, it can contribute to a better targeting (some L/NAs have a privileged access to some specific community sub-groups), but it can also ensure a new strategic approach (i.e. nexus or community-led).

In Lebanon, INTERSOS' protection response has been empowered by the partnerships with local organisations. The mission signed strategic partnership agreements with LNGOs with very specific technical expertise: access to hard-to-reach communities[6] in one case, suicide prevention in the other.

5.2 Selection of local actors: as near as possible to INTERSOS' targets

In line with its community approach, INTERSOS' strategic plan aims to identify ways to ensure the involvement of the local population, paying attention to the legitimacy and representativeness of the individuals involved to ensure the participation of minorities and vulnerable groups. This involvement should not be limited just to the needs analysis and planning, but should be extended to the implementation phase, and joining the efforts with local communities to bring relief in crisis situations.

If INTERSOS wants to ensure aid efficiency and reduce the gap between identified needs and adequacy of the response, it is important to be as local as possible when choosing potential collaborations. The best option will always be, when feasible, collaborating with CBOs/Grass Root Organisations and volunteer groups. When looking for a partner, INTERSOS will identify organisations respecting one or more of the following criteria:

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[6] LGBTQI+, PLHIV, PUD and migrant workers

Local (versus national): organisations created in the target area by local groups or individuals, recruiting local (vs national) staff and with a proven relationship with resident communities. Sometimes national actors were created in the capital or in other regions affected by previous crises and they don't necessarily have a strong connection with the local population.

For example, in DRC, affected populations did not consider organisations based in other regions or national capital as local to them. In Tchad, most of the national responders in the Lake region are NNGOs created in the East or in the South of the country, with limited cultural and linguistic connections with the Lake muslim communities. The closer the chosen actor is to the target population, the more INTERSOS can ensure their relevance, understanding of the context, of the local language, and access dynamics.

Participatory: some L/NAs - especially CBOs that evolved into LNGOs - have a solid participatory basis: networks of volunteers, boards, including the community assisted, and fundraising mechanisms rooted in the communities they serve.

These dynamics are often the proof of the positive relationship that the organisation maintains with the local population and can contribute to their sustainability.

Representative: localisation is about a power shift towards the affected communities, but too often, funding is directed towards organisations that don't represent the target group they are aiming to serve. This is particularly common when working in refugee settings, where L/NAs are mainly from the host community. Similarly, programmes supporting women's empowerment should be led by organisations directed and constituted predominantly by women. In a polarised setting, the representativeness of the partner is very important: in Bangladesh, it was observed[7] that local organisations are concerned with the well-being of host communities and their relationship with the government, sometimes over the rights and protection of refugees. When the legal framework does not allow minority groups to constitute a registered organisation (i.e. Syrian refugees in Lebanon), it is possible to look for L/NAs including individuals from the specific target groups in their boards and/or as senior staff or decision-makers.

INTERSOS wants to adopt a modus operandi based on complementarity and mutual support. While working in new or protracted crises, INTERSOS should always evaluate the possibility to intervene by supporting local actors and communities, while being together on the frontline.

5.3 Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

INTERSOS' strategy indicates that in each country there must be formal ways to ensure that communities are physically (or virtually) consulted and involved, accepting that activities may vary according to needs and priorities expressed by the local population.

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[7] "Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action" Veronique Barbelet for HPG

INTERSOS' approach to localisation is deeply connected with its accountability commitment, as it challenges the traditional top-down mechanisms and allows, through community involvement and participation, to transfer the decision-making power closer to the populations INTERSOS is aiming to assist.

Equitable partnerships are an effective way to promote AAP, as they ensure that local counterparts are co-designing and co-implementing the response with INTERSOS. Inclusion of CBOs and grassroot organisations in disaster response can ensure population's ownership and a major sustainability of the projects. From smaller community groups to larger national NGOs, L/NAs usually pay big attention to the affected population's participation.

To contribute to AAP through localisation, INTERSOS developed a specific safeguarding toolkit to support local partners in the set-up of context-specific safeguarding mechanisms. This includes a self-assessment tool that can be used also as benchmark, an updated MoU and due diligence including safeguarding references, interactive training material, and a comprehensive multi-language intranet toolbox with ready-to-use resources.

5.4 Avoiding transfer of risks

When working in highly divided and complex conflict settings, there is a commonly held view that local actors cannot be neutral because of their close ties to affected communities. Some research findings suggest the contrary; neutrality is a key operating principle for many local actors and is strictly associated with access: "Without being neutral you cannot be able to operate anywhere. So it is an effective conflict management method"[8]. On the other hand, L/NAs access capacity is strictly related to community links. So the challenges associated with neutrality and independence – perceived or otherwise – arise as a direct consequence of this access[9]. These links can have serious implications for L/NAs security and impact the perception of any INGO that may be in partnership with them, resulting in eventual security challenges for the INGO itself. At the same time, in contexts such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria, where there is a history of anti-westernism, ignoring the impact that a partnership between an INGO and a L/NA can have on local staff's acceptance in particular communities can be dangerous.

The establishment of any partnership between two organisations will lead to a mutual transfer of risk, therefore, it is essential to address the resulting security risks[10]. To do so, INTERSOS should pay attention to neither overestimate nor underestimate local security knowledge and capacity. There are both strengths and weaknesses in L/NAs perceptions: it is important to analyse the information collected, to distinguish between opinions and facts, as well as understand how different profiles (e.g. INGO vs L/NAs, ethnicity, nationality, gender etc.) engender different risk levels and risk perception.

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[8] Towards principled humanitarian action in conflict contexts. Understanding the role of partnerships. Voices from Nigeria and South Sudan (2020, NCA, DRA, KNH, DCA, Caritas Norge)

[9] Missed Out: The role of local actors in the humanitarian response in the South Sudan conflict (CAFOD, Catholic Agency For Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Tearfund, 2016)

[10] https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/08/08/going-local-going-safely/

"There is a general over-reliance on local partners' knowledge and skills related to security management, given their understanding of context dynamics, leading to an underestimation of L/NAs capacity strengthening needs"[11]. At the same time, local partners may often be reluctant to raise security concerns as they think it could affect their ability to obtain funding, as their implication is often related to their access-capacity, pushing them to assume a more risk-taking behaviour. The general attitude resumed by phrases such as 'these things happen' and 'we live here – it's normal' can lead to danger for the local staff as well as a possible contribution to a project's failure.

Therefore, when working in partnership, especially in high-risk areas, it is important to take into account the partner's security management capacity, and ensure they are able to safely deliver aid. This does not refer just to safety and security practices, but to overall risks perception and management.

INTERSOS missions should engage in participatory processes that aim to identify gaps in security risk management knowledge and skills as part of the Capacity and Risk assessment. INTERSOS developed a 5 steps learning pathway, composed by specific training and tools, as well as by joint assessments and regular and need-based guidance to support partners in their risk analysis and management exercises.

It is important to stress that a good quality of financing is essential to ensure safety and security on the field. Continuing to place increasingly greater responsibility on the shoulders of local humanitarian actors, while failing to cover minimum security requirements, means heightening local aid workers' exposure to risk. Therefore, collective advocacy efforts should be systematically undertaken to influence donors and insurance providers on the need to fund risk management budget lines, and on what risk management resources are required to responsibly and safely implement projects in partnerships between local and international organisations.

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[11] Singh, 2012, Security Management and Capacity Development: International agencies working with local partners, EISF Briefing Paper

6 PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING MODALITIES

The aid system is changing: donors demonstrate a growing tendency to avoid multilateralism, compliance requirements (including complex counter-terrorism measures) are increasing, and unstable and unpredictable political and security developments are affecting the humanitarian response. Some of these challenges are genuinely external, while others are resulting from an increased risk aversion. Donors are showing increasing interest towards localisation but the majority faces difficulties to identify a successful framework to channel funds directly to local organisations. Beside Country-based Pooled Funds mechanisms, direct funds to L/NAs requires in loco monitoring, mentoring, and management capacities over multiple small-medium size grants. For this reason, many donors are relying on international actors as "middle-men" in their relation to national ones, in order to delegate/share part of the responsibilities related to assessment, follow-up and capacity strengthening to/with INGOs, while ensuring local participation.

In this optic, INTERSOS missions are ready to collaborate with L/NAs, following the principles of equality and complementarity, strengthening their joint capacity to respond to affected populations' needs.

6.1 Project-based VS Strategic

When coming to partnerships, planning ahead can represent a strong advantage and ensure a better outcome. Long-term strategic partnership agreements, developed and signed, relying on mutual interest instead of on last minute funding, can represent a decisive advantage.

These agreements should not entail immediate joint implemented activities, but can subscribe to mutual commitments related to the partners' development: from the sharing of tools, information, and contacts, to more structured initiatives related to organisational empowerment and bilateral capacity strengthening.

The agreements are signed after a Capacity and Risk assessment, that allows INTERSOS to acknowledge the partner's strengths and areas for improvement, allowing the mission to set-up future collaborations requirements according to the risk level identified).

6.2 CBOs - micro, community-led and seed grants

INTERSOS' strategy is intended to stress the importance of identifying partners as locally as possible, with strong links, or directly representing the target communities INTERSOS is aiming to serve. It is important to consider the psychological impact of CBO work that allows communities to have an active role in the crisis that is affecting them. As it was recently observed in Ukraine: "Volunteer work was seen by all focus group members as an important coping strategy to maintain psychological wellbeing, foster mutual support, and assist with community cohesion during a time of crisis"[12]. In this perspective, collaborating with community and volunteers' groups offers unique advantages, but this kind of partnership can entail specific risks and difficulties, as CBOs usually have informal structures, and are less experienced in operational and grant management. For this reason, it is essential to identify the best funding modality according to the type of organisations INTERSOS aims to engage with.

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[12] Rapid Gender And Conflict Analysis: Poltava Oblast (August 2022; WHH, Concern and CESVI)

Seed grants provide funding to kick-start and pilot small-scale activities with the potential of being scaled-up in the future.

Community-led financing involves providing seed funding specifically for community groups. It is considered more sustainable in the longer-term as it assists communities/local organisations in generating their own assets, increasing and transferring resources, and improving their resilience.

Micro-grants are a good option to reach and fund 'hyperlocal organisations': community groups, and community-level grassroots with limited absorptive capacity. Direct payments are particularly suited for rapid response funding to support immediate needs, i.e. population movement.

From the field - Yemen:

Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) model is an innovative approach combining group-cash transfers and community-based protection model. SCLR "developed out of L2GPs[13] research into how people in situations of crisis ensure their self-protection. This approach outlines how external actors can participate in, support and resource community-led and community-driven responses."

INTERSOS is piloting it in Yemen, with the support of L2GPI initiative[14] and in collaboration with Deem, a L/NA, providing health and protection services. In Taiz governorate, Deem is running 9 Women and Girls Safe Spaces, 2 MHPSS Centres and 1 Community Centre. Their implantation in the area and strong links with the communities makes them a key asset to successfully roll out the SCLR approach.

These types of funding modalities help mitigate the perceived or actual risks of working with first-time local partners, as many offer a way of paying for the direct results rather than reimbursing the partner for their costs. As such, many of these modalities are suited for informal and new types of local civil society actors, movements, and innovative actions[15] as in Ukraine, where local and largely volunteer-driven efforts served as the backbone of the initial relief operation[16].

6.3 Localisation as exit strategy

The sustainability of the interventions is strictly related to the effectiveness of the planned exit strategy. This objective can be achieved through localisation, which provides the possibility of leaving a context without, more or less, abruptly cutting off operations. Localisation ensures continuity through the work of L/NAs, whether INTERSOS missions are closing its operations in one given sector, area, or country, and/or as part of a Nexus approach. This is possible through both a shift in perspective on the capacities and on the community ownership to be developed since the start. Community ownership of the activities of the partner is beneficial to its prolongation after a project life-span and inscribing an exit strategy component in every partnership is key to ensure that the partner's capacity to operate and lead independently is strengthened. With this perspective, capacity development becomes genuinely focused on what partners and communities, not the donor, need (participatory action research with affected population, leadership, strategy, resource mobilisation, and financial management) and can include administrative support to obtain needed registrations, legal papers, and skills to be direct receivers of funding in the given area. In this sense, integrating a financial sustainability component is essential to contribute to the effectiveness of the exit strategy.

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[13] Local 2 Global Protection

[14] https://www.local2global.info/

[15] ICVA Toolkit Zero Draft - Funding local society

[16] Nicholas Noe, *Localizing the International Humanitarian Response in Ukraine*, 2022, Refugees International

7 PARTNERSHIP TOOLS

INTERSOS decided to develop localisation-tailored tools contributing to the development and management of equitable partnership agreements. Some examples of the tools used include:

Capacity and Risk (CaR) assessment tool: this tool replaces the usual Due Diligence format, providing an innovative review and analysis of the partner's organisational, programmatic, financial, and operational capacity. This tool facilitates a joint assessment process, identifies points of strengths, as well as potential risks for the L/NAs organisational development, instead of focusing exclusively on the partnership-related risks. The tool becomes the starting point allowing to develop strategic agreements, need-based capacity strengthening, and tailored monitoring plans.

Vetting process, including communities' feedback: The objective of this participative process is to guarantee the accuracy of the information provided and to confirm the reliability of the L/NA. INTERSOS queries different stakeholders (L/NA's partners, donors and/or local authorities) and involves assisted communities. Their inputs are essential to verify how the organisation is perceived and interact with the population.

Strategic MoU: it aims at incentivising long-term equitable collaborations with strategic partners, instead of focusing on grant-based agreements. The MoU includes a Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan - BCSP, which identifies common goals for both organisations' strategic development.

Partnership Follow-up Matrix allows easy adaptation of partnership management standards according to the partner's profile. Through the results of the initial assessment, each department is aware of the level of support needed and the corresponding best practices to be implemented with the partner.

CBOs tools: community-based groups can not always fit standard criterias imposed by the humanitarian system. They have unique advantages and face specific challenges. For this reason INTERSOS developed an ad-hoc assessment tool, considering distinct factors (such as members' profile, governance, roles). To facilitate CBOs involvement in the project design phase INTERSOS developed a Workshop model, including a step-by-step guidance.

Toolboxes: department-specific online folders including partners-oriented guidance, learning material, tools and templates that INTERSOS field missions can access to provide the needed support to local counterparts. For the moment, INTERSOS developed Safeguarding and Security toolboxes as well as a specific ToT package for Financial management. More toolboxes are under-construction.

8 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Joint decision-making

Localisation commitment is a 'participation revolution'. It goes beyond local partnerships, 'accountability to affected populations', or 'communicating with communities', and relies on a shift of power. For this reason, INTERSOS aims to work with local organisations and communities ensuring partnerships on an equal footing and in line with principle of complementarity, designed through a more bottom-up design and adaptive responses. Open discussions, participation, and joint decisions in the design, implementation, and evaluation phases of the action are absolute priorities that can be reached just by planning in advance and by being ready to listen and make changes.

8.2 Quality of funding

The Grand Bargain drew attention to the quantity (or scarcity) of funding going to local partners. But quantity is not the only challenge. Over the past years, one of the main obstacles to localisation has been the poor quality of funding directed to LNGOs.

From the field - notes from interviews with L/NAs worldwide:

Especially in contexts of forgotten crises, localisation has been sometimes perceived as a way to 'save some money'. Among the most frequent bad practices adopted in these cases, L/NAs interviewed reported:

- Very low costs for HR, obliging them to adopt a non competitive saòary grid, with negative consequences on their recruiting and retention capacity
- Very low or no budget for support and security costs, limiting their operational capacities and exposing them to huge risks
- No coverage for coordination and management positions
- No overheads

Many local organisations accepted unfair deals, pushed by their commitment and/or because they needed funding to survive. As a result, they encountered major difficulties to implement, to spend, and to monitor as forecasted due to the lack of resources. In some cases, these programmes were cancelled or re-assigned to INGOs, fuelling the stigma over the L/NAs' poor capacities.

While collaborating with L/NAs, both the quantity and quality of funding is essential to protect the affected community, the partner, and INTERSOS.

Overheads (OH): OH are important and contribute to L/NAs sustainability and internal control. When collaborating with L/NAs in consortia, OH should be shared in the same way as with international partners. When the L/NAs is a subgrantee, OH should always be included and negotiated according to donors' policies. OH should be unrestricted, with no reporting obligations or time-bounds[17]. INTERSOS is currently developing a Guidance for OH to Local partners to set minimum standards for OH provision.

Support costs: Funding for operating costs (office, warehousing, transport, communications, computing, printing, and security) is included in L/NA funding agreements. If the partner does not include these costs in its first draft of the financial proposal, INTERSOS staff should open a discussion and understand the rationale behind the choice, suggesting some adjustments if needed to ensure the quality of the operations.

HR and programme costs: the funding provided is adequate to deliver a response that meets quality standards. Special attention should be paid to salary costs (the salary grid should have been shared during the assessment) ensuring they are n line with the L/NA policy and with the local job market.

Financial sustainability: INTERSOS should actively seek to strengthen the financial sustainability of L/NA partners, contributing to their empowerment while concretely reducing the risks.

From the field - Master budget:

Most of L/NAs encountered, struggled to strategically forecast and cover their structure costs, identifying as a major challenge the lack of a reliable financial management system allowing them to strategically use their resources. For this reason, INTERSOS developed a master budget (budget for shared costs) model to ensure better forecasting, cost allocation, and visibility over the growth and degrowth of the organisation. This tool can be used by both small and larger organisations, and it requires a medium knowledge of Excel and can be adapted to fit different L/NAs needs and profiles. In 2022 and 2023, INTERSOS accompanied some local partners through the set up of this financial tool and practices, offering tailored support and mentoring. The outcome has been very positive, with partners confirming the positive impact over the governance of their organisation.

8.3 Monitoring

Regular monitoring can facilitate the communications among the parties, effectively preventing and mitigating eventual problems. The level, frequency, and modalities of monitoring can be adapted according to the risk level for each department, evaluated through the initial joint assessment.

Capacity strengthening initiatives, like mentoring, joint field visits, and regular coordination meetings, can all be sources of data and information, to be collected and tracked into a monitoring plan.

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[17] Unless stated otherwise in the Country risk Analysis due to inherent risks factors impacting neutrality (see section 7)

8.4 Capacity Strengthening

Capacity-strengthening aiming at the sustainable improvement of the performance of partners is fundamental to realising the potential of localisation to empower local actors. Nevertheless, its process does not always bring the necessary results, as it is often built on partial top-down considerations and there is little appreciation of the existing skills.

Moreover, quality funding necessary to develop, support, and retain capacities within the local partners is often limited. This contributes to minimal and unsustained impact of skills-transfer activities. INTERSOS has a clear strategy for partners' capacity strengthening, aiming at reaching a sustainable improvement while appreciating the existing skills and resources. This strategy relies on five key aspects:

- **Need-oriented and demand-driven:** capacity strengthening actions should be based on the joint assessment, answering to the existing needs and should be discussed and approved together as a priority.

- **Impact:** always looking further than reaching a simple output, aiming instead to a general empowerment of the system/structure in place, for a more long-lasting impact of the action.

- **Shared responsibility:** As per Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan framework, for each objective identified, there are corresponding action points and responsibilities to be shared among the two-partners.

- **Follow-up:** no long-lasting change can be achieved with a one-shot intensive training. Follow-up is essential but should be tailored according to partners' needs and availability.

- **Bilateral:** L/NAs have a lot to offer and should not just be considered as 'recipient' in the capacity strengthening planning. Reciprocity can help build more equitable partnerships, while providing very useful skills and perspectives.

To reach more ambitious and sustainable capacity strengthening goals, INTERSOS experience demonstrated that choosing the good learning pathway is vital. In order to focus on long-term outcomes and system strengthening, more than on individuals' skills, INTERSOS ensured the combination of trainings with different methodologies, such as: mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, sharing tools and guidance to adapt them, paying for external consultancies, shadowing and secondment.

From the field - Lebanon :

INTERSOS collaborates in Lebanon with the LNGO EMBRACE, which provides essential mental health services to affected communities. Through the Capacity and Risk assessment it was highlighted how the organisation faced serious challenges related to staff retention. The country's financial crisis and the lack of a competitive salary grid impacted EMBRACE capacity to retain qualified technical staff, especially medical employees, with potential negative consequences on service provision. For this reason the BCSP included a joint objective to tackle this increasing risk, sharing responsibilities between INTERSOS and EMBRACE to achieve the expected change:

"The support provided through the strengthening of the HR department allowed us to adopt a lot of new documents (...) and it has been very effective. This was beyond an HR issue, it is more a local issue, but the combination of HR and Finance capacity building has significantly helped in staff retention"[18].

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[18] Extract from an interview with EMBRACE Partnership director

9 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Localisation is one of the key objectives for INTERSOS both as a way to ensure a better humanitarian response, and for its intrinsic value in the decolonisation of aid perspective. To achieve this goal, INTERSOS needs to commit to an internal change process, shifting its mindset and adapting its internal process to facilitate community participation, equitable partnerships, and reduce power imbalances. It is a complex pathway, as it requires an internal inter-department commitment to revise usual ways of working, but also because the aid system is vastly still dominated by a western-centric top-down approach.

To concretely orientate future years work in this direction INTERSOS developed an action plan:

1st Priority – *Strengthen INTERSOS' community-led approach*

INTERSOS' vision on localisation is deeply connected with community engagement, ownership, and accountability principles. For this reason, the main priority is to better structure and further develop INTERSOS' current work in community participation, ensuring a meaningful shift in the decision making, implementation, and evaluation processes.

1.1. Capitalisation of the wide experience INTERSOS' missions developed in terms of community-led initiatives

INTERSOS will promote open conversations and exchanges with regions and missions, involving INTERSOS field staff working on community-based initiatives to identify the best solutions, the lessons learned, and the main needs to further improve.

1.2. Identify, structure, and facilitate winning solutions for community-led approach

INTERSOS' mission aims to put the local population at the centre of the response, guaranteeing legitimacy and adequate representation of target groups.

To do so, INTERSOS will ensure preliminary consultations with the affected communities to understand the best modalities of collaboration, and a careful evaluation of the specific context and harm factors. At the same time, to grant a cohesive qualitative and bottom-up approach, INTERSOS will finalise a **toolkit for the structured collaboration with CBOs**, ensuring feedback from the communities and from field staff are included into the tools development process.

INTERSOS is also promoting more and more **community financing solutions**, such as micro-grants and seed grants, with the aim to spread this approach as much as possible both in crisis and post-crisis contexts.

INTERSOS also recently developed a structured **Community-based protection approach** that is guided by a bottom-up perspective in community engagement.

2nd Priority – *Improve partnership management and evaluation*

To ensure globally equitable partnerships, there is the need to support the missions in every partnership process from identification, assessment, management, and evaluation through the consolidation of tools and skills conceived in a localization perspective.

2.1. Consolidate and/or develop new tools adapted for equitable partnerships

INTERSOS developed specific tools for strategic partnerships that facilitate equitable collaboration and are tailored for long-term collaborations. These tools are focused on organisational development, while INTERSOS has a different package for grant-based collaborations. INTERSOS aims at developing a unique standard set of tools to ensure the localization principles are respected in any partnership.

2.2. Define and implement a MEAL partnership framework

In order to ensure the effectiveness and accountability towards the communities supported by INTERSOS and the partners collaborated with, it is necessary for INTERSOS to establish an internal framework for evaluating partnerships. This framework should encompass three dimensions of reflection:

A.   Partners' satisfaction over the collaboration

B.   Impact of the collaboration on the local partners' organisational development

C.   Impact on the affected communities

The last point does not refer only to the outcomes of joint projects but will serve in understanding how the partnership improved the assistance through complementarity, access, inclusiveness, etc. The MEAL partnership framework will guarantee that partners and communities' priorities and points of view are listened to and valued, guiding INTERSOS' internal strategic decisions.

3rd Priority – *Facilitate partners' empowerment through effective transfer of skills*

This paper underlines the importance of equitable and meaningful capacity strengthening actions through jointly-planned initiatives aiming to bring a positive and sustainable impact.

3.1. Create capacity strengthening toolboxes for each department

Empowerment plans have to be carefully tailored to partners' needs so they can't be standardised. But there are some common risks that L/NAs are facing and that may benefit from capitalization of expertises and experiences. For this reason, INTERSOS will further develop its set of **online tool-boxes including tools, policies, training material, and guidance** on how to support the partner in the capacity strengthening process..

3.2. Contribute to partners' financial sustainability

A common challenge reported by small and medium-size L/NAs is the struggle to ensure financial sustainability for their organisations. This difficulty is mainly related to both the limited access to financial opportunities and poor

quality of the available funding. Yet, there is an additional handicap that is impacting the use of available resources: most L/NAs do not have a financial tool helping them to track and forecast the spending on their shared and support costs. One of the main consequences reported is that some key expenses (e.g. the office rent) are fully charged on a single project, and when that is over the organisation can't ensure the financial coverage anymore. Beside advocating and contributing to a better access to quality funding for L/NAs, INTERSOS aims at supporting its local partners who wish to set-up a Master budget system, providing the tools and the guidance necessary to ensure the set-up, and follow-up to facilitate its correct use.

4th Priority – *Advocacy and communication*

Localisation became a key issue for many humanitarian agencies, due to both the practical necessities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic with restricted international access to crises, and the moral necessity prompted by reflections on racism and the humanitarian system's colonial past[19]. Despite investments and advances, the aid system has not yet achieved the grand bargain commitments. On the contrary, the amount of direct funding for L/NAs decreased in the last year. This is the predictable effect of an aid system struggling to change and adapt its internal functioning model. INTERSOS should engage in global, regional, and national discussions to support the shift of power that localisation aims to achieve.

4.1. Access to quality funding

Equitable financial conditions and access to quality funding opportunities should be the main goal of future advocacy action. INTERSOS should advocate for more funding reaching L/NAs - as this will positively impact the access, unicity, and sustainability of aid.

INTERSOS will pledge for financial opportunities that are targeted towards the communities it aims to assist, utilising adapted and bottom-up funding models.

Bad localisation practices jeopardise everyone's work: poor quality of funding lead to higher risk of fraud and affect the financial stability of the local organisations, negatively affecting their development, but also the partner INGOs and the affected communities.

4.2. Adequate funding for risks assessment and management

Continuing to place increasingly greater responsibility on the shoulders of local humanitarian actors, while failing to cover minimum security requirements, means heightening local aid workers' exposure to risk. Therefore, INTERSOS will support collective advocacy efforts to influence donors about the need to fund risk management budget lines, and related resources required to responsibly and safely implement projects in volatile contexts.

4.3. Equitable narrative

Fundraising and communication activities should ensure that local efforts and local perspectives are represented and valued. INTERSOS already pays attention to ethical storytelling, guaranteeing accountability, informed consent, and ethical representation. INTERSOS aims to ensure its narrative reflects its commitment to localisation, giving credit and visibility to local partners where it's due, and highlighting how the collaboration allowed to increase the efficiency of the response. Wherever possible, INTERSOS will commit to placing individuals from the affected communities at the centre of the story, stressing their role in the response rather than speaking on their behalf.

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[19] ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System.

5th Priority – *Organisational Culture*

INTERSOS must commit to improve its internal capacities and systems to allow its missions to succeed in the localisation process, both through standardised tools and policies, but also promoting flexibility for context-appropriate interventions.

5.1. Localisation culture and internal skills

Localisation requires a shift in the organisational mind-set that must start from internal narrative and staffing. On one hand, INTERSOS should ensure that at central and field level organograms take into consideration the localisation work and related needed human resources. On the other hand, localisation knowledge management and learning should be promoted, sharing the best practices and lessons learned, and capitalising local experiences at the global level. INTERSOS will take into consideration expertise in establishing and supporting local partnerships when recruiting new employees. Eventual gaps in the localisation-related skills should be addressed through capacity building, in particular for critical roles (i.e. Heads of mission and Programme coordinators). INTERSOS already launched this process through localisation-related training, new staff inductions and promoting internal discussions through regional workshops, country-dedicated ateliers, and technical brainstorming. Despite current efforts, there is still a lot of work to be done to address common bias and unlearn the usual practices related to a top-down system.

5.2. Internal tools and resources

NTERSOS should further develop its internal systems and procedures to allow an effective Localisation process. Appropriate tools and guidance on how to use them should be shared among the missions to facilitate the partnership process. This entails a significant amount of work that will engage the organisation for the years to come.

Each department should analyse the needs related to local partnerships and strengthen INTERSOS' internal capacity to manage, monitor, and support joint equitable initiatives.

Innovative solutions should be framed and disseminated.

Localisation should influence INTERSOS' messages, pledges, and strategies raising uncomfortable questions that will challenge its way of working.

The expected outcomes, if INTERSOS succeeds, will be meaningful relations with quality local partners, more effective and efficient programmes, and a safer response chosen and directed by the communities INTERSOS wants to support.

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